

Getting the Word Out — It's Easier Than You Think!

Improvements in communication technology make it all possible.

BY CHARLES "BUD" WHITE AND LARRY GILHULY

In his article 20 years ago titled "The Ten Pitfalls of Golf Course Maintenance" (<http://turf.lib.msu.edu/gsr/1990s/1992/920901.pdf>), Bob Brame made a strong case that it is not inconsistent bunkers, too many trees, or greens that are mowed within a one-hundredth inch of their lives that is the biggest challenge facing modern golf course superintendents. It was the ability to communicate to players on the many aspects of maintenance on a golf course, while using every tool available at their disposal. The question is, "Are you using all the tools to communicate with your players?" If not, read on, as methods of communication have advanced dramatically in the last two decades!

OLD FORMS OF COMMUNICATION

We don't have to go very far back in time to see that the only forms of communication were the written word or human voice. The same applied to the golf course, where golf course superintendents had always spoken either directly to or on the phone with players concerning their individual ideas. Information about various topics was written for the golf course newsletter or other form of written document. Meeting with players in a one-on-one setting is still the best form of communication, but this is simply not possible today. Other forms of communication have been adapted with great success, as shown in the following two success stories:

● **The good ole bulletin board.** The old standby of a highly visible



"The greens are eight feet." What better way to educate players on potentially controversial topics than showing them the actual conditions on the golf course?

bulletin board somewhere near the pro shop, locker rooms, or first tee, is still one of the best ways to get the word out on several basic topics. Figure 1 shows an excellent example of the written word with photographs at its finest. This bulletin board is found at Tacoma Country and Golf Club, where Joel Kachmarek, CGCS, covers all the basics of ball mark repair, divot recovery, and bunker rake placement, along with any other topics that occur on the golf course that may be of interest to his membership. Simple, high quality, good visibility, and ample use of photographs. They do tell a thousand words!

● **Maintenance standards.** In the May/June 2002 issue of the *Green Section Record*, an article by the author

(<http://turf.lib.msu.edu/2000s/2002/020534.pdf>) describes the outstanding golf course maintenance manual put together by Forrest Goodling, superintendent, and John Manley, general manager at Portland Golf Club. Today, this manual is given to green committee members and includes a DVD of the golf course and outstanding details concerning the maintenance operation. The new green committee person then has a much greater understanding of what it takes to maintain the golf course. The manual was originally done a decade ago, and to this day it remains the gold standard for maintenance manuals in the Pacific Northwest.

● **Don't overlook the human voice.** As mentioned earlier, one-on-



A highly visible bulletin board is still one of the best ways to get the word out to your players.

one discussions are always the best form of communication. Looking someone in the eye and hearing the tone in his voice often gives better insight into the topic at hand. On-site education by the superintendent is essential for golfer understanding, especially for individuals involved with management of the course. One simple example is cutting a soil profile of a green and explaining the importance of the layers. This provides great insight into the need for aeration and topdressing.

Sometimes, however, human emotion can get involved, and it is at that time that another human voice may be helpful to be a part of the communication effort. Whether this occurs at your golf course or not, the agronomists of the USGA Green Section are simply the best in the business at discussing and helping your golf course maintenance program. From turfgrass 101 to championship playing conditions, these 18 professional individuals visit more than 1,500 golf courses annually. They offer assistance unlike any other in the turf maintenance

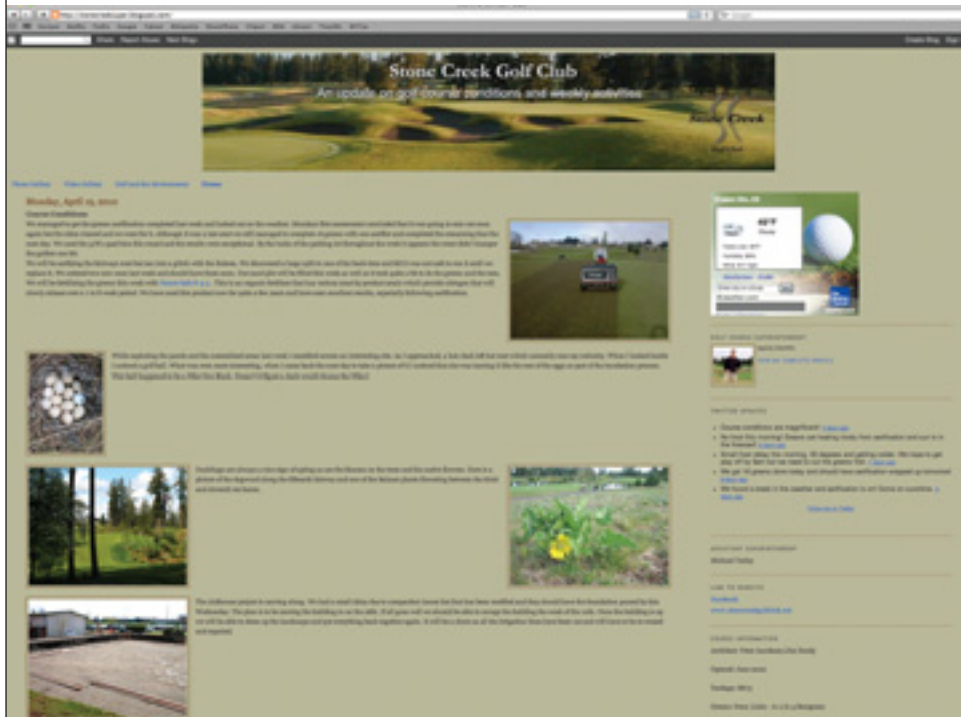
field. Since they sell nothing but their expertise, their views are unbiased, backed by science, and up to date with the scientific community. If you have not used this form of communication

with your golfers, give it a try. You will be glad you did!

NEW FORMS OF COMMUNICATION

The old forms of standard communication are still very much needed, but with the arrival of the Internet, the information age has gone to new levels. Fast and significant amounts of information are now just a click away, and getting the right information into the most hands as soon as possible falls into the golf course superintendent's lap. Based on observations made during the past few years, there are now three forms of communication that can get the word out within minutes of any occurrence on the golf course or can be used to bring players up to date with your golf course and course maintenance in general.

- **Email.** In many cases, email (and texting) has replaced the human voice on the telephone because the ease of typing and sending a note can be achieved when not at the office. For the golf course superintendent, the use of email blasts is extremely effective to



A superintendent blog or a portion of the golf course web page is a great way to keep players up to date on the golf course maintenance operation.



Don't miss the opportunity to make a one-on-one connection. Superintendents should play golf regularly with their golfers.

get the word out about current conditions on the golf course through the use of words and photos. As mentioned earlier, Forrest Goodling at Portland Golf Club has done a masterful job with their maintenance standards; however, he has done just as well for the past two years sending email blasts to the majority of his membership. These came in very handy during the past summer and winter, when Mother Nature sent two curveballs at golf courses on the west side of the Cascade Mountain range. Through consistent use of emails, Mr. Goodling has been able to keep snowbird members informed about what happened and what was being done to improve the situation. This same type of communication is being introduced throughout the country. Bottom line — the speed of email and the ability to send information to all players is one of the best forms of direct communication to keep golfers informed.

● **Blogs.** Though email is very effective and should be used as a very good method of communication, many golf course superintendents have gone one step further and have started their own blogs. The advantage of this type of communication is the amount of infor-

mation that can be placed permanently on a Web site, used extensively for photographic needs, and making those who say “our superintendent doesn’t communicate well” directly contradict their own claims! Although there are many outstanding Web sites throughout the country, David Phipps, CGCS, Stone Creek Golf Course (<http://stonecreeksuper.blogspot.com>) in the Portland, Ore., area is a good example of using this form of communication. Mr. Phipps uses photography extensively, along with regular updates at the end of the day, to discuss important issues with interested parties. He responds quickly to those who read his blog and takes time to share discussions with course officials.

● **Webcasts.** A newer form of communication being used extensively is live webcasts. In this regard, the USGA has conducted numerous live webcasts aimed at golfers who are interested in topics ranging from winter damage on Pacific Northwest greens, to the basics of aeration, to the maintenance of warm-season grasses, and numerous other topics. To access these subjects, go to the USGA Web page at www.usga.org. On the main screen, click “Live USGA Webcasts,” which takes

you to future meetings. If you cannot attend the meeting live, an archived copy is available for listening when you have free time. These talks are generally in a PowerPoint format and have some technical language; however, they are directed at golfers to disperse pertinent information as it applies to your golf course maintenance operation. Many of our topics would make excellent presentations at green committee meetings for golfer education. The webcasts are easily shown via computer and projector. If you have not been to one of our webcasts yet, definitely give it a try.

Getting the word out is a lot easier than you think! Those of you who used all of the tried-and-true methods of communication, and then added today’s new techniques using the information highway, report great results. It will help you let your golfers improve their understanding of the golf course maintenance operation, but don’t expect it to stop bad golf shots!

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