

## Uphall Golf Club: Tackling a Fall in Membership

### The Issue:

Uphall Golf Club in West Lothian, Scotland enjoys a mix of social and competitive golf. It has invested significantly in drainage to USGA specification so that the course can often stay open in wet conditions when other Clubs are forced to close. The Club places a strong emphasis on the development of the next generation and boasts over 100 junior players. Despite having these initiatives in place, during its regular business planning process, the Club identified that membership numbers were falling. The Club contacted Scottish Golf Union (SGU) who provided the support they needed to tackle the problem.

### The Solution:

Uphall Golf Club had initially contacted the SGU in 2013 to seek assistance and help with governance issues and also to assist in the production of a Business Plan. In association with the SGU, the Club held a well-attended Members Forum that generated the necessary information for developing the Plan, including in particular the idea of hosting an Open Day to increase membership.

By identifying the fall in membership and the need for an event to attract new members, the business planning process proved its worth. In May 2014, the Club held its first Open Day for more than a decade.

### Challenges and Solutions

The Open Day presented the Club with some huge challenges: there was no recent precedent or experience of such an event at Uphall. In response, the Club's secretary formed a sub-committee to drive forward this initiative. The first step was to establish a project plan with clear priorities: planning, allocation of responsibilities, setting of achievement milestones, and achieving outcomes. The sub-committee allocated roles and responsibilities and obtained permission from

### At a Glance ...

- Through a business planning process developed with the support of the SGU, the Club identified a need to boost membership.
- A sub-committee was formed to organise an Open Day, and the Club tapped into the expertise of members by seeking volunteers.
- Public awareness of the Open Day was raised through press advertising, social media, posters and leaflets.
- In another successful initiative, a "Winter Full Membership" campaign has offered reduced joining fees to new members.

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the full management committee to enlist the help of volunteers from within the Club's membership in order to tap into all available expertise.

Cleverly, the sub-committee benchmarked its costs at one membership fee, safe in the knowledge that it would only take one new member to break even. To promote the Open Day, emphasis was placed on engaging with local residents to raise local awareness – this was carried out with the help of some professional leaflets, banners and posters. With the assistance of the SGU, an article was posted on Twitter and with the help of the Club Professional's contacts the sub-committee initiated a press advertorial in the Edinburgh Evening News.

### Impacts:

The Open Day proved to be a great success! More than 50 players attended of whom 20 became new members. As a direct result of the promotional campaign, a further 15 new members joined in the days following the event. The Club now monitors membership fluctuations on a monthly basis and has succeeded in maintaining a level of stability since the Open Day.

### Next Steps:

Following on from the Open Day, a campaign ran over winter 2014/15 offering a "Winter Full Membership". New members joining during this time benefited from a reduced rate and an incentive to remain a full member come the better weather in April. By mid-December 2014, 10 new members had been gained and the campaign is considered another success story for the Club.

The Club intends to host a further Open Day in 2015, learning from the lessons of the 2014 campaign: most significantly to host the event in September rather than May.

### Tips & Advice:

Uphall Golf Club's Secretary has some words of wisdom for others embarking on a similar journey:

- ★ If you want to succeed then you really need to plan, and then plan some more.
- ★ It is all down to allocation of responsibilities, sharing the burden.
- ★ Find ways to attract potential new members to the Open Day (Uphall struck a deal with its caterers to provide free food, and didn't charge an entry fee).
- ★ Keep existing members engaged and involved, and make sure they understand the benefits of an increased membership (such as a freeze on fee increases).

### A final word from Uphall Golf Club:

Looking back, Uphall Golf Club considers the experience of hosting an Open Day to have been very positive, and is grateful that its membership is healthy once again. A nice touch was a video film produced for them by the SGU – it helped everyone involved to feel the hard work had been worthwhile. In summary, the Secretary says, "There was a lot of work involved, do not think this is easy, it is far from easy."

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](http://www.golfcasestudies.businesscatalyst.com)

