

As golf course operators, you are well aware of the extremely competitive nature of the golf industry. The key to being successful in such a competitive market is to set yourself apart from your competition in as many ways as possible. One sure-fire way to accomplish this is through design. Although sometimes it may seem rather complicated, coming up with good creative is actually quite simple when you involve the right people in the process.

SOLID BASE

Consider that creating the right design is like building a new green. If you start with the right base you will have no problem growing grass, you will have no problem with drainage and ultimately you will have a putting surface that will have people talking.

The right base is your logo. Design the right logo and you will have created your biggest marketing asset, much like the greens on your golf course. It is the most consistent component of all design work that will follow as it is the one piece that will be present in everything from the clothing in the pro shop to the signage on the course.

The design of your logo is not something that should be taken lightly; it is an extremely important part of your facility's image. As a golf facility it is important to pay close attention to all the possible uses of your logo including embroidery, screening, brochures, web, and vinyl applications for signage. The wrong design or colour usage can make your logo difficult to reproduce and ultimately could cost you more.

Be sure that your logo looks good in one colour as well as two or three because you will not always be using it in full colour depending on where your logo appears.

MARKETING IMAGE

As mentioned earlier your logo is your biggest asset when it comes to your marketing. Why? Because when designing anything for your facility, whether it is an ad campaign, a brochure, a menu or a new website, consistency is important and your logo can ensure that there will always be one component that is consistent.

It is an identifier for people and the right logo can be dissected and used so many different ways while maintaining the consistency in your image.

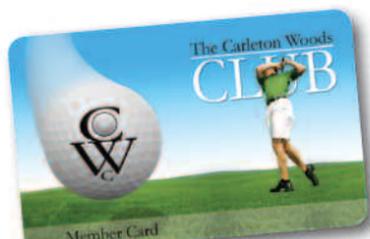
Once you have a solid base, the next thing you need to consider with your design is consistency. I can't stress enough how important it is to develop a consistent marketing image and stick with it.

How to get the right designs from the right designer for the right price

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All of your collateral material including newsletters, websites, scorecards, brochures, menus, advertisements, and signage must carry the same look and feel.

Keep in mind that when the creative is done right then the consumer will begin to recognize your facility because you are making it easy for them.

POWER OF DESIGN

Just as a good superintendent can make all the difference in a consumer's overall experience at your facility by the right conditioning and playability, a good designer or design company can make all the difference in your facility's overall image.

A designer is more than just someone who can make things 'look pretty'. There is always a reason behind a design and most good designers create with a purpose.

You always have to be thinking ahead to your future design plans and this is another area where a designer is taught to prognosticate to make certain that all the important factors are kept in mind as new material is being created. Since consistency in design and image are important you cannot be creating 'one-off' marketing material.

Aside from the ability to create stunning graphics for both print and web application one of the greatest assets a good designer possesses is the knowledge of the industry. They are capable of communicating with web hosting companies, printing companies and sign companies and understand how files and other types of artwork need to be created in order to avoid costly errors and slowdowns in the production process.

In most cases a designer will essentially handle the communication with your production company on your behalf and that way you only need to proof material, saving you valuable time. Some of the areas that designers are well versed in are; embroidery, screen printing, sign making, printing, web development (both graphic and technical), photography and typography.

COST EFFICIENCY

One of the common misconceptions in the design industry is that a professional designer is expensive and that most golf course operators could not afford the consultation let alone having one on retainer. Let me shed a little light on the subject before you start thinking, "Great ideas but how do I pay for it?"

Not all designers charge \$150 per hour and the best designers are not always the most expensive. Consider that if you want good greens you may not pay 150k per year for a superintendent but you don't pay 25k either. The same thing holds true for a designer or design company. You may not have to pay \$150 per hour but don't expect to get quality work for \$10 per hour either.

Here are some tips for finding a reasonably priced designer that can help you improve your overall image and creative process.

Newspapers & Magazine Designers

Many of the publications that you are already using for your advertising are capable of helping out some of their clients with the overall design process and in many cases the designers do freelance work in their spare time to make a little extra money.

My own experience speaks directly to this. Due to our clients' needs we spun off a consulting and design division, in addition to our magazine that has now done work for more than 40% of golf courses in Eastern Ontario.

Staff Member/Community College Student

Sometimes the answer is right under your nose and you don't even know it! Within your own facility you may have a student who is coming in at 5am to cut greens that is enrolled in a graphic design program and would love nothing more than to get paid a little more summer cash to keep their skills sharp in their chosen career path.

The only thing to be aware of in this situation is that they are still learning and might not yet possess all the knowledge

Logo Design Check List

Whether you pick a design firm or a freelance designer here is a list to use as a guide to see if your designer is following the proper steps to producing an effective logo. These steps can also be applied to almost any design project.

1. Design Brief: Designer will conduct a questionnaire or interview with client to extract the objectives, goals and history of the company.
2. Research: Designer will conduct research focused on the industry and competitors.
3. Reference: Designer will conduct research into logo designs that have been successful and current styles and trends that are related to the design brief.
4. Sketching & Conceptualizing: Designer will develop the logo design concept(s) around the brief and research using creativity and the rules of what makes a good logo.
5. Reflection: Designer may take a break and get some intermediate feedback to see if he and client are both on the same page.
6. Positioning: Designer will fall into two categories. Ones that take orders from clients on what to do OR ones that guide clients to the best solution. Decide which fits you best.
7. Presentation: Designer will choose to present only a select few logos to the client or a whole collection.

that a veteran designer would have. The same thing holds true for a student of a community college design program.

Small design companies

When you open up the Yellow Pages and start looking at agencies and design companies keep in mind that it is more likely that the bigger firms will have higher fees and there is no guarantee that the design work will be any better. Those loftier fees might just be so they can cover their higher overhead.

Look for small companies that have one person or owner as the main designer and hire help from students when the workload gets heavy. They are usually priced a lot lower per hour and are more versatile because they are generally called upon to handle every aspect of the process.

CHOOSING A DESIGNER

In reality, choosing a designer is not as tough as it may seem. You can use the guidelines above to establish a short list

based on availability. If you have no one in house that possesses the skill sets to do the actual design work then you may want to go the route of a designer or design firm.

In this case, as a golf course operator, you need to talk to as many designers as possible and find out what they are capable of doing for you. Can they develop a creative plan for you and design everything in-house or do they farm work out to subcontractors? It is important to understand the fee structure as well. Do they charge by the hour or by the job (flat rate)? In my company we have some things that have set pricing such as corporate identity packages and brochures, but in most cases we use an hourly minimum plus design time.

For more long term work we will try to establish an annual retainer with our clients because it is more cost effective than charging by the hour. Keep in mind that you should not be afraid to call your designer with any questions - especially if

they are on retainer. Your designer should welcome the opportunity to give you advice.

Finally, the most important question to ask a potential designer before you hire them is...do you golf? For such a niche market if your designer can't understand the terminology then how can they design appropriately? Designing materials so that they appeal to your golfers is something that needs to be done by someone who knows what they want to see, what is going to grab their attention and only a golfer can truly understand how to incorporate that.

FUTURE PLANNING

Creative design is one of the biggest areas that golf course operators neglect and it can significantly hamper your marketing efforts and can even cost you money. Find a designer you are comfortable talking to and who will listen to your ideas and provide you with theirs.

Go forward with the two most important principles in mind; logo and consistency, and you will be in a great position to successfully market your facility to golfers.



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