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Sports

Online golf discount service teeing off in Ohio

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By: Daniel Massa - Sports Editor



Golfers in the Ohio area who are looking for some cheaper ways to hit the links have a relatively new option to choose from.

Digital Golf Pass, which launched in the spring of 2015, is an online source that partners with courses all over the country to provide exclusive offers to DGP subscribers. The offers range from a free hat from the pro shop to a free round (users do usually have to pay a small price to use a cart).

Some facilities of the 20 that DGP works with in the Dayton area include Kittyhawk Golf Center in Dayton, Locust Hills Golf Club in Springfield and Moss Creek Golf Club in Clayton.

"There is a deal-hunting golfer out there, no doubt about it," said Damon Klepczynski, DGP founder and a Professional Golfers Association of America professional. "It's just a part of today's mainstream purchasing culture, and golfers are shopping golf tee times much like you and I shop on Amazon versus somewhere else."

Digital Golf Pass is the online presence of Tee Time Golf Pass, which has published printed golf coupon books since 1992, primarily on the east coast. Tee Time Golf Pass is a primary investor in DGP, and all of its deals now exist on the online platform as well.

The basic subscription is purchased by region, and costs between \$39.95 and \$59.95 depending on the region. A SuperPass is also available for an extra \$24.95 and makes every deal across the country available, instead of just a specific region. The subscriptions are valid for a year before a user has to renew.

The site currently operates in 12 geographic regions across the United States, including Ohio. Other regions include the Gulf States (Louisiana and Mississippi) and the Carolinas. DGP's Ohio region also serves parts of Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan and Pennsylvania and includes 340 courses.

While he was in the process of creating DGP, Klepczynski recognized a void in the golf industry in terms of making these deals available to as much of the population as possible.

"The majority of the print passbook market is of senior age," Klepczynski said. "It wasn't that somebody that is 20-50 doesn't want these value options. They're just not typically a print pass purchaser."

College-age golfers are definitely part of the demographic DGP seeks to engage.

"It ultimately comes down to how often one plays," senior accounting major and avid golfer Thomas Vonderhaar said. "If you play a decent amount—say once a week—and take advantage of the deals, it's probably worth it. If you play sporadically or on an inconsistent basis then it may be more difficult to judge whether it's worth the up-front fee."

The most unique aspect of Digital Golf pass, according to Klepczynski, is that DGP is merely the avenue for courses to advertise their own deals. Other, more popular online booking websites are known to enter into agreements with courses that take price control away from the courses, which usually result in those websites only offering less desirable tee times.

"We don't want to be the judge and jury [creating deals]," Klepczynski said. "We think that the [club] operators are the smartest people at their particular property. Even if there are four clubs in the same county at the same price point, they all should operate a little bit differently. They know how best to fill their tee sheet, so we allow them to do that."

Courses control all parameters of a deal, including the offer itself, the frequency with which it can be used, and what, if any, time restrictions apply (e.g. morning or afternoon special). Digital Golf Pass serves as the platform courses can advertise their offers on, rather than courses spending money and manpower to create their own digital platform beyond a normal web site.

"The reality of today's golf industry is that no course can afford to employ their own social media manager," Klepczynski said. "They're trying to keep the lights on and keep players on the course and keep it in decent condition. When they can get digital mobile presence held, they're apt to take it."

The web site does not require users to download a separate app. DGP's online nature allows courses to have a new way of interacting with their customers, even during a round of play. Courses have the option to create supplementary deals that will be triggered once a DGP deal is redeemed.

For instance, according to Klepczynski, if a golfer uses a DGP deal for a 10 a.m. tee time, that golfer will get an email from the course around noon offering some sort of retail special in the pro shop.

While DGP serves current golfers and courses in the short term, it also strives to give back to the future of golf by donating about 20 to 25 percent of its subscription revenues back among its 12 regions.

"We donate money back to the region [DGP] is bought in to foster tomorrow's golfers," Klepczynski said. "Our philanthropic model is to give back where the subscriptions are bought and do what we call 'New Growth Initiatives.' Many of our partners cannot afford to buy 100 sets of junior golf clubs and ship them to some schools. I'm hoping that we can fund that."

Klepczynski hopes those initiatives can also include having PGA professional golf instructors guiding gym teachers through teaching the basics of golf during their classes using those sets of clubs.

"Maybe we can create a golfer or two out of it," he said.

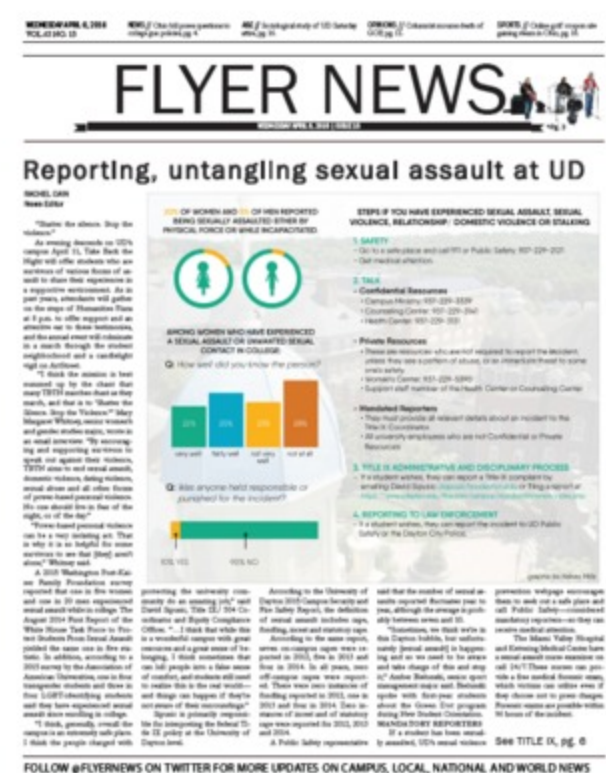
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