

TIME TO GET ON THE ONLINE MAP?

Hundreds of clubs have discovered that having online tee time booking or a high end website – or both – can pay handsome dividends, writes **Alistair Dunsmuir**

WHILE THE EGU *Are You Ready?* campaign is advising clubs to promote themselves, it is essential to have the right tools to exploit the rapidly growing online golf market. Thanks to BRS Golf's online booking system and CLUBView's website system, over 400 golf clubs have already been doing this successfully, so we're examining why these two tools are so effective for online marketing, club membership and income generation.

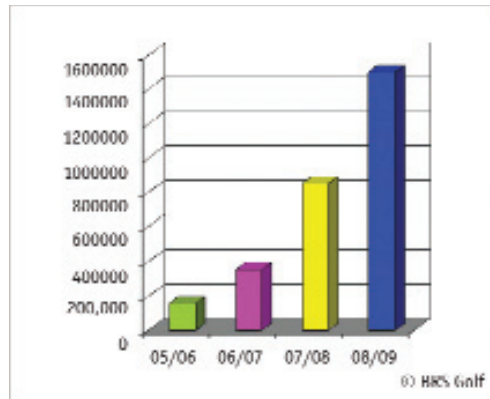
BRS Golf: how to exploit the growth in online bookings

With over 300 clubs, 105,000 members and 90,000 visitors using its system in the last 12 months, BRS is the market leader in the UK and Ireland in online booking and tee time management. From the seven million bookings made through its system, BRS has drawn some significant conclusions and market trends.

In 2008 alone, using their BRS systems, these clubs have:

- Enabled their members to make over 1.5 million bookings
- Attracted £1.5 million in online tee time revenue booked through clubs' websites
- Attracted hundreds of new memberships
- Sent on average two e-newsletters a month to their members and visitors using the BRS marketing feature.

The online revenue figure through club websites alone* has increased by 450 per cent over the past 24 months, reinforcing the



BRS MEMBERS BOOKINGS

- In the UK and Ireland, over 104,000 members are now using BRS to book casual tee times and competition tee times
- Over 3 million member bookings were made in the last 5 years.

almost exponential growth rate of online bookings. A relatively new user, Aberdovey GC, soon found the system has earned its keep, as manager Ian Hamilton explained: "With BRS our visitor green fee revenue is up circa 35 per cent on the same period as last year."

Shock: members prefer online booking!

Besides the sheer growth and volume of online golf, one of the most surprising statistics is the popularity of online booking with members, so if your committee still likes to think 'we don't do tee time booking', it seems it is out of touch with what members actually want. Childwall GC in the north west is a classic example, as club manager Peter Bowen explained: "Online tee time booking for members has been amazingly successful at Childwall, thanks to BRS. I used to hear all the

usual objections; now, we're even getting members booking while they're on holiday abroad, because they can. One delightful chap emailed me to tell me he was making an 'international booking' from Majorca; another regularly books online while he's travelling around the UK during the week."

As many as 25 per cent of all the golf club members in Ireland are using BRS to book tee times, and at clubs in the UK with BRS, members actively prefer to book online. Just like visitor booking, this habit is growing rapidly as the graph illustrates:

- In the UK and Ireland, over 104,000 members are now using BRS to book casual tee times and competition tee times
- Over three million member bookings were made in the last five years.

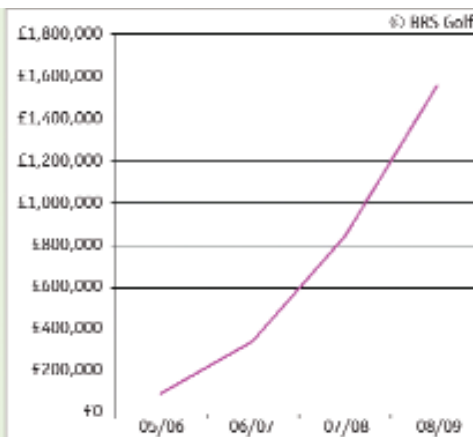
The simple fact is the online world is changing golfing habits, especially the way we book our golf. Brian Smith, director of BRS Golf, has a very clear message for golf clubs: "The majority of members as well as visitors prefer to book online and clubs in the UK and Ireland should make their online strategy and presence a top priority. It is not just about bookings, it's about data capture, marketing and communication. The online bandwagon is rolling and clubs with a BRS system are already enjoying the benefits."

Online visitor revenue growth: 450 per cent increase in 24 months

How fast are things moving? In Ireland, a country that's at the forefront of golf club

BRS ONLINE BOOKINGS VALUES

- Online bookings through BRS grew 450% in the last two years
- The average online revenue per club per year has grown by 230% from £4000 to £9100
- £2.4 Million and 130,000 visitors in the last 24 months
- Average green fee value is £18.46p, ranging from £100+ at Royal St. Georges to £10 for special offers.



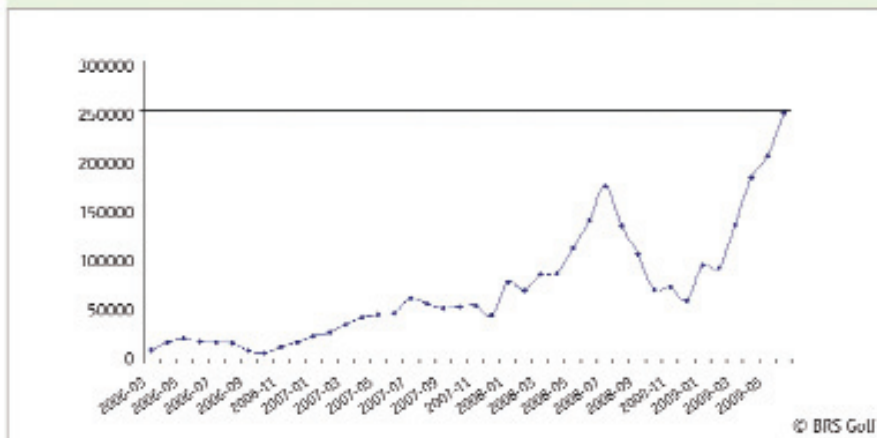
marketing, just under 50 per cent of golf clubs are fully online with email, website and tee time booking. It's worth noting that 90 per cent of these clubs use BRS Golf. So let's look at the hard facts over the last 24 months:

- Online bookings through BRS grew 450 per cent in the last two years
- The average online revenue per club per year has grown by 230 per cent from £4,000 to £9,100
- Clubs using the system have made £2.4 million and seen 130,000 visitors in the last 24 months
- Average green fee value is £18.46, ranging from £100-plus at Royal St Georges to £10 for special offers.

Online booking growth and seasonal variation

An online booking system enables your club to ride the wave when the season kicks off and the nomads start looking hard for courses.

- A staggering £250,000 was taken in June 2009, up £110,000 on June last year
- The impact of seasonal golf on online booking habits is well illustrated.



▲ Total online bookings per month through the club website of clubs using BRS

- A staggering £250,000 was taken in June 2009, up £110,000 on June last year
- The impact of seasonal golf on online booking habits is well illustrated.

Yield management

Key to online booking is effective yield management and BRS provides all tools you need. The tee time booking reports lets you see which periods are popular, that is peak, and which are less so, that is off peak. You then decide what rate to set your green fees for the off peak times in order to encourage people to those times. Gary Henry, manager of Galgorm Castle GC, a top 30 club in Ireland, uses the BRS Golf system's reports to analyse his business, and how best to

encourage take up of quieter slots: "We have green fees running from £17 to £45, but it all depends on the reports I get from the BRS system as to which times and rates we push."

BRS has also integrated its system to third party marketing companies such as Teeofftimes.co.uk and Teetimes.co.uk, giving the BRS customers access to over 500,000 golfers in the UK alone. These golfers are now emailed on a weekly basis with offers from these companies, increasing business at participating clubs.

Online marketing: BRS is much more than a booking system

The BRS system enables you to market your club to visitors and societies to bring in incremental revenue and attract new memberships. Galgorm Castle's Gary Henry explained how he does it: "We're focused on two databases, members and visitors. The BRS system enables us to set up and e-newsletter the

members' database to remind them of member-get-member incentives, and this has helped pull in 80 new members.

"We e-newsletter the 700 or so visitors monthly, and we attract more email addresses with a promotional offer run at the club with data capture on our score cards for a break at our sister hotel. I now expect an average of 20 replies within 24 hours from visitors when we mail them, so we don't need to advertise regionally as much."

Society golf

What about society golfers? According to Galgorm's Gary Henry, the BRS Golf system helps this income stream as well: "We use the database we've built up of society organisers

for the Christmas card and society pack posting. We also include all the organisers when we mail visitors about group and society packages and promotions, and that works very well both to remind the organisers, and to increase our society bookings generally. When we get society bookings, we always mail back a confirmation, and with that is always a reminder that our pro shop is the ideal place for gifts, prizes, and so on."



The ideal online marketing and communications tool: a CLUBView website

The growth in the online trend is reflected by another habit of 21st century lifestyles: checking out the websites of whatever it is we're looking for, especially golf clubs. However, as almost every golf club now has a website it is much easier for everyone to see what makes a good one – and what doesn't. CLUBView websites are the choice of clubs that understand the value of marketing and communicating with their members and visitors, and want the best tool for the job.

The choice of the UK's smarter golf clubs

The majority of CLUBView's customers are primarily quality golf clubs and top golfing experiences, as recent signings demonstrate: The New GC of St Andrews, Pannal GC, West Sussex GC, Ashridge GC, Hankley Common GC, Royal Blackheath GC, Worpleston GC and Hillside GC, and they appreciate CLUBView's advantages.

Being unique is absolutely essential

Anyone in marketing will tell you websites must stand out from the rest, a point well made by Martin Silver of Ashridge GC: "We saw that many top 100 clubs are CLUBView customers, and while other website systems use a template that make clubs all look the same, CLUBView can be designed to make your club be unique. That's essential as far as we were concerned."

Showcasing your club to best effect

As consumers, golfers buy with their eyes. The CLUBView system is completely flexible in the way its pages can be set up and designed,

so it makes the ideal tool to exploit images that make the most impact. Reigate Heath GC's website is a good example



(www.reigateheath.com). With stunning photography by Kevin Murray, there's a splash page based on an image of the club's 9th/18th green set against a dramatic sky, the banner imagery of various holes changes with each section, and the course section exploits the Eagle Eye yardage guide aerial photography to dramatic effect.

Websites as an online marketing tool – how effective is yours?

Websites, like any marketing tool, get tired and out of date, but if you are a CLUBView customer, instead of wasting money on another website, just £600 gets it completely redesigned by CLUBView.

Reigate Heath GC and Richard Arnold, club manager, has seen all sorts of benefits: "Our members have greatly enjoyed seeing their club presented in a whole new way, with better imagery, better navigation and more streamlined content.

"Virtually everything is now just two clicks away. It's the impact on the visitors and prospective members that is really telling. Everyone is checking out the website, and this is encouraging green fee visitors in greater numbers. I'm getting application forms for new memberships emailed to me from people who have looked at the site and filled



in the PDF forms.

"The same goes for society organisers looking for golf days."

Richard and club professional Adam Aram also use the e-newsletter feature of CLUBView to communicate with the membership and visitors' databases. The CLUBView system captures and builds email address databases, and comes with an e-newsletter template designed with your club's branding. Richard Arnold: "Communicating with the members and visitors has never been easier, and we use this facility as a matter of course for most of our marketing now. It certainly saves money on advertising and postage."

The value of a long term relationship

There's more to a website than its purchase, and many CLUBView customers testify to their satisfaction with their supplier relationship. Martin Silver about CLUBView: "Longer term, besides paying a little more for it, I'm confident that besides good training and support we'll be looked after by a quality provider that cares about and listens to its customers."

The benefits of full integration between BRS Golf and CLUBView

Clubs and club managers really want only one membership database, and this is what BRS and CLUBView have, uniquely, achieved for their customers. This means when a member registers or updates their data on the CLUBView system it automatically updates the BRS Golf system's membership data. Similarly, when a member logs in to the members' area on CLUBView, it automatically logs him or her into BRS's system. The two companies are discussing transferring summarised data from the BRS system into the CLUBView diary system; many secretaries like the CLUBView diary, and passing data seamlessly will mean one data entry for course and diary-based activities.

With the single database strategy in mind, CLUBView is also pioneering integration with other systems like GC Gold, DJB, HandicapMaster and Open Solutions to link and share data with CLUBView. But if your club already has CLUBView and installs BRS Golf, you will instantly have one data source for both members' log ins and tee bookings.

There's no such thing as a free lunch!

While it's tempting to buy the cheapest, make sure the suppliers will still be there in two to

"OUR CUSTOMERS FIND THAT THEIR WEBSITES PAY FOR THEMSELVES MANY TIMES OVER, SO NOW IS A GREAT TIME TO PUT YOUR CLUB ON THE ONLINE MAP"

three years' time; it's well worth checking the financials of any supplier, and both BRS Golf and CLUBView (WebCreative UK) have good records and long histories of development based on listening to their customers.

The moral of the story: do it now while the season lasts!

Brian Smith and Kevin Evans of CLUBView think there is a simple message behind all these facts and trends: "Get your online strategy set out, get the right tools for the job and you will benefit in many ways. Over the last six months BRS Golf have introduced various pricing and payment options including an option to get the BRS club diary module free of charge in return for tee times – just visit our website www.brsgolf.com for further details."

Kevin Evans agreed: "Most of our customers find that their BRS system and CLUBView websites pay for themselves many times over, so now is a great time to get the right tools and put your club on the online map!" **GCM**

* This figure excludes revenue via channels such as teeofftimes.co.uk and teetimes.co.uk

