

Insch Golf Club: Flexible Membership

Insch Golf Club is a parkland course located in the heart of rural Aberdeenshire, Scotland. It boasts eighteen challenging holes and a friendly, modern clubhouse.

The Issue:

Although the Club's membership was stable, its expenditure had been exceeding its income for many years and there was a need to boost regular income from all sources, including increased membership. The Club recognised that a traditional membership is not always economical for people who only play a handful of times per year. To target these players, the Club devised a flexible membership scheme for infrequent players.

The Solution:

Following the Club's AGM in March 2013, a Task Force was formed to devise and implement a marketing initiative to recruit new members. The Task Force proposed a new category of membership and the proposal was accepted by the main committee. The new category was aimed at players who play ten to fifteen times per year, for whom a standard annual membership is uneconomical. Although the Club had a minimal advertising budget for the scheme, it was effectively marketed via a local radio station and as a footnote on all golf club correspondence using the catch phrase "Play less, Pay Less".

This alternative membership category is based on 'units' that can be redeemed each time the member plays. The idea is simple: the member buys a block of units and when these have been used up they buy some more. Units are valid for two years.

In most ways, Unit Members are treated in the same way as other members: they establish a handicap, play in competitions (excluding club championship and singles matchplay), have full access to the course, and more.

At a Glance ...

- The Club needed to boost its regular revenue from increased membership.
- A Task Force was formed, which proposed a new category of membership for infrequent players.
- Under the scheme, members buy "blocks" of units corresponding to playing time.
- Flexible members mostly have the same benefits as full members.
- A high proportion of individuals who joined under the scheme have since become full members.

“ The Unit Membership scheme is aimed at the players who play 10-15 times a year and do not join clubs, mostly because they cannot justify the cost. ”



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However, Unit Members are not allowed to hold office or speak at General Meetings.

It was agreed that the Unit Membership would be operated as a temporary marketing initiative aimed at attracting new members and as such would be reviewed after a reasonable period of operation.

The Challenges:

The new scheme was implemented smoothly with no major challenges; a key to the success of this was ensuring that full members were not disadvantaged. The new membership category was structured so that, overall, flexible members did not pay less for their golfing time than full members. Although the scheme is not closely monitored, there have been no incidents of flexible members abusing the trust of the Club by playing without submitting their units.

Impacts:

Following the introduction of the scheme there was a steady take-up, and by November 2014 the Club had twelve fifty-unit members and six one-hundred-unit members. Inch Golf Club believes that offering this flexibility attracts new members who are either completely new to golf or can't justify a full membership due to time or financial constraints. It has been particularly successful in retaining young adult players whose former Juniors membership had been paid for by parents. One of the most significant positive impacts has been that around half of all members joining the Unit Membership scheme have subsequently converted to a full membership.

The scheme received a lot of interest from Offshore Oil Workers who are on a work rotation and could not justify full membership but were able to have an official handicap to

use when attending Corporate Golf Days and Society outings, etc.

Another positive impact resulted when some members who were struggling to maintain their full membership and were considering stopping playing golf decided to convert to the Unit Membership and stay with the Club.

Next Steps:

It quickly became apparent to the Club that the Unit Membership scheme is a highly effectively marketing tool. It has not only attracted additional flexible and full members but also significantly increased the level of social membership and associated revenues. Although it was initially intended as a temporary programme, the Club now intends to continue offering this category of membership.

Tips & Advice:

The Captain of Inch Golf Club offers the following advice to other clubs considering a flexible membership scheme: don't price the membership too high, and make sure your members appreciate the benefits of the scheme for the Club before going ahead. It is important to ensure that existing members are not disadvantaged in any way, to avoid resistance to the plans.

A final word from Inch Golf Club:

The Unit Membership Scheme has provided a valuable tool to raise the profile of the Club and demonstrate to members and golfers outside of the Club that we are constantly looking at innovative ways to maintain standards and ensure a successful future.

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.



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