



CLOSING THE KNOWLEDGE GAP

Most clubs begin membership campaigns not knowing enough about their markets to make informed decisions.

By Rob Hill

Asked why he robbed banks, the infamous Willie Sutton is credited with this insightful explanation: "Because that's where the money is."

For club owners and managers, it's equally obvious that their money (and success) is in membership, especially in their ability to attract new members. But despite the preponderance of evidence that supports the value of market research in any membership campaign, few clubs have the knowledge they really need.

So how do you assess your level of market understanding and identify the gaps in the knowledge you need to make informed decisions? A good place to start is with some basic questions:

Regarding existing membership:

- Do I know the demographic profile of my membership?
- Do I know how these different profiles use the club?
- Do I know what my current members want?
- Do I understand their lifestyle and attitudes off the golf course?

Regarding your competitors:

- Do I know what my competitors are offering and what they are charging?
- Do I know how they are recruiting members?
- Do I know how my club differs from the competition?

Of your local population:

- Do I know how many golfers are in my local market?
- Do I have demographic information on my local market?
- Do I have psychographic information on my local market?
- Do I know how my club is perceived by golfers and non-golfers?

If you do not know the answers to those questions, here are some ways to increase your knowledge and understanding of your markets:

Member surveys can be an excellent starting point for learning more than just the age and address of your members. Either in hard copy or preferably online, survey questions should focus on gaining

a good understanding of the lifestyle of your members, their habits and attitudes. This will help you in profiling what segment of the local population your club is attractive to and what messages are needed to gain their interest.

Focus groups can help you explore some of the trends that arise from a survey, allowing you to delve further into these subjects and test suggested solutions. Focus groups with golfing non-members are also hugely valuable. Non-golfers also are worthy of similar attention. In the UK, for example, Sport England estimated there are 800,000 adults who think they would like to play golf but currently don't. Seek out those who may fit this profile in your catchment area to participate in focus groups to learn more about their barriers and how you can address them.

An **analysis of clubs** in your region and in your competitive set is critical to reaching a better understanding of market choice. Seek out product and price information from these clubs on membership categories, visitor offerings, food & beverage, practice, tuition and events. Benchmark your club's data against these to highlight areas of advantage and opportunity.

Third parties data sources are not as readily available for golf clubs in the EMEA region as they are in North America. But there are some useful sources, including golf federations. Some federations are better than others, but most should have some data relating to participation and membership trends. Professional firms (such as Sports Marketing Surveys) may have data relevant to your club or may be commissioned to gather information on your behalf. Others such Pitney Bowes, Experian and Nielsen can assist with psychographic data.

Free demographic data is usually available from each country's respective census website. This information can help you not only understand the population profile, but also provide insight to future trends. Regional data regarding transportation, media habits, leisure participation and spending will help you build a picture of your business environment.

Online tools, which are free in some cases, allow you to enter the street addresses of your membership and see a map of where they live relative to the club. This can help you refine your areas of focus for membership growth. Try the website batchgeo.com for some quick and interesting results.

Putting your findings to work

A better-defined picture of your current members helps you target additional prospects who share their characteristics. What's more, a greater appreciation for the lifestyle and habits of both golfers and non-golfers in your market can help improve your communications and even your offerings. Understanding how you compare against your competitive set will also help you shape your offering to your target audience.

Whichever channels, vehicles and messaging you choose to attract new membership interest, be sure to design marketing programme that enable you to test the insights you have gained, whether

in list selection, offer, creative or other dimensions. Testing will improve your understanding and deliver even better results in your next membership recruitment campaign.

Rob Hill is director of Global Golf Advisors' EMEA division.