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Tim McCutcheon is a CPGA Professional and former Canadian Tour player. His company, Timprint, specializes in custom golf scoreboard presentations.

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The Changing Face of Golf Retail

Steve Woods

The golf business is in a time of change. One particular segment of the marketplace where substantial transformation is taking place is in retail. The era of the mass retail, high volume, big-box approach is definitely here. And while it certainly has its merits, like all change, it comes with a price. That cost comes in the form of an unrelenting toll that has all but diminished the smaller independent business model of 5-10 years ago.

Just like we have seen in the electronics industry and the home improvement industry, there seems to be a full blown conversion to the oversized, one-stop shop experience. We see less and less of the small independently owned golf retail store as new and bigger outlet stores are opening. The large chain business model is being generally accepted by golfing consumers and seems to be thriving.

There are pros and cons to each. One offers convenience and selection. The other may be more personable and attentive to an individual's needs. Then again, everybody has a unique comfort zone when it comes to purchasing new equipment or apparel.

But wherever we choose to go, there should be a choice. The question is, will there be a choice?

When asked whether the independent can survive in the days of mass retail, Tony Shuster, Store Manager & Franchise Director for Nevada Bob's Golf (Ontario) 23 locations, quickly answered, "no."

Mike Groves, owner of Par Golf, formerly Pro Golf, in Brampton simply stated that "when the day arrives that a mass retailer opens for business in our neighborhood our doors will close. It is all about economics and the fact is, the primary concern of today's consumer is

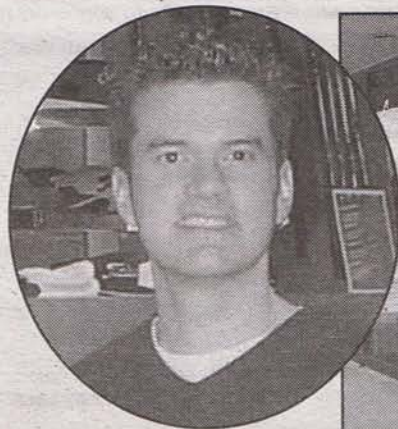
price."

Groves also suggested that "it is the cost prohibitive nature of marketing and advertising which make competing difficult. We have loyal customers, we can compete on price, and we offer outstanding service," Mike has been in the business for over ten years, "but we are still dependent on walk-in traffic. And they are the customers who are most affected by high profile marketing and advertising."

Jeff Williamson, an owner with Cambridge Golf and Fashion (a former DiMarco Outlet), offers "The consumer needs to know bigger is not always better. This illusion of cheaper prices in big stores can quickly be dismissed by coming in to our store of 18 plus years. I think most consumers appreciate the small town feeling they will get when purchasing from the independent where the owner is on-site and the staff all take pride in what they do."

Is this change an issue? Depends on your particular perspective and whether you see the benefit of a 'few player' market. Nevada Bob's, which is owned and operated by Canada's largest sporting goods retailer the Forzani Group, will soon open a new flagship store in the Markham area that will emulate the new trend toward a larger, selection friendly, higher volume atmosphere -- a move that should consummate their place in the evolutionary merchandise model. "We have the support of the Forzani Group, which enables us to adapt" added Shuster. "This ability is what will allow us to compete."

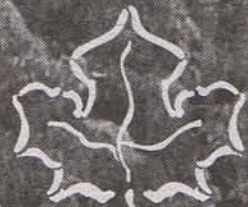
If you have an opinion on the future of golf retail & the impact of the changes we are seeing, let us know your thoughts at info@golfscene.ca.



Jeff Williamson



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