

# Winning Ideas

## Putting a Fresh Spin on Golf Range Marketing

BY PHILLIP GRAVELY

When it comes to marketing a golf range, sometimes it seems like it's all been done before. Range owners advertise on television and in local publications. They host demo days, set up community partnerships, run direct mail campaigns, offer customer discounts and more. In fact, many range owners find themselves wondering what else they can possibly do.

Sometimes, however, there are visionaries who find ways to market their ranges in unique and profitable ways. To honor these strategic thinkers, *Golf Range Times* has created the Innovator Awards. These new annual awards recognize range owners who create and execute innovative and successful marketing campaigns. Congratulations to our first winners.

### TAKING BACK FATHER'S DAY

Like many ranges, Mad Golfer Golf Club in Southampton, Pa., frequently experiences the bottom-line blues around holidays. "They are invariably slow for us because families are always doing something else," says Kal Katz, president of Mad Golfer.

Although in many cases this is simply unavoidable, Katz identified one holiday in particular where he thought he could fight back—Father's Day. Fittingly armed with an idea from his son, Mike, Katz set out to reclaim his revenue.

The Mad Golfer Golf Club name and logo are based on a character that is a mix of a golfer

and Albert Einstein—a sort of mad scientist of the links. To facilitate his promotion, Katz created a life-size cutout of the Mad Golfer. He then spread the word that anyone who brought dad to the range on Father's Day would receive a free family photo with the Mad Golfer.

As families arrived, Katz and his staff took their picture and then printed the photos on a digital printer in the office while the family played miniature golf. Once the family finished playing, Katz attached the photo to the scorecard, which naturally bears the name and contact information of the facility and includes a bounce-back coupon for one free round of miniature golf with the purchase of another.

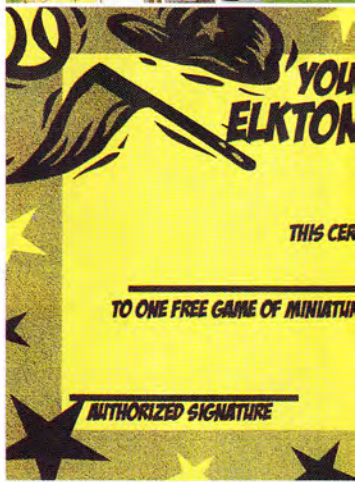
"Dad then takes the photo home and puts it on the refrigerator," says Katz. "He

won't throw it away—his kids gave it to him."

Katz says he expected an increase in traffic due to the promotion, but the response was far better than he could have imagined. "Our revenue on Father's Day doubled from this promotion," he says, adding that he also saw substantial increases in pro shop sales. "We do a lot of promotions, but this has been the most effective by far."

Though Katz ran ads in the local newspaper promoting the event, he says much of his success was the result of one-to-one marketing with existing customers. For the month preceding Father's Day, Katz and his staff distributed coupons announcing the event to every mother and child who came to the facility.

When asked why the promotion worked so well, Katz says it was a combination



### 2006 INNOVATOR AWARD WINNERS

●● **First Place**

Mad Golfer Golf Club  
Southampton, Pa.

●● **Second Place**

Elkton Golf & Batting Center  
Elkton, Md.

●● **Third Place**

Westwood Plateau Golf Academy  
Coquitlam, B.C., Canada



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**COUPON EXPIRES**

Westwood Plateau Golf Academy (above) modified an existing promotion of giving free tokens for purchasing a multi-bucket card (right), surpassing revenue expectations for the month.



Elkton Golf & Batting Center printed certificates (above) for free rounds of miniature golf and batting cage use (right) and sent them to local schools.



Inspired by the facility's unique namesake, Mad Golfer Golf Club created a cut-out (left and below) to boost attendance during a normally slow holiday weekend for a Father's Day promotion.



of a great idea on the part of his son, his staff's diligence in marketing the event in advance and anticipating the specific need of his target market. "That's what kids do on Father's Day," he says. "They buy something for dad."

The positive effects of the promotion continue throughout the year for Mad Golfer Golf Club. Katz says the bounce-back coupon for mini golf has created a great deal of repeat play and brought many families back to the facility. And, though he can't measure it directly, he suspects the scorecards on refrigerators throughout this community have served as friendly and effective reminders that his facility is nearby.

If he were to do anything differently, Katz says it would be to advertise the promotion stronger and sooner. He also would be more aggressive with the point-of-sale campaign in the facility. Otherwise, he can't think of anything he would change when he does it again. And he will do it again.

"This is now my annual Father's Day event," says Katz.

### SCHOOL TIES

Six years ago, when Dave Shortall took over Elkton Golf & Batting Center in Elkton, Md., the facility was in serious need of repair and on the verge of going under. Slowly but surely, Shortall used a disciplined approach based in outstanding customer service to get the facility back on its feet.

"The first few years, we concentrated on getting the center in shape and making the current customers happy," he says.

By year three, Shortall was happy with the looks of the facility and ready to actively begin growing his business. He immediately identified his next challenge: making his potential new customers aware of the physical transformation at Elkton. "We needed to get people back to the facility to see the changes we had made," he says.

Since Shortall had put every cent he made back into the facility, he found himself with almost no budget for marketing. So, he got creative. Shortall and his staff printed certificates that could be redeemed for a free game of miniature golf or three free batting cage tokens. They then sent a letter to

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every guidance counselor in the 17 elementary schools and six middle schools in the Cecil County Public School system. The letter included a sample certificate and encouraged counselors to request as many as they wanted to use as rewards for students who made honor roll, had perfect attendance or otherwise excelled.

Shortall modeled the promotion on a similar campaign conducted by local fast food establishments. However, he had one distinct advantage to his model that caught the eyes of counselors. "We advertised these certificates as the healthy alternative, since they promoted physical activity," he says. "Our thought was, 'Why should a national chain be the only one in on this action?'"

Shortall contacted the counselors in February, when the range business is typically slow. Then, staying true to his customer service roots, he

handled the calls from counselors and delivered the certificates himself, usually on his way to work. In the first year of the promotion, he distributed 3,000 certificates to local schools. The program is now in its third year.

When he began the promotion, Shortall hoped each certificate would bring at least two people to the facility—the student and a parent—and generate 15 percent in additional sales. In the first year, 450 of the certificates were redeemed, and the average additional sale to redeeming customers was approximately \$10. The total cost of the promotion was a mere \$150.

While his sales projection was right on for the first year, the number of people per certificate was actually between three and four. That exposure laid important groundwork that translated to a 25 percent increase in sales last year. By August of this year, sales already were up 22 percent.

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