The Golf Consumer – US – November 2012

Scope and Themes

"The golf industry is challenged to grow participation—or at least to stem the exodus of players. The steady decline in the number of golfers has manifested in a reduction in the number of golfing facilities, annual rounds played, declining golf equipment sales revenue, and declining golf/country club memberships. While the recession of 2007-09 can be blamed for some of the losses, the downward trend in the market has been evident since the early 2000s .In addition to cost being a barrier, the length of time it takes to play, a lack of ability/confidence, competition from other sports, and a persistent image problem all serve to drive down participation."

– Fiona O'Donnell, Senior Lifestyles & Leisure Analyst

In this report we answer the key questions:

- **Can golf ever really be an affordable leisure option for the less affluent?**
- **Should traditional 18-hole courses be modified to allow access for time-crunched players?**
- **Are today's courses beyond the skill level of the average player?**
- **What is the industry doing to stem the loss of players and engage new ones?**

Participation in golf has been steadily declining since its peak in 2003. While the economic recession foots some of the blame, the fact that annual rounds had been declining prior to the downturn indicates a loss of interest in the sport itself. As with most leisure activities, a lack of money and time are most often cited as reasons for not playing the game and, even with an improving economy, golf continues to be a relatively expensive sport requiring a substantial investment of leisure time.

Golf course design evolved throughout the 1990s to meet anticipated demand from serious golfers (and aging Baby Boomers) who wanted to be challenged by PGA Tour-like

DID YOU KNOW?

This report is part of a series of reports, produced to provide you with a more holistic view of this market.

courses. During the boom years of golf course development, courses became longer and more difficult. Now, it appears that the game must evolve once again if it is to attract a new breed of recreational, casual golfers who do not aspire to join the Tour, but rather enjoy the social and physical benefits of the game.

Industry players have noted the loss of participation and have launched programs to target the nontraditional golfer (women, younger adults, kids, and minorities), though as participation continued to slide through 2011, these do not yet appear to have been successful. However, 2012 may be the year that the pendulum swings positive for golf. Golf equipment sales are up for the first time in five years, and year-to-date rounds of golf played are up compared with 2011.

For the purposes of this report, Mintel has used the following definition for its discussion of the market for golf equipment:

- Golf clubs of any kind including putters, drivers, irons, sand wedges, hybrids, etc.
- Golf balls
- "Soft" goods, such as golf bags, gloves, and shoes.

Specifically excluded from the definition are golf vehicles of any kind, course fees and club memberships, golf lessons, golf apparel, tees, and training aids of any kind such as instructional videos, books, and other golfing-related publications. Antique or second-hand equipment of any kind is also excluded.

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