THE NEW IN-HOUSE TEACHING FACILITY FROM DIAMOND GOLF INTERNATIONAL

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Helping hands

There is a vast array of training aids on the market, from simple inexpensive devices to high-tech – and bigger ticket – systems and kit. Used cleverly, they can not only improve the learning experience for your coaching clients, but also your bank balance, as Laura Cork discovers.

Anyone for tennis? When Martin Kaymer was spotted practising on the range before his 2014 US Open victory with a tennis ball between his forearms, it spurred the launch of the Golf Connection Ball. Whether official or incidental endorsement, there's arguably no better publicity for a training aid than being seen in the hands of a tour player.

At just under £20, it's one of numerous, simple and inexpensive items that pros can use – and can encourage their clients to use – to reinforce teaching messages.

One of 2015's undoubtedly success stories has been the DST Compressor. Contracts with club sponsors prevent most players from actively promoting it, but thanks to eagle-eyed photographers and cameramen, we've been treated to the sight of several tour players – including major winners – getting ahead of the curve on the range.

That's precisely what prompted Stuart Kerr, head pro at Strathaven Golf Club, to investigate when he was watching the action at Augusta earlier this year.

"I spotted the DST training club when I was watching the US Masters on television. I saw Justin Rose was using it and I was intrigued to find out more," he says. After unsuccessfully googling 'bendy club' and other such phrases, Kerr finally found out what it was and contacted DST Golf.

He's now one of many to join its affiliate programme (see www.dstgolf.net for affiliates; the public site is www.dstgolf.com). The scheme has been updated since its first version and now has a simple coupon code, assigned to each affiliate, which gives the customer a 10% discount and the golf pro a 25% commission on all sales. Pros can give the coupon code to coaching clients in person, or can share it via social media or email campaigns to club members and coaching clients.

Kerr is fairly new to the scheme, but one of his clients has already purchased a DST training club (right), using the code. He teaches everyone from beginners to low handicap amateurs and professionals: "I tend to use the DST with the better players and professionals. It gives a great feeling of where the hands need to be at impact to create a better compression on the ball."

Over the years, Kerr has purchased several training aids. He's a fan of the Explanar, which he describes as "a piece of golfing genius" from its inventor, PGA Master Luther Blacklock.

"I have had this for a number of years... I use it for anyone with backswing or swing plane problems, plus I use it with beginners to give them the right feelings associated with swinging a golf club. Anything that helps golfers to create feelings rather than thoughts is a great aid."

Another device Kerr has recently adopted is the Sure-Set (left), a product which has also enjoyed significant success this year – and one that, coincidentally, is certified by Explanar's creator, Luther Blacklock.

Invented by PGA professional Dan Frost, the Sure-Set stand was busy throughout the Golf Trade Show last month, and sold out of stock by the end of the second day (see PSE Oct, page 8).

Kerr says he first saw the product online and acquired one for his own use. "Then I started to incorporate it in my coaching, with all levels of golfer. It creates wrist hinge, forearm rotation and shoulder turn all in one." In fact, says Kerr, Sure-Set creates similar backswing feelings to the Explanar. "Recently, with some pupils who have used the Sure-Set, I've seen a very good improvement in numbers on the Flightscope, and especially on their swing path."

He is now a Sure-Set stockist. Pros can get involved with Sure-Set, either as a stockist or as an official instructor. Stockists can buy packs of 10 for £450 (RRP £80 each), so there's a great margin to be had. The official instructor scheme is designed for teaching pros who may not sell as many as a stockist would. Instructors can buy one Sure-Set for their own use, at £50, and then receive £20 commission on client purchases, by using a coupon code online at checkout stage.

Reaping the rewards
Affiliate programmes, done well, deliver a win-win – in fact, a triple win, with the supplier, the golf pro and the end user all benefiting. Using online marketing tactics, they deliver a healthy margin for the pro, often without the need to stock the kit in the pro shop.
This month, SkyCaddie’s much heralded SkyTrak launch monitor (right) goes on sale. It also drew in the crowds at the Golf Trade Show and, as senior VP of international sales and marketing, Jacqui Surman told PSE (Oct, page 34) that its unveiling to the media in September, an affiliate programme is being set up for pros to become showcase dealers and receive 20% commission. At £1,695, the SkyTrak is an affordable personal launch monitor and the numbers stack up: it’s been tested against other more established monitors and gave very similar results. We’ll be following its progress in the coming months.

SkyCaddie has already had success with SkyPro, which launched in 2013. Retailing at £149.95 – and with a margin for pros of up to 30% – it’s a personal swing analyser and latest editions include information on angle of attack and even putting analysis. 3D motion sensors capture up to 100,000 data points per swing, from address to impact, giving a picture of the swing which can be viewed from multiple angles. Data such as clubhead speed, swing path and plan, club face rotation and shaft angle is transferred instantly by Bluetooth to a smartphone or tablet, and delivered via a free SkyPro app.

Carl Bianco, head pro at Woking Golf Club, had a clever idea to spark interest in the device, as he describes: “We arranged an indoor demo, where we showed SkyPro off using the big TV in the clubhouse.”

And, at Drayton Park GC, in Oxfordshire, head pro Jon Draycott says he’s sold more than 100 SkyPros, “but sales only started once our staff started going up and down the driving range, suggesting that people try the SkyPro.”

When the aforementioned SkyTrak hits the market, it will come up against well-established monitors in FlightScope, TrackMan and Foresight’s GC2.

The GC2 has earned its stripes in custom fitting, but is also proving popular for coaching. Butch Harmon, no less, has picked the monitor for fitting and instruction at all of his world-renowned teaching facilities. “We’ve tried every kind of launch monitor in the business and there’s nothing that can compare with the GC2,” he said. “It’s far and away the best we’ve ever used.”

Martin Hall, who hosts the Golf Channel’s School of Golf, adds his vote. He uses it with Foresight’s HMT (head measurement technology) system and says the combination of the two is “second to none”.

“It’s absolutely superb, which is why I use GC2 and HMT in my garage at home every day, and why I use them with my students… Without exception, every student

The result? More than 50 members at the club now have SkyPro and, says Bianco, they frequently email their swings to him. “Teaching with a SkyPro means your pupil can instantly grasp what you’re saying, because they not only see their swing – in great detail – but they can look at the statistical analysis, too, which you can’t do on video. SkyPro is a very good seller and a superb training aid.”

Paul Everitt of Crow Nest GC in Brough, West Yorkshire, says he has a SkyPro for people to borrow. “I often use one when I’m teaching and if you let the customer take it away and use it for a while, you’ll often sell one afterwards.”

Making an impact

Former tour pro Bertie Cordle, DST Golf’s owner and inventor of the club, told PSE that his affiliate programme was designed, in part, to benefit the club pro. “Over the last couple of decades, greens fees have been cut out of the value chain with the advent of golf superstores… and I don’t want these clubs to sit on a shelf in a warehouse without pros showing golfers how to use them.”

He has signed up 800 affiliates in the past couple of months alone – and has sold “tens of thousands” of clubs in the last few months. “It’s gone berserk,” he says. “Since we launched at the PGA Merchandise Show in January, we’ve had huge surges in demand, often sparked by who’s seen (on tour) using the club that week.”

Early users were Henrik Stenson and Justin Rose, both of whom were handed the DST club by their respective coaches, Pete Cowan and Sean Foley. At the last count, says Cordle, there were 220 players on the PGA Tour and European Tour using the club. “And if you include LPGA and Ladies European Tour players, along with men and women on the Japanese tours, we have 419 players. I think that’s unprecedented.”

The DST club has been nothing short of a magic wand for some affiliates, says Cordle. “We have one pro in the US, Nick Taylor, who has made more than $80,000 in four months from recommending the coupon code.”

If you still need convincing of the merits of joining DST’s affiliate programme, consider this. The DST Compressor is the training club, but the company also offers the CR10 transition club, which the R&A has approved, in the last few weeks, as meeting its standards for conforming equipment.

“This means we have the ability to move from the training club market – worth around $80 million globally – to the $8.5 billion market for primary or conforming clubs… We are exploring strategic opportunities,” hints Cordle.