

WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF GOLF CLUB MEMBERSHIP?



- Is the boom of 2020 here to stay?
- What do the golf clubs of the future look like?
- What exactly is an independent golfer?

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DIRECTOR

Name: Chris Knight PGA

Role: Director at The Revenue Club

About: Chris and his team offer independent visitor expertise to 120 clubs in the UK and Ireland to help maximise value and revenue through technology and customer data



CHRIS'S STORY: Golf clubs now have more data around tee bookings due to Covid and one of the big things is how they use that data to improve their membership offering and the general golf offering

overall. If you have, say, a seven-day member paying £2,000 a year and an intermediate member paying £800, and they are both trying to book a peak time – i.e. a weekend morning – then I don't think it's fair that someone who pays £800 has the same booking rights as someone who is paying £2,000.

In that case, if your tee-sheet is at maximum capacity, the club may want to look at changing the lead time based on the member category to ensure value is provided to that member. Now that golf clubs have all this data, they can't just say 'we are busy on Saturday!'

Clubs have had a massive swell in membership enquiries over the last year but are they capturing the details of all those enquiries and re-marketing to those people even if they don't join? At a lot of clubs, you walk in and ask about membership but they don't take your name, number or email. That information needs to go into a sales funnel and that customer needs to be managed. You can't wait for someone to walk in waving £1,000 at you. I expect a lot of clubs have missed opportunities because they have not managed the sales. I think there's still work to do on that front.

What does the future of membership look like? For me, a membership, at its core, is still about the course. People often forget that. And it needs to be a place where you want to go. There will be places that survive on the back of being an old boys' club because they are great courses but, for the wider market, it has to be more than just a golf club.

Name: Kevin Fish

Role: Business owner of Contemporary Club Leadership Ltd

About: Kevin's unique background in the industry – he is an experienced club manager in his own right – gives him a detailed understanding of the impact of lockdown. His work with thousands of club managers reveals the granular detail of what is impacting clubs in the UK

KEVIN'S STORY: Everyone acknowledges the decline our clubs were suffering from prior to this crisis, and for a while it looked like the lockdown was going to take many clubs under. That fear in clubs was real, where frankly the elected committees had just fallen asleep at the wheel, failing to do what was necessary to secure their club's long term health and viability. The surge of interest in golf over the last 18 months has been a lifesaver for a large proportion of clubs, and what is interesting is that those clubs are now calling to ask how they can make sure they never have to look over that cliff edge again.

Perhaps this is the wake-up call that elected committees needed to take a longer term view. I saw, for instance, a great process in action at Muswell Hill which has a hugely successful academy introducing people to the game, backed up by a range of membership categories that suit each age and stage of the new/returning golfer. What sets this club apart is that the existing members fully embrace their role in welcoming those newcomers to the club, so that they feel like they belong.

I'm afraid to say that there are examples of the opposite being the case, where the long-term members really don't like this influx of members, even when they have helped to secure the future viability of what was previously a club in decline. That is the key battleground that must be won.

What does the future of membership look like?

The value of anything in life can be calculated by comparing the experience you receive against the price you pay.

We know definitively from our research exactly what three things members want from their club: 'Give us a great golf course, show us the club is in safe professional hands, and then make us feel special.' I know BIGGA have truly helped clubs achieve one of those main ingredients – it's down to the rest of us to make sure we deliver in the other areas now.



CONSULTANT

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GENERAL MANAGER



Name: David Scott PGA
Role: General manager at
 Dumbarrie Links in Fife

About: Dumbarrie
 opened in the pandemic
 but its pay-and-play model
 has thrived and it hosted
 the Trust Golf Women's
 Scottish Open in August



D **AVID'S STORY:**
 We were always
 focussed on being
 pay-and-play,
 purely on the basis
 of the course's
 location in the St Andrews area and
 the sheer demand for quality links
 courses.

Our targets were the tour operators
 and overseas guests but we were
 certainly not forgetting golfers
 at home who wanted to treat
 themselves to something a bit
 special.

We have three price levels. The
 regular green fee is £259, then £125
 for Scottish residents and £98 for
 Fife residents.

When we opened on May 29, 2020,
 we had no clubhouse and no car
 park.

We changed our plan after Covid
 hit to target 7,000 rounds during the
 season.

We actually doubled that figure
 by the end of it. What was looking
 like a disaster at the time ended up
 being not too bad at all.

The most important thing was the
 marketing we got through social

media from people who played and
 returned to play.

It has surpassed everybody's
 expectations.

A couple of days after we opened, a
 gentleman sought me out and said
 that he was going to be a resident
 in Elie over the summer due to
 Covid.

He said he'd like to buy 100 rounds
 and gave me a cheque for £11,500.

Then he got to September last
 year and called me to say he was
 running out of rounds and he
 bought another 25.

This year, himself and a friend
 both put down £10,000 each. That
 certainly helps.

**What does the future of
 membership look like?**

Golf has had a massive shot in the
 arm because of Covid and people
 have seen the benefits.

It's up to clubs to embrace the
 demands, to modernise their
 thinking and not have a 20th-
 century mindset.

I still think, though, that pay-and-
 play only has a future in areas
 where there is high demand.

DIRECTOR

Name: John Grant
Role: Director of Golf at the St Andrews Links Trust

About: John joined the St Andrews Links Trust in 2007 and oversees golf operations at the Home of Golf, including on the courses and at the state-of-the-art Golf Academy



JOHN'S STORY: We don't have members at the Links Trust in the traditional sense, but we have a very close relationship with our thousands of Ticketholders, many of whom are members of local clubs in St Andrews or beyond. Over the past two years we have seen increased occupancy on the course from Ticketholders, partly because of the resurgence of interest and appetite to play golf but also with a reduced number of visiting golfers in St Andrews. Those numbers have also been boosted over the past two years with greater numbers of children joining our junior golf association (SALJGA) and students, who stayed in St Andrews during the pandemic, turning to golf as a pastime. We

pride ourselves on being open to all at the Links and provide many different pathways for people of all ages and abilities to get into golf on the course or at the Golf Academy. Our ambition is to develop and deliver memorable experiences for every person at the Links, whether they wish to play, learn, shop or relax. With regard to our core product, the courses, during this Covid period we have learnt a great deal about making golf more accessible for Ticketholders to book online as well as the importance of engaging with them, trying to improve awareness and understanding of the courses and facilities, making sure that we let people know what's going on, when the courses might be busy or identifying dates when competitions are being played.

We hope to see visitors returning in increasing numbers in 2022 and will continue to work to maintain the equilibrium of visitor and ticketholder play at the Links. We don't differentiate between those customers and want them all to have the best possible experience.

What does the future of membership look like? How people consume golf is changing, digitisation and technology continue to grow in importance. We've really begun to look closely at how that customer experience in a digitalised world is going to drive things differently in the future. There's work for us to do over the next few years and we're committed to making sure the Home of Golf continues to develop and deliver memorable experiences.



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