

AMENITIES, MARKETING TOOLS & REVENUE SOURCES

Paul V. Ciminelli

With today's ever increasing competition in the golf driving range/golf practice facility business, owners and operators need to make important decisions on where to expend improvement or development dollars. These decisions will ultimately affect the survivability of your facility and the ability to generate increased revenue. Traditionally, facility operators will look to a correlation between the facility improvement and the amount of revenue directly attributable to that improvement. Often time's facility operators have not been willing to expend limited funds unless a direct revenue source is created. The time has come for owners to view many simple improvements as marketing tools to help give you that edge over your competition.

Examples that we discovered purely by accident at one of my facilities involved a customer recovering from heart surgery. I couldn't help but notice that an elderly gentleman appeared out of breath every time he bent down to tee a ball. It would take him almost a minute to catch his breath and hit his shot. I approached him and asked if we could be of assistance. He was in his late sixties, he loved golf and his physician suggested he get active shortly after surgery. I am always testing new equipment so I had several inexpensive automatic teeing machines at the facility. We immediately set one up for this gentlemen explained its operation and told him we would set it out for him whenever he came. He was very grateful and came almost every day that season. After about a month his health improved to a point where he didn't need the teeing machine anymore. The positive results of this accommodation were that we had a customer for life and he told all the members and instructors at his cardiac rehab group about how we took care of him. As a result of this simple gesture and having the right "amenity" available we earned loyalty from a customer and gained new customers. On a more ironic note, this gentleman went through his bucket much quicker and cleared the position for more customers. Had I installed the teeing machine in several stalls and charged more for hitting balls in those stalls, I would have been disappointed at the

AMENITIES, MARKETING TOOLS & REVENUE SOURCES

result. Using this device to fill a special need resulted in increased revenues and ultimately increased profit.

Other examples of traditional amenities that are valuable marketing and sales tools include benches, available rest rooms and shaded areas. Many owners have said to me, "I don't want customers sitting around. I want them to hit and move on." A significant number of your customers may not be able to hit 100 or more balls without using the rest room or sitting down. In the next several years a majority of the population will be more than fifty years old, a significant number will exceed sixty-five. Promoting golf to all members of our society requires accommodating special needs. If your facility provides clear unimpeded access or what we may consider simple creature comforts, customers will notice and return. Having benches and rest rooms may mean the difference between selling a small bucket or selling a jumbo. It might mean the keeping or losing these customers. The elderly gentleman I discussed above would have his wife drive him to the range. Shade from the sun and adequate seating insured her comfort and created a relaxed atmosphere for the gentleman to hit his shots.

Another type of inexpensive improvement can be a small fenced in area directly behind the tee-line. A two or three feet high coated chain link enclosure about twenty-five by 10 feet provides a simple and secure viewable area for children. This is a place a parent can bring a young child and enough toys to keep them busy while mom or dad takes a lesson or hits a bucket of balls.

Should I install a putting green? Can I charge for using it? Should I charge more to hit off the grass tee? Do I charge for use of rental clubs? Do I position small dispensers all along the tee line or do I sell balls from just one location? Many of these questions depend your particular market and the competition. Many of these so-called amenities do not lead to a direct entry on the revenue sheet, but result in providing a complete, friendly and ultimately profitable environment. Addition of a putting green at one of my facilities ultimately led to a dramatic improvement in our instructors' ability to

AMENITIES, MARKETING TOOLS & REVENUE SOURCES

offer complete lessons to their clients. Before the green was installed putting lessons had been relegated to a corner of the retail shop directly on the carpet. Now in addition to using the green to teach, customers can test new putters from the pro shop or just practice a part of their game that accounts for more than thirty-five percent of their strokes on a golf course. Finally, with the addition of an inexpensive portable canopy placed over the green, lesson revenue will never be lost because of rain.

Remember, look past the ability to generate revenue directly from improvements. Consider these improvements marketing tools. Highlight and promote the special features of your facility.

Paul Ciminelli is President & CEO of World Wide Golf Development, Ltd. a company specializing in the development and improvement of golf practice facilities and a range owner himself. He can be reached at 800-597-3948 or at paulciminelli@arcgolf.com.