# Customer Experience Management and the Golf Business

# Foreword

## Golf should be about the players

Fifteen years ago, before I joined the EGCOA, I was a golf club manager. I was old school, and I thought if you just organized the course and the rules then everything would be fine. This was a logical approach, I thought, and I was successful! Business was booming, bonuses all around, and I felt I understood the golf business like no other.

Then the financial crisis hit and suddenly our momentum was winding down fast. I did my best to develop a better golf course with nicer fairways, faster greens and anything I could think of, but none of it made any difference. I didn't know what to do.

I soon realized I was focused on the wrong thing. Golf courses don't bind people together, people do! I came to understand that it's all got to do with social community. Paying attention to the player experience, including players socially and integrating them in club community, this is what makes the difference between whether people stay or leave - and you only make money when people stay.

The science behind human decision-making reveals that, to a large extent, it is our basic instincts that influence our decisions: We are subconsciously wired to be social and we need to be part of a group where we feel at home. This affects our decision making in all things, and golf is also a means to achieve social inclusion.

The beauty of it all is that Players 1st confirms these ideas - the same player-centricity comes out of their surveys. To retain your members, you only have to listen, because they say it loud and clear: Give me attention and integrate me socially.

This approach is unique in sports. Here, it is rarely about the individual, but always about the sport. We got away with that for a long time in golf - everyone wanted to play golf before the financial crisis - now we're trying to focus on the human being.

At the moment the game and the industry are stable, but we can see that the organizations that focus on the social aspects of the game are very successful. We can still play golf and pay attention to the game, but to be successful you'll need to tick all the boxes: The sport, the social aspect and high-quality golfing experiences. Presently, there is a major international paradigm shift happening in the golf industry - finally it's the players in the center, and the timing of Players 1st is excellent. It fits right in with where we are with golf at the moment. I cannot imagine golf without Players 1st or a tool like it - golf should be about the players!

**Lodewijk Klootwijk**
General Secretary of the European Golf Course Owners Association

# Introduction

## Keep growing the game that we all love

Dear Reader,

This is for you, the golf club owners, managers, staff and otherwise interested parties in the golf industry. The purpose of this e-book is to inspire and guide our current and potential users to create great experiences for golfers around the world. Players 1st was founded on the ambition to grow the game that has given us so much joy over the years - this is our way of giving something back to the game and to the community.

In our four-year history we have grown from a small start-up to a global company and we are now the leading Customer Experience Management firm in the golf industry. We facilitate a growing international community of industry professionals and golf enthusiasts who are all dedicated to the cause of advancing the game and improving the golfing experience. In collaboration with our partners we have succeeded in creating tools and solutions with unmatched results by putting the players first.

In chapter 1 of this e-book we guide you through the fundamentals of current Customer Experience Management (CxM) theory, and in chapter 2 we bring CxM into the golf business context. In the third and final chapter we present a collection of case stories from the Players 1st community. This chapter is continually updated with more inspirational tales from the world of player-centric golf club management.

Before we get down to business, we want to thank the people and organizations who have contributed to this e-book with case stories, foreword and professional input – this would not have been possible without your support. We also want to take this opportunity to thank the players – you are truly the lifeblood of this sport, and without your commitment to the game of golf it would not be the most challenging, the most rewarding, and the most beautiful game on earth.

Enjoy,

**Morten Bisgaard**
Co-founder of Players 1st

**Jacob Buksted**
Co-founder of Players 1st

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# The fundamentals of CxM

- What customer experience is and why it needs to be managed
- The customer journey and the chain of touchpoints
- The Net Promoter Score ®
- The Voice of the Customer
- The Closed Loop Process

# The fundamentals of CxM

**- A general introduction to CxM and why it is important**

In this era of big data and analytics, Customer Experience Management (CxM) is emerging as a powerful tool, allowing service providers to compile comprehensive metrics at various customer touchpoints, enabling them to fine tune their offerings and elevate their customer experience. Customer service leaders including Southwest Airlines, Zappos, Amazon and Apple have been early adopters of CxM as a cornerstone in their quest for service excellence and have garnered strong brand loyalty and profitability as a result. The advent of cloud computing and Software as a Service business models have now drastically lowered the implementation and operational costs of CxM, which means that anyone can afford to realize a CxM program.

Customer experience is essential to both the survival and success of your company, and today it is widely accepted that a thriving business to a large extent must be grounded in the continuous maintenance of customer experience. CxM is the essential process to win back defecting customers, cultivate loyalty, enhance your company's profitability and deliver a sustainable competitive advantage.

Every business is different, and it is important to design your CxM program to suit the needs of your specific business, the resources you have available, and the goals you aim to achieve. While the expressed goal of CxM is to generate economic growth, in a pleasant twist growth is actually just a fortunate side effect of satisfied customers - focus on your customers and the bottom line will naturally follow.

## What customer experience is and why it needs to be managed

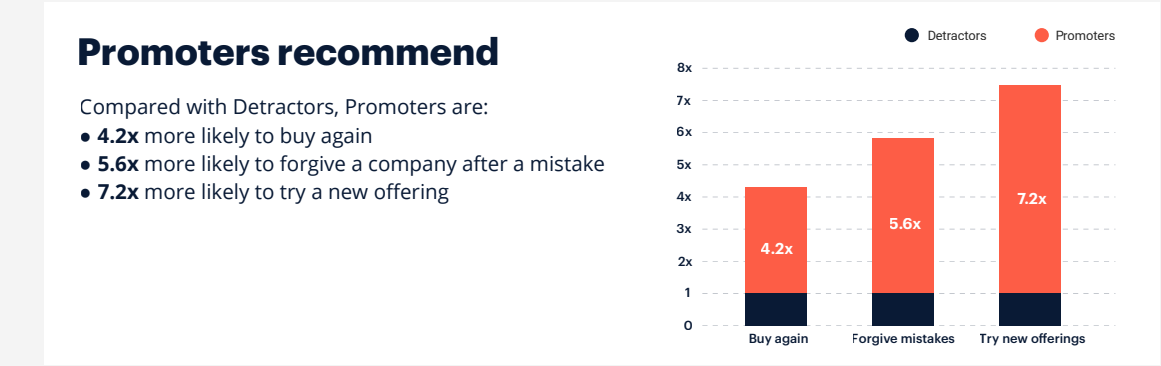
**- Induce loyalty in your customers to support future growth**

Customer experience is the sum-totality of how customers engage with your company, how they perceive your brand, and how satisfied they are with your interactions. Basically, customer experience is a reflection of how customers feel about your organization.

Customer experience can make or break your business. Companies that take a customer-centric approach and listen to their customers' feedback perform better overall, but sadly CxM programs are often unsuccessful despite good intentions and great efforts - collecting data is fairly easy, but it is also easy to focus on the wrong metrics and hard to convert data into productive insights without the right tools.

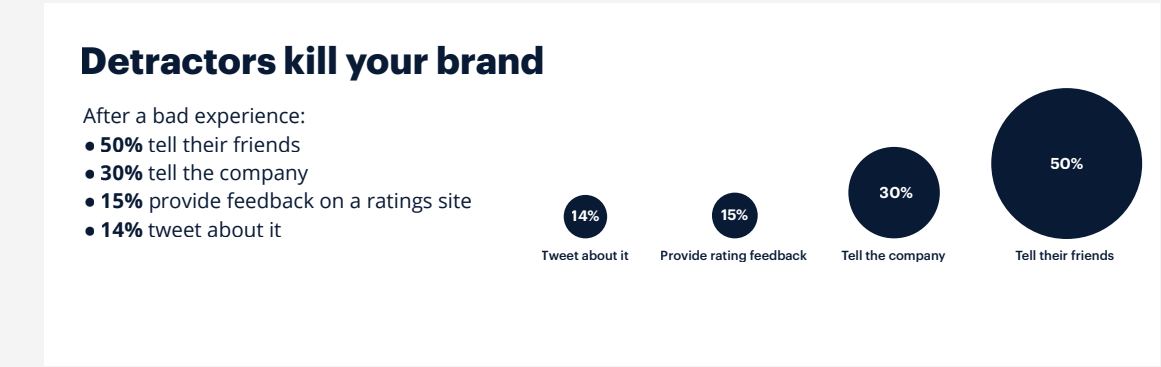
The benefits of CxM, however, are more than worth the effort. Continually satisfying your customers' needs and providing great experiences will induce loyalty in your customers. Loyal customers, also known as Promoters, are valuable to your company in several ways:

- They stay longer and purchase more
- They help identify improvements and opportunities
- They promote your company via word of mouth
- They cost less to serve in the first place




**Source:** https://experiencematters.blog/2018/01/18/15-factoids-cx-efforts-roi-infographic/

Detractors on the other hand have an even bigger negative effect on your reputation when having a bad experience.




**Source:** https://experiencematters.blog/2018/01/18/15-factoids-cx-efforts-roi-infographic/

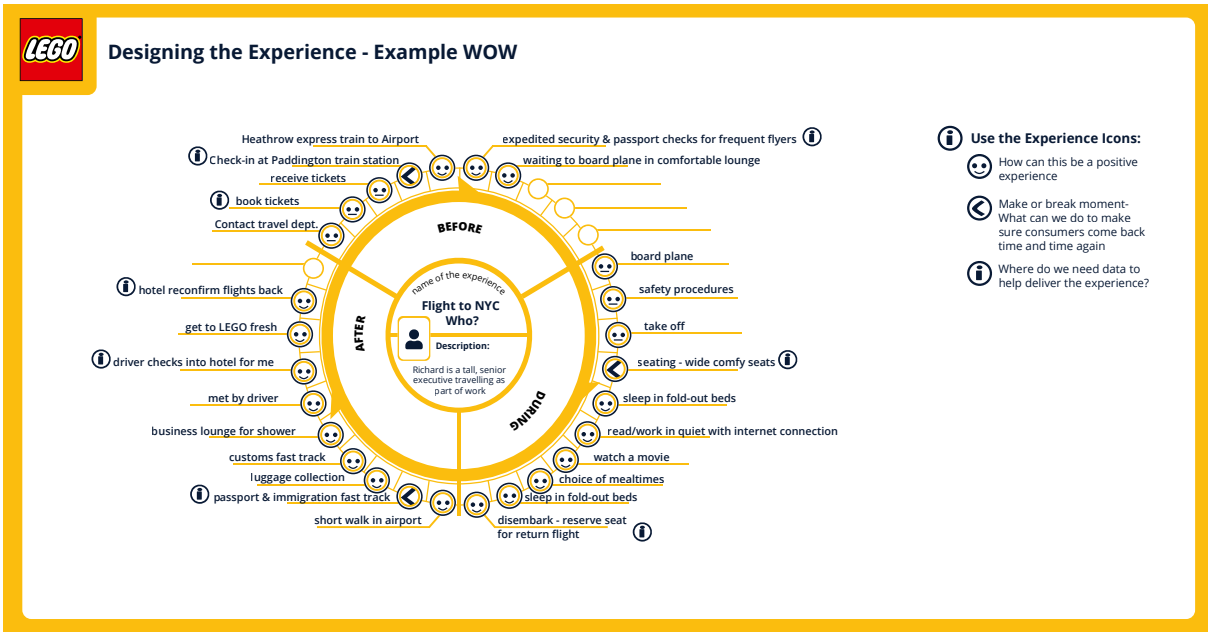
## The customer journey and the chain of touchpoints

### - Creating an enjoyable experience for your customers

Whether by design or without, every company provides a customer experience. Taking control of that experience is what sets successful companies apart. Customer experience must be managed along the continuum of the customer journey to successfully increase loyalty and lifetime value of customers.

A customer's experience, whether good or bad, is determined by a variety of concrete and ethereal factors. However, in the context of CxM it is useful to view it as the sum of "the chain of touchpoints."

This chain refers to the many encounters where your business and customers engage with each other, whether to provide a service or exchange information or otherwise. Customer touchpoints are important in and of themselves, but collectively they constitute the overall customer journey and ultimately a customer's experience with your company. See example of a customer journey below.




To be operating at highest capacity all touchpoints need to be performing as one; a healthy business is a finely tuned machine in which all service areas and touchpoints are working together to provide great experiences. If your company can harmonize the touchpoints in the customer journey and make them work in unison they will collectively provide an experience greater than the product or service itself.

Here are some important factors to consider in relation to the customer journey:

- **Multi-channel service:** Customers expect a seamless experience across all channels
- **Staff behavior:** Frontline staff can make or break an experience
- **Organizational silos:** Communicate between departments
- **Technology:** Use tech wisely and make it easy

In the end it is all about creating an enjoyable experience for your customers. It is important to tend to all individual touchpoints, but if one touchpoint is performing badly the decline may be caused by another weak link in the chain, such as bothersome tech, poor communication between departments, or countless other factors that may only become visible through your Voice of the Customer platform.

## The Net Promoter Score ®

### - The most popular way of measuring customer loyalty

The Net Promoter Score (NPS) is widely accepted as one of the best ways of measuring how satisfied customers are with the experience your company provides. NPS enables companies to track its Promoters and Detractors and it produces a clear account of an organization's performance from the customer's point of view. However, it is important to emphasize that NPS is a tracking tool and it does not provide any insights about how to develop more Promoters – it is what you do with the score that really matters.

NPS indicates how loyal customers are to your company and is in fact the only customer experience metric proven to be a reliable indicator of a company's financial health and potential growth. According to Bain & Company, companies that achieve long-term growth score two

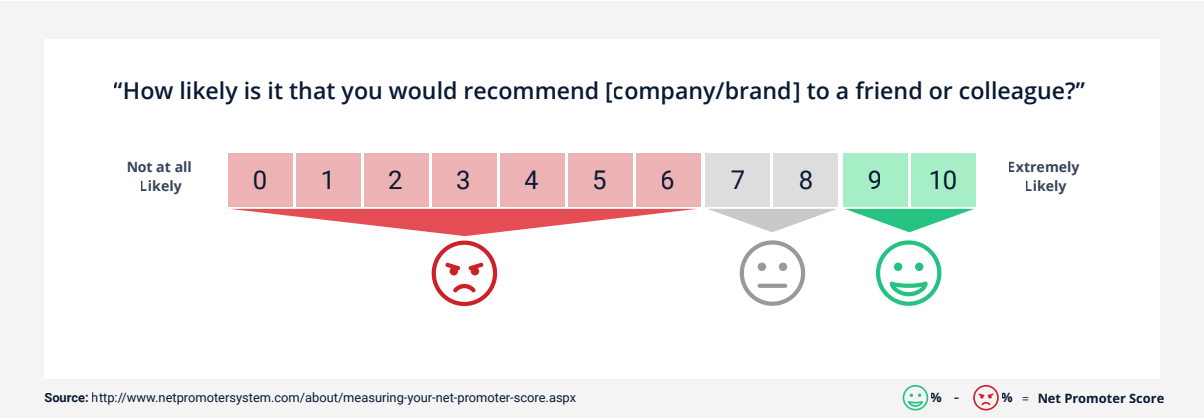
times higher than average on NPS, while NPS leaders in general grow at twice the rate of competitors.

The beauty of NPS is its simplicity. It asks the ultimate question to customers:

*"How likely is it that you would recommend [company/brand] to a friend or colleague?"*

Customers respond by grading the question on a 0-10-point scale and are then divided into three distinct groups:

- **Promoters (9-10):** Loyal, enthusiastic customers who stay longer, buy more and help identify improvements and opportunities. They account for more than 80% of referrals in most businesses.
- **Passives (7-8):** Passively satisfied but are likely to defect when a better offer comes along.
- **Detractors (0-6):** Dissatisfied, unhappy customers. This group has high churn and defection rates, and while they may appear profitable on paper their negative attitudes and criticisms are very likely to lower your company's reputation, discourage new customers, and demotivate employees.




NPS should be measured continuously to track how your CxM efforts fare with customers. The goal of CxM should be to increase the number of Promoters and to this end NPS is the perfect measure. Essentially, because Promoters are so great at attracting new customers, companies have much to gain by focusing on retention and cultivating loyalty instead of spending all their time, energy and resources on discount offers and marketing schemes.

# The Voice of the Customer

## - Enable effective CxM with a Voice of the Customer platform

A Voice of the Customer platform is integral to the broader practice of CxM. Specifically, Voice of the Customer is the continuous process of gauging customer experience by capturing customer expectations, preferences and aversions from experiences with your company and brand. Successful Voice of the Customer platform enables you to systematically listen to your customers and generate insights that drive change toward better customer experiences.

A Voice of the Customer platform should establish and support a Closed Loop Process of feedback that enables effective CxM by continuously assessing and reacting to customer satisfaction at key touchpoints of connection and engagement in the customer journey. Use you Voice of the Customer platform to drive and regularly repeat the Closed Loop Process:

- **LISTEN** to customer feedback
- **INTERPRET** the resulting data
- **REACT** to improve experience
- **MONITOR** the results and evaluate performance

Feedback data is typically gathered through surveys; the data is analyzed and converted into customer insights; insights are used to create data-driven plans of action to bring positive change; monitor performance, rinse and repeat.

Voice of the Customer platforms provide smart tools that enable you to gather and convert customer feedback into actionable insights. By integrating data collection, analysis and monitoring capabilities into a single interconnected platform - a dashboard for managers and staff alike – your company will have a smart overview that makes it much easier to understand customer experience and customer sentiment, and thus take well-informed, appropriate action.

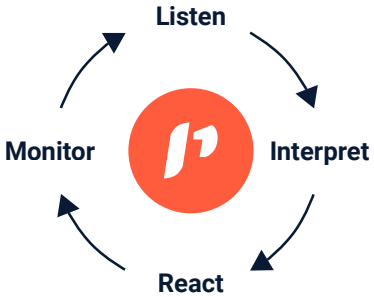
# The Closed Loop Process

## - Understand the power of feedback

“Closing the loop” is a fundamental aspect of CxM. Basically, it refers to the “loop” that is established by the continuous exchange of feedback and reaction between you and your customers. Periodic surveys and sporadic feedback data are simply insufficient to drive much-needed changes, which is why you will need an effective Voice of the Customer platform to fuel and drive the Closed Loop Process and enable effective CxM.

### The Closed Loop Process

A well-refined Closed Loop Process will:
- Improve service recovery and reduce churn
- Provide an efficient way to listen to customers and staff
- Provide a better understanding of root causes of customer loyalty or lack thereof
- Drive tactical and strategic decisions
- Enable you to continuously reassess, rethink and react




**Source:** www.surveypal.com/how-to-build-a-voice-of-the-customer-program-in-5-steps

Closing the feedback loop is a perpetual work in progress. It is useful to think of this process in terms of four sequential stages, Listen, Interpret, React, Monitor, but in reality, these stages should occur simultaneously as well as repeatedly.

While service recovery and customer relations are important benefits of the Closed Loop Process, the next-level benefit is the ability to cultivate company-wide focus on customer experience and to acquire a deeper understanding of your customers. Making the Closed Loop Process an ingrained and repeatable mechanism in your company is imperative and the more people that are regularly involved, the more effective and profitable the process will be.

Below, we walk you through the four pillars of CxM, the Closed Loop Process of Listen, Interpret, React, Monitor. These four stages will also form the basis for chapter two, in which we bring CxM into the golf business context.

### Listen

First of all, you will need to listen to your customers and gather data. Depending on the needs and goals of your company different kinds of feedback may prove more valuable. Surveys that are easy to respond to are particularly useful for gauging customer values and satisfaction over time, and they are the cornerstone of successful Voice of the Customer platforms.

Depending on the nature of your business some kinds of feedback may be more relevant to you. There are three different kinds of feedback data to consider:

- **Direct feedback:** Intended feedback captured from different touchpoints across the customer journey (surveys, market research, written complaints).
- **Indirect feedback:** Public conversation about your organization that is not necessarily intended as feedback, but often reflects unbiased sentiment (social media, review sites).
- **Inferred feedback:** Operational and transactional data. Website clickstream data, purchase history or contact center operational data. May be difficult to capture but carries a lot of value.

### Interpret

Flat survey data needs to be converted into meaningful insights and knowledge of customer experience. This will enable you to develop strategies for correcting negative experiences to improve retention, increase loyalty and profit from Promoters, and to drive growth.

To this end, you will need Voice of the Customer software with advanced analytic capabilities, that can:

- Measure and view NPS in real time
- Analyze NPS scores by customer segment, product/service, and geography
- Identify root causes of positive and negative customer experience
- Identify how loyalty evolves along the customer journey
- Measure the performance of individual touchpoints and customer interactions

Great software can make everything a lot easier. I should be a platform that provides a relevant overview to all respective members of your company. This enables staff to share insights, collaborate and follow up on alerts and notifications; it should provide NPS by segment, trend analysis, loyalty drivers, benchmark functions and much more, that make it easy to analyze and act accordingly to customer feedback data.

## React

Survey data and NPS scores are meaningless if they are not properly utilized to drive change and improve loyalty and growth in your company. CxM is about taking action and neither NPS scores nor experience data will change a thing on their own. They are reflections of what you do, but tough decisions and strong actions are always required to make positive changes.

Practically speaking, you will need to swiftly follow up with customers upon receiving feedback to solve issues or take helpful action. Subsequently, ensure that your actions have had the intended effect by checking back in with the customer as quickly as possible.

However, reacting to feedback is not just about good customer service. The Closed Loop Process should lead to actions that improve the overall experience - not just for a single customer, but for the benefit of the entire customer journey experience.

## Monitor

It is important to set up a structure in your company that facilitates continuous change and correction. To this end, management and staff should be able to monitor your customer experience performance every step of the way. CxM programs encompass all business functions and the process should connect to all company operations. This requires commitment, accountability and flexibility at every level of your organization. Collaboration is pivotal to the success and effectiveness of the actions you choose to take - from executives to managers to frontline staff, all must be on board and on the same page.

It is a good idea to establish a team of members from a wide variety of functions in your organization who will monitor your operations and lead the way towards change and progress. Their key functions would include working to:

- **Share** customer experience insights and data frequently with managers, leaders and staff
- **Drive** strategic improvements on a daily basis
- **Fix** issues by identifying and correcting root causes of negative customer experience
- **Discover** innovative new ways to satisfy your customers and generate promoters

# The voice of golfers

- Listen: The customer journey in golf
- Interpret: Generating golf player insights
- React: Taking informed action
- Monitor: Reviewing results and actions
- The Players 1st community: Growing the game

# The voice of golfers

## - Why CxM is especially relevant in the golf business

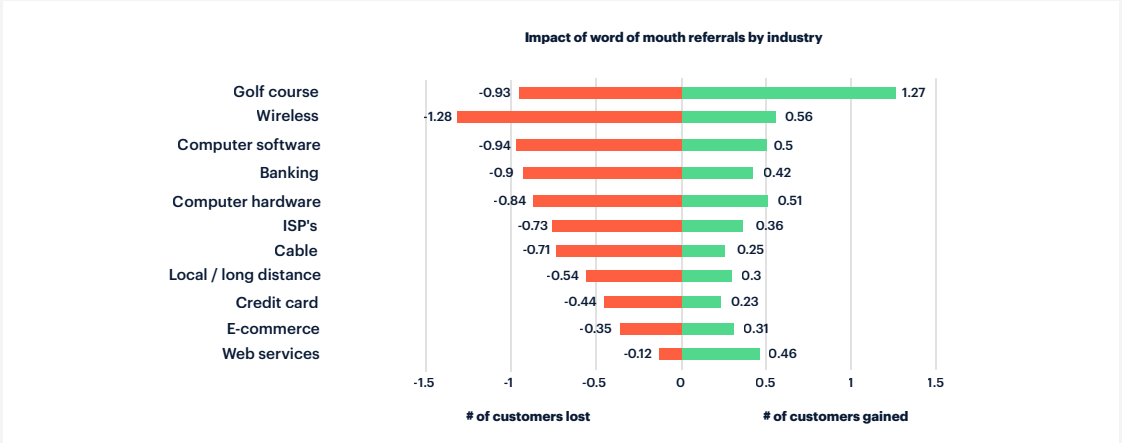
As detailed in the previous chapter, CxM is a prerequisite for success in practically any business: Providing great customer experiences lowers churn and increases retention and customer loyalty; loyal customers will purchase more and will recommend your company near and far, thus referring many new customers back to you.

In the context of golf, however, the gravity of CxM increases considerably and its fundamental principles come to life in a very real sense. Essentially, golfing is a complex experience, and while many players may come to a club because of physical aspects, or just to play golf, they stay for the ambience and atmosphere, the social community and relationships, a sense of belonging, and the outstanding experience that only you can provide - these are generally the things that induce loyalty.

Playing golf is something you enjoy in your spare time and, as such, golf clubs not only compete with other clubs, they compete for the players' time in general. A golfer's decision to visit your club is rarely made without careful consideration, and we know from a variety of studies that golf club members and guests rely heavily on recommendations from fellow golfers when choosing between clubs and the experiences they provide. If clubs are unable to provide great experiences they will simply not be able to compete.

By focusing on the customer journey clubs can develop a strong base of golfers that promote the clubs on their behalf. In the golf business, as opposed to the retail industry for example, customers are personally and socially involved to a very high degree, and word of mouth referrals have a huge impact to the point where, if you just focus on retention and the customer experience, your loyal members and satisfied guests will handle the bulk of you marketing and attraction needs.

In other words, this is basically why CxM is particularly relevant in golf: You have much to lose by neglecting the players, but also a lot to gain by making sure they have a good experience.




**Source:** https://voiceofcustomerguru.wordpress.com/category/loyalty-economics/page/1/

The basic arguments for using CxM in the golf business are fairly straightforward, and making players feel welcome and gaining their loyalty simply requires the right set of tools, a little guidance, some expert advice, and a dash of inspiration. We still encounter clubs that name three typical reasons why they object to using CxM; too time consuming, too expensive or to difficult to implement.

In the past they may have had a point, but today, the barriers of time, money and skill are no longer valid excuses. Through recent technological advancements, such as Machine Learning and Artificial Intelligence (AI), we have removed these barriers with the Players 1st platform, making CxM easy as well as affordable. Some of the key features our Voice of the Customer platform are:

- Golf specific survey templates for your relevant player segments
- Integration with major tee-sheet providers for automatically survey sendout
- State-of-the-art dashboard with benchmark tools, priority maps, call-to action notifications

and much more. Your club will be fully equipped and ready to provide great experiences to your members and guests alike.

The Players 1st solution and the tailormade Voice of the Customer tools we provide enable golf clubs of all shapes and sizes to easily implement the continuous and repeatable Closed Loop Process of Listen, Interpret, React, Monitor.

In the following chapter we guide you through this process and equip you with the tools and insights you need to implement an effective CxM program in your club.

## Listen: The customer journey in golf

### - How to view your club from the player point of view

First and foremost, clubs need to listen to the players and to view themselves through the eyes of the player in order to be able to assess and fulfill their needs. Regrettably, too many clubs do not make the effort to fully understand the player point of view, resulting in misguided assumptions about player needs and characteristics.

The game is evolving. Golf is more accessible than ever before and attracts a wide variety of player segments with lots of different needs. Still, many clubs operate with the same flat policies and approaches they did 20 to 30 years ago, and the way clubs approach golf club management has generally remained the same. Who are your customers and what do they need? - these are extremely basic concepts, but it is imperative that they are not taken for granted.

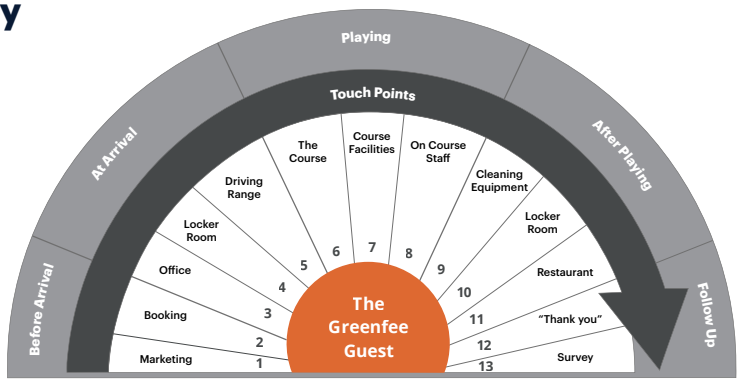
**The player journey from touchpoint to touchpoint**

The player journey map is an effective tool that can help clubs envision and anticipate player needs, and it is a great first step to becoming familiar with the player point of view. This technique breaks down the player journey and visually maps a player's visit by identifying all the touchpoints that you and your team need to be aware of.

The first and most important point of the player journey map is that playing golf is just a small part of the overall experience. The journey is made up of a long interconnected chain of touchpoints that connect service areas to one another, and players should have a smooth and seamless experience between the various touchpoints.

## The player journey

A player experiences many touch points during a visit to your club.




**Source:** Players 1st

Generally speaking, clubs need to consider the player journey before arrival, at arrival, when playing golf, after playing, and in the follow-up. By gauging player satisfaction at the various touchpoints where players receive a service or engage with staff you can obtain performance indicators that empower you to focus your efforts and maximize customer experience.

Golfing is a complex experience and a wide variety of touchpoints affect player satisfaction. Clubs who fail to view themselves from the player perspective might make the assumption that good greens are all they really need, while in reality the players' experiences are much more nuanced.

Some services are expected, such as full sand bottles in golf carts and adequate practice facilities, and while there is not much to gain by fulfilling theses expectations, if they are unfulfilled it may be strike one with the customer. Failed touchpoints add up and, although they may be overcome by successful touchpoints, if players are faced with too many unfulfilled expectations they will surely be determined to hit back, and you risk making a Detractor out of a possible Promoter. On the other hand, a strong, well-functioning chain of touchpoints will add up and result in great experiences for your members and guests.

### Different journey maps for each player segment

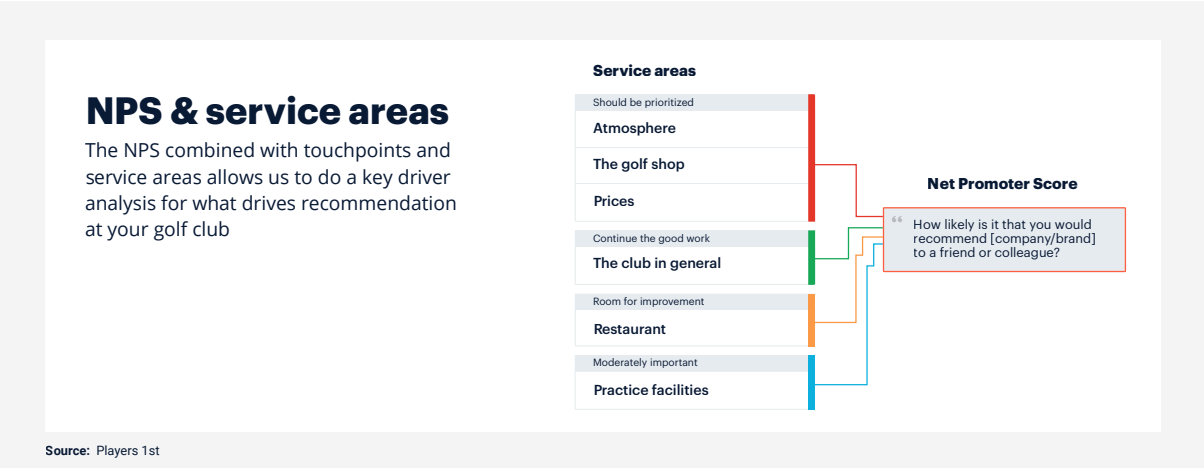
Detailed player journey maps for different player segments will equip you to match your services to the distinct needs of the player segments that are most important to your club. Different player segments, such as members, greenfee guests, junior and senior players, as well as different events, corporate or otherwise, each involve a different journey map. It all depends on how the players would meet the services that your club provides.

Whether your club is a private member club or a public course the purpose is the same: To deliver the best possible experience to the players. Different journeys simply call for different questionnaires, so to make it easy for our client clubs Players 1st and the associated industry bodies have designed plug and play survey templates for golf courses to implement based on a variety of distinct journey maps.

### How to measure the overall player experience using the Net Promotor Score

All the Players 1st surveys are designed in accordance with the Net Promoter Score. NPS is a strong performance indicator that enables clubs to evaluate touchpoints and service areas and to figure out where the player journey may be coming up short.

By combining the overall satisfaction score with the scores of each touchpoint or service area we can correlate the answers and explain exactly what to work on to improve the experience for the given player or player segment.




**Source:** Players 1st

However, on its own NPS does not answer the question of WHY someone answered the way they did, such as what could have affected a player to give your greens a score of 6 or 7 on the NPS scale - that is for the player to know and for you to find out. Take the time to engage with the players and to listen to their feedback and they will no doubt tell you all about it.

## Interpret: Generating golf player insights

### - How to analyze data and focus your efforts

Clubs will have varying amounts of available resources, some more limited than others. However, successful CxM isn't necessarily determined by the amount of money you spend, rather it depends on how you focus your efforts and the heart you put into the job. Whatever your situation may be, you will need to work with the areas where you get the biggest effect from resources spent and where you are most likely to increase overall satisfaction.

Focus on generating meaningful and actionable insights that you can use to develop a strategy that targets your preferred segments. Private clubs will of course focus on current members and particularly new members, while public courses should typically have a strong focus on guests as well.

Feedback data will be plentiful, so a strong focus is important, or you might end up simply indulging a narrow segment of rambunctious players that do not necessarily represent your target audience. Developing player journey maps is a good start to figuring out the characteristics of the various segments that you choose to focus on, and Players 1st can provide additional data tools to release insights about your players that will enable the development of strategies for correcting negative customer experience and increasing overall satisfaction.

## Prioritize your resources

It is important to spend you resources wisely and to allocate them to the areas where they will have the biggest impact. The priority map is an effective tool to find out which areas require more or less attention and resources based on current priorities and NPS.

Priority maps illustrate what the various player segments value most in a given context based on concrete feedback data. Such insight can help you understand the mindset of specific groups of players and how to improve their experience and secure their loyalty. Different segments have different expectations and needs, and the priority map is a neat and powerful tool for gathering meaningful player insights that will help you spend your resources wisely.

The example below illustrates how club members prioritize the elements of training opportunities and the attributes of PGA pros. The bottom left corner contains the least important elements, which have a low impact on NPS and is also of low evaluation. In this case, they are "Booking availability," and "Price of lesson."

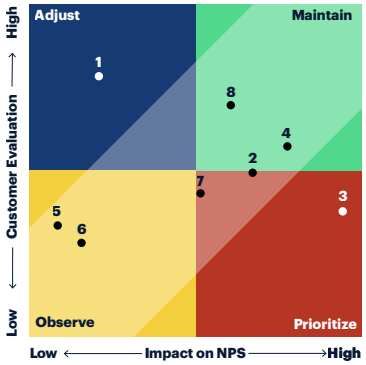
The top right corner contains your strengths. These are the elements that are evaluated high and have a high impact on NPS. In this case, they are "Contributes positively to club environment," "Attentive and service minded," and "Improves the skills of the player."

The top left corner contains the elements that are currently of high evaluation but have little impact on NPS, which means there is no reason why this should be of such high priority. These are the elements where you can safely reduce the amount of dedicated time, effort and resources. In this case, while PGA pros certainly need to be experienced golfers, "Skill level of PGA pro" is typically overemphasized despite the fact that it does little to improve the player experience.

Finally, the bottom right corner contains elements that are of low evaluation but have a high impact on NPS, which means allocating more resources to these areas can significantly improve the player experience. In this case, PGA pros that are rated high on "Pedagogical and inspirational" in their coaching methods receive a high NPS by the players.

### Prioritizing touchpoints

1. Skill level of PGA pro
2. Improves the skills of the player
3. Pedagogical and inspirational
4. Attentive and service minded
5. Booking availability
6. Price of lesson
7. A good and varied lecture offering
8. Contributes positively to club environment



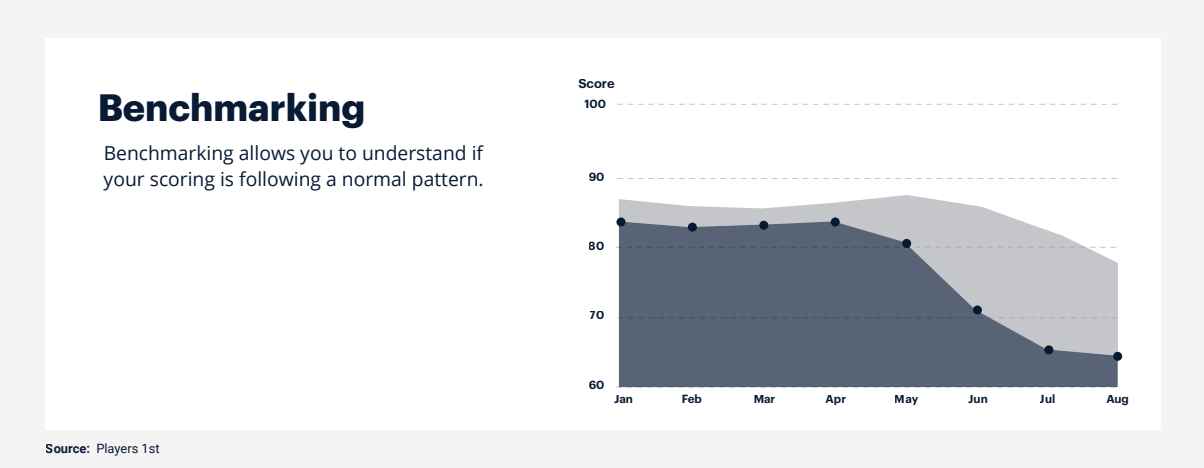

**Source:** Illustration of data from the Players 1st platform

Besides the improvements to player experience, Players 1st data shows that focusing on the elements of coaching that are of high priority to the players, in terms of NPS, will eventually lead to higher retention rates, because players will take more lessons, become better players, and be more seamlessly integrated in club community.

## Benchmarking

The most important thing to remember when interpreting data and results is that everything is relative. When you are inspecting your scores you will have to compare them to something else in order to know whether a score is good or bad. The only surefire way to measure your performance at a given touchpoint is to compare scores with other clubs like your own.

The typical mistake is to relate your own touchpoint scores to each other and prioritizing the ones that score the lowest, however, some touchpoints will always score lower than others and that is okay. For instance, people will never rate prices very high on a 10 point scale.




**Source:** Players 1st

Remember that your scores are always relative and compared to other clubs perhaps your lowest scoring touchpoints are actually doing quite well. This is why we have created the benchmark function for the Players 1st platform. It will guide you to interpret your results, so you know where you are performing well and where you are performing badly, and it will be a solid indicator as to where you need to take action.

## Modern technology will guide you

Advanced analytical software is able to release insights from vast amounts of player data like never before. The Players 1st platform utilizes smart tech like state-of-the-art AI and Machine Learning, and with our easy to use dashboard organizing data and generating insights is simple as can be.

Certainly, smart tech cannot replace expert advice or professional consultants, rather, these technologies will be instrumental in the day-to-day service on the Players 1st platform; they can instantly process vast amounts of data, learn over time, and provide a smart overview of solutions and best practices.

Great software makes it easy to collect data, analyze it and turn it into insights that enable clubs to implement a plan of action and subsequently distribute new surveys in order to repeat this process. Software cannot take action for you, but it can provide the insights you need to react accordingly.

# React: Taking informed action

## - How to develop loyal golfers

A well-maintained Closed Loop Process will keep collecting data and generating insights as you go along. However, you will need to use your data to take action in order to improve the overall player experience and develop loyal golfers.

The actions you choose to take need to be based on data and insights or you are just shooting in the dark. Your gut feeling will not always be on target and it is easy to be influenced by the loudest opinion in the room, so taking action based on concrete evidence from player feedback, as well as solid knowledge of segments, player needs and priorities, is always the way to go.

### The price of loyalty

The primary objective of your reactions, and of CxM in general, is to increase the number of golfers who are loyal to your club, a.k.a. Promoters, as well as reduce the number of golfers who are dissatisfied or indifferent, a.k.a. Detractors and Passives respectively.

Loyalty does not just evolve on its own but will take time and proper action. Loyalty is instilled when you let your members know that they matter and that their voice is heard, and their opinions taken seriously. While retention is not free, loyal members cannot simply be bought. Rather than economic incentives they value the experience, club atmosphere, participation, and involvement. The social aspect is a big part of the experience of belonging to a club and a strong driver of loyalty. Socially integrating players in your club community is key, and it is important to make them feel welcome and at home. Eventually, your long-time members will work as loyal ambassadors who will organically attract new members as well as add to club community.

While long-time members require some special attention to ensure their retention, we know that this attention will be worth it in the long run as their lifetime value will far exceed the costs of retention. New members are vulnerable and prone to abandon ship within their first two years, so these two first years may require you to spend a few extra resources. However, from an economic perspective retaining members over a lifetime is much more cost-effective than continually throwing money at marketing schemes and advertisements to attract new members that will abandon your club within a year or two anyway – and probably due to a lack of socially inclusive club community.

Our studies show that two out of three members who leave their club leave from preventable causes. In other words, their club has failed to take care of them when in fact they could have acted to do so. In general, golfers are a loyal bunch, and in a healthy club members will usually only leave from unpreventable causes, such as moving to a new home, severe illness or passing away. Sadly, two out of three of the members who leave their club from preventable causes will not relocate to another club, instead they tend to stop playing golf altogether.

### Reacting to your members and guests

In order to cultivate loyalty, you will first of all need to retain your golfers and improve their experience. Reacting appropriately to data and feedback from your members and guests, whether it is positive or negative, will increase player satisfaction and the likelihood of retaining new and existing members and keep guests coming back.

You will need two different processes for carrying out your reactions: One for guests and one for members; one process that can kick in at a moments notice to support your guests, and another process that continually develops long-term strategic plans of action to support your members.

Guests require swift reactions from your team to fix issues right away, because you only have a brief window of opportunity to ensure that they have a positive experience. Of course you won't need to change your bunkers if a single guest is dissatisfied, however, if this is a general trend among your guests then you will definitely have to take it into account.

Members require long-term reactions that strategically aim to improve the player experience. While guest reactions are generally aimed at individuals, members are part of segments that require you to consider the priorities, needs and circumstances of specific groups of golfers, such as seniors, juniors, new members, new players, low/high HCP players and so on. Different member groups require a different strategy for improvement, and you will need to pay close attention, communicate and stay in touch with the various segments.

Given time, your arsenal of member insights will enable you to build up extraordinary member experiences, both in terms of the specific segments and the overall experience.

**Turn your dissatisfied golfers into Promoters**

Reacting to player grievances is not simply about providing good customer service or improving customer relations. Rather, this is an opportunity to acquire a deeper understanding of your members and guests and use it to guide your actions.

Negative feedback may be tough love, but without it you would not truly know how to deliver an exceptional player experience that keeps players coming back. Be grateful and always thank the players for their feedback, even if it is negative. We know that a dissatisfied player with an issue that has been properly handled will effectively be happier than the average player

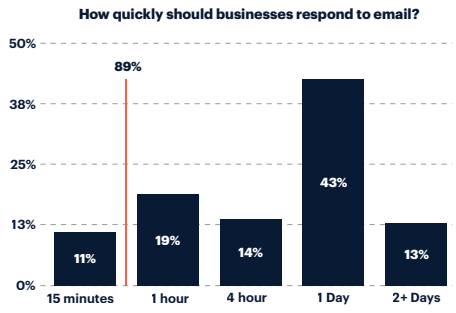
Inevitably, situations will arise where your team's efforts to deliver an outstanding player experience will fall short. What separates leading courses from the rest of the pack is their ability to turn the situation around and turn their Detractors into Promoters.

Communication is key. Make sure to set up clear lines of communication to close the gap between you and the players, and make sure that contact information and comment forms are readily available.

When you receive feedback from a dissatisfied guest you need to act quickly. The faster you respond, the higher the likelihood of turning a negative situation around. A fast response lets the player know that his/her input has been heard and taken seriously and creates a positive starting point for a dialog to resolve the issue.

## Response time

In today's 24/7 communication environment, to satisfy the expectations of 89% of customers, businesses need to respond to emails in one hour according to a recent survey by Toister Performance Solutions.




**Source:** https://www.toistersolutions.com/blog/2018/4/15/how-fast-should-a-business-respond-to-an-email

**Example:** A guest has had a poor experience at your club, so poor that he has taken the time to call you on the phone. Let us call your disgruntled guest "Thomas".

Listen to Thomas' explanation of the situation in its entirety and without interruptions. Even if you do not agree with Thomas, let him know that you understand his point of view. Apologize to Thomas - the customer is not always right, but you can still be sorry that he had a disappointing experience.

Only then should you focus on the solution, and you can offer your side of the story - not as an excuse, but as an explanation. Thomas' misunderstanding or lack of information could have contributed to the complaint and learning more about your course's procedures and underlying rationale might help settle heated emotions.

Keep it short and sweet, as the more you say increases the chance of raising another argument. Keep the conversation moving towards a solution – you are not going to drastically change your course policies or operations based on a single complaint, but there may be other steps you can take, such as modifying a procedure or talking to an employee to ensure that the situation does not happen again. By explaining the actions you intend to take you demonstrate to Thomas that his feedback is valued and is being given serious consideration.

If you can, give Thomas a financial incentive for a future purchase, such as a discount code for a round. Hopefully, Thomas will come back for an additional - and more positive - experience with your course. Finally, make sure you can deliver on your promises. Ideally this exchange would take place in person or over the phone, however, it is certainly still possible to engage in constructive dialog about a player's experience via email.

## Monitor: Reviewing results and actions

### - Developing a player-centric approach to golf club management

The closed loop process, as the name suggests, is not a one-time thing, and you are not going to solve all your issues with a single round of surveys. CxM is a continuous process that requires you to regularly monitor feedback and data results and to reassess your actions.

You will need to set up a player-centric structure in your club that facilitates and drives strategic improvements on a daily basis. This requires commitment from every single employee and it is imperative that upper management makes CxM a priority and leads by example - all the people involved need to be on the same page and be dedicated to providing the best possible experience for players each and every day.

#### Setting up the survey frequency

In the short term, you can use short and quick comment cards with NPS surveys for your guests that notify a dedicated support team. This enables you to react promptly to issues and thus stop the bleeding before it turns lethal. Players 1st subscribers can configure a variety of notifications to let relevant personnel know in real time whenever they receive feedback, which allows fast response via smartphones and other mobile devices.

Otherwise, the survey frequency should be based on the flow of customers. If you are running a public course with many guests, you will need to survey and monitor every interaction. Guests are often a great indication of your performance because they will typically be experiencing you club for the first time and you can quickly find out how small tweaks in your services and facilities impact the player experience.

Members, on the other hand, should be surveyed with less frequency - perhaps once a year. You could divide your members into two or three pools and survey each group at different times each year, so as to keep a steady flow of member feedback. While member feedback is extremely valuable and sometimes more insightful than what you receive from guests, bothering them with surveys every time they step through the door will be detrimental for obvious reasons - and you can still keep an eye out and stay in touch with your members without daily surveys.

## Developing a player-centric club culture

For CxM to be effective it is crucial that you develop a player-centric club culture. Inadequate commitment to player satisfaction, from managers and staff alike, means all your efforts will significantly decrease in value and impact - your data will basically be just another KPI. A club-wide culture of player focus will provide the foundation that supports the actions you choose to take and will ensure swift reactions to unexpected issues. Sadly, too many clubs ignore or completely miss the point of this important aspect of CxM.

Management needs to make CxM a priority and encourage a player-centric focus: Staff should feel like player satisfaction is a vital and inherent part of their job description, and they should be empowered to take immediate action on their own to improve a player's experience.

Your entire organization should have access and be able to monitor customer experience data; responsibility starts with higher management but should involve every single employee. Everyone needs to be on the same page, share the same goals and the same perception of reality in order for your efforts to bare fruit. Make CxM an ingrained mechanism in your club - the more employees that are regularly involved, the more effective and profitable the process will be.

Frontline staff affects player satisfaction to a high degree. They can make players feel welcome or quite the opposite, so communicate clearly to staff that the player experience is important to your club; convey your service expectations and your core values; educate your staff to be skilled and enthusiastic about delivering a great player experience or hire new people with the right attitude.

Ultimately, it is important for everyone to step up and set good examples for each other to emulate, especially people in leadership roles. It sends a very negative message if management doesn't follow through on declarations of dedication to player satisfaction.

Once everyone is dedicated to your player-centric values, empower your staff to take action and encourage them to take ownership of their job – do not encumber them with rules and oversight that gets in the way. Empower everyone to be a customer service leader - cultivate happy, empowered, committed staff that will:

- Take responsibility and develop their own creative ways to serve the players
- Delight players in their own personal voice
- Do whatever it takes to make the players happy
- Meet and exceed service standards

While staff should always be encouraged and empowered to take action on their own, collaboration is pivotal to the success and effectiveness of the actions you and your team choose to take. Develop easy lines of communication that enable staff and management to cooperate and to ensure that nobody is facing a difficult problem alone.

Admittedly, achieving an established player-driven culture made up of staff and management that operate and cooperate seamlessly will take time, hard work and true dedication. Remember to always defend your player-centric focus - if someone is out of line or not acting according to

your standards seize this opportunity to teach and help the employee grow to be more successful in the future. A club culture that treats players with dignity and respect is only attainable if the same is true between literally everyone who works at your club.

Finally, remember to celebrate your successes and appreciate your hard-working staff. For instance, it is always very effective to give staff a bonus if they deliver great KPIs. However, there are many ways to show your appreciation: A pat on the back, recognition at the weekly meeting, a mention in the newsletter or perhaps even a nomination at the annual awards dinner. Recognize and reward your staff regularly for good customer service - it may be just the motivation they need to take it to the next level.

## The Players 1st community: Growing the game

### - Be a part of the future of golf

As a partner and client of Players 1st you are inducted into a global community of industry professionals and golf enthusiasts who share the same passion for the game - you will be part of a larger conversation and a collective endeavor to shape the future of golf. When your club joins the Players 1st community you are effectively contributing to the development of a better, stronger game through the data that is collected from your golfers. You will be part of a larger knowledge sharing network of clubs, federations and golf business organizations.

At Players 1st we analyze the collective mass of data, and we are able to spot comprehensive insights and popular trends from around the world of golf that we then give back the community. As a member of this community you are contributing to the advancement and prosperity of golf - for your own benefit and for the game as a whole.

**Growing the game**

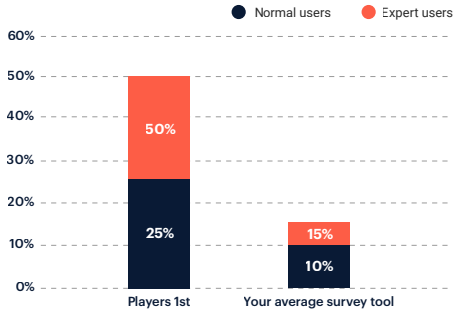
Our network spans across international boundaries; we collaborate with the national golf federations, with the ECGOA, the NGCOA, and the R&A and USGA; we support more than 1500 clubs worldwide from the US to the Middle East, so when you partner up with Players 1st, not only do we guarantee excellent CxM software and solutions, we welcome you into a progressive organization of clubs, owners, managers, federations, consultants and businesses who all want the same thing: To grow the game of golf.

At the annual Players 1st Conference we invite our members to discuss the future of the golf industry, share findings and stories, and to network and collaborate. Here, we take a look at the next generation of golf initiatives, trends and insights. Additionally, we share our findings continuously on social media and on the Players 1st blog, as well as facilitate a knowledge sharing forum for golf business professionals on LinkedIn.

We want to empower the golf industry by shining a light on the player point of view. The players are the lifeblood of the industry and putting the players first is the best way to cultivating a strong and healthy sport. This seems to resonate with the players and, in fact, we have some of the highest questionnaire return-rates compared to standard survey tools. Players care about their clubs, they want their feedback to be heard, and when you use Players 1st they will know that you care.

## Questionnaire return rates

Our return rates range between 25 percent for newer users and even as high as 50 percent for expert users. When it comes to the golf industry, we are the best in the business.




**Source:** Players 1st data

### Meta findings: Examples

In this section we provide a few examples of Players 1st insights that has previously been shared on our blog. To read the articles in their full length simply follow the link under each example, or go to www.blog.players1st.golf to learn more.

**Example 1: The PGA pro version 2.0.**

Are your training opportunities supporting your player-centric focus? Players 1st data shows that PGA pros who are attentive and service minded and contribute positively to club atmosphere attract significantly more customers. Furthermore, they are in a unique position to assist with integration as well as making players better golfers. PGA pros can be strong drivers of loyalty and retention.

Read more on the blog: www.blog.players1st.golf/blog/2018/2/thepga-pro-v20

**Example 2: Fast greens reduce restaurant visits.**

What is the speed of your green? Players 1st data shows that fast greens are often causing bad flow, which in turn results in significantly fewer customers at club restaurants and a lower overall Net Promoter Score. One weak touchpoint weakens the entire chain, and in this case, we have found a strong correlation between high green speeds and a decline in restaurant visits.

Read more on the blog: https://www.blog.players1st.golf/blog/2018/the-chain-of-touchpoints

**Example 3: How 3+ lessons per year increase retention rates.**

How many of your new and existing members receive lessons? Players 1st data shows that with just 3 lessons per year more than 50% of players will improve their HCP, and as a result clubs will increase retention rates significantly. Pro training always increases the likelihood of improvement and players in all HCP groups can improve from taking lessons. A better golfer is a happier golfer.

Read more on the blog: www.blog.players1st.golf/blog/2018/benefits-of-pro-lessons

# Case stories from the frontlines of CxM

- The modern greenkeeper (Pickala Golf, Finland)
- The good beginning (the Danish Golf Union)
- When data turns to action (Silverbell Golf Course, Arizona)

# Case stories from the frontlines of CxM

**- Experiences with CxM as told by members of the Players 1st community**

The following section is a collection of case stories as told by the people that are directly involved with managing player experiences every single day. We hope these stories will serve as an inspiration.

## The modern greenkeeper

**- with Markus Suojoki, superintendent at Pickala Golf**

Of all the golf courses in the Nordic countries, Pickala Golf Course in Finland is the largest. With 159 bunkers divided among its three distinctive 18-hole courses and a par 3 field, Pickala stretches across 200 hectares of beautiful and versatile land. In a mini-Finland replica fashion the course features open park-like nature, rolling fields, seascapes and hilly forests that will provide a pleasant journey for leisure players or demanding landscapes for experts and professionals.

Markus Suojoki, Golf Course Superintendent at Pickala Golf, and his team of 43 assistant greenkeepers, certainly have their work cut out for them. However, with the help of a continuous stream of player feedback the course at Pickala golf has acquired an excellent reputation and receives top scores from members and guests alike.

Aarni Nordqvist, Club Developer at the Finnish Golf Union, always uses Markus Suojoki as a textbook example of how greenkeepers can take advantage of customer feedback when he is consulting the clubs of Finland or attending conferences and events. In his view, Markus is s prime example of the modern superintendent - the next generation of greenkeepers.

*"Years ago, when I first met Markus, he had this broken iPhone, but he was looking at the Players 1st dashboard through his broken screen every single day! At the time, the dashboard wasn't even updated for use on smartphones! Generally speaking, this is an integral part of what his team does every day: He checks what the players think and personally writes back to every person who has made a comment that relates to the course. Imagine receiving a response to your complaints directly from the Superintendent! I think that makes a great impression on players."*

*- Aarni Nordqvist, Club Developer at the Finnish Golf Union*

**Superintendent at Pickala Golf, Markus Suojoki:**
The course here at Pickala is quite big and we receive lots of feedback from the players. Every day on my way to work I check for player responses - I check for everything that has to do with the course, everything that happens out here that concerns me.

We have about 2000 players here - lots of competition players, seniors, young players - and they all expect different things. Someone is always a little unhappy. When I receive someone's

opinion then I go to the dashboard and I can find out if there is a tendency that I need to consider. Sometimes it's just one person's opinion, and I can see on the dashboard that everything is actually just fine. Sometimes I also find that we need to make some changes to our greenkeeping based on the feedback.

For example, we changed the way we cut our roughs - some players weren't satisfied with them. We also changed the speed of our greens - they were scoring low with the players during the summer, we asked them why, and they responded that they were too fast. The players wanted the greens a little slower, so we slowed them down a bit, but they were also very fast last year!

We also recently made some changes to the bunkers due to player feedback. We tried a different kind of sand, different machines, and raking the sand differently - just little tweaks and changes. Now the results are a little different, but it's hard to say from just one season. We will see how the players respond in time.

I think it's important to listen and talk to the players because it makes them happy! Sadly, a lot of players don't leave their email when they make comments, and then I can't reply. If they do, I always send them an answer. If the comment is positive or neutral I write something like, "nice that you are here, thanks for coming to the course." If a player is unhappy, I might write, "I'm sorry that we didn't fulfill your expectations today, I hope that you will come back, and we will do better." In outstanding situations, I might also be able to arrange a lower green fee and give a small discount.

We renovate the greens all the time and we often have machines on the course so sometimes the problem is our fault - but mostly the problems aren't so big. In any case, their response is always good! 80% of them write me back - they are surprised that people actually read their comments! Their response and their tone is always a lot different from what they wrote in the first place, which I think is amazing. They really appreciate it.

As superintendent I manage a staff of 43 greenkeepers who see the players and speak with them on a daily basis, so I want to be able to show my staff how to better work with the players. I use results, feedback and benchmarks from the dashboard to explain what we need to focus on to improve the course and give the players a better experience. In my opinion, greenkeepers aren't actually here for the sake of the grass, we are here for the players!

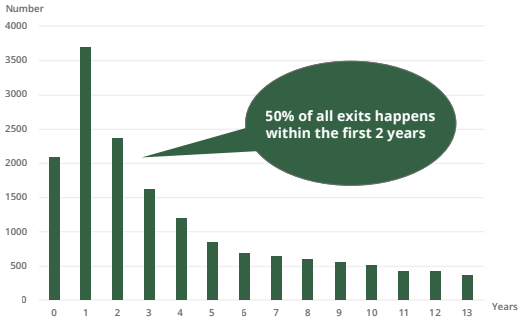
# The Good Beginning: Integrating new members

## - With Jonas Meyer, Head of Development at the Danish Golf Union

In 2016 Jonas Meyer and his colleagues at the Danish Golf Union identified a troubling issue in their member clubs. They found that 50% of all members that abandoned their clubs in Denmark left within the first two years of membership. At the time most clubs were focused on keeping existing members loyal while little effort was put into caring for new members.

### Identifying the issues

After analyzing their data, DGU found out that 50% of all members that abandoned their clubs in Denmark, left within the first two years.




**Source:** DGU

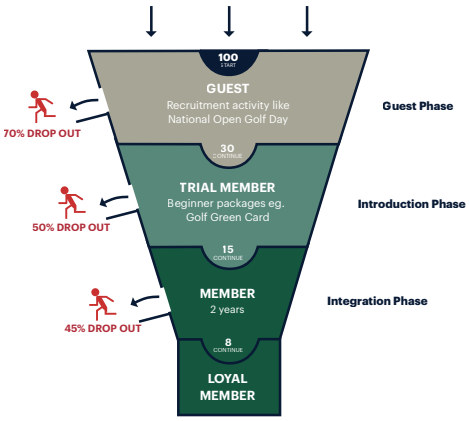
**Head of Development at the Danish Golf Union, Jonas Meyer:**
In collaboration with Players 1st we sat down to study data gathered from the Danish clubs, which confirmed our suspicions of high churn rates in new memberships. Instead of looking at sweeping data on a national scale we now had very specific, concrete feedback and local data from all our member clubs.

It was clear that, essentially, we had to give new members a great beginning to their life as golfers - in fact we found that increasing retention is all about the beginners. We made a strategy for change which was basically to confront our member clubs with hard data and personal feedback to induce a shift in focus and behavior. We named this campaign “The Good Beginning.”

### Finding the focus

DGU realized that they needed to focus on the social well-being of the individual player.

Data showed that only **one in 4** new players, became a part of the community, the others quit.




**Source:** DGU

The typical approach to beginners has been to provide technical step-by-step training processes that aim to teach them the rules and pretty much how to swing a club. We realized that we needed to focus more on the social well-being of the individual player, and to find a solution that supported that. We basically wanted to change the retention mindset and induce a shift in the focus of the entire Danish golf industry.

All that intimate knowledge about the individual clubs enabled us to provide better counseling, and we were able to identify and proactively seek out the clubs that needed our help the most. The benchmark system in the Players 1st platform positioned all 185 clubs in terms of their ability to retain new members, and clubs were now able to see exactly how they were doing compared to their colleagues in the business.

We would visit the top 25% of clubs that were doing well to find out what really worked, which methods resulted in good feedback and kept new members satisfied and happy in their club. This enabled us to bring that knowledge to the bottom 25% and provide counseling based on approaches that we knew actually worked.

Some clubs, despite being aware of the problem on a national scale, believed they were doing well themselves, even if they were not. Being able to present relevant, local data is a significantly stronger, more pressing way to emphasise the gravity of the situation.

Clubs were surprised to see that players were feeling left out and overlooked, and they quickly realized something had to be done. We were able to give them the tools to do so - tools that we knew for sure could make a difference. In fact, we were able to track positive change all the way back to an earlier club visit, which was a great way for us to reflect on our strategy and evaluate our approaches to retention.

It will be very interesting to see what The Good Beginning will mean for retention over a longer period of time, but we are currently seeing a significant increase in satisfaction and loyalty in new members in the Danish clubs. Players are definitely much happier, because they receive a much better welcome than in previous years.

We set out to change the mindset of an entire industry and the way we approach retention in the Danish clubs. This was definitely a major challenge, but we are now seeing a clear shift in focus in the local and national golf conversations; clubs are talking about how to provide a good beginning and we are witnessing high levels of engagement and participation.

My filosophy, so to speak, when it comes to data and knowledge, is that they are powerful tools to adjust priorities and focus, and thereby producing a change in behavior. The continuous stream of feedback that we harvest from the Players 1st platform has enabled us to redirect attention and focus to what really matters: the players.

# When data turns to action

## - A success story of data driven course improvements at Silverbell Golf Course

### The course

Silverbell Golf Course is a championship layout located high upon the west bank of the Santa Cruz River. The course features wide undulating fairways that meander among stands of mature pine trees, strategically placed bunkers, and two large lakes that come in to play on five holes. The remarkable varieties of holes challenge a golfer's skill for both power and finesse. A par 70 golf course consisting of five par 3's and three par 5's of varying lengths and strategies will test and excite golfers of all abilities from beginner to professional. The back tees measure 6900 yards, and the forward tees are over 5800. The Silverbell facility is operated by the Tucson City Golf in partnership with the OB Sports management company which provides operational support.

### The problem: Poor drainage for bunkers

Since the course construction, drainage for the bunkers on the course had been a constant issue, resulting in standing water and complaints from golfers during wet periods. While management was aware they had an issue, the solution to the problem would require extensive remodeling and addition of drainage to the bunkers. The cost involved would be considerable and as a result, the project struggled to gain support.

However, as part of the best practices introduced by OB Sports to the course, the Players 1st Customer Experience Management solution was deployed and soon started capturing detailed data on guest feedback.

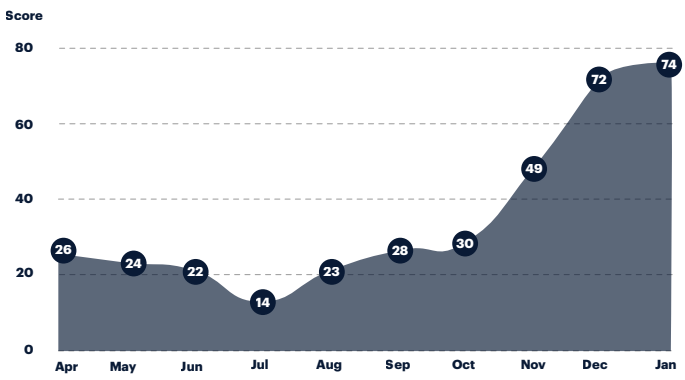
After collecting survey data for a couple of months, the analysis of the customer experience data quantified the impact that the poor conditions of the bunkers were having on the overall guest experience. In addition, a comparison of Silverbell's scores with benchmark data from other clubs utilizing the Players 1st platform confirmed they had a major competitive issue.

### Data to action

Armed with the guest survey analysis, the on-course team was able to justify the project and secure the necessary funding to proceed with the project. The modifications were implemented over a two-month period and guest survey data was collected throughout the transition – see figure below.

**Bunker evaluation**

A graph showing the bunker evaluation for Silverbell Golf Course




**Source:** Data from the Players 1st platform

As the data shows, on completion of the project, the bunker satisfaction scores climbed dramatically as a result. In addition, Silverbell's Net Promoter Score also improved significantly as shown in the figure.

The Net Promoter Score increased 20 points over the period and in addition, with the number of Promoters increasing significantly coupled with a corresponding decrease in the number of Detractors resulted in increased word-of-mouth recommendations among the local golfing community.

**Project payback**

The bunker improvements not only drove higher customer satisfaction, but also translated into improved financial performance. Course utilization and revenues per available round increased and the facility also benefited from reduced maintenance expenditures related to the bunkers. This ultimately resulted a payback period for the project of less than 12 months and provided a permanent solution for a problem that had plagued the course since its construction.

# Let’s grow together

We’re a global community, and we’re growing fast. Our vision is a world consumed by a love of this amazing game. With clubs joining from the coldest norths of Finland to the warmest souths of Arizona, we are growing our community of fellow golf experience ambassadors; all with the same vision of growing the game. Players 1st is an open community where not only players, but clubs and federations share input and ideas with one another.

**Get started today**