

Speak Up!

Talk to anyone attending the Golf Business Canada Conference and Trade Show and most would say the biggest benefit is the sense of openness and easy exchange of ideas. But, take people out of that national forum and back to their own neighbourhood and a shroud of competitive secrecy takes over. After all, who wants to reveal their path to hard won success to those competing for the very same customers?

The truth is that we can't look for new ideas if we're busy hiding our best under a bushel. Our heads are in the sand if we think that we can keep golfers to ourselves and be the only golf experience for our customers. My customers play at many other courses and I can run a better show if I am aware of those experiences.

A few years ago, a monthly 'meeting of the minds' started between 3 neighbours in the fiercely competitive Toronto golf market. Each a General Manager of their facility, all face seasonal time pressures, but all make the time to get together monthly for an update. The meeting always takes place at a different location (to avoid detection) and almost always involves golf carts (moving targets). If our methods appear overly stealthy -remember, we *are* plumbing the depths in our search for elemental truths of our businesses. Questions like 'How much do you pay for coffee cups?' or 'Why do callers *always* have to talk to the Head Pro to ask if it's raining?' pepper our conversation. It's heady stuff.

Something like a game of golf provides a cover for this pithy dialogue and often we are joined by the General Manager at our host facility in order to create the look of a real foursome.

While we haven't solved all the great mysteries of our business, we have learned a lot along the way. The monthly game lets us see how other courses serve their players and has shown *us* one of the core benefits of golf that we have been selling

to the public: that golf creates an understanding of your partners' character and allows relationships to develop in ways that few other activities do.

Thanks to these monthly meetings, we each have a better understanding of our competitors' position in the market. Communication is always easier with time spent on the course and it isn't unusual to come away with an idea or two that we can make our own. From what I've observed, the real leaders in any industry are the competitors that can give and take with their peers to elevate everyone's experience. There is always something demanding our attention back at the office, but that time spent working on the business rather than in the business allows us to get a fresh look at the bigger picture- and it's fun, too!



L to R- Westview's Collin Nisbet, Cardinal's 'Killer' Kilgour, Pheasant Run's Craig Evans- Dons of York Region's 'Golf Illuminati'.



CRAIG EVANS

Craig has been stealing good ideas to help run his family's golf club near Newmarket, Ontario for over 25 years. If you have any to share, contact him at cevans@pheasantrungolf.com or at (905) 898-3917.