

GOLF CLUBS NEED TO JOIN FORCES

Collective solutions may be the answer to the challenges of today's issues.



Golf is experiencing stagnant participation levels globally. In the United States, the world's biggest golf market, the number of golfers has fallen by two million (about 9 percent) since 2010, according to the National Golf Foundation. Despite an improved US economy, only 6.5 percent of all private golf clubs have a waiting list. Revenues are shrinking while operational costs are escalating. South Africa is no different and our challenges remain the same. Some of the more common questions any club should ask today:

- How do we grow our existing revenue streams?
- Can we find alternative sources of revenue?
- Are we operating cost-efficiently?
- How well do we manage our assets and cash flow?
- Do we have plans in place to support short-, medium- and long term goals, or are we taking it day by day?
- Who is responsible for executing the agreed plans?

Golf club committees would typically address these questions and pass them on to their general manager to implement. However, MWG have found instances where clubs only deal with them to a limited extent, or not at all. A key

challenge is continuity. Committees change frequently and, often to a club's detriment, adopt a different course of action to their predecessors, in order to make their mark.

Every club has its unique set of challenges emanating from diverse factors such as location, facilities, water resources, staffing and their member profile. However, the majority of clubs in the same region face similar challenges. This provides the perfect opportunity for clubs to engage with each other and seek collective solutions.

Clubs should consider sharing resources and staff. The cost of course equipment should be enough to initiate these conversations. Why not share equipment which is used infrequently? Can a manager with the right skills not run more than one club? Can two clubs not share a head greenkeeper with strong deputies on either side? Why can't clubs share administrative duties?

We have seen instances where clubs do co-operate, but historical club rivalry, diverse cultures and the egos of decision makers often leads to a resistance to engage with each other. If committees were more inclined to put their respective interests first, we could enjoy a few success stories.

Perhaps clubs should agree to independent third parties facilitating closer co-operation. The reality is that clubs are going to have to change their approach, so tough decisions cannot be avoided. Clubs should be run as a business overseen by a committee or board who do not involve themselves in operational affairs. In the US, committees are held accountable and in some cases individuals have been prosecuted.

A primary concern for golf clubs is the difficulty attracting the younger

WHAT IS YOUR GOLF CLUB DOING IN TERMS OF KEEPING PACE WITH FUTURE TRENDS IN THE GAME?

Breaking with traditional thinking is a contentious issue at many of our clubs, whether they be in the main centres or smaller regions. It is a subject that offers a variety of opinions and few hard facts. Mark Wiltshire Golf, a golf-management company based in George in the Garden Route, has agreed to discuss this topic in a series of articles in Golf Digest, by sharing ideas, and providing possible solutions, while analysing some of the reasons many golf clubs are struggling financially.

generation. Time is a buzzword in golf's inability to grow. The R&A and USGA have recognised this and introduced rule changes to speed up play. Clubs have introduced other time-related concepts such as 9-hole competitions and holes set up as par 3s. France has a system that lets you pay for only the holes you play, and introduced a form of recreational practice to improve your golf without swinging a club!

At this year's PGA Merchandise Show there were Apps and gadgets for almost anything golf related. An interactive ball tracking system that shows the flight, carry, distance and path is in place at driving ranges to make hitting balls more fun for kids. Innovative ideas will ensure golf is enjoyed by more people.

However, to benefit from all this, and without taking away certain valuable traditions, we first need to change the way we manage clubs.

- *Mark Wiltshire Golf provides specialised golf management services that includes club management, course maintenance, consulting, course design, construction and project management.*

