

Incentives, Rewards Help Build Loyal, Long-Term Customers

Facilities provide perks to PGA Professionals and Get Golf Ready students to encourage repeat business and grow the game

The primary objective of Play Golf America programs such as Get Golf Ready is to grow the game and plant the seeds of golf that will grow into loyal, long-term customers. But after getting participants hooked on golf through Get Golf Ready instructional programs, how can facilities encourage golfers to continue to patronize their lesson facility and reward them for playing more rounds of golf?

During the Play Golf America Conference at the 2011 PGA Merchandise Show in Orlando, PGA Vice President Ted Bishop introduced the concept of providing incentives to his facility's instructors for generating Get Golf Ready follow-up purchases. He planned to pay his teachers a percentage on purchases by their Get Golf Ready graduates. It's a concept that's caught on.

At Sunset Hills Golf Course in Charlotte, N.C., for example, PGA Director of Golf Del Ratcliffe "motivates" his Get Golf Ready (GGR) instructors by paying them an hourly wage and by giving each instructor part of the \$99 rate each participant pays. Instructors then receive \$5 each time a graduate of their Get Golf Ready class plays 18 holes at Sunset Hills, or at any facility operated by the same

Incentivizing your growth of the game programs can produce faster results and greater return rates.



management company. The instructor collects his \$5 per round "incentive" until the student plays 20 rounds of golf, giving each instructor the possibility of collecting a \$100 "bonus" for each GGR graduate.

The money taken out of the \$99 registration fee for each Get Golf Ready student goes to help fund the instructor's PGA/PGM level checkpoints, books and education. Brian Lermack, a PGA Professional at Renaissance Park Golf Club in Charlotte, for example, helped pay for his PGA/PGM Education with the incentive money he received and is now a full-fledged PGA member.

PGA General Manager Rich Richeson offers some special perks to students and instructors of Get Golf Ready courses at Charlotte Golf Links in North Carolina, to encourage them to continue their golf matriculation beyond the GGR classes. When students graduate from a GGR class, they receive a "Power Card" loaded with five free rounds they can use like a debit card. Giving students a Power Card encourages students to return to Charlotte Golf Links, provides Richeson with an easy method to track their activity at the facility, and helps Richeson provide incentives to his instructors. Each time the student returns to play golf, the instructor receives \$10. This incentive lasts through the new golfer's first five rounds.

"The incentives encourage the instructors to build relationships with the students, and gives them a good reason to work to turn those Get Golf Ready students into longtime customers at the facility," says Richeson. "The Power Card also gives the students an incentive to come back and play at our facility. It demonstrates that we want them as a long-term customer."

Which point-of-sale (POS) systems are best for tracking spending from Get Golf Ready students so facilities can accurately compensate staff members for facility loyalty? That was the challenge facing PGA General Manager-Director of Golf Greg Nichols at Ko Olina Golf Club in Hawaii.

"We are currently reviewing a proposal to install a new software system that will give us the capability to accurately track all types of customer spending—range, academy, golf merchandise and food and beverage—from our Get Golf Ready graduates," notes Nichols. "We are definitely committed to finding a way to properly recognize, both financially and otherwise, the efforts of the individual professionals and the efforts of the entire support staff that helps drive awareness and enrollment for the program. But we want to be sure we can track customer spending first."

While Nichols continues to develop a compensation and bonus program for staffers who teach Get Golf Ready classes, he will give each instructor a performance bonus based on the number of students and classes they teach during the year. Additional compensation will follow when a POS system to track ancillary spending at Ko Olina is brought on line. Then, the incentives will flow more freely—along with a steady stream of long-term customers. ■