

# Pro Shop

## Merchandising to Women: The Romance Begins

by Kathleen Talbot Denton

For ages, women have been stereotyped in the golf business as slow players, difficult to deal with, hard to please, and oh, yes...cheap!

But the reality today is that there are more women taking up the game of golf than ever before. And surveys show that one out of four golf shop customers are women.

The US study by The National Golf Foundation reports that women spend \$6 billion on golf merchandise and playing fees annually and that women make anywhere from 11 per cent to 30 per cent of their men's apparel purchases, as well. While these figures represent indices from the US marketplace, the numbers in Canada, although smaller, are rising quickly.

These staggering figures should get your attention. Women shoppers are particularly strong at resorts and private country clubs. But the trend is the same at public access facilities.

Many of your potential customers are college-educated, affluent and considered 'prime spenders'. They have plenty of disposable income and are willing to "dispose" of it, IF they are catered to and treated with respect.

Clearly, something has to be done to keep these women coming back. The key is learning to speak the language, and not just give lip service. But, where does one begin?

### **Know Your Market**

According to the 1999 RCGA Golf Participation in Canada Survey, the average woman golfer is 42 years old and plays 11.4 rounds of golf a year.

But for the intent and purpose of this article, you may be interested to know that nearly half (46.7%) of all female golfers have a household income of over \$50,000 and a further 26% of these women come from homes making over \$75,000.

To capitalize on this purchasing power, one needs to ask, "Who is MY female customer?" "What is her average age, income and life-style?"

You can't buy an apparel line because it works for another golf shop. You must analyze your customer and develop a profile of her. Perhaps you only have 20 active women golfers at your club, but this should not mean you can not buy and

sell to women. You should constantly consider non-golfing women as your customers, also.

Prospective female shoppers might come in as guests of members or nearby hotels, or maybe they're at the club for a luncheon or meeting. Meet them, talk to them. Notice how they dress and the price range their apparel falls into. Consider mixing some "street-wear" into your inventory plans along with the golf apparel to accommodate these customers.

You can buy things that could be worn for golf, but don't have 'golf' written all over them. You'll be surprised at how many women love that small, 'specialty store' atmosphere you can create. If you can attract and keep women in your shop, you could be looking at a substantial increase in golf shop revenue!

### **Time to Start the Romance**

Pay attention to them! All too often, when a female enters a pro shop, the male staff ignore her. Big mistake.

Train your staff to jump from behind the counter, offering up a big smile and a handshake. Teach them to learn their names, and find out what their needs are. Offer to special-order what you don't carry. Put a suggestion box in the ladies locker room and encourage them to use it. Check it often.

Ask them what they'd like to see in the golf shop: Golf wear? Fashion items? Clubs/Bags/Accessories? Size ranges? Price points they'd be willing to pay in each category? Make them feel welcome and special.

Hold "Ladies Day Sales" that will make it a treat to come out. Develop a 'Ladies Corner' or area in the shop they can identify with. Build eye-catching displays with themes centered around the ladies.

After the tournament schedule comes out, start thinking of original ideas that work back to them. Go to their functions and mingle with them, perhaps offering tips on performance or rules. Hold clinics for them. Offer to supply their tournament prizes for a small mark-up. Let them know you want to provide service to them and stay involved. Loyalty can be very strong medicine once it is developed.

### **Keep Their Interest**

Women want variety. Many pros think women are simply price conscious, but what they really want is selection. "Styles", "designs", "coordinated outfits", "colour schemes", seem to be the latest buzzwords. If it is assembled well enough, price will be last in the decision-making process for many women.

Don't be afraid to add the matching socks, belts and visors when ordering ladies outfits. If you are really brave, check out shoes that work, too. Nothing extremely

exotic, but perhaps colour combinations such as navy and white, tan and white, black and white; and incorporate them into the collections.

Consider the philosophy of trying to sell at least three items to each customer (shirt, shorts, shoes) - commonly referred to as the 'three rule'. Ingrain it in your staff's consciousness and watch sales soar! For women, (and increasingly, men), it is about looking and feeling good in the whole outfit.

Once the collections sell down, usually between 60-90 days, go ahead and start a sale rack - again encouraging them to buy multiple pieces by applying staggered discount strategies (e.g. 30%, 40%, 50%) and using the "Buy 1, Buy 2, Buy 3" philosophy. Keep the rack in the rear of the store, continue to receive new merchandise and repeat the cycle on an ongoing basis. This way the shop will always be fresh and enticing at the same time.

### **Help with Equipment Purchases**

Don't assume all women are high handicap players. They aren't. Surveys of the top equipment manufacturers show that women are looking for performance, not colours or cosmetics when it comes to their game. We are all a little intimidated when we go to buy something we don't know much about. Your challenge is to take the intimidation factor out of the purchase.

Consider holding a women's Demo Day. Keep current copies of the latest women's golf publications on hand and carry some of the popular brands advertised, or if you need to keep inventory lean as mentioned earlier, special ordering should be an option for those seeking specific merchandise.

Capitalize on the marketing that is already being done for you. Most golf goods manufacturers are spending hoards of money right now marketing the female golf demographic. Once you know what women want, then obtaining what they want is easy.

Taking time to communicate with your female customers will promote a two-way educational dialogue and most likely will translate into additional sales.

### **Sage Advice for Savvy Selling**

If all these ideas sound good, but a bit overwhelming based on hectic schedules, running tournaments, teaching and already complicated ordering with suppliers, there are solutions.

If your green grass shop can handle the absence of one of its staff for a short time, there are seminars and workshops that can provide invaluable merchandising lessons. Techniques that, once learned, can be applied in-house upon return. Or, if you sincerely don't have time but want to obtain true 'selling savvy'- hire it done.

As Larry Mathe, president of E.P. Pro says, "(Hiring a professional marketer) can be the difference between success and failure. A person with a merchandising background will greatly enhance your chances for success in your shop." Not to mention the time and headaches it could save you.

And besides, with someone else to tend to all the details, you'll have more time for romance!