



#GOLF

AND THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION

MAKING THE TURN:

REAL WORLD EXAMPLES

In addition to enhancing the golf experience, OB Sports uses golfer data for marketing. In addition to the social media usage mentioned above, OB actively uses email to communicate with customers. Much of the golfer data is collected through their card member programs. To sign up for the program, a golfer must pay a nominal fee and provide additional information about themselves. In exchange, the loyalty program gives them discounts off green fees, pro shop merchandise and other perks.

PALMETTO DUNES GOLF RESORT

WALK, RIDE OR PEDAL

Palmetto Dunes Golf Resort became the first resort along the East Coast to offer the new Golf Bike at its three courses midway through 2015. Built from the ground up to play golf, the Golf Bike holds up to 14 clubs and supplies are integrated into its frame, making it easy and stable to balance. The bike also features six different speeds, for easier navigation of elevation changes and its step-thru frame allows golfers to easily get on and off.

Nine bikes were put into use across the three courses at Palmetto Dunes, joining Segways as alternative forms of getting around the golf course for the more adventurous golfers, many of whom are millennials. There is no additional cost to reserving the bikes and they are provided first come, first serve to resort guests and members.

Clark Sinclair, director of golf at the Fazio Golf Course at Palmetto Dunes, said attracting millennial golfers to the resort wasn't the only consideration in investing in the Golf Bikes, but it was a factor. "Absolutely we expect the bikes to be popular to the more fitness-minded younger generation of golfers," Sinclair said. "The bikes allow golfers to enjoy a round of golf and get in a good workout at the same time. There's also a spot for a cooler and the bike is very course friendly."

Usage has been limited given that the bikes were introduced after the prime spring season on Hilton Head Island, but expectations are that they will be very popular when the fall golf season comes around. During May and June, Sinclair estimates about 40-plus golfers had taken the bikes onto the

course, and their addition has generated media and marketing buzz that has benefited the resort.

Steve Cury, a member of the management team at Higher Ground, maker of the Golf Bike, said the bike was originally marketed as an alternative to golfers who typically walked the course for exercise. Cury, however, can see it appealing to millennials looking to add adventure and fitness elements to a typical round of golf. The Golf Bike, Cury said, is currently in use at about 20 courses, more than half of which are in Colorado. The first shipment of bikes didn't go out until this past May (about 80), so their popularity with golfers - millennials or otherwise - remains to be seen.

"Our goal was to add an element of fitness to the game of golf that also addresses speed of play," said Cury. "We think those things will certainly have an appeal among millennials."

CITY OF LOVELAND, CO

PUTTING THEORY INTO PRACTICE

Steve Southard, Golf Operations Director for the City of Loveland, is putting his knowledge of the golf learning process into practice at Loveland's three golf facilities. Southard says that, regardless of age, a beginner's motivation to play golf is either self-directed or encouraged by a parent or friend.

As a result, Southard has set up various types of golf experiences for the ways in which people are introduced to the game. For those who are encouraged by a parent, they built a SNAG (Starting New at Golf) course. For beginners whose learning is self-directed, the facilities are transforming their driving ranges by adding targets, obstacles and training material. Southard also understands the importance of friends teaching other friends to play golf, so they created a Topgolf-like experience at their resort course.

That Topgolf-like experience, dubbed "Games on the Range," is the most recent addition to Loveland's Mariana Butte course practice facility. On weekend evenings between 5 p.m. and 8 p.m., various targets are set up on the range and players of all abilities can challenge one another to games of tic-tac-toe, climb the ladder and first to 11.

None of the targets, which vary in size, are more than 100 yards away. Food and beverage service enhances the social experience. The difference between Topgolf and what they're doing, according to Southard, is that the City of Loveland really wants people to become golfers.

The programs in Loveland appeal to all ages, but they afford beginners the opportunity to choose a pathway to the game that is most appealing to them. They also want to remove the perception that golf is intimidating and unwelcoming. By welcoming people with these various golf programs, the City of Loveland is not only connecting with millennials, but they're building a good base of golfers across multiple generations.

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA GOLF ASSOCIATION

WORKING TOGETHER TO ACTIVATE MILLENNIALS

Golf facilities may well be the epicenter of the effort to motivate more millennials into the game of golf, but they are not alone in the cause. Take for instance the Southern California Golf Association (SCGA), which has recently increased its efforts to recruit more college-aged adults and young professionals into the game.

The SCGA is among the largest golf associations in the country, with 150,000 member golfers and facilities. For the past several years, the organization itself has seen a worrisome drop in membership among 18- to 34-year-olds compared to previous generations. The association maintains strong support among junior golfers and older adults and seniors, but has grown increasingly concerned by the lack of involvement among millennials.

"We enjoy a lot of junior participation, but it seems like when they reach 18 we're losing touch with many of them," said Kevin Heaney, SCGA's executive director. "We're not sure if it's because they're not playing or aren't interested in posting scores. But there's definitely a gap there that is concerning to us."

That concern has translated into action on two fronts – to increase millennial play on Southern California

golf courses, and to increase the number of millennial members of their association.

Craig Kessler, SCGA's director of governmental affairs, recognizes there are several issues keeping millennials away from the course, but believes the most significant is the financial stress many young adults face today. Kessler points to the nearly 12 million non-golfers between the ages of 18 and 34 that are interested in playing golf now as proof the game remains popular among millennials. Affordable access, he said, could motivate many of those from the sidelines to the tee box.

To bring more millennials to Southern California's golf courses, the SCGA is using its influence to unite municipalities and golf courses to find a solution that might alleviate the cost burden for millennials. They recently hosted a forum on golf participation among young adults where golf fees and policies were at the core of the discussion. From that meeting, Kessler said he expects the creation of specialized rates and incentives for young adults to be developed among municipal courses in the region, which make up a good portion of daily-fee golf. The effort would include a special rate for young adults similar to junior and senior rates, and potentially implement dynamic pricing that would provide off-peak incentives for collegians with flexible schedules.

"We've seen universal buy in on the idea, especially among management companies in the region," Kessler said. "We realize there has to be a focus on this issue, and there also has to be a re-investment if we are going to attract young golfers and keep them long term."

On the membership side, the SCGA has developed two new programs designed to attract college age adults and young professionals. The membership programs focus on recruiting interested but inactive millennials by granting access to exclusive courses, providing discounted greens and range fees and offering game improvement programs.

The programs will also offer members access to social and competitive events intended to reach young adults. These events include "Nine and Wine" events and Glow Ball tournaments in multiple locations across Southern California. The association also stages a Summer Golf Series that offer events free of rules and handicaps, which create a fun and inviting atmosphere for players of all skill levels.