



### **Withington - Ahead of the Game - Membership Recruitment and Retention**

With the rise of the “mobile golfer”, and the current economic climate many clubs are finding that they need to be more creative in the way they try to attract and retain members. Withington in South Manchester is a typical members club, and like all similar clubs is trying to find ways of recruiting new members in an ever increasing competitive marketplace.

Perhaps Withington is slightly unusual as it has, within its vicinity, two other courses within a “Tiger’s length Drive” and any prospective new member is bound to consider all three alternatives before selecting his/her chosen new club.

So the riddle for them to solve is how do you get ahead of the competition when it comes to the recruitment of new members? Their answer was initially to form a Marketing committee, comprising of members who had been involved in Marketing, Sales and PR all of their working life. After some discussion and brain storming they decided on a multi-pronged marketing campaign that would promote the club both externally and internally.

“There are certain things we have put in place that we will not disclose as these have given us an edge over our local competitors” says Bob King, who sits on the committee and became Captain in November 2008. He goes on to say “One thing we can talk about is that we decided we needed more intelligence on the way our greatest asset, the golf course, was being utilised, so we could market it and promote its usage during its quieter periods. In order to do this we decided we needed a Tee- Booking system that could report upon tee usage over a period of time. This now gives us the ability to look at things such as preferential pricing, twilight rates etc”

#### **Marketing Database:**

“Once you know what you have to sell, you then need to market it to a receptive audience, until the introduction of BRS our ability to send out mailers or anything similar was limited to trawling back through historical records of past societies and maybe, if we were lucky, some visitors may have recorded an address in the visitors book.

As we have implemented the On Line system all visitors and society contacts are recorded in the BRS contacts area, we can now selectively mail out to categories of visitors whether they be society members or walk in visitors, via email, SMS texts or letter.

The beauty of this approach is that these people have been to our course and know it well. We can keep them notified of future society/visitor rates or special offers for such things as winter packages.

More importantly they are a prime target to promote our membership. We now have over 500 contacts in our marketing database and this will continue to build through our use of the system."

### **Membership Retention:**

With an ever increasingly gloomy economic outlook the credit crunch is being forecast to bite golf clubs hard when the next rounds of membership renewals are due. Forecasts of 15-20% non-take up of renewals are being quoted by various industry gurus. Certainly members are going to be ever more aware of the cost of membership and more importantly the VALUE for money they are getting.

This situation is made worse by the actions of many clubs who have chosen, (quite understandably), to drop joining fees. This has meant that club golfers feel less loyalty to a club and are more prepared to "vote with their feet" if the course conditions are poor or if they can get a better deal elsewhere. So given this gloomy scenario how do you escalate your clubs value in the mind of the member?

Withington's answer is to try and offer the best possible service to its members so they feel valued and important. "Traditionally, clubs like our own used to rely on posting a plethora of notices on the members notice board, we all know these never got read or became unsightly wallpaper as far as members were concerned," remembers Bob King.

"Once more we have embarked on a multi-threaded campaign to keep members informed of all events and escalate our value to the member. By using the tee booking system the members have a very visual picture of the availability of the course on any specific day. Prior to this they would have had to phone the pro-shop or office or travel to the club to see that a large society had taken the first tee for three hours. Now they can look on line and plan their day to best effect. If playing partners have to withdraw they are immediately notified via Email. We now even have the capability to advise them via text messages that the course is closed due to weather conditions for example. This can be targeted to just those members who are booked in for that day's golf on the tee sheet."

They are also starting to use the same techniques they use for visitors to send out information to Members. Mass membership mailers can be sent from the system, at no cost, to members email addresses. One of the by-products of introducing Members tee booking systems is that you can collect members email and mobile details and this helps build your members marketing database.

The club can promote social events, and send out notices in this form with the assurance that they will at least be seen (and hopefully read!)

Bob King is convinced that every club will need to look at these kinds of issues in the coming year or so. It's going to be a rough ride, but Withington believe they have the tools and the foresight to make the very best of what may become a difficult situation.

For further Information please feel free to call Bob King on 07976 111206, or ask for a free on line demonstration at [www.brsgolf.com](http://www.brsgolf.com) . You can also contact Brian Smith a Director and one of the co-founders of the company via email on [brian.smith@brsgolf.com](mailto:brian.smith@brsgolf.com) .