

West Chilmington Golf Club: A New Type of Membership

Located in rural West Sussex, West Chilmington Golf Club is a private, parkland course. Designed and built twenty-five years ago by a duo of Ryder Cup champions, it prides itself on being one of the friendliest, most welcoming clubs in the county.

The Issue:

West Chilmington identified that, nationally, golfing habits were changing and decided to investigate this further. Many months of research led them to ask themselves two questions:

1. How should the Club respond to an increasing number of multi-course social players?
2. How could the Club attract current non-golfers to try the game?

The Solution:

In March 2014, West Chilmington Golf Club commenced a year-long trial of a new type of golf membership: the 9 Hole Club. This offers a 50% reduction on 9 hole course green-fees in return for a low £30 annual fee. Along with the membership, 9 Hole Clubbers receive complimentary vouchers for lessons and half-rounds on the 18 hole course to encourage them to progress and improve. In addition, 9 Hole Clubbers are eligible to join 9 Hole Club roll ups and competitions which are held regularly. In holding these events, the Club encourages the nine-hole players to play and improve their golf as well as to give them an opportunity to become integrated in West Chilmington's social scene.

This was an instant success and in September 2014 the Club introduced the 18 Hole Club, a similar concept offering reduced 18 hole green-fees for just £65 per year. For a small additional fee, members can even "upgrade" to the 18 Hole Club Plus which offers entry into selected competitions and the ability to hold a handicap.

At a Glance ...

- West Chilmington Golf Club carried out research into the future of golf, golfing habits and membership options.
- In March 2014 the Club launched its 9 Hole Club loyalty scheme membership.
- Over the following 8 months, 225 beginners joined as 9 Hole Clubbers.
- In response to this success, in September 2014 the Club launched an equivalent 18 Hole Club membership for just £65 per year.
- For an extra £55 per annum, 18 Hole Clubbers can upgrade their membership to enable them to hold a handicap and play competitively at the Club.



ENGLANDGOLF

All three of these memberships include full use of the clubhouse and facilities as well as access to the Club's members-only website.

The Challenges

The main challenge for the Club has been in ensuring that all material promoting the memberships are clear, precise and comprehensive. The Club has found that questions always arise from prospective members that were not thought of, and its goal is to pre-empt them!

Impacts:

The 9 Hole Club membership was a huge and immediate success: in the first eight months following its implementation, 225 new members joined! In particular, the Club observed a large increase in the number of families and mixed groups using the course. Pleasingly, by February 2015, eight 9 Hole Club members had upgraded to become full members of the Club.

After only two months, the 18 Hole Club had already attracted 25 new members. Two of the members who originally joined as 18 Hole Clubbers had already upgraded to full 7-Day memberships.

“It's so important for golf clubs to react to the changing habits of golfers and find new ways of encouraging more people into golf. Forward thinking is so important.”

*Marketing & P.R. Manager,
West Chiltington Golf Club*

Next Steps:

West Chiltington Golf Club has been monitoring its 9 Hole Club membership closely: looking at playing habits, upgrades and dropoff rates, and also at the time and day of members' play. The Club has used this information to tailor the vouchers it offers to the 9 Hole Clubbers and make them more relevant to these members.

During 2015, the Club plans to hold "9 Hole Club Member Days" on the 18 hole back 9. These events will be hosted by full Club members.

“Many golfers these days are looking for a seasonal playing ticket rather than full membership and we think that the 18 Hole Club meets that need.”

Owner, West Chiltington Golf Club

Tips & Advice:

The Club's Marketing & Public Relations Manager tells us that it's all about research: "We spend a long time finding out about our demographic, and reading up on the future of golf and how we as a club can introduce the general public into the sport in a relaxed and friendly way."

Based on surveys and follow up interviews, the UK and Ireland's Golf Home Unions have identified and showcased examples of "what works" in golf club management in a series of case studies. The focus has been on clubs that have been successful in achieving more players, more members and stronger clubs. The intention is to share information and guidance on effective practices in business planning, customer service, membership, and women's and girls' golf. For further information about this and other case studies and for further support, please go to www.golfcasestudies.businesscatalyst.com.



ENGLANDGOLF