

Are You Missing Anything in Your Efforts to Communicate?

A website provides a tool to communicate current information regarding golf course maintenance operations.

by **DARIN S. BEVARD**

IN REPEATED surveys regarding the skills golf course superintendents need, better communication skills continue to be mentioned at the top of the list among course officials. In numerous publications, superintendents state that maintaining turfgrass is often the easiest part of their job. Interacting with people is the most difficult. These two statements provide a great insight into the relationship between the superintendent and course officials.

Many different priorities and agendas exist within the framework of turfgrass maintenance at public and private facilities. The golf course superintendent is ultimately responsible for setting priorities and coordinating maintenance, whether it is for the putting greens or the clubhouse grounds. Oftentimes, the public at large is not privy to the goals that management sets and the superintendent implements on the golf course. Communicating the priorities and goals of the golf course maintenance staff as they relate to the needs of the customer can make interacting with people easier and more productive.

So what are the best ways to communicate? There are standard ways of communicating with members and customers, such as through newsletters and bulletin boards. Unfortunately, newsletters are published monthly at best, and an individual must be at the facility to see a bulletin board. Of course, face-to-face communication is still very important. However, not every person, superintendent or otherwise, is comfortable with speaking before groups or even talking face to face with the people in power. In a world of cell phones, pagers, and the Internet, other options are available.

One available avenue of communication that, in my opinion, is being under utilized by superintendents is the Internet. Many private and public golf courses now have websites. Several superintendents have taken the opportunity to ask for a portion of their course's website so information can be



Kennett Square Country Club (Pa.) uses a golf course maintenance website to introduce crew members to the membership and provide regular updates on course conditions, weather impacts, daily maintenance routines, and future projects.

provided about golf course maintenance. These superintendents can inform their customers about the daily operations and goals of the golf course maintenance staff. Pictures can be posted easily to show progress on current projects. Maintenance schedules can be posted so that people know what to expect regarding pesticide sprays or disruptions in play due to tasks such as putting green aeration. In this way, individuals have regular access to information that they may be interested in. Additionally, the information can be updatable easily so it can be kept current.

A very high percentage of golfers are accessing the Internet. At Brandywine Country Club, in Wilmington, Delaware, the club was interested in initiating a website. Superintendent Randy Hess said that a club survey indicated that 85% of the membership had Internet access. Thus, a website seemed to be a good way to reach the members. Brandywine Country Club is moving forward with its website.

At Kennett Square Country Club, in Kennett Square, Pennsylvania, superintendent Joe Liebsch has been maintaining communications with his membership through a website for six months. The site has provided the opportunity to introduce the maintenance staff and update the membership on everyday maintenance issues. Addi-

tionally, timely updates can be provided. In December, when a severe storm brought close to four inches of rain, Mr. Liebsch was able to post pictures of course damage that occurred, especially to the bunkers. Very cold weather prevented the bunkers from being repaired due to frozen sand and ice-covered bunkers. These facts were provided in the weekly "Grounds Update" on the club's website, alerting the membership to the unfortunate condition of the bunkers. Past updates are archived for those who may have missed them or want to review them. However, as Mr. Liebsch mentioned, people cannot be forced to the site, and promotion of the website is needed to make the membership aware of what is available.

Several web companies specialize in websites for golf courses. Usually, updating the sites is quite easy to accomplish through the website host. Text and pictures can easily be included. A digital camera allows for this information to be e-mailed to the hosting company for quick posting, but photos can be scanned for the website as well. For private clubs, membership numbers provide access to the club website.

A website may not be for everyone. Discipline is needed to maintain current information on the site. Interest can decline quickly if regular updates are not provided. Additionally, there is no substitute for good face-to-face communication with the membership. However, the golf course superintendent's job does not always allow for face-to-face meetings with all parties on a consistent basis. Having a web page that highlights the activities and philosophies of the superintendent and his crew can be a valuable tool for the superintendent and the entire golf course operation.

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