

Carmarthen Golf Club: Excelling in Customer Service

At a Glance ...

- ✚ Facing severe local competition, Carmarthen needed to gain an edge over its rivals.
- ✚ The Club adopted a value-added approach, based on exemplary customer service and a focus on “pay and play” facilities.
- ✚ The Club implemented a 3-5 year plan.
- ✚ The first aim was to win Welsh Golf Club of the Year – this was achieved in year 2.
- ✚ A consulting firm now supports the Club in benchmarking the Club across the UK.
- ✚ Recruitment and staff training underpin the success of the plan.
- ✚ The Club reports “fantastic” results including increased sales.

Carmarthen Golf Club is a parkland course set in the Carmarthenshire countryside. It is regarded as one of the finest golf courses in Wales and is one of the most popular. Building on its success and driven by the motivation to set itself apart from the competition, the Club embarked on a project to improve its customer service.

The Issue:

Severe local competition meant that the Club needed to find a way to stand out from its rivals. There was evidence of an increasing market demand for “pay and play” and other visitor-type facilities, including society and corporate business.

The Solution:

The Club's pricing was already competitive and most other nearby Clubs were offering similar packages. After much deliberation,

it was concluded that the main area in which Carmarthen could gain a competitive advantage was customer service.

By improving its customer service, the Club has been able to keep fees marginally higher than the competition, while successfully selling its packages based on the “added value”.

“ We sold our packages on the ‘added value’. ”

The Club has strived to reach its full potential, embarking on a 3 to 5 year plan to win the Golf Union of Wales’ (GUW) “Welsh Golf Club of the Year” award. This required a unified team effort from the Committee, the Director of Golf and all other staff.

The second aim of the 3 to 5 year plan was to become one of the best clubs in Wales: this needed to be measured rather than guessed. Carmarthen enlisted Club 59, a market leader in providing performance measurement systems to the golf, leisure and events industry, to help it achieve its goal. With the

“ This was overall a team effort from the Committee, Director of Golf and all other staff. ”

support of Club 59, Carmarthen has been able to benchmark its achievements in sales and customer service delivery against those of the United Kingdom's leading golf clubs.

The Challenges

Carmarthen Golf Club encountered two main challenges during the implementation of its plan. The first was the difficulty of securing the necessary buy-in from everyone who needed to be involved in implementing the new initiative.

The second main challenge was the constant need to train new staff, especially casual staff.

To address these challenges, training days were organised, regular staff meetings held, specific action plans drawn up, and the achievements and updates were regularly communicated to all staff.

Next Steps:

The Club's aim is to continue with the plan and achieve consistency in the high level of customer service it has attained. As part of the Club 59 package, the Club is annually visited by six mystery shoppers and receives six sales calls. It analyses the results and from them creates a list of required improvements. These are prioritised and implemented, before being reviewed the following month.

The Club continually monitors the outcomes of the customer service initiative to identify the impact on sales and revenue. The Director of Golf, Committee and Club 59 measure

“Customer service works. Learn more about it, spend time training the staff. This investment will bring you a return.”

the Club's success against the agreed competitors and, in addition, customer feedback is obtained through feedback forms and follow-up emails.

Impacts:

The benefits to date have been impressive, with a positive impact on sales being achieved within the first 6 to 8 months of the plan's implementation. The improved

customer focus has also allowed the Club to capitalise on secondary spending, and to generate a considerable amount of return business.

In just the second year of implementing the 3 to 5 year plan, Carmarthen achieved its goal of receiving the GUW's "Welsh Golf Club of the Year" award.

Carmarthen reports many encouraging spin-off benefits: customer testimonials, positive staff feedback, and many sales opportunities – from initial calls through to taking deposits on return bookings before customers depart.

Tips and Advice:

Carmarthen Golf Club has learnt a great deal from its initiative and partnership with Club 59. Subsequently the team has some advice for others thinking of embarking on a similar initiative: customer service works - learn more about it, spend time training the staff. "The investment will bring you a return."

A final word from Carmarthen Golf Club:

The team at Carmarthen is rightly proud of its achievement. All those involved have evidently enjoyed the experience too, describing it as "Fun and fruitful. The feedback makes us proud."

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.

