Club Membership Questionnaire

KEY FINDINGS 2018
Methodology

The biennial club questionnaire has been running since 2004. This study, completed by SPORTS MARKETING SURVEYS INC. on behalf of England Golf, is designed to provide a snapshot of the national golfing landscape, complete with current trends.

Paper copies of the questionnaire were distributed to every affiliated golf club in the country in February 2018. In addition, an online version of the questionnaire was made available.

Based on the number of clubs which completed the questionnaire, SMS consider this to be a statistically significant sample, representative of the national landscape.

The commentary included within this results booklet has been provided by SPORTS MARKETING SURVEYS INC. and England Golf.

Introduction

Over the last decade the golfing landscape has changed considerably. Club membership has steadily declined and only recently shown signs of stabilisation, while the number of independent golfers and leisure golfers has continued to grow.

Golf as a sport has also diversified in this time and there are numerous opportunities to play, outside the traditional 18-hole format, including adventure golf, entertainment ranges, virtual golf and competitive socialising experiences. Some affiliated golf clubs have started to respond to the evolving market with flexible memberships, academies, fun golf formats and by improving the off-course experience.

Given the competition for our leisure time, clubs need to continue to develop and trade on their differences. It’s true that some clubs have closed during the last 24 months, but new facilities are being built and other clubs are investing in redevelopment projects to diversify their business and generate additional income streams.

The good news is that golf is the 5th largest participation sport in England and there is significant demand for the game. More and more clubs are creating points of difference and continually evolving to remain relevant.

Web and paper-based survey for affiliated clubs

426 responses received

Members’ clubs 70%
Proprietary clubs 27%
Municipal 3%

Fieldwork completed in May 2018

More than 6 million adults have played adventure golf in the last year

More than 3.7 million people have played golf on a full length course in the last 12 months

More than 2 million people are playing golf at least twice a month¹

¹Numbers come from the independent research agency Sport MR, through their monthly Sport and Physical Activity Tracker - Hearts and Minds
The average number of members per golf club has seen an increase at 484 in 2018, compared to 460 in 2016. The average price of full adult membership has increased from £857 in 2016 to £901 in 2018. Prices have generally seen an increase, apart from juniors, which has seen a small decrease. Intermediate and senior prices have moved the most, with an average increase of £50. It is worth noting that there are regional variations.

While overall membership numbers have seen a small increase, the number aged 65+ has increased by 13%. This may be a reflection of the good health of golfers, enabling them to play longer and stay members for longer. Our recent health research highlighted the benefits of golf on players’ physical, mental and emotional health.

In 2018, 38% of clubs saw an increase in membership and these members, on average, play more frequently. Weekly and monthly participation is relatively static, although there has been a small increase amongst adult men. These figures reflect the continuing theme of lifestyle pressures impacting on leisure time.

**PERCENTAGE OF GOLFERS WHO PLAY WEEKLY SINCE 2014**

**PERCENTAGE OF GOLFERS WHO PLAY MONTHLY SINCE 2014**
In 2016, we identified common themes among clubs which were successfully growing their membership. These included the importance of creating a welcoming environment, catering for a range of different needs, communicating regularly with members and visitors, developing facilities to broaden income streams and becoming part of the local community.

The results from the 2018 questionnaire reinforced this and, with more clubs taking positive steps to address these issues, it’s encouraging to see a significant shift in the number of clubs which have seen membership growth over the last two years.

To help bring the findings to life, we have drawn out the key themes and linked them to examples of good practice.

**Key Themes**

- **Your golfing market**
- **The customer journey**
- **Retention and satisfaction**
- **Effective use of facilities**
- **The business operation**

**Get in touch**

Our delivery network of Regional Managers and Club Support Officers can offer guidance to clubs considering using some of the ideas outlined in this report.

Contact clubsupport@englandgolf.org to find out more.
Golfers come in all shapes and sizes and many will be on different stages of the golfer journey. Clubs need to recognise this and make it easy for people to play golf in a format that suits them and their needs.

It is impossible to please everyone, so clubs need to establish and clearly define their market.

Are you a traditional club which established golfers aspire to join, are you a starter club which nurtures those new players or are you primarily a social club with a golf course attached? Determining who you are and what type of golfer you want to attract will help to shape the type of membership packages and offers you promote.

Clubs are offering more categories of membership and nearly every type is seeing an increase. Seven-day membership is still by far the most popular category of membership offered, but clubs showing growth are increasingly offering more tailored packages, which provide flexibility and cater for less traditional golfers. These include flexible, points-based memberships for those who are time poor, corporate packages which provide opportunities to network, academy/trial memberships for those getting into the game and student/intermediate offers to enable younger people to manage the cost of a significant outlay.

PlayMoreGolf (PMG), a preferred partner of England Golf, links individual clubs across the United Kingdom under one flexible membership and provides choice, value, flexibility and convenience with all the benefits of golf club membership.

“We signed up for the PMG scheme in February and the marketing went live at the beginning of March. They paid for Facebook, Google AdWords, Email and SMS campaigns – all specifically designed to attract golfers in our area and demographic. Knowing the experience of the PMG marketing team, I was expecting a strong result but even I was startled that it generated over 190 new leads in just one month.

Not having any sales resource I had upgraded to the premium sales service offered by PMG, and they not only made sales via their in-house team, but also booked appointments straight into my diary for show rounds. 53 new flexible members in one month is a fabulous result, we still have all those other leads to work on, and of course, more to come as the marketing gets even more targeted.”

Brad Chard, Club Secretary
When targeting new members, 69% of clubs want to attract adult women; 57% target members’ friends and 56% want to attract more boys and girls.

In Europe, golf is very much seen as a family event, yet only 50% of venues in England have targeted families for new membership. Those clubs which do offer family packages have seen growth. The first step to attracting new members is to understand the potential of the local market.

**SUCCESS STORY**

**Windlesham Golf Club, Surrey**

Set amidst the beautiful Surrey countryside, Windlesham Golf Club is a par 72, 6650 yard championship parkland golf course with two loops of 9-holes. In 2015, Windlesham won the prestigious England Golf GolfMark Club of the Year award.

The club offers innovative packages for juniors and also attract adult beginners with flexible coaching and membership packages which have welcomed a number of newcomers to the club and game.

The club is known for putting its members first and peak times are reserved during the week for members and their guests to use the course.

The clubhouse has been recently renovated and is a spectacular focal point of the modern golf club. With this in mind the chairman, Peter Lumley, engaged with England Golf’s Club Support Officer, and as a result an ‘Understanding Your Market’ report was commissioned. The report highlighted a segment of the market – Young Fanatics – that the club currently did not offer a product for.

In order to target these golfers, the club opted to use Facebook advertising and a dedicated landing page on the website. The wording, imagery, and clarity of call to action were all designed to appeal to the specific segment, and the club worked hard to ensure that signing up was easy and enquiries were dealt with promptly.

Around £1500 was spent on this campaign, which created nearly 600,000 impressions and 2,600 link clicks. It generated over 27 intermediate membership sales with a projected annual income influence of over £33,000.

In order to target these golfers, the club opted to use Facebook advertising and a dedicated landing page on the website. The wording, imagery, and clarity of call to action were all designed to appeal to the specific segment, and the club worked hard to ensure that signing up was easy and enquiries were dealt with promptly.

“Realising the market segments in our local area was the first step in our campaign to attract a younger demographic to the club. As well as a simultaneous Google AdWords campaign, we utilised the tools of Facebook advertising to raise awareness of our new membership structure. During the process, we noticed this segment is more likely to refer or join as a group which increases the likelihood of playing and staying.”

George Rourke, Business Development Manager

As well as membership packages, the type of activities offered is also important. Added value deals are one of the least used membership initiatives but are the most successful way for clubs to increase membership. Similarly, outreach work and engaging the wider community has seen the third largest increase in membership.

Reduced membership fees have been offered by 39% of clubs, with 37% seeing an increase in membership. On the flip side, this is one of the least successful initiatives, with 47% of clubs seeing a decrease in membership. Adding value, based on the survey may well be a better approach.

52% of clubs offer 9 hole green fees

**INITIATIVES AND ACTIVITIES OFFERED**

In addition, outreach work and engagement with local facilities and businesses appears to have a link with increased membership. Driving ranges and similar facilities are often where the journey into golf begins and they can act as feeders to clubs and could help drive membership. It is worth noting that clubs need to be prepared to welcome newcomers, both by making the facility accessible and friendly and creating offers that appeal to a broader range of needs.
SUCCESS STORY
Trentham Park Golf Club, Staffordshire

Trentham Park draws members from far and wide, given its charming location in wooded surroundings and only a stone’s throw from Stoke-on-Trent. The clubhouse has recently been refurbished, the course has had the greens re-designed and this community facility continues to modernise and cater for a broad audience through its quality function facilities.

After engaging with England Golf, the club decided to take advantage of a new segmentation tool, to help them understand their own membership mix as well as identify potential members within the local area. The tool highlighted a couple of key segments to go after and the golfing profiles enabled the club to create offers that would appeal, along with the most effective route to market. After evaluating the membership packages already available, the club developed a timely trial membership offer aimed at latent golfers inspired by The Open. With the barrier of financial commitment broken down by the trial offer, the club had an opportunity to entice these golfers back into the Open. With the barrier of financial commitment broken down by the trial offer, the club had an opportunity to entice these golfers back into the

Consider the experience you offer from the perspective of a new customer, who may be new to golf, a new member or a golfer visiting your facility for the first time. Typically most people will search for information, want to sign up or book, have a great experience and leave feeling that they want to return. It’s therefore important for clubs to be visible, make engagement easy, be friendly and welcoming, and consider ongoing communication that is tailored to each individual.

Around 1m visitor rounds were booked online directly with golf clubs in 2017. From 2007–2017 the number of bookings made through third parties grew to an estimated 1m rounds in the UK1. Even though those numbers are impressive, the adoption of online booking technology in golf has been relatively slow compared to other industries. What is encouraging for golf clubs is that this is one of the few areas of the market that continues to grow and highlights the importance of having an effective online booking channel.

Progressive golf courses are starting to realise the benefits of moving tee booking online and are subsequently achieving the benefits of increased efficiencies, improved customer service, targeted marketing communications, reduced manpower requirements, better data collection and the ability to sell at any time of the day.

Golf continues to struggle with negative perceptions, so anything that can be done to break down these perceived barriers and showcase golf as a friendly, accessible sport can only be a good thing. An attractive and welcoming environment is critically important to the success of a golfer’s experience and to the club’s public image. For many people the first impression of a club can be found online, so your website and social media channels should reflect the type of club you are and connect with existing members and potential customers.

“The door to door campaign definitely hit the right audience following market segmentation research and is certainly an option to go for with future marketing. Some of the converted customers may have been considering membership offers from a number of clubs but the direct mail strategy has certainly nudged them towards Trentham Park.”

Jon Farmer, General Manager

ONLY 63% of clubs use an online booking system

WAYS CLUBS MARKET THEMSELVES

1The Revenue Club 2018
As well as online presence, associations with other local organisations, businesses and facilities appear to positively impact on membership. Playing golf in an informal setting, like adventure golf or the local driving range, can be an excellent stepping stone towards playing on a rated course and potentially academy or flexible membership.

Once you’ve attracted a new golfer, there are many effective welcoming techniques, but our research indicates that they are not always used. These include a welcome pack including events for new members and introductions to key personnel, other members and potentially a buddy system to help integrate new people into the club.

Druids Heath is a member’s club renowned for its well-manicured course, tree lined fairways and fast undulating greens. Druids Heath pride themselves on delivering a first class service to members, visitors and guests alike. The club was keen to share these values with a wider golfing audience through their digital and social media presence.

The club partnered with Albatross Digital Golf following another winter of poor weather conditions. The idea was to use digital marketing to build a solid pre-qualified pipeline of membership, society and green fee leads heading into the spring and summer.

Understanding the customer journey was vital to ensure that the leads were of good quality and to give Druids Heath the best chance of converting them into paying customers. They used the following process:

“**Our whole value in the market has gone through the roof since working with Albatross and we’ve generated over £30k in membership revenue in just three months.**”

**Gareth Anthony, General Manager**

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**SUCCESS STORY**

**Druids Heath Golf Club, Staffordshire**

1. **STEP 1 – LEAD MAGNET**
   A high value proposition to get potential customers to fill in their personal details.

2. **STEP 2 - DATA CAPTURE**
   Generally the higher value the proposition the more data it is possible to collect. Use a landing page and ask questions to find out what they are interested in as a customer.

3. **STEP 3 - LOW COST ENTRY**
   As a thank you to the potential customer for giving their details, offer a special green fee to get the customer down to the golf club.

4. **STEP 4 - UPSELL**
   Follow up with regular contact selling the benefits of club membership or society days.

5. **STEP 5 - CONVERSION**
   Bring them into the club and make them feel welcome and give them a sense that they are part of something.

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**WELCOME METHODS USED BY CLUBS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Welcome Pack</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New members’ evening</td>
<td>27%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intro to Captain / Vice Captain</td>
<td>27%</td>
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<tr>
<td>New members’ meeting</td>
<td>26%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Golf lesson(s)</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discounts</td>
<td>19%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Introduction to other members</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddy system</td>
<td>13%</td>
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</tbody>
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Out of all the clubs which used one or more of the welcome methods listed, 65% have seen stabilised or increased membership over the last two years.

The initial welcome is clearly important, but it is still just one part of the overall customer journey and clubs need to consider the before and after, as much as the actual physical experience.
World of Golf, London, is one of the busiest ranges in Europe and one of the world’s finest practice facilities. It recently hit the milestone of offering 50 hours a week of beginner group coaching, with classes of up to 12 players, and this year it aims to start 1500 new golfers.

The first step to developing their entry level programme was breaking down the barriers of cost and embarrassment. The introduction of an online booking system provided customers instant confirmation of their sessions and a follow-up email includes practical information about what to wear and bring.

The programme itself offers free beginner courses of six, one-hour group lessons with a PGA professional. The only cost is the range balls. The sessions teach technique and give an introduction to rules and etiquette. A follow-up improvers’ course is offered at £12 and at the end of the six sessions the group goes to play a local, beginner-friendly 9-hole course with their instructor, which creates a simple, step by step pathway. The approach successfully attracts diverse groups, with one-third of customers coming from BAME backgrounds; at least 40% are women; and the main age range is 30-45.

“Lessons were initially advertised with a Google Pay Per Click campaign and now World of Golf also successfully uses Facebook advertising. Customers sign up online and receive immediate confirmation and nearer the day they receive a more personalised email, both to remind them and to offer advice on what to wear and bring.

“The professionals taking the classes use email to build relationships with their students, sending them tips and videos to encourage them. They will arrange games at local friendly golf clubs where the new golfers can meet other budding beginners. There’s also a golf holiday programme and beginners enjoy golf weekends in the UK or Portugal. All this helps to cement the relationship between the customers, the PGA professional and the World of Golf business.”

Jon Woodroffe, PGA Professional

Capturing, tracking and utilising data on your members and visitors is key to supporting business decisions. Even if a limited amount of data is available, it’s worth tracking, as without it, decisions are made blindly without all the facts in view.

In terms of collecting data, clubs are very good at collecting member data, but still fail to capitalise on visitor information. Part of offering a fantastic customer experience is taking time to understand who they are and then tailor your offers, promotions and communications accordingly.

**Retention and satisfaction**

Once you’ve attracted golfers to your facility, you need to keep them satisfied and make them want to return. When looking at retention and satisfaction it is essential to monitor your membership numbers, attrition/churn, course and F&B utilisation and levels of satisfaction. Some of this information can be sourced from the management systems clubs have in place, such as Club Systems and Intelligent Golf, other areas may need additional tools like online survey platforms like 59Club and Players1st.

“Not capturing the details of these golfers is an opportunity wasted.”

With green fees on average accounting for 21% of turnover, this would suggest a significant throughput of visitors and non-members who are potential customers and future members.
Kettering Golf Club, Northamptonshire

Kettering Golf Club was operating effectively under the excellent guidance of Chairman Graham Althorpe and the officers of the club but it was felt that improvements in several areas could be introduced to increase revenue, create new revenue streams and improve the customer experience or in Graham’s words “sweat the assets better”.

Following the club’s engagement with England Golf’s Increasing Membership and Participation pilot, coupled with attendance at Northamptonshire’s Golf Development Group Forums, Graham and the club have developed a strong on-going working relationship with the county’s Club Support Officer, David Davis. The club is open to new working practices and change and a number of statistical/analytical documents were trialled and developed at the club, culminating in the creation of England Golf’s ‘Knowing Your Numbers’.

The analysis provided by working through the ‘Knowing your Numbers’ diagnostic tool and statistical information, assisted the club officers in their decision making process, especially in regard to membership. In addition, by taking time to understand levels of retention as well as use of the course and the F&B services, it became clear that some adjustments could be implemented in order to improve churn and better cater for the membership.

A new CRM and website was introduced, the F&B offering was improved, along with service levels and a more relaxed dress code in the clubhouse. The club also enhanced its PGA professional presence by recruiting James Waycot, who operates from a newly fitted Pro Shop featuring a golf simulator, and registered trainee Michael Campbell. The well respected PGA teaching professional, Kevin Theobald, was also retained.

After the initial benchmarking and implementation of these changes, the core membership has been retained, with net growth of 87 members at a value of £87k since 2015. In addition, the F&B spend has also increased, with an average spend of £307 per member per year, leading to additional income of £21.4k from the new members. By taking the time to understand member usage and member churn, the club have not only maintained their membership, they have also attracted new members.

“Effectively David is a trusted and knowledgeable external resource whose wider golfing industry experience has proven to be a great resource in defining and testing future strategies by the officers of Kettering golf club.”

Graham Althorpe, Club Chairman

How members use the club is also an important factor of retention. Everyone’s club participation journey will be different, so you need to have different options for different types of members. A clear participation journey makes it easier to progress people through the club.

We know that 67% of members take part in at least three competitions a year, so what do the other 33% want from the club? Virtually all clubs continue to offer competition formats such as stableford, medal, better ball and Texas scramble, and we’ve seen an increase in clubs offering 6-hole, 9-hole and short format competitions; moving from 62% in 2016 to 70% in 2018.

Some clubs are clearly monitoring uptake and continuing to ask their customers for feedback, but a large percentage aren’t taking the time to better understand their wants and needs.

Customer review sites are commonplace and regardless of whether you ask for feedback, some people will already be posting their thoughts about your club on a wide range of sites. Be proactive, as gaining regular feedback from your members and visitors can help you deal with issues promptly, continually develop your offering and publish good new stories and customer satisfaction.
The mix of facilities on offer will be greatly determined by your golfing market. How often do you assess what you offer? Are some aspects of the club more lucrative than others? Could you repurpose parts of your facility, both on and off course, to improve your offering or attract new people?

Compared to other sports, golf is facility-rich, with the majority of clubs offering a bar, restaurant, changing rooms and some form of pro shop. However, increasingly, people are expecting more from their experience, which is no different for golf. The ancillary facilities that appear to have the biggest impact on membership growth are children’s play areas, crèche’s, coffee shops and other sports on site, including gym/health and spa facilities. That said, only a very small percentage of clubs are offering these additional services.

Going forwards, clubs and facilities need to focus on understanding their place in the market and ensuring their offering matches the needs of their customer base. Too many golf clubs are targeting the same type of golfer, which leads to a lot of churn and not necessarily much growth. As well as the course being set up appropriately, the ancillary facilities need to be modern and fit for purpose in order to meet customer expectations.

The design, character and appearance of your course and clubhouse will all affect your customers’ experience and enjoyment. They will influence their decision to return, or not, and this will have a direct impact on your business. You should assess both ‘on course’ and ‘off course’ features to understand your options for programming activities, re-purposing built areas and making simple changes to enhance the environment and remove barriers.

It dawned us to broaden our communication channels when we realised that just using email or printed bulletins wasn’t effective enough in getting our messages across to the majority of our members. After a brief survey of our membership, we made some changes in how we communicate and interestingly, the most popular method of communication was video.

Richard Weeks, General Manager

Hunley Hotel & Golf Club is a proprietary-owned, clifftop golf course in north Yorkshire. As a modern club with a varied demographic of members, it’s important that Hunley uses a wide range of communication channels to get various messages across to its membership. These channels can include email, video, audio, social media posts, verbal and noticeboard announcements. To be sure of reaching all sections of the membership it’s sometimes necessary to repeat the same message, but through various channels. Taking this step ensures the club’s message is taken in by as many members as possible.

Hunley Hotel & Golf Club, Yorkshire

SUCCESS STORY
Golfers in the United Kingdom spent £4.3 billion on the game in 2014, accounting for 14% of all consumer spending on sport. More than half of consumer spending on golf, £2.2 billion, was channelled through the UK’s near 3,000 golf clubs. As such, golf clubs are small to medium enterprises, with significant assets, turning over £100s of thousands of pounds each year.

Golf is a big business that relies on large, well-maintained facilities and a wide range of skilled personnel and volunteers to function.3

With all that in mind, it is hard to understand why 17% of clubs are still unincorporated. Many clubs are choosing to incorporate as it limits the liability faced by directors (officers) in the case of insolvency. The risk of having to pay liabilities out of their own assets seems an unfair burden on volunteers.

Of the rest, 49% of clubs are either a company limited by guarantee or by shares, with a further 11% benefiting from CASC (Community Amateur Sports Club) status. The others are made up of small percentages of limited liability partnerships, sole traders, community interest companies and industrial and provident societies.

Fynn Valley won England Golf’s Most Welcoming Club Award in 2017, recognising the inclusive ethos which the club has followed since it opened in 1991. The club recognised a few years ago that the existing buildings did not enhance the welcoming atmosphere and were not fit for purpose in a modern sporting environment. The club entered a period of consulting with its members, local residents, parish council and the planning authority, which led to the design and implementation of a modern new venue. All facilities will be housed under one roof, and can be scaled according to business levels and the season. It will open in autumn 2018.

“The club understands the importance of positioning itself as a hub for the greater local rural community, as well as its golf clientele, and to this end the new facility will offer a coffee shop and bistro alongside a large function space which will also be used to provide classes such as pilates, yoga etc. An outside oak-framed gazebo houses a pizza oven and barbecue ready for the summer evenings on the sunny terrace overlooking the golf course. The business plan demonstrates how the increased income from F&B will permit further investment into the golf course, creating a sustainable business model for the future.”

Jenny Holmes,
Director and Company Secretary

This modern club is aware of the increasing need to offer more and has utilised its range of facilities to offer weddings, functions, conferences, fitness studio, coffee bar and dining alongside a flexible approach to golf club membership. Making the club a destination for more than just the traditional golfer has also created links within the community by hosting the local Stroke Association club for their social get together. This link has led to a series of courses with the golf professional to offer golf to these stroke survivors, promoting the health benefits of golf and driving business by using their range and 9-hole course during quieter times, whilst driving awareness of the club through local media.

“Making Farrington accessible to more people within our local area has been a key driver to maintaining a healthy business, vibrant community and utilising the space and opportunity at the golf course. It cements our links with our community and gives people options and there is an option for everyone.”

Jon Cowgill,
Director

71% of clubs own a freehold
94% of clubs employ a manager or secretary
23 volunteers on average per club
17% of clubs are unincorporated

* A Satellite Account for Golf in the UK, Sheffield Hallam University March 2016
Formby Golf Club is located on the west coast of Lancashire and takes pride of place amongst a number of other outstanding clubs within the area. Just over four years ago they took the bold step in changing how the club was governed in order for them to function more effectively and improve how their club was run. In 2014 the General Manager, Stuart Leach, and the management committee began to lay the foundations which would allow the club to be sustainable in the future. Whilst being incorporated, the club also wanted to make sure it met all minimum operating standards to be fully compliant according to national legislation within the UK. The reason being all customers have high expectations of how organisations should be run. Once this had been achieved, Stuart and the management committee looked at their overall structure and began to see how this could be changed. The idea was to create a structure which brought all members of the club together in order to achieve their vision and ensure an excellent golf experience for their members and visitors.

The club structure of old took a number of years to refine, but remains a key element to their overall success as a business. Stuart Leech is in charge of managing the day-to-day operations of the club. He is also responsible the recruitment and management of the employees including staff appraisals, under the direction of the management committee. Those on the committee have been identified as having the right skills and knowledge according to a clearly defined role descriptor to competently fulfil their role. Each year three new members are elected on to the management committee and they will have been a member of a sub-committee prior to their appointment. The club has a strategic plan which is used to guide all committee meetings that take place. The members’ requirements form a key part of the strategic plan and these are sought through an annual member survey. The plan is then finalised and shared with the members at their AGM to make sure the club remains transparent in what it is trying to achieve.

The club has nine different sub committees all chaired by different people with six to 10 different members in each. Every committee chairman serves for a period of three years and are responsible for guaranteeing that certain elements of the strategic plan are achieved. In their third and final year as committee chair, they are shadowed by the person coming in to replace them so they can learn what that role entails. Each chair is also provided with a terms of reference along with all other committee members to again provide clarity on their roles.

Formby Golf Club has realised that by having robust processes, systems and practices in place ensures accountability of the elected management committee and transparency of its actions to the membership. It also provides security that whilst operating against the backdrop of a struggling economy, procedures are in place for maintaining effective relationships and decision making to build sustainability for the golf club going forwards. Stuart and the club wish to share their findings, not so that other clubs could mirror exactly what they have managed to achieve in the last four years, but instead take the basic principles and apply it their own golf clubs in order to give them every chance of succeeding in the future.

Apart from structure, are you running an efficient and effective operation?

Are you maximising every inch of your facility to ensure long term sustainability? Understanding your major costs and identifying opportunities for additional revenue are aspects of running a viable club.

Our findings offer clubs ideas and potential solutions to further improve their operation.

Clubs that are seeing an increase in the proportion of revenue accounted for by green fees are more likely to see an increase in membership. This could be due to more opportunities to convert visitors into members.

GREEN FEE REVENUE

In addition, 37% of clubs run membership renewals in April, but 19% still choose to do this in January. Unsurprisingly, clubs showing growth tend to have renewals between March and September.

Golf courses that are using price and yield management strategies consistently generate an increased volume of online sales, without necessarily compromising their prices. However, this may be difficult for clubs to achieve as it requires time and a working knowledge of the best tactics to employ. In addition, until relatively recently a lack of golf-specific technology has made it difficult to manage price changes without appropriate tools. It is challenging to implement, track and measure results consistently or accurately and only a few technology solutions allow this.

As an industry, it is important to look beyond traditional, static pricing structures. Pricing is a highly effective tool that can be used to increase revenue with minimal impact to the existing operation, particularly when combined with effective digital marketing. Whilst it is not a panacea in isolation, improvement to the top line using simple pricing strategies and digital marketing can move golf clubs closer to realising the full potential of their key asset, the golf course.
Having worked with third parties for a couple of years, the club’s online sales were good and they wanted to explore the possibility of using this sales channel to benefit the club further. After an initial face to face consultation with The Revenue Club, yield management experts and an England Golf supplier, the club conducted a trial month to see what differences could be made. As well as achieving a 16% uplift in online sales, it became apparent there were a number of key areas where the club was not able to capitalise on online demand:

- No clear direct online booking function on the club’s website
- No digital marketing strategy/calendar
- No ongoing measurement of costs generated from selling online

Following a cost analysis by The Revenue Club it became clear that by paying outright for tee sheet software, the golf club would have the ability to realise a far greater share of the profits from their online sales. The existing barter arrangement software was replaced with a new tee sheet paid for by cash and the club suddenly saw their online green fee revenue increase by over 500% year on year in two months.

One of the key reasons for employing The Revenue Club was to increase the average price of our tee times by having more control and management in place. This was difficult to do internally as we have a small management team at the club, and our time is stretched over various tasks. The team helped us transform our digital presence in order to better target the online golfer. The results have been fantastic so far; we have more than doubled our online green fee revenue for the first two months of the year. The Revenue Club is continuing to market and dynamically price our tee times.

Colin Henderson, Honorary Secretary

Fairhaven Golf Club, in Lytham, is an inland treasure on Lancashire’s world-famous golf coast. An Open Championship Qualifying course, it lies just two miles from Royal Lytham & St Annes Golf Club. The club was one of the first to adopt Golf Management Group’s Contracts Manager into daily life at the golf club. The Golf Management Group (GMG) are a preferred partner of England Golf and offer a golf specific, high quality procurement service. In the last 12 months, GMG have worked with over 75 clubs and secured savings of £366k.

Contracts Manager is a cloud-based filing cabinet. It enables you to de-clutter by storing an unlimited number of contracts, latest invoices and any other pertinent documents in your golf club’s secure Contracts Manager portal. You can drag-and-drop documents from your desktop, log the contract start and end dates, and – crucially – log the notice period required should you wish to terminate service. Contracts Manager then gives you a simple ‘traffic light’ system which enables you to see which contracts are approaching a critical date, at a glance. As and when any contract approaches a critical date, the system will send an alert, whereupon GMG can assist you as to whether to renew, renegotiate, or look elsewhere in the market.

I find Contracts Manager to be an effective way of managing contracts both on and off the golf course. Everything is managed online – it cuts way down on paperwork! We are always up to date and no more looking through 500 sheets of paper to find what you want. It has saved loads of time! It normally takes hours to read all the different contracts, and to ensure legal compliance throughout. GMG now do all of this for us. And not only do we save valuable time, but we also have the confidence that we are agreeing to the best-possible combination of price and terms, which GMG also explain clearly to us.

Martin Robinson, General Manager