

Padeswood & Buckley Golf Club: Attracting Members

Set in North Wales' countryside, Padeswood and Buckley Golf Club offers picturesque views, a friendly welcome and a challenging game. However, the membership had fallen significantly, leading to serious concerns over the financial viability of the Club.

The Issue:

Padeswood and Buckley Golf Club had historically lost approximately ten per cent of its membership annually at renewal. In the past, new members joining throughout the year had always offset this reduction. In 2011/12, however, around one hundred members left and only sixteen were recruited. The future of the Club was at risk.

The Solution:

The full membership fee at that time was £640, slightly above average for the area. It was decided to offer a 16-month membership (for new members only) for £450. Existing members were promised that if the membership drive was successful then their fees would be reduced.

The offer was publicised via the Club website, existing members, and in the golfing press. Additionally, inserts were placed in the pay packets of all Airbus staff (approximately 5000) at the nearby factory. Members were offered a credit of £50 on their bar card when they introduced a new member.

The strategy was developed by a small group of senior Club Council members. Council approval was sought and the membership consulted at a General Meeting.

The Challenges

The Club recognised that this was a high-risk strategy, especially as the plans were strongly criticised by a small section of the existing membership. Some existing members were unhappy that just prior to the implementation of the scheme they had paid the full membership fee of £640.

“The promise of lower fees if the strategy worked was kept so all members benefited.”

At a Glance ...

- Padeswood & Buckley's future was at risk by 2011/12 as annual non-renewals were no longer being off-set by new members.
- In response, the Club decided to offer a significantly reduced fee to new members for a limited period.
- Existing members were promised lower fees in future if the scheme was successful.
- Results were almost immediate, with a significant boost in membership.
- Word of mouth proved the most effective method; the Club also successfully recruited via local employers.

“To continue as we were was not an option. The result has been that we now have a substantial membership. Our retention rate is the highest that we have ever had.”



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It was explained at the General Meeting that the future of the Club was in doubt if it continued to lose members. As a result, the vast majority of members accepted that the action had to be taken.

The promise of lower fees if the strategy proved successful was adhered to, so all members benefited from the initiative. No existing members resigned as a result of the offer.

Impacts:

The initiative ran from December 2012 to March 2013. The renewal date for all those joining in this period was April 2014. Results were almost immediate: approximately 120 new members were recruited, of whom the vast majority were male. From April 2013, the Club's annual membership fee was reduced to £499. The annual renewal date for existing members was October 2013, at which time they also paid just £499.

The most successful recruitment method was via existing members. No new members joined as a result of adverts in the golfing press.

“ Results were almost immediate with new members taking advantage of the offer ... As a result of the risks taken, the Club now has a substantial membership with a high retention rate. ”

The initiative ended in March 2013 but the lower fees continue to attract new members. The steady recruitment of new members is offsetting the number of members leaving the Club, so membership continues to grow.

The atmosphere in the Club has changed: it is busier and social events are being well supported by new members, which increases other revenue streams. Additionally, some

new members are already getting involved in committees.

Tips and Advice:

Padeswood and Buckley Golf Club took a risk when it adopted this initiative and in doing so learned many valuable lessons. The Club offers the following tips to others considering similar membership offers:

- ★ Set realistic targets.
- ★ Sell the idea to existing members and obtain their full support.
- ★ Use current members to reach out to new ones with an incentive offer. People are more likely to join a club where their friends are members.
- ★ Consider carefully before advertising in the golf press – it is costly and did not work for this Club.
- ★ Publicise the offer on your Club website's home page.
- ★ Have application forms readily available on the bar, in the Pro-shop and from the website.
- ★ Advertise with large local employers, discuss with them the option of advertising on their internal website or putting leaflets in pay packets, perhaps offering an extra incentive for their employees who join the Club.

A final word from Padeswood & Buckley Golf Club:

The Club's Captain regards the initiative as "Highly Successful", an accurate self-appraisal of a high-risk but essential initiative which has turned the Club's fortunes around.

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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