

Marketing Plan

Understanding Marketing

Before starting to market your club, it is important to understand what marketing is.

In its basic form it's the process of communicating the value of what you offer to prospective customers for the purpose of attracting them to purchasing your product.

What has your golf club got to offer? Why should people become a member? What message do you want to get to these prospective members and how will you deliver the message?

Marketing can help your golf club in many ways. Here are a few examples:

- It attracts new members, more activity and more revenue.
- It helps to identify the right people.
- It puts you in their shoes, seeing the club from a different perspective.
- It highlights to all, including the current members, the attributes of the club.
- It fulfils people's aspirations – living up to the marketing message.
- It encourages measuring of results and review of the status quo.

Marketing is all about seeing your club through your customers' eyes. It is about understanding what they want, making sure you are delivering on those expectations, communicating the fact and ultimately selling them more or keeping their business.

To give it a high chance of success a marketing strategy must be supported by a marketing plan. Like any other parts of your golf business, e.g. strategic planning, course maintenance, communication and finance, successful marketing is about putting a process in place and following it.

Principles of a Marketing Plan

Your marketing plan sets out actions, dates, costs, resources and targets and how they can be measured.

These are the key areas which should be covered in any plan:

- Where are you now;
- Facts about your members;
- Facts about your visitors;
- Facts about your competition;
- Clearly defined objectives;
- Marketing tactics to be deployed;
- Winning over stakeholders;
- Setting the budget; and
- How it will be measured.

When writing a marketing plan it is important to make it SMART...

Specific: Ensure that you set clear targets e.g. increasing membership by 10%.

Measurable: You must know if you have been successful or not.

Achievable: Are you being too ambitious?

Realistic: Are you sure you have enough time and resources available?

Timely: Have you set a timeframe and is it realistic? Is it regularly reviewed?

In order for a plan to happen someone has to be responsible for it. Make sure someone, or a team of people e.g. marketing sub-committee, undertakes to implement it, or parts of it, review its progress and its success.

Marketing DOES NOT work when:

- It is not SMART.
- It is not easy to implement and overwhelms the running of the club.
- There is no dedicated resource i.e. someone to make it happen.
- There is no commitment from the key stakeholders.
- There are no processes in place.

Where are you now

Before starting any marketing plan it is important to establish where your golf club sits in relation to the current landscape. There are two simple tools you can use here.

PEST Analysis

The first is a PEST analysis (political, economic, social, and technological). Here you need to consider all of the outside influences which may affect your golf club and its day to day business.

SWOT Analysis

A SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) is when you start to look closely at your golf club and ask what is good and bad, what are the challenges you are facing and how a potential member may regard you.

How to undertake the analysis

The best way to undertake both of these analyses is by asking your marketing sub-committee or volunteer members to a brainstorm meeting so you can debate the various headings and decide your strengths and weaknesses. The important thing is for everyone to finally agree so you can work to a consistent profile.

Sample SWOT to identify what position your golf club is currently at:

Strengths – what has your golf club got to offer? e.g. great course / clubhouse, catering & conference facilities, qualified coaches, ease of access, practice facilities, immediate entry.

Weaknesses – what areas may be impacting upon your success? e.g. limited membership packages, a membership that is viewed as insular or unfriendly by outsiders, a lack of understanding by members of their role in promoting new members, a rundown entrance giving a bad appearance to passers-by.

Opportunities – what is available which could benefit your golf club? e.g. close to a local leisure centre, schools, a clubhouse that could be used by the community, skills amongst the membership.

Threats – what could be a direct threat to your golf club? e.g. other local clubs, other sports, running out of funds to upgrade ageing facilities and equipment.

Facts about your members

In order to build up a picture of where you are in terms of your club business, you need to start understanding your customers - both members and visitors.

To really understand members you should be able to answer the following questions:

- How often do they play?
- How many never play or play infrequently? Why?
- How many of them don't use the bar? Why?
- Which members brought guests?
- How many members joined in last 12 months?
- Why are they joining?
- How many members left in last 12 months?
- Why are they leaving?

In order to help answer these questions you can conduct regular member surveys, new member surveys and departing member surveys either on-line, by post or by phone.

Facts about your visitors

In the same way you need to know about your members, you also need to know about your visitors. Not only are they your future short-term revenue, but they could also be your future members.

To form a picture of the type of person that is visiting your club, you need to consider the following:

- Where are they from? (Member of another club?)
- How they were introduced to your club? (e.g. advert, email, member introduction)

- How did they book?
- How often do they visit?
- When do they play golf and who with?
- What they think about you? (customer satisfaction survey)

When building a visitor and social green-fee players' database, it is essential that you capture their name and e-mail address so you can then start communicating with them.

Your website should have several data collection points so you are building up your visitor database online. Also, you can have an electronic collection point in the golf shop e.g. iPad, or develop a simple contact card which is manually completed at the pro shop counter.

By collecting this data, you are building a very powerful and cost-effective database of future golfers who have an interest in visiting your club or potentially becoming a member.

This information also means that you can tailor offers to meet their needs, determine the best way of communicating with them and track your marketing efforts.

Facts about your competition

Getting the full picture of how your golf club is performing means you also need to know how you are measuring up against your competitors and the overall golf market.

Information is key here and this is accessible from various sources, e.g. competitor golf club websites, mystery shop your local golf clubs and public-access facilities, Golf Australia and/or your state / territory association reports and information, GMA Benchmarking and benchmarking in your local area.

The factors that you need to consider are:

- Membership numbers and fees;
- Green fee prices;
- Corporate golf packages;
- Function packages;
- Where and how they are marketing; and
- Are you comparing like for like.

Only by knowing the answers to these basic questions and understating where you fit in the local marketplace, can you be realistic about what is achievable.

Clearly defined objectives

We know that marketing can help drive your golf business. There are usually 3 key areas that golf clubs wish to improve:

- Finding new members and visitors (customers);
- Getting existing customers to buy more;
- Getting existing customers to buy more often.

These are sound principles but it is important to define each of your objectives even more clearly by making them SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time defined.

You need to take the following steps:

- Define what you want to achieve. For example, we want to grow our membership
- Make it measurable. For example by 20%
- Ask if it is achievable or realistic in terms of the resources you have at your disposal
- Set a time frame e.g. by the end of the year

Marketing tactics to be deployed

Once you have defined your SMART objectives and you have your manageable list, now you need to decide what tactics you will use to implement them.

These have been traditionally known as the four P's in marketing and they have been increased by three more to become the seven P's:

1. **PRODUCT:** What are you offering?
 - a. For example, you could develop a new type of membership package for beginner golfers
2. **PRICE:** What will people pay? How is the offer to be positioned and to which customers?
3. **PLACE/POSITION:** How does this offer sit within the marketplace?
 - a. For example, how does it sit next to what your competitors are doing/offering?
4. **PROMOTION:** How will you promote the offer?
 - a. For example: advertising, direct mail, e-marketing
5. **PEOPLE:** Do you have enough resource to drive this initiative?
6. **PROCESSES:** What do you need to put in place?
 - a. For example: databases, contact cards, what needs to be in place so the offer can be marketed and fulfilled.
7. **PHYSICAL EVIDENCE:** What do you need in terms of marketing literature?
 - a. For example: page on website, email template, posters and leaflets.

There are many forms of Promotion

Promotion doesn't have to be expensive and there are a variety of different methods that can be utilised:

- Word of mouth – promotion by members, staff and visitors that's free.
- Club website – reaches a large audience at a small cost and the club is in control of the information.
- Promotion on golf marketing web sites, including Golf Australia's Twitter campaign #timetosign.
- Promote in magazines and golfer newspapers. Free editorial may be available.
- Email marketing – collating contact emails of visitors provides the golf club with an ongoing mailing list to promote information to.
- Utilise members – run a member's invitation day, introduce a friend or family day to promote vacancies and playing opportunities. Information can be displayed on club notice boards and in newsletters.
- Flyers – direct mail campaign and/or display in local facilities, shops, businesses, colleges.
- Local and regional newspaper/magazines – a more costly method of advertising, however information could be combined with other events and offers.
- Promotion through other facilities – speak to local driving ranges, par 3 courses, gyms, football and netball clubs to see whether they would be willing to display promotional material – establish a reciprocal arrangement.
- Corporate golf days – offer local businesses a corporate package, which includes details of membership and general playing opportunities.
- Open days – run an open day with both golfing and social activities to encourage people into your facility.

Download and use the *Club Template - Marketing Tactics* resource to help you structure your club's marketing objectives.

Winning over stakeholders

If marketing is to succeed within any business then it is vital that all the key stakeholders are aware of what needs to happen and how. It's imperative that you involve them earlier in the process so they are fully bought in.

Stakeholders in a golf club consist of three key groups:

- Board/Committee
- Members
- Staff (if applicable)

Board/Committee

These should be the easiest to convince that marketing has to take place as they will know the full business picture. It is in their best interest for the golf club to be operating on a sound footing and for them to be seen to be taking a proactive approach.

Any marketing plan should be agreed by them and publicly supported as it is implemented.

Members

This is probably your hardest group to convince. Typically members regard marketing as encouraging people to clutter up their golf course! Whilst you need to have some empathy with this view, you are marketing your club for a reason, usually falling revenues due to fewer members and fewer visitors. Someone has to pay and without improving business it is usually the members.

Setting up a small marketing sub-committee with a few volunteer members - including those likely to oppose you - is a good way of demonstrating you are keen to include the members at every opportunity.

Having them actively involved and spreading the word means everyone is aware of what is happening and any promotional activity they may spot won't come as a surprise.

Keep members informed through your website and share the progress of any initiatives you may be trying.

Staff (if applicable)

If your club has staff, then this is another important group to have fully on board before you start any marketing activity. Your golf professional and staff, food and beverage staff, course maintenance staff and administration staff all have face to face contact with your members and visitors.

Engaging with staff will be especially important as you undertake more and more data collection. It may be a good idea to make your golf professional part of your marketing sub-committee, especially if he or she is responsible for day to day contact with green fee visitors.

Setting the budget

Not all marketing costs money. There are various simple processes you can put in place which make a real difference but cost little to implement, such as collecting visitor data and then conducting e-marketing.

However, at some point you will have to allocate some money to your marketing budget. (This might not be as frightening as it seems if you are tracking your activity so you know what works and what doesn't.)

If you are embarking on marketing for the first time, it is best to follow the simple budget setting process below:

- Agree a budget first i.e. what the golf club can afford;
- Allocate by key target groups / audiences e.g. members, visitors / green-fee players, function visitors
- Divide it by the selected media activity (this will dependent on funds);
- Plot a projected return.

How will it be measured

Once you have established your marketing plan, selected your key objectives and started to implement them, it is important to keep measuring their success - or not.

Even though your overall timeframe may be over 12-months, it is sensible to monitor progress at regular intervals, usually quarterly. This will allow you to measure if something is working - and change it if it's not. It's no use waiting until the end of the year and discovering something hasn't worked.

Also, if something is working it will allow you to divert more funds or activity into this area.

Make all of your marketing tactics measurable. For example, use an advert to drive people to your website to download a voucher. This will allow you to judge if something is working or not.

Marketing is about understanding your members and prospective members' needs and wants and targeting your efforts towards meeting those needs and wants.

A marketing plan, appropriate budget and commitment from your key stakeholders are needed to support your marketing effort. Creating a marketing campaign to target a selected segment of people to become members is an exercise that can be undertaken at clubs of all sizes.