



Spread Your Wings *Debbie Waitkus*

GOLF FOR CAUSE



Do you work in an organization that would like to have more customers? Perhaps all you need to do is modify your marketing effort to attract them. Granted adding more customers might force adjustments to some of your internal procedures in order to handle the additional workload. But let's say you have potentially 1000 new customers waiting in the wings. Would that be a good thing?

It is if you're in the golf industry!

Changes underway in the golf industry – including the recent announcement that Darla Moore and Condoleezza Rice have become new members at Augusta National, home of the Masters – might give you some ideas about looking at your organization anew, with an eye on capturing customers waiting in the wings.

According to the National Golf Foundation (NGF), golf was a \$64 billion industry in 2005, just 7 years ago. At that time, 30 million people were playing golf and purchasing golf attire, golf course real estate, gloves, tees, equipment, golf balls and more.

More recently, the economy has done a number on the golf industry, just as it has on many business segments. NGF research indicates that, in 2011, the number of people playing golf fell to 25.7 million golfers. Over the last 5 years participation decreased 13.8%. From 2010 to 2011, the NGF reported a decrease of 400,000 golfers.

Think about what that 400,000 represents: a lot of lost rounds, lost sales of equipment and attire, lost golf-related jobs, lost business opportunities, missed celebrations and business conversations at the 19th hole. But, the golf industry is fortunate, because there *are* customers waiting in the wings. *A lot* of customers.

A recent Golf 2.0 Boston Consulting Group study states that more than 19 million women are interested in playing golf. 19 million! Let's see (doing a little quick math)... yep, 2.1% of 19 million equals 400,000. Last year's loss could be negated simply by engaging 2% of a group that already says they want in!

Admittedly the golf industry was designed and geared toward men; yet, considering the current economy, and the growth of women as decision makers and power players in business, the customer base is changing. The move by Augusta National serves as validation. Newsflash: Women use and spend the same currency men do. And spend it they do! According to 2011 Women's Longitudinal Research by Sports and Leisure Research Group, women control 73% of household spending and influence 92-94% of purchases.

The golf industry *has* tried to attract women to the sport during the last decade, but

the effort needs more imaginative thought. To get the ladies on the golf “bus,” and keep them on it, requires more than painting the thing pink and telling them they are welcome to ride it now.

In Her Shoes is a campaign the PGA launched in 2012 as part of its Golf 2.0 initiative. The campaign teaches PGA members how to “speak female.” Understanding the customer is crucial to attracting and retaining her.

Previous attempts to invite women to play golf had the industry making it about how to play, and how to be more skilled. That was because the focus was wrong – it was male oriented. In general, playing golf for men is about the score and conquering the game. For women, it tends to be more about creating relationships. The lesson has been learned now. Yes, paint the golf bus pink or other fun colors, but drive it along a different path. While you’re at it, fill it with fun clinics and trunk shows. Add some food and beverages too. Oh, heck, throw in some wine!

Know your target audience and modify your product accordingly. Understand their needs. Be conscious of potential deal breakers such as one that happened on a recent golf outing. A middle-aged couple went to play. The husband is a skilled golfer; the wife, a beginner. They were paired with another couple. The other couple was lovely in every way, but the beginner wife was intimidated. She was embarrassed about not being able to play well enough and feared doing something wrong. She never got out of the golf cart.

A [WSJ.com](http://www.wsj.com) article on May 9, 2012 titled, “The XX Factor: What’s Holding Women Back?” shares a story about employees at Google. All employees are encouraged to nominate themselves for promotions. Men jump at the chance, often before they’re ready, and are turned down. By the time a woman submits her name, she was probably ready a year or two ago. Again, know your audience and modify your products and services accordingly.

In January, 2012, in addition to the Golf 2.0 initiative, the National Women’s Golf Alliance (NWGA) www.nationalwomensgolfalliance.com launched the *Rolling Out the Green Carpet™* campaign. NWGA goes to golf facilities to educate, evaluate and consult. What are the things the facilities can do to be even more welcoming to women - growing the game and increasing corporate bottom lines? NWGA also goes to the customers, those who are playing already and the 19 million interested in playing. NWGA tells these women what the golf courses are doing to make women feel welcome – and which courses and facilities are doing it well.

Give some thought to your organization and industry. You have customers waiting in the wings. Who are they and what would engage them and encourage them to use your services? Do you need to modify your product or service in some way? Do you need to change your marketing message or your website? Who could you partner with to help move those customers off the sidelines and through your door? If you want to bring them in, you have to give them what they want. It’s as simple as that.

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