

MASTERING TEE SHEET MANAGEMENT

Every tee time that is sold *adds* to the profitability of your club. Conversely, manage your tee sheet poorly, and your club loses money. It's simple math. The online and electronic tee sheets used today can make your club more profitable and maximize play. Dynamic pricing has changed the game regarding yield management and there are some great resources now available to those who manage the tee sheet. However, they still require constant management by the pro shop staff to ensure some or all the strategies below are utilized and designed into the system.

REVENUE MAXIMIZING TEE TIME METHODS

FIRST TEE TIME

As you begin to set up your tee sheet for each season, it is very important to establish your first-off time. Working closely with the superintendent, you must find the earliest time to start, given the sunrise and the needs of the turf team to prepare the course ahead of play. A best practice to use would be implementing a "pace setter" group 10 minutes prior to the first time open to the public. This time can be used by staff or ambassadors to set the pace for the day and ensure proper distance is kept from the team prepping the course.

TEE TIME INTERVALS

Tee time intervals play a massive role in the inventory available on any given day. Understanding the business model and desired guest experience for your facility will go a long way in properly spacing tee times. At a high end and perhaps difficult resort course, 12-minute intervals may provide the best pace of play and experience for a high dollar round. At a daily fee course without many barriers to proper pacing, 10-minute intervals will allow you to get more golfers onto your golf course throughout the day.

DOUBLE TEE STARTS

In shoulder seasons and winter months, double tee starts are utilized to allow more people to play 18 holes at a premium rate before sunset. In the summer, double tees often enable more people to play 18 holes before the heat becomes too excessive.

- ★ Focus on the highest-demand times and book around those times. For example, suppose you have significant demand for early mornings on weekends. In this case, your tournament sales director may be able to sell an afternoon shotgun, and you will maximize revenue for both the morning double tee and the afternoon shotgun.
- ★ Clear communication with guests is essential. Make sure you explain the strategy of a double tee and what tee they will be starting on, either #1 or #10. Club associates making tee times and developing electronic tee sheets need a complete understanding of a double tee and the staggered timing it requires.
- ★ Another double tee may follow a morning double tee start. For example, a double tee running from 7:00 am to 9:15 am would be followed by one from 11:30 am to 1:45 pm. The strategy of the second double tee would be to maximize the number of players paying a premium rate before the twilight rate in the mid-afternoon becomes available. In this example, the mid-afternoon rate would not be available until 4:00 pm, after the second double tee had ended.

SHOTGUN STARTS

Shotgun starts are highly effective in maximizing play. They can be used for daily fee play or a tournament or event. The keys to shotgun starts are:

- ★ They should be scheduled first thing in the morning or first thing in the afternoon. A mid-morning or mid-afternoon shotgun start will often leave you unable to book tee times before or after the shotgun. Be mindful of using holes 1 and 10 to start two groups on, as well as par 3's that follow par 5's.
- ★ You should have at least 100 players, and ideally, 120 or more in each shotgun start to maximize revenue. Understanding the average daily revenue for the facility given day of week and time of year will allow you to properly price your outing.

REVERSE SHOTGUN STARTS

A reverse shotgun start is a strategy whereby smaller groups can start play at the same time while you also simultaneously tee off regular tee times. Generally held first thing in the morning, a reverse shotgun puts golfers on the course starting on hole 18 and working backward.

For example, 36 players could start at the same time, at 8 am, on holes 4-12. Meanwhile, golfers could be teeing off the first tee until the group that started on number 12 reaches the first tee, at which point it would be closed as the shotgun group comes through.

Reverse shotguns can also be valuable in allowing smaller groups to tee off and reopen the 1st tee earlier without the strain of "turn times." If you have a group of 24 who are looking to shotgun start and make their way to a banquet lunch at the course, it may be worth it to work with your superintendent on a reverse shotgun. If the turf team can make holes 15-18 available, you can shotgun start the group and clear the 1st tee within one hour.

EARLY BIRD TEE TIMES

Sell nine-hole rounds off the back nine for the first hour of daylight. The green fee is reduced because greens may or may not be mown based on staff and budget, but you've created incremental revenue. You can utilize a staff tee time as a "pace setter" if necessary.

DAILY FEE BOOKING STRATEGIES

We can't emphasize the importance of booking *every* reservation with extreme care and designing your online tee sheets correctly. When executed properly, these simple reservation techniques can incredibly impact utilization. The key to these strategies is constantly observing and managing your tee sheet.

DYNAMIC PRICING MODEL

Since the implementation of the online tee sheet, golf has followed other industries such as the airlines towards a dynamic pricing model. The theory behind this model is that each seat on an airplane may have cost the guest a different price based on when it was purchased. Leading software in tee sheet management now allows strategies

to be built to adjust pricing-based booking window, utilization, and even comparative weather. When building out strategies to dictate dynamic pricing rules, you will want to know and understand the booking behaviors of your customer base.

- ★ What type of volume does your facility do as a whole? How far out would you like your customer to book their tee time? Changing the pricing model can adjust the booking behaviors of your customers to better suit your operation. Shorter available booking windows to the public can create a sense of urgency, but also leave you scrambling to fill slots.
- ★ When are the most desirable tee times for your customer base? These may change based on seasonality or other factors. For example: A prime time in the summer may be 8AM to avoid the heat. Prime time in a cooler season may be in the middle of the day to avoid any disruptions from frost delays.
- ★ You can use certain tools within the tee sheet system to make one-time adjustments based on new information. When the 75-degree Friday in January shows up in the forecast you can use a pricing override to adjust rates up to match the desire to play that day.

PAIRING SMART

Whether the customer calls you or books online, review the reservation sheet for pairing opportunities. This ensures that twosomes are paired together and prevents multiple tee times from being used by only two or three players.

You will often have golfers request to be paired with nobody else. Explain to them courteously that this is not possible or steer them to non-peak times of the day when doing so will not result in a loss of revenue.

REDUCING NO-SHOWS AND SHORT-SHOWS

The “gap” is the difference between how many people booked a tee time and how many actually showed up. We can minimize this difference by implementing systems to remind guests and hold them accountable for their reservations. The following are the programs you can use that encourages the guest to show up, cancel, or adjust the number of players before the day of play.

CREDIT CARD GUARANTEE

Like other industries with perishable inventories, such as hotels and airlines, we need to hold our customers accountable to either show up or call and cancel. It’s important to remember that the purpose behind taking a credit card is education and accountability. If they are not going to play, we want to know well in advance.

Require credit card reservations from every guest booking a tee time during an established window. Establish a cancellation policy and charging policy for no-shows that is clearly communicated from pro shop staff and even in confirmation emails. Many golf courses now have set up prime windows to be pre-paid only reservations.

- ★ Determine the window of days and times you will require a credit card to make a reservation.
- ★ Set the fee to be charged for no-shows and short-shows.

- ★ Determine how far in advance the guest needs to call to avoid being charged (the cancellation window). The typical cancellation window is 24 hours.
- ★ Set up a reminder email through your tee sheet system to be sent to each group 48 hours in advance of their tee time.
- ★ With groups of eight golfers or more, call 48 hours before they play to ensure all of them are playing.

FILLING EMPTY TIMES DUE TO NO-SHOWS AND SHORT-SHOWS

If you successfully implement the strategies above, your course will see a reduction in gap % and an increase in cancellations or changes to player counts. This results from guests becoming educated and complying with the reservation policy. Programs to fill these empty slots are needed at every course, especially during high-demand times. Here are several to choose from:

WAITLIST CALL BACK

When implemented correctly, this is an extremely powerful guest service strategy and a revenue generator. By capturing excess demand during peak periods and contacting them if anyone cancels, you are proactively filling your tee sheet while at the same time substantially exceeding the expectations of your guests.

Where we have excess demand, we should try to capture contact information from those guests we can't book and call or email them back, *whether we have cancellations or not*. We can fill prime tee times on short notice if we have openings. If we do not have any openings, we can offer an off-peak special, a stand-by slot, or attempt to book the guest for a different day or time.

- ★ Establish where wait list names will be recorded and what information needs to be captured.
- ★ Identify alternates to offer guests on the wait list that we cannot accommodate on their preferred day and time.
- ★ Determine who will be held accountable for making calls to guests still on the wait list 24 hours before the day of play.
- ★ Decide on a simple tracking mechanism to identify guests we successfully accommodate from the waitlist.

HOLDING BACK SHORT GROUPS

Short shows represent a sensitive customer service issue because any fee charged or other penalty is incurred by the guests that showed instead of the ones that did not. That is why charging short shows doesn't work in our industry. However, to maximize revenue and improve the pace of the play experience for our guests, we need to send out full groups whenever possible.

In the case of short shows, the best practice we have found is to ask the group in question to wait for one to two tee times to pair them with additional players. If they do not wish to wait, explain the pace of play issue. You may have some groups that want to go out so side on the side of service and return visits.

REPLAY STRATEGY

Remember, an open tee is the most expensive thing in running a golf course. The last proactive opportunity to drive additional rounds on the day of play is asking guests if they would like to keep playing after 18 holes. This is a very dynamic strategy and may change every day based on your actual demand.