

Cardigan Golf Club: Tackling Dwindling Membership

Despite its idyllic seaside location, Cardigan Bay Golf Club in West Wales has experienced the types of recruitment difficulties common to many rural golf clubs. Membership was declining, and the Club did not have the benefit of a dense local population to draw on for new, younger players.

The Issue

Cardigan Golf Club's membership is perhaps typical of many: predominantly retired men and women. Without attracting new, younger members to the Club there was a strong concern that the number of members would decrease over time.

Although the Club has a popular junior section, its members typically don't remain in the Club in the longer term, being drawn away by the commitments of school, university and employment. Attracting adequate numbers of members was proving to be a challenge, given the relatively sparse population of rural Cardigan.

The Solution

The Ladies' Captain and the Club's Pro invited members of local women's groups to a "taster day" social event which included a meal, a talk, a putting competition and a lesson from the Pro. A more personal six-week course of shared lessons was promoted at the event, an offer that attracted a number of women who subsequently became full members of the Club.

A similar event was held the following year, this time using Golf Development Wales (GDW) marketing tools to advertise both the initial social event and the trial course of lessons. GDW also provided support and enabled the Club to offer the lessons as a highly subsidised rate. Both weekend and midweek lessons were offered.

The junior section also greatly increased its membership through "taster days", and through making contact with local schools at sports festivals.

At a Glance ...

- Cardigan had been experiencing the type of recruitment difficulties common to many clubs, especially recruitment of younger members.
- Membership has boomed after the Club introduced Ladies' and Juniors' taster days. The taster days were used to promote a six-week course of subsidised lessons.
- The Club has a successful strategy of integrating new members through personalised one-to-one communications and support.
- Existing members are also actively encouraged to introduce friends to the Club.

“ Getting them (juniors) to the taster sessions and lessons is the easy part - maintaining contact, an enthusiasm and keeping them is the hard part. ”



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The Challenges

Although the initiatives have been successful in boosting the Club membership, they have not been without challenges. In general, securing new members in the current financial climate is often difficult. There have also been some logistical difficulties: the ladies section meets on Tuesdays, which can be problematic for women in employment. Although they are able to play at weekends, the risk is that some may not feel a membership is worthwhile without frequent use.

In contrast, the men typically make less effort to contact one another proactively to arrange games. The Club overcomes this difficulty by “buddying” new members with volunteer mentors. While sufficient volunteers aren’t always available, this approach has been effective in encouraging new members to participate in golf games. More generally, the Club hopes that providing cheaper membership for the first year and renewal in the better weather may prove to be effective in attracting and retaining members.

Where juniors are concerned, maintaining contact and enthusiasm with the youngsters proves trickier than initially attracting them to the taster sessions: finding the right players to nurture them and bring them forward is the key to them becoming full members, the Club has found.

Impacts

Membership has boomed since the introduction of the women’s social events and juniors’ taster days. Six men and six women are currently signed with the Club until March 2015 and the Club now has twenty-four junior members of whom fourteen are girls. The Club is hopeful that many of the adults will renew their initial membership in the spring.

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.

Next Steps

The Club plans to contact new members individually to offer refresher lessons and to discuss their integration into the various sections, and believes that this personalised approach is likely to be effective. Additionally, the Pro, Ladies’ Captain and juniors will continue to attend sports festivals to reach out to potential new junior members. The Club will continue to work closely with GDW and offer taster sessions and social events to continue to attract and encourage new members.

Tips & Advice

“Ensure you nurture your new members” is the key advice from Cardigan Golf Club. They advise keeping the personal one-to-one contact alive, but to avoid pushing new members to compete or rush their

“Maintaining personal contact with the adults coming into a new group or club is not easy. It only takes one harsh word or criticism to put off a new golfer.”

game before they are ready. The Club also recommends advertising new member events early and encouraging existing members to bring friends. “Support, support, support,” is the advice of the past Lady Captain.

A final word from Cardigan Golf Club

The Club is rightly proud of its initiatives to tackle the problem of dwindling membership. The onus is now on the members to provide the support required to keep the new golfers returning to play.

