

Member retention

In most golf clubs, membership revenue is the most important income of its operation.

As such, member retention should form an integral part of the golf clubs risk management, communication, marketing and strategic planning. The committee should regularly monitor changes in membership numbers.

Understanding why people join, continue, or leave the club is vital information when developing the way the club operates. This information also feeds back to short, medium and long-term financial planning, facilities planning, volunteer planning, communications and marketing as it impacts on the clubs capacity to service its members.

It is good practice to maintain records of movement in player rounds and membership numbers and compare those figures to previous years.

You may consider your club to have the best facilities and services in your local market, but if it is not what people want, you could be missing major opportunities. It might be because they are dissatisfied with what the club has to offer or it might be that their circumstances have changed. Whatever the reason, you need to know so you can determine if it's possible to get them back and to reduce the likelihood of other people leaving for the same reason.

It is known from research that a new member, within the first two years of membership, is more likely to talk to others outside the club about his or her membership than do existing members. Having recruited a new member it is therefore especially important to make sure the new member has assimilated well in to the club and has got to know some of the key people around the club. It is recommended to undertake a short phone or email survey of new members around six-months after they have joined the club.

During the annual renewal process, some members will consider whether they have received *value* during the year by roughly calculating their average cost per round; and comparing that value to their membership experience.

If members have a relatively high-cost per round, these members could be 'at risk' of not re-joining.

Given the above, you should be regularly monitoring the playing frequency of your members and identifying those who are playing less frequently. Then consider initiatives to contact these members and 'encourage' them to visit the club to play more often.

An alternative response to the 'at risk' member is to eliminate the 'annual renewal event'. Many clubs now offer monthly payments via 'direct debit' and these arrangements can easily continue month to month. To assist with any increase in administration requirements, there are services such as 'Pay as you Golf' which provide a service of collecting subscriptions instalments from members.

Also, it is important to get feedback from members who have departed (resigned or unfinancial) your club. There are many ways to obtain this feedback:

- **Ask them in person.** The simplest way to find out why they left is to ask them on the phone or in person. This may not appear easy to do, particularly if it is negative feedback, but if you want to improve your club, you need to know the reason why people are leaving. You must also ensure that if you're going to ask the questions, you need to be prepared to respond and change. More often than not people appreciate being contacted in person by someone at the club as it shows the club cares. In some cases the member who has resigned from the club will enquire about options of re-joining in another category or at a future date.
- **Questionnaires and Surveys.** Asking members to put their thoughts in writing on a questionnaire or survey is one of the most well-established feedback techniques. If your club has an effective database of contacts for your members, it should be easy to email a survey out to members who have departed. Another easy option is to use one of the free online survey tools available e.g. survey monkey, to develop one which you can send out to your members to complete. Survey cards placed on a service counter is also an efficient method.
- **Website feedback.** If you have a website, you can set up an area for departed members to provide feedback through this. This is also a good strategy to implement for all members to use, so hopefully you can hear of any discontent before it leads to members leaving.

Understanding why members leave and stay is crucial for the sustainability of your club.

Recognise that not everyone is prepared to provide feedback, but those that do should be listened to. If one person has something negative to say regarding your club, you can be certain that there are potentially more out there who won't say anything but will take their membership elsewhere.

Be grateful for members voicing their concerns to you. It's better to find out this way than via another means such as social media. Make it easy for members to provide feedback. That way you know exactly where the issues are within your club and can work to resolve them.

Consider the following initiatives to retain members:

- Encourage an enjoyable, welcoming and inclusive environment;
- Offer a good value proposition – i.e. perceived as good value for money;
- Have few playing restrictions;
- Communicate with members regularly and openly in different formats;
- Seek feedback from members via surveys and active engagement;
- Offer reasonable membership subscriptions and a range of membership packages;
- Offer a range of payment methods for fees;
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- Have a clear purpose and direction - i.e. ensure members are aware of the club's future direction (strategic plan);
- Offer a variety of social golf and competition golf opportunities;
- Have family and social activities;
- Demonstrate sound governance;
- Don't send standard worded letters to members who are late with subscriptions that demand payment and threat suspension or expulsion. Instead first follow up by speaking with the member to find out if there is a club-related issue that is preventing them from re-joining. Then try and resolve that issue.

There are a variety of reasons why golfers choose not to remain in membership and it is important to address these issues to support future members. Introducing golfers to membership is essential, but so is providing an inventive and attractive membership package which provides ample opportunities to ensure that golfers remain within the game and your club.

Current members should, where possible, be given the opportunity to feedback their thoughts on membership and actively welcome and support new members where possible.