

Abersoch Golf Club: Business Planning

At a Glance ...

- ▶ In the past Abersoch lacked a clear management structure or strategic planning, and the business was vulnerable.
- ▶ A new planning process has prioritised debt repayment and the Club is on target to achieve this goal.
- ▶ Pro-active marketing, mainly through word of mouth and media features has helped raise awareness and repeat business.
- ▶ A reduction in green-keeping staff and the recruitment of customer-focused front-line employees has improved team working and resulted in a more accommodating Club environment.

Abersoch Golf Club has been described as “The Friendliest Golf Course in Wales”. It is also one of the ten courses to play in the UK that are under 6,000 yards. The Club is located on the Cambrian Coast in rural Snowdonia – yards from the beach. Until recently, Abersoch had no real strategic planning or clear management structure and the Club needed a significant overhaul to help ensure it would have a positive future.

The Issue:

In the past, Abersoch Golf Club lacked a strategic planning process or clear management structure, and had limited budgetary controls. Two consecutive poor summers would have resulted in a slide towards heavy membership losses, dwindling

“ The implications if there had been two consecutive poor summers would have been a slide towards heavy membership reduction, dwindling green fees and mounting debt. ”

green fees and mounting debt – risks the Club was not willing to take. Something had to change.

The Solution:

In 2013/2014, a more structured business planning initiative was implemented. Budgets were set to further the policy of debt repayment as a priority with course improvement/management a secondary priority.

The Club also began to focus more proactively on marketing. Marketing schedules were produced and costed, and a formal emphasis was put in place on word-of-mouth advertising, providing features for publication in the media, and generating repeat business.

To maximise the effectiveness of marketing, the specific roles and responsibilities of the Chairs of various committees were clearly defined, and they were given guidance on how to promote the club at every opportunity. To facilitate their work, responsibilities were delegated to the sub-committees which did not require prior approval by the Executive. There has been an emphasis on continually finding volunteers with the right experience to join the committee and sub-committees.

The number of green-keeping staff was reduced by 25%, a move which was initially difficult but has resulted in a smaller team of three green keepers who work particularly well together. Specialist staff are recruited for certain tasks as the need arises.

Changes in front line bar and catering staff have resulted in a more accommodating and customer-focused Club environment.

“ Getting like-minded volunteers to be nominated for committees and sub groups helps to deliver productive ideas and pushes through conclusions. ”

The Challenges:

While most members have supported the changes for the future of their Club, there are a few who have not agreed with the necessity of the new management practices, and fail to acknowledge that these are necessary to ensure the financial survival of the club and minimise annual “subs” increases.

Implementation of some of the initiatives, especially the recruitment and induction of more customer-focused bar and catering staff, took up a significant amount of management time, but it is expected that these measures will generate a high return on investment in the longer term.

Next Steps:

The initiatives are ongoing: the Club knows that a two poor-summer scenario could only be another season away. Constant management control is required and the various initiatives still need to be consolidated. Some of the volunteers who have managed the Club in the past are, for various reasons, leaving and new volunteers urgently need to be brought on board. Without significant help from volunteer members, it is very difficult to manage the Club on a day-to-day basis and in the longer term.

Now that the customer-focused front-line staff are in place, the Club Manager expects to be able to allocate more time on marketing activities.

Impacts:

The Club continues to monitor its progress against goals, and its top priority of being debt-free is on target to be achieved by the end of 2015 if there is a dry summer.

Awareness of the course has been raised and repeat business is increasing. Abersoch has recently been placed 17th in Golf Monthly Magazine’s “Best Course in Wales” ranking – its first time in the top 25 and evidence of its increased profile and reputation.

Tips and Advice:

Abersoch Golf Club has learned some lessons in its business planning process. Its key tips for other clubs are to set out a clear

“ Set out a plan, obtain influential allies and do not get diverted from your goal. ”

plan, obtain influential allies and do not get diverted from your goals. The Club Manager also emphasises the need to be flexible on the timescales for achievement as change can be slow and slowed by apathy and resentment. The important thing is to keep going!

A final word from Abersoch Golf Club:

The Club’s manager is rightly proud of his club’s achievements. He describes his experience as “A learning curve but I hope the members can see gradual improvements without significant cost increases.”

Based on surveys and follow up interviews, the UK and Ireland’s Golf Home Unions have identified and showcased examples of “what works” in golf club management in a series of case studies. The focus has been on clubs that have been successful in achieving more players, more members and stronger clubs. The intention is to share information and guidance on effective practices in business planning, customer service, membership, and women’s and girls’ golf. For further information about this and other case studies and for further support, please go to www.golfcasestudies.businesscatalyst.com.



ENGLANDGOLF