Padeswood & Buckley Golf Club: Recruiting Women

The Issue:
Padeswood and Buckley Golf Club had historically lost approximately ten per cent of its membership annually at renewal. In the past, new members joining throughout the year had always offset this reduction. In 2011/12, however, around one hundred members left and only sixteen were recruited. The future of the Club was at risk.

The Solution:
Padeswood and Buckley Golf Club’s membership suffered a large drop in 2011/12. While an initiative was put in place to tackle the overall fall in membership, the Club’s Business Development Committee addressed the specific problem of low recruitment to the Ladies Section and the ageing of the Section.

The Club implemented the GDW’s New to Golf initiative, including a free taster session and initial low cost group lessons, followed by a trial membership. The group lessons carried a charge of £5 – a registration fee paid to GDW who in turn funded the lessons.

Impacts:
The initial taster session was attended by around 40 ladies, following which they were invited to sign up for six group lessons. All of the taster session participants took up the group lessons offer.

At the end of the discounted lessons, the ladies were offered a three-month trial membership and six further group lessons for £90. Approximately twenty ladies – half of those who attended the taster session – took out a three-month trial membership. By the end of 2014, six of these ladies had taken out a full membership, four a lifestyle membership, and four were expected to join in spring 2015.

Remember, if the new ladies do not integrate quickly they will probably leave and all your efforts will have been wasted.

At a Glance …

- Recruitment to the Club’s Ladies Section was declining and its average age was increasing.
- To attract more female members, the Club implemented a New to Golf initiative, including a free taster session and initial low cost group lessons, followed by a trial membership.
- The scheme was highly successful, with half of all participants later taking out full membership.
- Tips offered by the Club including advertising the scheme in local shops and organisations that employ many women.

Set in North Wales’ countryside, Padeswood and Buckley Golf Club offers picturesque views, a friendly welcome and a challenging game. However, recruitment to the Ladies Section was declining and its average age was increasing. The Club had to put measures in place to attract more young women.
Next Steps:
The programme has now finished, however the Business Development Committee has contact details for the ladies who took part but have not yet joined the Club. They plan to stay in touch with the ladies with further information about the Club and any future offers.

Tips and Advice:
This was the first time that the New to Golf programme was run at Padeswood and Buckley and many valuable lessons were learned. The Club offers the following useful tips for those considering similar initiatives:

- Ensure that your professional staff are fully committed to the programme.
- Use your existing members to promote the taster sessions and tell them when the taster days are happening.
- Advertise locally with posters in shops and organisations that employ large numbers of women.
- Ensure you have the resources to cope with the taster day and set aside putting, chipping and iron play areas.
- Be organised.
- After the taster session, invite the attendees to the clubhouse. Provide refreshments, promote the scheme, answer their questions and sign them up there and then.
- When offering the trial membership invite the prospective members to the bar and offer them a drink. Promote the friendliness of the clubhouse. Ensure the Pro is present at all meetings.
- Identify existing lady members who could support the new ladies. Ensure they have the right attitude for the job – early on the emphasis should be on fun, the rules can come gradually.
- Consider setting up a 3 to 4 hole mini course on the practice ground.
- Arrange for existing members to practice with the new ladies at quiet times.
- Once the new recruits have become full members, ensure that they are involved in the Ladies Section, provided with a mentor, and generally shown around and included in the Club.
- Remember that if the new ladies do not integrate quickly then they will probably leave and your efforts will be wasted.

A final word from Padeswood & Buckley Golf Club:
GDW’s New to Golf programme worked well at Padeswood and Buckley. The Captain summed up the experience as being “very enjoyable both for the new ladies and those who supported them through the process.”

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.