

# ENGAGING WOMEN AND MILLENNIALS WITH GOLF

**5** ways to broaden  
the appeal of the sport  
that complements  
meetings to a tee

Golf may be struggling to maintain its fan base among the general population, but amongst meeting attendees, there are more reasons to be optimistic than pessimistic that the popularity of the sport will grow.

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# Table of Contents

- 2 Introduction
- 4 Golf Usage at Meetings
- 5 The Value of Golf
- 6 The Challenge of Golf
- 7 5 Ways to Bring Back Golf

Recently, *Successful Meetings* sent a survey out to our readership asking them how they would be incorporating golf and spa programs into their events in 2017. We closed the survey with 151 readers having responded. Of that number 49 percent were corporate planners, 32 percent worked for associations, and 19 percent were independent or third party planners.

Only 17 percent of the respondents said they always offered golf options at their events, a level that was down five percent from one year ago. The reason for this is simple:

Over the last few decades, the demographics of meeting attendees have shifted. There are more women in the workplace and in management and executive roles than ever before. But despite the growing enthusiasm and engagement of women players on the fairways and greens, golf still tends to be a man's game.

The second factor is generational. Younger attendees are more interested in spending their time out of the conference room engaging in more meaningful activities. When they do seek out entertainment, it tends to be of a more adventurous nature.

These issues are the prime drivers diminishing golf's appeal as a conference activity. But they can be turned around. Here's a strategy guide for returning golf to its proper place among optional activity alternatives at meetings.





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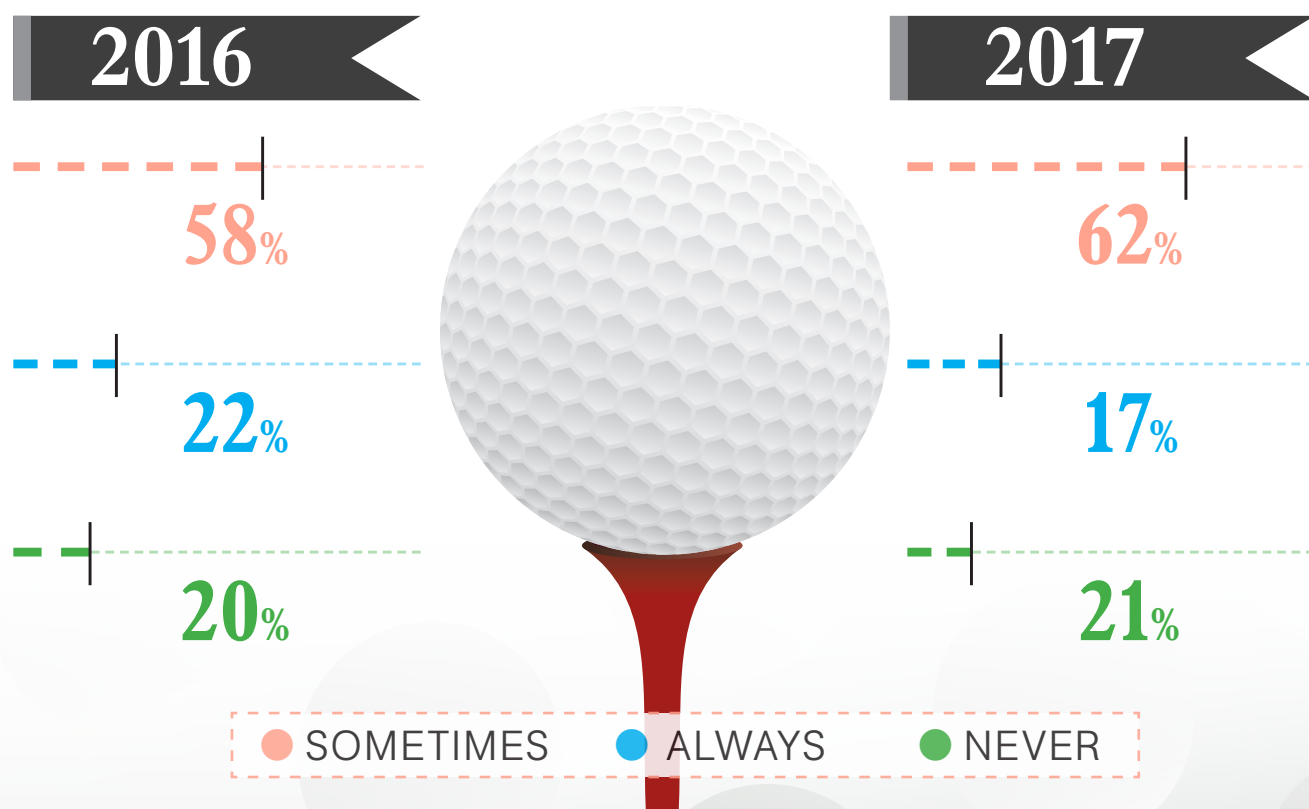
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# GOLF USAGE AT MEETINGS



84%

of meeting planners do not think golf is perceived as too lavish for meetings.



# What Value Does Golf Add to Meeting Experiences?

“Tremendous value, executives have time to let their hair down and tend to develop stronger relationships.”

“GOLF IS SIGNIFICANT.”



“This activity is the most popular for our incentive trips.”

“REWARD FOR ATTENDEES.”

“The events allow teams to collaborate and improve morale.”

“Attendees are better able to **focus** on meetings content if fun activities are also offered.”

“Opportunity to raise funds for a non-profit during the meeting — great way to give back.”

“With golf, our sales teams have a “captive audience” — **four hours on a course** can offer quite a relaxed opportunity to talk business and build relationships.”



“CHANCE TO SEE THE FACILITIES AT THE RESORT.”

“TEAM BONDING.”

“We have found that adding a golf package will raise the interest of the group by at least 65 percent.”

# Biggest challenges to including a golf option in meetings

FINDING **TIME**  
IN THE AGENDA TO  
OFFER GOLF

**56%**

**35%** FINDING THE  
**BUDGET**

FINDING ENOUGH  
**PARTICIPANTS** TO  
CREATE A TOURNAMENT

**31%**

**33%** MANAGING THE  
**LOGISTICS**

**9%**

The perception that golf is too lavish to have at meetings has dropped almost 10 percentage points between 2016 and 2017.



# 5 Ways to Bring Back GOLF

1

## Make the Game Female Friendly

"The golf industry is taking steps to make the game more attractive to women," says Jon Last, president of White Plains, NY-based Sports & Leisure Research Group, a custom research and market analysis company for the sports and leisure industries. "Nine-hole rounds, golf social events, and shorter holes are being created with the needs of women golfers in mind."

The good news, according to Last, is that women represent huge opportunity for growth. "Only 19 percent of the golfers in this country are women," he says. "But more women are assuming leadership roles in companies and that offers a great opportunity for meetings to help women learn about a game that can help them build their careers."

LPGA legend Annika Sörenstam agrees. Today, she is a business-woman and philanthropist, and a proponent of getting women more interested in golf. "Most of the female executives that I know love to play golf, so there is an opportunity for the game to expand its appeal to all women in the workforce," she says. "We need to build on that base of upper-level female executives and encourage them to include golf activities during meetings where they are the final decision makers."

Here are three ways to get female meeting attendees more receptive to golf activities:

**Make it a learning experience.** Have a half-day event where guests break into groups to learn about the strategies connected to the short game and long game in golf, and detail the physical fitness required to succeed at golf. Follow that with a golf clinic that puts theory into action, run by the course pro.

**Add a social component.** Sörenstam says combining something like a wine-tasting event on the golf course can increase the appeal of learning golf among women because it offers a strong networking experience that complements the activity.

**Address the intimidation factor.** For some would-be women golfers, however, there could be an intimidation factor. Jacy Russell of the incentive house Spear One feels that those who just play occasionally may not want to be grouped with those — often men — who golf all the time.

Sörenstam concurs. "While there are certainly more female executives with management roles in business today than ever before, I think women could possibly be intimidated by playing with the men in outings and on business trips, so they may sign up for other offerings. But women love to come and learn in smaller groups, and I think there is still a great market for that. There is still no better place to learn somebody's true character than on the golf course."

## 2

## Speed Up the Game

Four to five hours is a big block of time to take out of a meeting for an extracurricular activity, and this is what 18 holes take to play. “The general trend today is toward people being more careful with how they spend their time during a conference,” says London-based Rohit Talwar, a global futurist and the founder of Fast Future Research. “This is an austere and nervous era, and people are worried about their jobs. They want to use their time at conferences to get the skills they’ll need to keep up at the office, and that’s tough to do when you’re spending so much time on a golf course.”

According to researcher Jon Last, the industry has initiated a number of coordinated efforts to address the time factor of golf. Here are three ways to speed the game up:

**Offer speed golf.** This is a four- to six-hole course that is attractive to meeting groups.

**Group clinics.** This takes a fraction of the time it takes to play real golf, and it gets players at all levels participating at the same time. It also eliminates the intimidation factor as competition is removed from the equation.

**Scrambles.** In this version of the game each player tees off on each hole, the best of the tee shots is selected and all players take their second shots from there. This enables novice players to play with experienced players and get through the course in a reasonable time frame.

## 3

## Broaden the Appeal for Younger Attendees

It is important to today’s younger generations that they spend their free time in a meaningful way, says Talwar, which is why corporate social responsibility has been challenging golf as a favored extracurricular activity on meeting agendas. To meet this challenge, many organizations are combining their golf activities with sponsorships that raise money for charitable causes.

Younger meeting and incentive attendees are also more drawn to adventurous activities particular to the destination they are visiting. That’s why a lot of resorts and courses are offering more introductory, “golf-lite” activities as a way to expose the game to a wider array of meeting attendees and put a novel twist on an old sport. “The core game of golf has been around for a very long time and is still quite appealing to some, but there are other ways to deliver a golf

experience,” says Last. “It’s the industry’s job to bring people along that learning curve in ways that are different than in the past. Today, there is a broader array of comfortable entry points.”

Here are two novel approaches to expose golf to younger attendees:

**FootGolf.** It’s a cross between golf and soccer. Players “tee off” (or in this case, kick off) with a small soccer ball, kicking it down fairways with the objective of getting the ball in a 21-inch-diameter hole in the fewest number of kicks.

**Glow-in-the-dark night golf.** This turns golf into an evening activity that puts the emphasis on fun rather than competition. In many cases finishing the game is optional.



## 4

## Promote Golf's Unique Advantages

Many organizations have been formed to help promote the sport, such as We Are Golf, an industry lobbying consortium that is trying to help the game shed its elitist image. The PGA of America has an initiative in place called Golf 2.0, with the goal to make the sport "more relevant" to lapsed golfers and others, especially women and minorities.

The organization has been sending PGA staff members across the country to teach course operators how to address a wide range of issues, from retaining best customers to courting women. In a nutshell, 2.0 aims to retain core golfers, reengage those who have left, and create new players. It plans to achieve these goals by tailoring messages and delivering customized programs to each of nine consumer groups identified by the Boston Consulting Group, which was retained by the PGA during the formation of 2.0. These groups represent a broad demographic: core golfers making at least \$150,000 annually; occasional men and women golfers with no children; former golfers, including men, women, retirees, and parents; children; and Latinos familiar with the game. Also prominent are the USGA's efforts to address pace-of-play issues. But for planners, it's important to remember that there is a core audience of meeting attendees for whom golf still has a strong appeal, and there are situations where the game is the perfect vehicle to achieve an organization's strategic goals.

Indeed, golf is still instrumental in high-end corporate entertaining when CEOs or other C-level executives want to spend time with clients or customers, says Charlotte, NC-based Robert Miller, chief sales and marketing officer for 54 Sports, an event management firm.

"Although golf has lost some of its popularity as an activity for internal meetings, it is still important during events that include clients," says Miller. "Four solid hours in front of a client cannot be replicated in a boardroom or sitting at a football game."

## 5

## Golf — For the Hardcore Non-Golfer

Sometimes no matter what you do, there are going to be some attendees who just don't want to golf. But that doesn't mean you can't get them out on the course. Even non-golfers can enjoy many of the same benefits of being on the course that golfers do — without the golf. The links make beautiful venues for receptions, cocktail events, and teambuilding activities. Golf courses in particular provide a lot of flexibility for meeting planners, with plenty of space for anything from receptions and cocktail parties to sit-down dinners and special events such as concerts.