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*Jo Ann Hoffman,
president, Meeting
Industry Ladies
Organization*

Golf Issue

Planning Advice from the Pros


Timelines, formats,
and more

Golden Links Winners

The best
places to play

Even the Score

How to make
golf events more
accessible for women

A woman with short blonde hair, wearing a dark blazer over a light blue turtleneck and light-colored trousers, is captured in a golfing stance on a green. She is holding a golf club, and a white golf ball is positioned on the grass just in front of the club head. The background is a soft-focus view of a golf course with trees and a body of water under a clear sky.

*Jo Ann Hoffman, president,
Meeting Industry Ladies
Organization: "Women tend
to have more responsibilities
beyond work—so their time is
at a premium. And golf takes
a long time."*

EVEN THE SCORE



What can be done to make golf—and golf events—more women-friendly? By Lauren Walker

Whether women meeting planners play or don't, they all seem to know a lot about golf.

"Seventy-five percent to 80 percent of meeting planners do at least one golf event a year. You tend to get a little surrounded by it," says Jo Ann Hoffman, president of the Meeting Industry Ladies Organization, Bethesda, Md. As former chief operating officer and director of meeting services of the American Association of Blood Banks, Hoffman should know. "Traveling around to all these great destinations, where golf is in your face, a lot of planners get caught up in it."

Women are taking up golf in greater numbers than ever before. Between 2000 and 2001 alone, the number of women golfers rose from 5 million to more than 6 million, according to the National Golf Foundation. The number of male golfers rose from 18.9 million to 19.7 million. So while men still outnumber women by more than three to one, women are a key target for future growth.

"The increase in women's golf is a real trend," says Nancy Berkley, president of Berkley Consulting and author of *Women's Golf Programs That Work—Best Practices and Case Studies*. "There are many forces converging that make golf more accessible and desirable for women."

Among these forces is the Sunriver Women's Golf Forum, which has convened annually at the central Oregon resort since 1997 to share the wisdom of key women in the golf industry about what makes a positive golfing experience for female players. The forum has identified several challenges women golfers face: finding time to play; lacking confidence in their abilities; finding supportive learning environments; finding enjoyable, fun practice



Nancy Berkley, above left, author of Women's Golf Programs That Work—Best Practices and Case Studies, sees the upsurge of women entering the game as a significant trend: "There are many forces converging that will make golf more accessible and desirable for women."



Suzanne Woo, above right, author of On Course for Business: Women and Golf: "Golf should be fun. Most people would rather play with a fun beginner than with a great golfer who has no personality."

and playing opportunities; and overcoming the belief that golf is a 'man's game.' Much of what this group is learning may make golf more congenial to all newcomers, and might even change the nature of the game.

MILO, founded in 1986, and the Executive Women's Golf Association, founded in 1991, have made great strides for women in the meeting industry. MILO organizes three annual golf events for women meeting professionals: the Meeting Industry Ladies Open (also called MILO); the Meeting Industry Ladies Invitational; and the MILO Institute, which provides three days of intense golf education. In 1997, Club MILO was formed to provide a golf-related membership organization for women in the industry; it now has 500 members. EWGA, with more than 17,000 members, hosts an annual championship series and conference and hundreds of local golf events every year through its 100 chapters.

Stay the Course

There's no denying that women still face difficulties in starting—and staying with—the game. Although there are no major studies showing that new women golfers

leave the game any faster or sooner than new male golfers, plenty of anecdotal evidence says so. "In my view," says Berkley, "women need more encouragement than men to take the skills they learn on the practice tee out onto the course."

Also, women are still being treated differently on the course—although that's changing, says Connie Jalet, sales executive with the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority, who has been golfing for 20 years. "The attitude of the staff is probably the biggest thing. For instance, you'll still find marshals who just assume it's the women who are holding people up, when in reality, if the men have bets on their game, they may be the ones taking longer to line up their putts."

"The three major reasons I hear for why women don't participate in business golf are they don't have time, they're not good enough, or they're afraid of looking foolish," says Suzanne Woo, a San Francisco-based real-estate lawyer, founder of BizGolf Dynamics, and author of *On Course for Business: Women and Golf*. "But golf should be fun. Most people would rather play with a fun beginner than with a great golfer who has no personality."

Time just might be the most important factor in why women don't stick with the game, according to Hoffman. "Women tend to have more responsibilities beyond work—so their time is at a premium. And golf takes a long time." Her solution is remarkably straightforward: "We'd like to take away the stigma of playing nine holes instead of 18. Women would play more often—it's easier to find two hours a week than to find four or five—and they'd have more time to practice."

In fact, the Sunriver Forum made "legitimizing and promoting nine-hole rounds" one of its goals for helping to retain women golfers. Nine-hole rounds are part of EWGA's regular program offerings, for example, and this has played a big part in members' retention in the game, according to Sara Hume, EWGA's executive director and a forum participant.

Get Comfortable

Gail Kurisu, of Golf Events by Design in Sunnyvale, Calif., says that most women who want to play start out on the right foot. "They're doing everything right: they take lessons, they practice, they learn the rules and etiquette. They're very conscientious about their game, very methodical. But they tend to reach a plateau. They understand the basics, but for them to feel comfortable actually going out on a course and playing golf is a huge, huge step."

So she created a program with an LPGA teaching pro to get the women she'd been instructing past that point. "We take them out to play a nine-hole training tournament. We bring them to the tee box, show

them how to mark their balls, and teach them what it means to be careful of lines and shadows, so that when they went out with other players, they wouldn't make the kind of mistakes that offended people.

"It's very hard, otherwise, to practice the actual social dynamics of playing a round," she adds. "If you go out to play by yourself, you'll get paired up with other people, and given the numbers, you're likely to get paired up with men, who may or may not be gracious to a beginner, who may or may not be welcoming to a female player. And if you're already uncomfortable, it can be very intimidating."

It's a Catch-22: You can't feel comfortable playing without experience, but you can't get the experience until you feel comfortable. "It's a problem," says Amanda Flangas, who is on the board of the National Association of Golf Tournament Directors and is a former executive director. "Women in business still feel intimidated about their skill level. But in many cases, the men are not superior in their golf abilities. They might just be more confident."

Women-Friendly Facilities

One of the most important ways a facility can make itself woman-friendly is to have women instructors, women pros, women rangers, women starters, and other women on staff. "That's huge," says Cary Broussard, vice president of marketing for Wyndham International Inc.'s Women on Their Way initiative. "Women players need to see other women all around, doing all these things."

Some hotel companies have a visible commitment to welcoming women golfers. Wyndham, for example, has entered into a partnership with EWGA, and will serve as the group's official preferred hotel. The company also supports LPGA Golf Clinics for Women. Marriott Golf also recently announced that each facility Marriott Golf manages will offer individual instruction, group clinics, tournaments, club rentals, and leagues designed specifically for women.

In fact, the best place to research if you want to make an event woman-friendly is the facility itself. Often it's the little things—bathrooms (both at the clubhouse and throughout the course), hair dryers and cosmetic trays in the locker rooms, a nice selection of women's clothing and equipment in the pro shop—that tell you a lot about the resort's emphasis.

"From my own perspective, a lot of courses could do more to accommodate women," says Connie Jalet, sales executive with the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority. "Most courses don't have women's rental clubs. If you're lucky, they'll have seniors clubs you may be able to use. If they have locker rooms, you know the women will have one shower and 10 lockers, while the men will have 50 lockers and five showers."

What Can You Do?

What can meeting planners learn from groups such as MILO and EWGA to make their own events more friendly to women? One of Woo's suggestions is to hold tournaments at multicourse resorts, putting together a day of activities for beginners to run at the same time as the 18-hole tournament. "Have a morning clinic followed by an afternoon of nine holes. It makes a comfortable environment for inexperienced golfers of either gender, and adds a way to participate for those who can't spare a whole day. Then everyone can get together for the banquet and awards."

"Write it in the invitation—women invited, or beginners invited—or say handicaps aren't necessary," she adds. "And make prize categories that women are likely to win—not just the longest drive, but the most accurate drive, or the longest putt."

Another suggestion: "Make it mandatory that each team has at least one woman on it. Don't put all the women into one foursome," she adds. "I hate that."

Cary Broussard, vice president of marketing for Wyndham International Inc.'s

Women on Their Way initiative, suggests having someone at the executive level actively encourage women to participate. "It's a nice touch to get someone at that level to send out an e-mail, to show support," she says. "And make sure to have some prizes that are appropriate for women. If you had spa prizes, or trips, or golf



Cary Broussard, vice president of marketing for Wyndham International Inc.'s Women on Their Way initiative (shown here with her father, Louis Jehl): "Make sure to have some prizes that are appropriate for women. If you had spa prizes, or trips, or golf clothes that a woman might want to wear, it would go a long way."

clothes that a woman might want to wear, it would go a long way."

"My biggest pet peeve," adds Jalet, "is that at events, they always give you a men's shirt. The excuse has always been that there aren't enough women players. But most of the time you can find out ahead of time how many women have signed up, or go by past experience."

Broussard suggests holding an information session before an event to go over some basic questions. "Women often don't know what to wear, and that can keep them from attending. If you're a company putting on a golf event, have a pre-event where you review the etiquette, the rules, and appropriate clothing. Incorporate things no one feels comfortable asking, or that the new golfer may not know enough to ask."

It's also important to remember that there are many male golfers, pros, starters, and caddies who welcome women to the game. "When contemplating mixed events, women often ask me, 'Do they really want us to play?'" says Woo. "Of course they do. So go out there and have fun!"

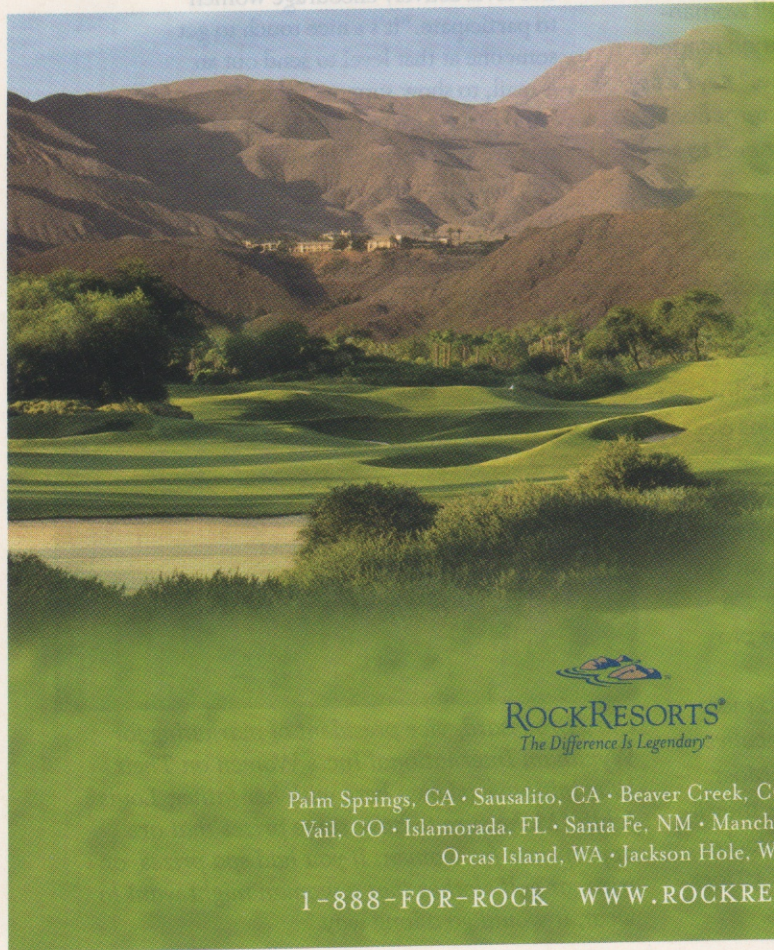
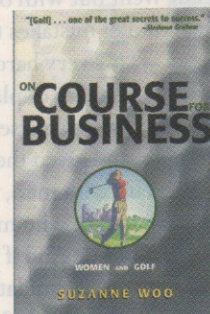
Those Men!

Women's top two complaints about golfing with men

1. Men who hit their tee shots and then drive or walk by the forward tees, forgetting that the women still have to hit—It's rude and disrespectful, and not a way to impress your prospect about how much you value her and her business. A generous gesture is ... to get out of the cart and stand on the forward tee with her. She won't feel as rushed as having three guys waiting in their carts for her to hit.

2. Men who give unsolicited swing advice—It's annoying for women to receive swing tips because they're usually bombarded with them. It's even more annoying when the male player isn't that good or has an ugly swing.

Excerpted from *On Course for Business: Women and Golf*, by Suzanne Woo, John Wiley & Sons Inc., New York, 2002.



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