



Slow play is one glaring issue facing the golf industry. Rather than hiding from this challenge, golf facilities are better served to advertise the reasons why golfers enjoy their experience and get a break from their busy schedules.

All Things Considered — A USGA Staff Opinion

If You Can't Fix It, Feature It

Within the challenges facing every golf facility are marketing opportunities to increase golfer enjoyment and participation.

BY BRIAN WHITLARK

Advertising campaigns for products that are guilty pleasures or embarrassing to talk about are often more successful when the slogan emphasizes, not hides, the most glaring feature. Good campaigns that market products such as sugary cereals or bathroom tissue emphasize their glaring features in a way that

embraces the best qualities of the product through the eyes of the consumer.

The golf industry is faced with glaring features of its own, including the difficulty to play golf courses and slow play. How can the golf industry “feature” such issues rather than hide them? As an agronomist, my marketing

background is essentially nil, but with the help of a family member who is a marketing consultant (and core golfer), we came up with a few ideas to feature golf’s most glaring issues.

Golf courses are too hard:

Some courses were intentionally built to emphasize difficulty. While this may cater to the very small population of

low-handicap players, some average golfers are shying away from the game because they feel the courses are simply too hard to play. Rather than hide the fact that your golf course is hard, consider emphasizing this element. Show golfers the course is difficult in such a way that really matters and appeals to core golfers. For example, your golf course may offer a tough enough test that it hosts annual U.S. Open qualifiers. Perhaps it has hosted any one of the 10 USGA Amateur National Championships in the past. Does your facility host a collegiate tournament, state high school championship, or local golf association event that has merit among the golfing community? Emphasize that great golf courses help make great players.

Much of the difficulty associated with playing golf comes from the length of the holes. Course officials should encourage golfers to move forward to play a yardage best suited to their driving distance and skill level. A program known as [Tee It Forward](#) was initiated in 2011 as a joint venture of the USGA and PGA of America to encourage golfers to play a shorter course by moving up to a set of tees that they might not otherwise play. The vast majority of golfers not only have more fun playing from shorter yardage, but they often play faster.

Golf takes too long: Demonstrate why golfers at busy venues love the course and feel the experience at your facility is worth their time. Emphasize the benefits and features from the eyes of your core golfers, your “brand champions,” as they would be known in the marketing field. For example, former President Bill Clinton was quoted in an interview about golf saying, “You can’t do it and think about something else.” He says that golf is “an incredible release” and makes him “feel fresh and more acute and able to concentrate better when he went back to work.” More of President Clinton’s interview can be found at the website [We Are Golf](#). Explore the reasons why golfers enjoy their experience while away from their busy schedules.

Consider offering distractions when golfers are waiting for their next shot.

Think about theme parks. For example, when waiting hours in line at Disneyland, Mickey Mouse™ may appear and surprise the children with a treat or photo opportunity. A similar strategy could be used to engage golfers during idle moments between shots with the help of GPS and on-cart videos. One



idea would be to describe to golfers different playing strategies for the hole they are waiting to play. Offering such a feature through the eyes and voice of the golf course architect would be a powerful element. Another idea is to communicate any recently completed or future projects on the golf course. Virtually any course enhancement project would of interest to golfers, especially if it impacts playability and the environment. As an example, golfers would enjoy learning that the rough along the right side of the 11th hole is now being maintained as a

native area to encourage local wildlife and reduce water and fertilizer inputs. Finally, other video ideas could include swing tips and short-game advice from the golf professional, as well as offering current scores and highlights from the sporting world.

Imagine the frustration airline passengers feel while sitting on the tarmac for several hours without any information regarding the reason for the delay. The best airlines communicate timely updates during tense situations and may pacify passengers by serving additional drinks or snacks. Similarly, when golfers wait on every shot for the group ahead, they naturally become frustrated, especially when they are unaware of the reasons causing slow play. In such circumstances, the value of marshals or player assistants cannot be overstated. Coming from a friendly marshal, a simple “I apologize for the slow pace of play, ladies and gentlemen,” “We are doing our best to speed things up,” or “Here are some cold towels to cool you down on this hot day” can go a long way to appease frustrated golfers.

Pace of play is a significant challenge facing the game. If you would like to learn more about what the USGA is doing to improve place of play, visit the [USGA Pace of Play Resource Center](#).

It seems every golf facility faces some form of scrutiny that may discourage golfers from playing, whether it is cost to play, difficulty of the course, slow play, or even misconceptions of golfers regarding the environmental impact of maintenance inputs. In all cases, it is best to spend the energy, time, and resources to feature the challenge rather than hide from it.

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