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Technology & Communication Study

Generational Differences Among Golf Course Staff

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In most club environments, staff consists of individuals of several different generations that all need to work together. Unfortunately, communication among the generations sometimes experiences a disconnect—especially in terms of preferred technology methods.

Golf Course Industry, working with Syngenta Business Institute, conducted research to identify “generational differences among superintendents, assistants and workers of different ages, particularly in how they interacted with one another and how they utilized technology to not only better communicate, but to better themselves professionally”.

The survey was distributed via e-mail links to 4,000 superintendents on their distribution lists, and analyzed the approximately 250 valid responses that they received—segmenting and analyzing the data based on generational differences. The data was then supplemented with personal interviews of respondents from the different generations to help elucidate the study’s findings.

The results of the study do show a bias toward those who are familiar with and use the Internet on a regular basis, as it was distributed electronically, as well as toward the Baby Boomer generation, as there is a preponderance of them in the industry, when compared to Generation Y. The survey revealed more similarities than differences, with a few notable exceptions.

Generational Disconnect

According to the results of the survey, the broader the age difference, the greater the disconnect between generations. Though Boomers have almost no issues working with members of Generation X, 26 percent felt that there was a disconnect when working with members of Generation Y. Likewise, Generation Y reported no disconnect whatsoever working with members of Generation X, but 34 percent reported a disconnect working with those from the Boomer generation. Generation X, on the other hand, seemed to have a bit more difficulty working with those on either side of it, with 11 percent reporting a disconnect with Boomers and 20 percent reporting a disconnect with Generation Y.

Management Challenges

Keeping in mind that differences across generations may reflect differing values, the study also examined what respondents felt their main challenges were when managing an intergenerational workforce:

- Getting them to arrive at work on time.
- Keeping people off mobile phones during work activities.
- Boosting morale without using bonuses or raises based on merit.
- Finding staff that doesn't look at the job as just a paycheck.
- Getting the Boomers and Gen Y working together.
- Being able to provide them with challenges.
- Motivating (workers) in a down golf market.
- Making sure they know that the supervisor understands their issues.
- Employees not listening to how managers want things done.
- Pride in work and attention to detail, self-motivation.

Source: 2011 study by Golf Course Industry and Syngenta Business Institute

Hiring Preferences

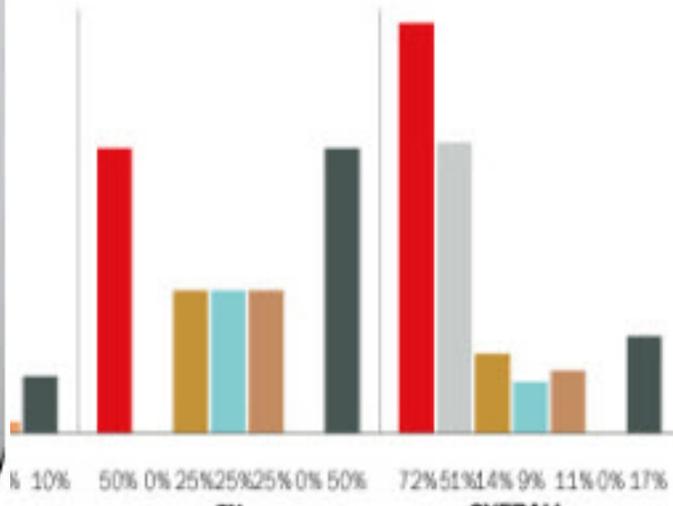
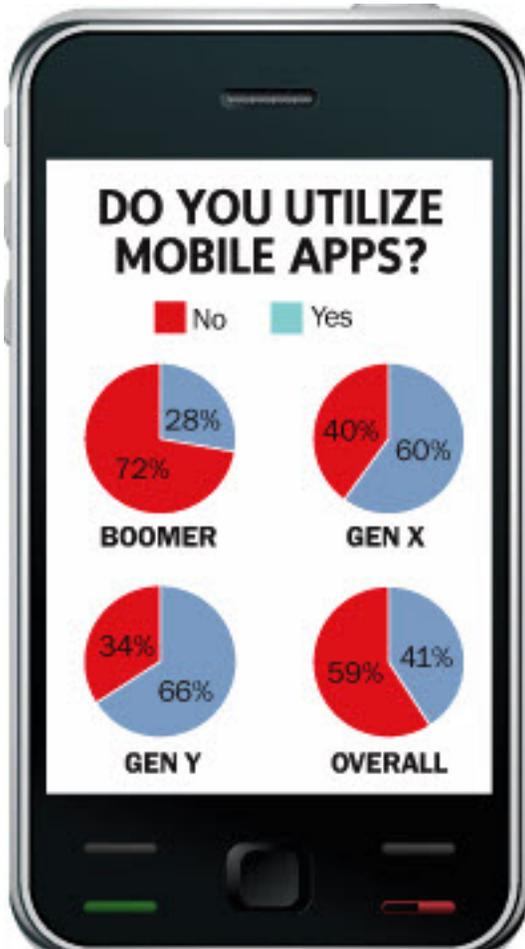
When respondents were asked what their preferred sources of information were for finding quality new hires, word of mouth was preferred by 72 percent overall. Interestingly, though, while newspapers came in as the second most popular source for both Boomers and members of Generation X (with 66 percent and 72 percent respectively), members of Generation Y ranked newspapers as entirely obsolete with zero percent expressing any inclination toward using them as a reliable source of candidates. Generation Y did, however, rank “Other” sources for new candidates far more favorably. Options, such as “the course's own website, national and local association websites, college and high school job boards, internal HR departments, and even simply placing a "hiring" sign out in front of the facility,” were seen as reliable candidate sources by 50 percent of the members of Generation Y surveyed—much higher than the 19 percent and 10 percent given by Boomers and Gen Xers, respectively.

- Word of mouth
- Newspaper classified ad/job posting
- Craigslist
- Post notes on local/community bulletin boards
- Online job-services (Monster, etc)
- Social media (Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, etc.)
- Other

Source: 2011 study by Golf Course Industry and Syngenta Business Institute

Mobile Apps

Mobile app usage was a key area of contention and differences among the generations. Though Generations X and Y reported similar mobile app usage levels, at 60 and 66 percent respectively, only 28 percent of Boomers reported using mobile apps at all. During the respondent interviews, Boomers were found to complain of “a perceived abuse of mobile devices among the younger generations.”



Source: 2011 study by Golf Course Industry and Syngenta Business Institute

According to the study, golf course staff who used apps reported the following favorites:

- Accuweather
- Weather Channel
- Words with Friends
- Weatherbug
- Local television stations
- Maps
- ESPN
- Gas Buddy
- Toro NSN
- DropBucket
- Sunseeker
- Agrian Mobile
- GIS 2012
- TweetDeck

Source: 2011 study by Golf Course Industry and Syngenta Business Institute

Preferred Communication Methods

Though it may seem that the younger generations gravitate more toward e-mail and digital communication over more personal contact, such as phone calls and in-person meetings, the data from the survey indicates that it's far more perception than fact. Across the board, all generations ranked phone calls as the most preferred method of communication, favored by Boomers (69%), Generation X (72%), and, above all, Generation Y (75%). In-person meetings and e-mail tied at 66 percent across all generations, with Boomers and Generation X displaying more of a proclivity toward texting than Generation Y (34 and 32 percent compared to 25 percent), and Generation Y leaning more toward social media than their older counterparts (Gen Y: 25%; Gen X: 10%; Boomers 5%).

Jackie Abrams is NCA's communications manager.