

DO YOU WALK THE TALK?

Is Your Course as Women Friendly as You Think It Is?

According to a 2006 Ipsos Reid Study on golf participation, one out of every four Canadian core golfers is a woman. There seems to be more and more women out there, playing with spouses, business colleagues, or friends.

In fact, “one-third of all ‘new golfers’ are women,” claims the Executive Women’s Golf Association (EWGA). And some golf courses tend to attract more women than others. Why? Because they connect with what women want and that keeps us coming back.

GETTING STARTED

The EWGA, a non-profit international organization, provides opportunities for women to learn, play, and enjoy the game of golf. Members spend a lot of time discussing courses and planning future games.

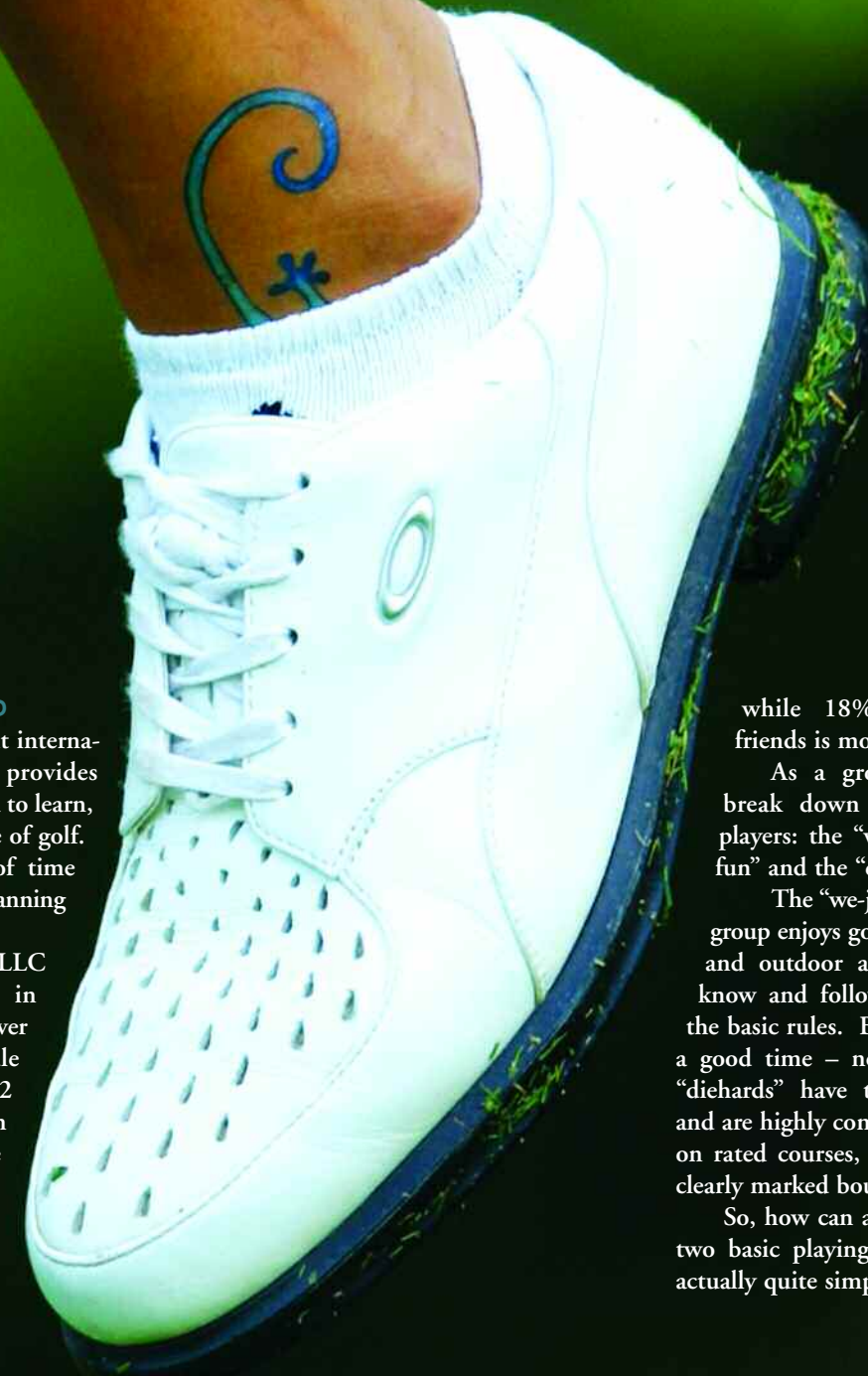
Golf Datatech, LLC conducted a survey in November of 2008 of over 1,000 serious female golfers (a minimum of 12 rounds per year). When asked to identify the single factor they enjoy most about playing the game, 32% chose the challenge of the game as their primary motivation,

while 18% said being with friends is most important.

As a group, women golfers break down into two levels of players: the “we just want to have fun” and the “diehards.”

The “we-just-want-to-have-fun” group enjoys golf for its socialization and outdoor activity factors. They know and follow golf etiquette and the basic rules. But, they are there for a good time – not a long time. The “diehards” have the rules memorized and are highly competitive. They insist on rated courses, distance ratings, and clearly marked boundaries.

So, how can a golf course keep the two basic playing groups happy? It’s actually quite simple.



THE PRO SHOP

Women are sensitive to the attitude in a pro shop. Friendly, welcoming staff encourages us to come back and to spend money. Women want to learn and are not afraid to ask questions if the environment is open to them. Make women's slope and rating data and handicap conversion material easily available. This shows that you take us seriously.

Provide quality rental clubs and even shoes for women. More women are travelling on business today and would love an opportunity to stop in for a game — without having the hassle of dragging clubs through an airport.

The Golf Datatech study indicated that the average female respondent estimates they spent slightly less than \$700 in the past year on golf equipment, with 18% saying they spent over \$1,000. They also estimate they spent an additional \$515 on golf apparel, with 14% spending above \$1,000.

Women enjoy browsing through racks of apparel, shoes and golf-related gifts. Remember to stock clothes in a variety of colours and sizes to fit all tastes and shapes. If you stock sunscreen, bug spray, wet wipes, and women's balls and gloves, you'll show us your care.

STARTERS/PLAYER ASSISTANTS

Your starter is your course ambassador. He or she sets the tone for the day.

Exceptional starters greet groups and provide them with the distances from the various tee boxes so players can judge which tees they are most comfortable playing from. A nice tip is to tell the women golfers where washrooms are located.

Be cautious about using stereotypes about women golfers. Experienced golfers know their range and can determine when the group in front is safely out of range so they can hit and inexperienced players will usually ask.

If the pace of play is slow, player assistants should be careful to determine which group actually needs to be spoken to. Is there a group with a big "money game" going on or is there a group spending too much time on "ball hunts"?

When a tournament is booked, it's important the players assistants understand the purpose of the event. For example, charity events are fun tournaments, and rules are often not strictly enforced. In one tournament, the players assistant really helped out by hitting shots over an extremely daunting hazard for rookies.

However, when you book a championship tournament, it is a given that it will take extra time because every ball must be holed. Women take the rules of golf seriously during competition and on course staff should be aware of this.



10 Ways To Keep Us Coming Back

1. Pro shop has friendly, helpful staff.
2. Pro shop carries rental equipment for women and a variety of women's clothing, balls and shoes.
3. Starters and players assistants treat women's groups the same as men's.
4. Slope rating and handicap conversion material are easy to find.
5. There are two sets of tee boxes rated for women.
6. Forward tees boxes are well maintained and located in appropriate, interesting settings.
7. Benches and ball washers are available on the forward tees on at least 1 out of every 3 holes.
8. Fully stocked washrooms are accessible every 5 to 6 holes.
9. Restaurants and beverage carts offer healthy food choices as well as wine and coolers.
10. There is a 9-hole rate and league for women.

TEE BOXES

We love courses with at least two sets of rated tee boxes for women. That way we can choose ones that fit our game.

Tee boxes should also be placed in interesting but appropriate spots. Women don't want incredibly difficult tee placements, nor do they want hole after hole of identical starts.

The average woman golfer has an RCGA index of about 28. The forward tee boxes should be set up with that in mind. You can always identify a Robert Trent Jones Senior designed course. The forward tees are placed at just the right distance so that by their second or third shot players are roughly in the same position as the people who teed off further back.

Tee boxes should also be large enough so markers can be rotated. And greens keepers should ensure markers face the fairway — not the trees. Nor should markers be placed so far back on the box that it's impossible to take a proper swing.

What about ball washers and benches? They don't have to be on every hole but if some forward tees had these facilities it would really give you extra points in our books.

EWGA-Canada is posting the names of Canada's women-friendly golf courses on our website. If you would like to submit your club's name, please complete our survey and fax it to EWGA-Canada at 416-441-0591. You can download the survey from www.ewga.ca, click on women-friendly courses.

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FAIRWAY MARKERS

There are very few courses that don't have yardage markers – up until the final 100 yards. What about after that? Many women often find themselves here unsure of the club to use. Courses can speed up the pace of play by adding additional yardage markers on sprinkler heads — after the red post.

TEE TIMES

Women golfers are executives, homemakers, students and retirees. In 2007, Golf for Women magazine reported more than 50% of North American women golfers hold professional or managerial positions. Women should have equal opportunity for tee times. If there is a men's league, we would expect you to start a women's league, if there was enough interest generated.

Women are often on tighter time schedules than men. The Golf Datatech showed 40% of respondents were constrained by limited leisure time. If you



offer a nine-hole league for women – in addition to an 18-hole – you'll get more women out to your course.

When dealing with women's leagues be sure to communicate your policies clearly and regularly. If non-league players are going to be inserted on the tee sheet or on the 10th hole this is likely to cause some conflict as it delays playing time and breaks up the groups who may be planning to finish together. Work with the league to find solutions to tee access challenges.

WASHROOMS

You'll rate high in our books if we can access washrooms every five to six holes. Remember women don't have the plumbing to use the outdoor facility! And please ensure these facilities are clean and stocked with toilet paper, soap and hand drying materials.

We love the clubs that provide the "extras" in the main facility washrooms: deodorant, hand cream, body lotion, etc. If you have showers - hairdryers, soap, shampoo, and towels are noticed and appreciated.

FOOD AND BEVERAGE

Cart people find that women don't wave them down as frequently as men. It may be what they are carrying. You'll increase your women's business by including ice tea and coolers along with the standard pop and beer. Fruit and other healthy snacks are also popular with women golfers.

And with more and more people becoming health conscious, how does your restaurant's menu stack up? Is there variety? Interesting salads and low carb entrees, or a special salad at times during high women volumes could increase your food and beverage sales.

Women want a place to congregate after a game. Do you offer a variety of wines by the glass? Is your restaurant open after a twilight round? This is the type of thing that really fosters a positive environment for women golfers.

LITTLE EXTRAS

It is also the little extra steps courses take that keep us wanting us to come back. How about extra towels for golf cart seats in inclement weather?

I'll always remember the course in western Canada that had its players assistants bring blankets to our carts on a cold day. And the course in eastern Canada that had its assistants take iced towels out to the golfers on a particularly hot day.

These are some of the things that can set your course apart as women friendly.

In conclusion, if your course wants to tap into a new and rapidly growing section of the golf market, it won't be costly or hard to do. It's just a matter of taking women seriously.



JANE WATSON

Jane Watson is president of both EWGA-Canada and the corporate training company J Watson Associates Inc. An ardent golfer, Jane travels for business and for pleasure stopping wherever possible to fit in a game. She has played many of Canada's platinum courses and in 10 countries of the world. Contact Jane at president@ewga.ca.

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