

Most operators are starting to see a decrease in the demand for non-peak tee times. As such, what do you do to fill these rounds?

There are numerous options available from outside companies offering their services to fill these rounds, while making money off your property. The services offered are “last minute bookings”, discount rounds, or loyalty programs based on usage and tournaments but how can you increase your rounds and still generate a profit?

The real answer is for the Club to control their own destiny, by undertaking a market study and controlling their tee sheet. Once the operator has completed these procedures, he or she can decide on the appropriate approach to filling tee times.

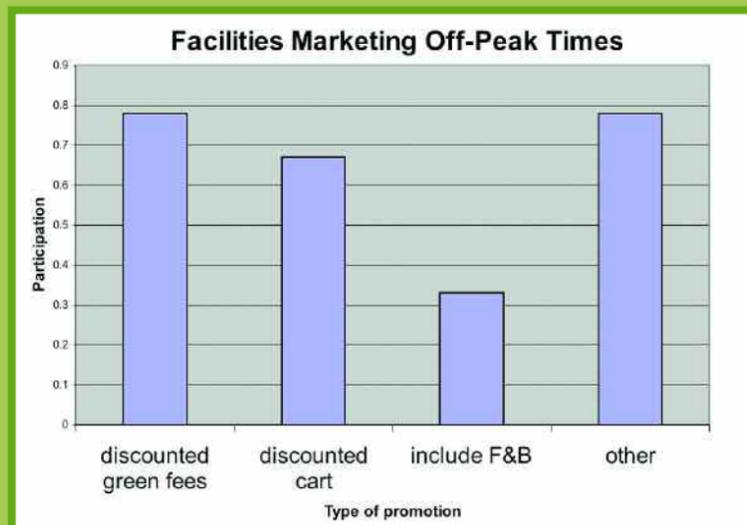
For the most part, green fee rates will dictate usage. The first task is to complete a detailed market study for your area. This study will not only look at the price points of golf courses in your immediate area, but examine the demographics of the surrounding population, corporate opportunities, and tourist sources.

MARKET PLAN

First the operator must identify the opportunities for local loyalty programs and potential leagues, such as corporations, schools, and not-for-profit organizations. This should help the operator determine the peak and non-peak times and decide whether to create a ‘prepaid green fee’, non-peak membership program, etc. The key will always be to price your tee times with the appropriate green fee rate and then market these rates to potential patrons. Since green fees and cart fee revenue for the most part directly increase cash profits, it is essential that these revenue generators be maximized.

*Tee-Time
Anyone?..... ANYONE?!!*

Facilities Marketing Off-Peak Times



What are you doing to market your off-peak tee times? The NGCOA Canada conducted a mini survey to see what golf facilities were doing about their off-peak time openings.

The results showed that 89% were making a specific effort to fill their slower times. This graph will provide a quick reference, although please keep in mind that the survey sample was limited. The most common approach was to discount the green fee however there were variations on straight out discounts. In an effort to obtain return customers some facilities offer coupons or credits to be used on their next visit or they offer multiple green fees packages for off-peak times. The added value approach is being used by some through tee gifts or by packaging golf products with green fees.

There are some facilities that are using everything they can think of including loyalty programs. Innerkip Highlands created a VIP club and the complete details are available at www.innerkiphighlands.com/vip. Alastair Barr from Welsford Golf Course noted: "To be successful in the industry you have to offer rates and specials different from your rack rate at off peak times. It also takes the stress off your peak times by spreading people to other times of the day, potentially creating more customer loyalty." Barr states that, "Tuesdays were historically very slow, until we started a '2 golfers for the price of 1' day and it is now my busiest day of the week." Barr also notes that facilities should not forget the added value found in increased power cart and food and beverage sales.

Whether discounting is right or if adding value sells more times will always be debatable, but what is clear is that those openings on your tee-sheet are not going to fill themselves. As such, you need to find ways to attract the attention of the golfer so that they will come and leave some dollars at your facility.

Once the market plan has been completed, and all the opportunities for rounds identified, it is imperative to develop an action plan to fill your tee times. Peak times are usually filled; however, with the uncertainty of weather, it would be favorable to still fill some of these tee times with tournaments, whereas non-peak times can be filled with leagues. If you do not currently have league play at your course, consider creating a women's league or a corporate league from the surrounding neighbourhood.

One of the key questions in the market plan is whether to have members; and if so, will there be an unrestricted full membership and a separate weekday membership or just one general membership. It is important to keep in mind, that there may be alternatives to memberships or prepaid green fees. Additional packages can be created using peak and non-peak times. Another great method to get new patrons is to use a lower capture fee (i.e. say \$100 to \$200) plus a discounted green fee or cart fee, and food and beverage pricing. You can space out these packages accordingly, by offering various discount pricing.

In addition, operators should maintain a list of patrons' e-mail addresses, so that they have direct marketing for the unused tee times. This lower capture fee can also allow patrons to book tee times ahead of the general public. Remember, the key to success is to control the tee sheet and ensure that these individuals do not book all your key peak times. The typical approach is to block a percentage of tee times and only offer them to discounters, usually 48 to 24 hours before the tee time.

SET YOURSELF APART

If there is significant local competition, then the operator must explore other means of pricing. This can include 'free' carts at non-peak times or allowing family members to play for free at specific times. Other promotional opportunities are teaching sessions for beginners at non-peak times, where patrons can play after the session or play as a group with a golf pro observing various groups as they play.

The key is to create hype and image for the course. Some creative operators are offering a matching/couples night; others are promoting couples leagues/family leagues, etc. With these types of promotions, the more fun the patrons have, the higher the likelihood of them returning to your course or joining a league.

SECONDARY OPTIONS

Once the operator has exhausted marketing all approaches that control their own destiny, they should then consider outside sources. These sources can be last minute tee time companies and discount sources (i.e. cards or books). The best outsourcing is where the discount given is less than 50%.

It is important to try and keep golfers off guard as to when discounts will occur; otherwise, you may find golfers waiting for lower prices. In essence, last

minute tee time operators can find regular patrons waiting for these rates instead of booking ahead of time.

If there are hotels in your area, do not lose sight of capturing last minute travelers. These individuals usually do not have golf clubs, so good rental clubs are a must. As such, it is important to have a good relationship with the hotel concierge to promote these services.

For golf courses that have a slow start due to weather, some operators will offer 'early bird' packages at reduced pricing during the weak weather periods. In addition, if there are golf shows in your area, usually reduced pricing can be a feature that your Club could sell at the shows. Typically these packages are geared to couples or foursomes. If there is other entertainment in your area, consider promoting your golf package with this other entertainment entity, such as winery tours or shows.

In the end, the key to financial success is controlling your tee sheet and appropriately pricing your product.



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