



VALUE YOUR CUSTOMERS

GET SERIOUS ABOUT RETENTION

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Foreword

**Your members are the lifeblood of your club.
And as the governing body for amateur golf in
England, we want to see your club succeed.**

I've always believed that keeping players in the game is just as important as attracting fresh blood. But here at England Golf, we want to be certain we're offering the best advice to keep your membership healthy.

So we commissioned Manchester Metropolitan University Business School to uncover the facts around membership.

This is what they discovered.



Nick Pink, CEO

Retain or recruit?

New members aren't the only goal

Too many clubs focus their efforts on attracting new members. But is this really the best way to increase membership numbers?

A focus on recruiting new members can cause a high churn rate because existing members aren't being looked after. A high churn rate, in turn, leads to a focus on recruiting new members. It's a never ending cycle.

The simple solution

Retaining an existing member costs less than acquiring a new one. A healthy base of loyal members is essential to running a sustainable business.

The 2016 Club Membership Questionnaire identified some successful ways clubs are growing their membership. What did these methods have in common? They're all about keeping existing players happy and engaged:

- Creating a welcoming environment for all members and visitors
- Catering for a range of different needs
- Communicating regularly with members and visitors
- Developing facilities to broaden income streams
- Becoming part of the local community

The better your relationship with members, the better your reputation, and the easier your recruitment campaigns will be¹.

The hidden heroes

England Golf volunteers have always tried to keep players engaged. In a recent research report, volunteers highlighted that retaining members is a real concern².

But what about the volunteers themselves? Research has shown that if you keep former volunteers involved in the club, they'll keep giving back to the game³.

Caring for everyone in the club, not just the players, is the most fundamental step in a long-term strategy for success.

A word of warning

Trying to retain existing members doesn't mean ignoring new customers.

Sometimes club culture can put off new customers⁴. So, while it's important to meet the needs of current members, it's also important to remain outward looking⁵.

Creating a clear pathway for players to progress through the club is the key to a sustainable business^{6,7}. But a clear vision for a new member strategy requires a solid understanding of what your current members really enjoy.

While it's important to meet the needs of current members, it's also important to **remain outward looking**

The 6 most important ways to keep members happy

Manchester Metropolitan University reviewed the research on participation and retention of customers in the golf market. They discovered six key drivers of membership retention⁸:



1 Fun and engagement

Enjoyment is essential to retaining members. Member engagement should be at the heart of everything you do.



5 The welcome

What does it feel like to be a new member? Look at all the steps in the process of welcoming someone to the club and keeping them engaged. A single meet-and-greet isn't good enough.



2 Ethos and atmosphere

Your club is unique. So it should have a unique ethos. But be careful not to exclude people - you still need to be open to different ideas and different types of member.



3 Member experience

The customer experience extends all the way from the car park to the bar. And it's not just limited to golfers. Non-golfers and potential members are just as important.



4 Club participation journey

Do you have different options for different types of members? How about new members or novices? A clear participation journey makes it easier to progress people through the club.



6 Long-term involvement

How do you track member engagement? You need to find innovative ways to involve members (new, existing and lapsed) in events.

Fresh ideas

The six key points are the basics of maintaining your club membership⁹. But that's not the end of the story. Every club can do a bit more to recruit and retain more members. Here are just a few examples to get you going. We're sure there are plenty more good ideas out there, so don't be afraid to try something new.



Female-friendly clubs

Negative language, attitudes and perceptions can drive anyone away from a club, not just women^{10, 11, 12}. But a sociable, flexible and inclusive environment can really encourage women to keep playing¹³. A welcoming atmosphere and a clear approach to retaining female members is essential.

Lyme Regis Golf Club

Women-only beginner group coaching sessions were held at various times, including evenings, weekdays and weekends, to attract working women and those with children.

Details were advertised through the Get into golf website and emailed to all current members, with a request to pass them on to family and friends. As a result 24 women aged in their 40s and early 50s registered for the first sessions.

Current women club members were recruited as ambassadors to support the new players during the sessions and a Facebook page and WhatsApp group were set up so the new women players could communicate and organise games in between sessions.

A £300 beginner membership was introduced, including unlimited lessons, a half set of golf clubs and the opportunity to play the course from the 'beginner' tee. These members were encouraged to play a short, six-hole loop to build confidence and complete play within an hour.

Arcot Hall Golf Club

A social experience can be a really effective way to introduce new members to the club. Arcot Hall used a buddy system to ease new golfers into the women's section. Even more importantly, these new recruits are still committed players months later.

Brian Rumney, Club Secretary, says, "We are delighted to have had so many new ladies getting involved in this programme who are still regularly playing golf six months after the initial taster."



Alternative playing formats

Having fun and taking different approaches to practising the game is crucial for new members¹⁴. If your club can emphasise enjoyment more than expertise, people are more likely to stay involved.¹⁵

Stone Golf Club

Golf Express is England Golf's campaign to promote short format golf. Stoke-on-Trent's Stone Golf Club embraced the idea to help older members stay involved with the club.

What they didn't expect was the added bonus of lapsed members re-joining. Players are visiting more often and the club has seen an increase in green fees and memberships.

For more information on Golf Express, visit golfexpress9.org or contact your Club Support Officers.

Topgolf

Alternative play doesn't even need a course. Topgolf is an entertaining game based around a driving range with targets.

Micro-chipped balls and live screens keep track of scores, and each bay includes colour-coded clubs, heating, food and drink service, and access to a roaming pro.

Topgolf have successfully created an accessible entry to the sport, with 60% of visitors returning. For players who want to get more involved with the game, they offer coaching, group lessons, and information on local courses.

Players are visiting more often and the club has seen an **increase in green fees and memberships**

Stone Golf Club



Keeping older people in the game

Golf is an attractive game for older people. It brings health benefits and helps people feel part of a community¹⁶. Close friendship groups are a real boost for your retention rates.

Brightmet Golf Club

Brightmet had a large group of golfers over 65 who were struggling to complete 18 holes. They were at risk of leaving the game entirely. Their solution was the "Victor Meldrew Society".

The society play up to a 10-hole game three or four times a week. They also meet for a meal (with partners) every few months. The group is about socialising as much as the golf.

For those players unable to complete even the 10-hole game, the group set up a bowling club. The bowlers are just as much a part of the society as the golfers and get involved in drinks, meals and quiz nights.

Wigan Golf Club

Older players at Wigan Golf Club started dropping their membership down to five days. Around 30 players in their 70s couldn't return scores in the weekend competitions because of their declining ability and the club's rule of playing from white tees.

The club decided to adjust the teeing area and rating for one of the trickiest holes. Players can now choose which tee to play from and get their handicap adjusted. The older members have moved back to seven-day membership. And there's an added bonus - games have sped up because players don't need to take provisional shots or search for lost balls!



Finding your niche

Every club is unique. We're confident that our 6 tips will benefit everyone, but there are plenty of ways to customise your membership approach. Embrace your club's culture and vision, and find your Unique Selling Point.

Mark Butler Golf Academy

Sedgley Golf Club was a council-run facility that needed a makeover. The new management wanted a club that would stand out from the crowd.

The new Mark Butler Golf Academy is a community venue based around the Golf Express 9-hole game. The club uses a loyalty card scheme to help players continue with the game and stay committed to the venue.

It's not just about the golf either. Members come to eat, drink and socialise, as well as practice their game.

Gaudet Luce Golf Club

Gaudet Luce realised beginners were a huge market for them. So they created an innovative package to ease new players along the path to committed members.

The two-year beginner's programme gives players a short introduction course, then a year's half-price membership for the Par 3 course, and finally a year's half-price membership for the 9-hole course.

By removing barriers for beginners, the club has helped over 400 new members get into the game in the last two years.

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Gaudet Luce Golf Club



Embracing disabled people

It's vital to accommodate people with disabilities, illness, or injuries. Especially since golf has a high number of older players that would be excluded otherwise. And remember that a lot of disabilities are invisible.

Prenton Golf Club

Prenton are a prime example of how forward tees can widen participation. They introduced two shorter courses. The black course is 20% shorter than the red tee and the silver course is 40% shorter.

The courses have helped new and young players build up confidence and enabled other players to remain in the game when they can't manage the length of the full tee.

Neil Jackson from the club says, "Juniors have commented that they feel better taking a 6 on a par 4 off the Black tee rather than a 7 or 8 off the Yellow tee. We've also had very low handicap golfers playing off the Silver tee practising their short game as both courses are SSS rated."

Hinckley Golf Club

The Council of National Golf Unions (CONGU) introduced the Club Handicap system so golfers can have a handicap over 28 (men) or 36 (women) for home competitions. Hinckley Golf Club have made great use of the system to help golfers play to a handicap that reflects their ability.

Sarb Matharu, Handicap Secretary, says, "It allows players to track their progress and gives many an incentive to play and submit scores and be part of the club competitions. For golfers who are getting older, or who are recovering from injury or a break from the game, the Club Handicap system has been great to keep them playing".

Knowledge is power

You can't always stop people leaving the club. But you can take steps to understand more about what's going on.

Take a look at things like attrition rates, membership satisfaction and trends:

- How many members have joined in the last 12 months?
- How many members have left in the last 12 months?
- What's the monthly retention rate vs annual retention rate?
- What are the most common reasons for people leaving?
- How do you measure satisfaction?
- What is the lifetime value of a member?

Whatever you're measuring, understanding more about your membership statistics will really help you gauge your progress.

The more you understand about your retention strategy, the more effective your recruitment campaigns will be. Your existing membership is the best place to start when looking for new target areas for potential members.

Attrition rates for a medium size golf club in the US are between **13.1%** and **23.4%**¹⁷. How do you compare?

Conclusion

We think it's a no-brainer. An existing member and a new member bring in similar green fees and membership fees. But it's cheaper to retain an existing member than recruit a new one.

And the research from Manchester Metropolitan University shows that focusing on existing members can actually help bring in new people.

If your members are happy, your culture is welcoming and fun, and you can accommodate different abilities, your new member campaigns will be more successful than ever.

For more information on how England Golf can help you and your club, visit our website. You'll also find contact details for your local Club Support Officer. Get in touch with them for personalised help with your specific needs.

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