

Unrealized Potential

Three-year survey shows a widespread desire to play the game, and the need for PGA Professionals to accommodate with structured programs

By Bob Baal

Recent study results shared by the National Golf Foundation on behalf of Golf 20/20 crystallizes why it is imperative that the golf industry offers structured instruction and playing opportunities to convert “wanna-be” golfers into regular players. Over the course of three years this study sought to measure to what level non-golfers “Have an Interest in Playing” (H.I.P.), offering the following as response options:

- Very interested
- Somewhat interested
- A little interested
- Not at all interested

Their responses, in millions, can be seen in the graphic on this page. Considering that there are currently estimated to be 27 million golfers in the U.S., what immediately jumps out is that based on the results there are roughly 27 million more people who are very or somewhat interested in playing the game. Stated another way, the potential exists for the number of golfers in this country to double ... provided those respondents have the opportunity and motivation to act on those desires.

It should be noted that of those 27 million wanna-bes, more than half had tried the game previously but gave it up for one reason or another not divulged in the survey.

Now, consider some other figures that the golf industry has been turning over for several years: 3.5

to 4 million new golfers do act on their desire to try the game every year, but roughly the same amount leave the game annually, resulting in the total number of golfers (and corresponding rounds played) to remain relatively flat.

The NGF reports that overall retention rates of new golfers hover around 50 percent annually, but that figure traditionally jumps to 80 percent for golfers who are introduced to the game through a structured, professionally-instructed program (Get Golf Ready, in its short history, has topped that at 84 percent).

Furthermore, consider that five years after taking up the game, new golfers who reported having regular opportunities to play (beginner leagues and programs, couples nights, 6 hole scrambles, etc.) continued to stay in the game at the rate of 80 percent.

Putting it all together, this message should become clear: in order to tap into this pool of people “H.I.P.” on golf, the industry must focus on attracting and retaining new golfers by not only providing an introduction to the game, but also keeping the newbies engaged with inviting opportunities to play regularly and improve.

Get Golf Ready is primed to help PGA Professionals do just that.

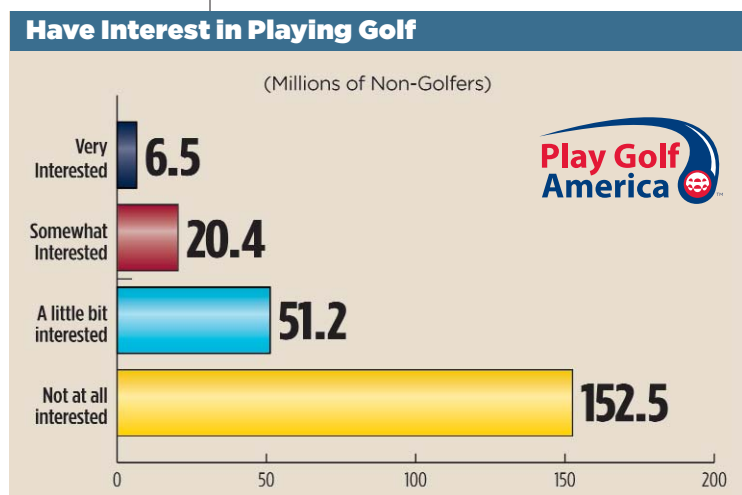
Taking it to the next level

Along with teaching expertise, opportunity and relationships are the core tools put to use by PGA Professionals in growing the game. They are also the keys to turning those H.I.P. on golf into more golfers playing the game at your facilities. Get Golf Ready was introduced by the industry two years ago to attract new and former golfers with a fun, structured format to teach the basics of the game and get the students ready and confident to enjoy the game when opportunities to play arise. All indications show that mission is being accomplished.

But what of the Get Golf Ready students who don't immediately have a regular group to play with or a league to join? Unfortunately, many are destined to be among the millions who exit the game over time. That is where extended levels of Get Golf Ready can come in, to provide ongoing structured programming to keep beginners engaged in the game through continued learning and play opportunities.

Some PGA Professionals, like Cheryl Anderson of the Mike Bender Golf Academy in Lake Mary, Fla., have already tested these waters by offering two additional levels of the popular program: a Level 2 that is more detail specific on the mechanics of the swing and situational golf; and a Level 3 program that strictly focuses on on-course play and instruction. Both have proven effective.

“Getting better at golf is an ongoing process,” states Anderson. “My Get Golf Ready students want to get to that next level so they feel like they are accomplishing something, and even my more experienced students have taken the Level 3 class because it supplements the lessons they are already taking.



Most recently we started our scheduled outings and the students are excited about these as well."

Fulfilling the Power of 10

Extending the instructional elements of Get Golf Ready to additional levels will be a national focus in 2011, says Golf 20/20 Director and PGA Professional Cathy Harbin. "Thanks to the efforts of The PGA, the curriculum is adding a Get Golf Ready 2 this year as a guideline and additional resource," says Harbin.

While this is almost certain to produce more committed golfers, there is still another step needed to fully engage them as committed players. And it's also up to the PGA Professional to take that step, continuously.

According to Harbin, the No. 1 suggestion for Get Golf Ready has been that, after this fun and engaging program, there should be some follow up from the PGA Professional instructor about the students' golf experiences, and about continued learning and playing opportunities. "They liked their instructors, and looked to them as their continued mentors in the game, but feedback too often indicated that they didn't hear from them again," Harbin reports.

To keep those interested golfers from falling back into the latent demand pool, and to fulfill PGA President Allen Wronowski's Power of 10 call to action of making new golfers out of 10 people this year, all PGA Professionals involved in introductory programs can and should develop strate-

Find Your H.I.P. on Golf Number

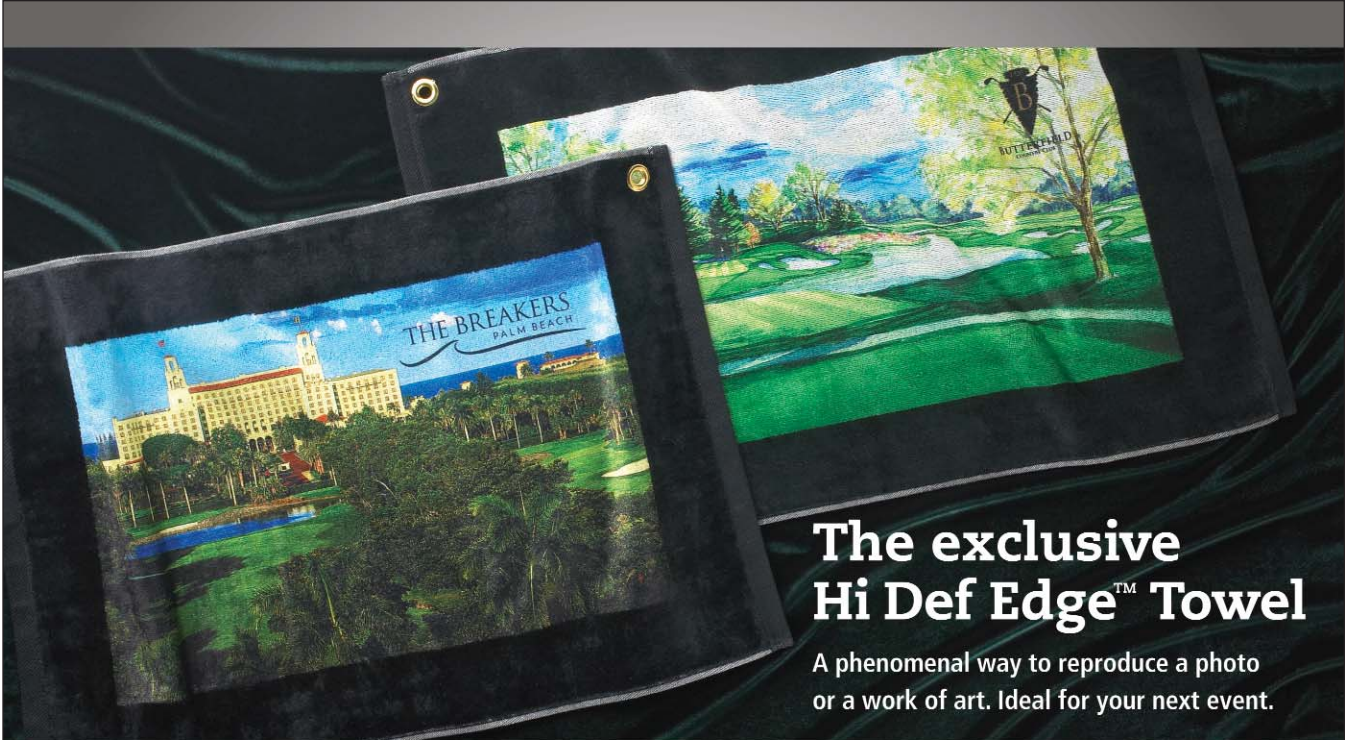
Through the H.I.P. survey Golf 20/20 has the ability to project the number of people interested in playing golf who reside within a 10-mile radius of your facility. PGA Professionals interested in learning how many potential golfers as defined by the Latent Demand survey reside near their facilities can contact Golf 20/20 Director Cathy Harbin at charbin@worldgolfoundation.org. "It is a lofty goal to respond to 16,000 facilities, but that is how important this message is to the success of growing the game," says Harbin.

Another valuable tool to use in addition to Get Golf Ready and structured playing opportunities in converting H.I.P. golfers is PGA Golfer Portraits, which categorizes the types of golfers most likely to be your customers into segments and helps define strategies to attract them to your facility. PGA Golfer Portraits 2011 is currently accessible on PGALinks.com under the Research tab.

gies for following up with students and creating play opportunities. This can be accomplished in a number of ways: phone calls, e-mails, posting on your facility's website, creating a FaceBook page where you can post information about group outings and encourage students to post progress updates, and more.

"We can't just assume that people will automatically get out and play regularly once we teach them the basics of the game and the golf swing," says Harbin. "That's only part of the journey toward creating lifelong golfers; PGA Professionals need to complete the journey by serving as motivators and facilitators to get people coming back to the golf course time after time." ■

Bob Baal is The PGA of America's senior publications editor.



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