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Linking logos and greens

by Len Kahn

Opening a golf course in North America's third largest golf region seemed inviting enough — you know there's lots of willing customers — but begged the question: how do you ensure you'll stand out among the abundant competition?

That was the challenge for the owners of Piper's Heath Golf Club in Milton, Ont., one of Canada's most prosperous and fastest growing areas.

In developing an image and brand story for their new course, the owners — two families — needed to develop a distinct identity to attract customers in a niche they believed was not being served in the region.

General manager and co-owner Marc Gruehl commented that the market for private golf clubs was saturated. But the family saw this as an opportunity — they would create a market for discerning public golfers that offered good value along with exceptional golfing. This course would fit between the many pay-as-you play courses in the region (\$35–\$60 for green fees) and high-end Glen Abbey (about \$235 a round).

"We wanted to offer great value: \$80 if you wanted to walk, and \$105 if you wanted to ride in a cart," Gruehl said.

Designer Graham Cooke, one of Canada's best known golf architects, fashioned a challenging but fair links-style track with undulating mounding and tall grasses to create movement and definition, which was important given the relatively flat terrain.

The greater challenge was to come up with a brand identity that balanced seasoned golfers' expectations but also reflected a modern sensibility to attract juniors and women.

After a year of struggling for the right name, Gruehl finally came up with the words "piper" and "heath," reminiscent of old world Scotland, the home of golf, some may say. However, Gruehl

wanted to avoid a stodgy, old boys image. "We wanted a name and image that was an empty vessel — something we could grow into," he said. "In particular, we wanted a logo that stood on its own, like the Nike swoosh."

They retained Len Kahn of Marketing911, a marketing agency based in Guelph, Ont. Kahn's team came up with a number of different looks including a bagpiper that Gruehl and his team initially didn't like. But they came back to the piper logo because it was "regal, clean and portrayed a modern feel for golf," he said. They eschewed the traditional red and green, which have been overdone in the golf market, and instead chose "powerful and vibrant purple and gold."

They followed through on their promise of great value by pre-selling rounds of golf in packages before the course opened. With this, golfers received 25 per cent off the regular fee when they bought a package of 60 rounds. Before opening, they had sold more than 3,000 rounds.

The combination of a solid golf experience, a commitment to service and a valuable experience added up to a successful first season. With half of the season gone and expectations of 10,000 rounds in the first year, Piper's Heath opened in July 2006 and put through 20,000 rounds.

This year, Piper's Heath is continuing to make itself more attractive as the summer home of the Junior Golf Academy of Canada, featuring Sean Foley, one of North America's brightest young instructors and coach to PGA Tour player Stephen Ames. The academy will also offer a comprehensive instruction program to adults. [mem](#)

