

# The Inside Scoop on Corporate Golf Event Planning & Management

By Rick MacDonald, President /CEO, San Diego Golf Reservations

You've been assigned, ordered or talked into coordinating your company's corporate golf tournament. Your company's Board of Directors and President will be hosting and entertaining the company's top clients and salesmen and there is an expectation you will coordinate the most enjoyable and memorable golf event...EVER!

Relax...coordinating a corporate golf event is both harder and more time consuming than you thought and much easier than you think!

First, you don't even have to be a golfer, let alone a good golfer to coordinate a successful golf event, although you will need to learn Golf Event Lingo 101. With the guidance below and a little tutoring and assistance from either a Golf Event Management Specialist you hire or the Tournament Director at the golf course you select, you'll do fine, especially if you are already a very methodical, persistent..."the devil is in the details" kind of person. The Tournament Director will help you with some, but not all, of the planning and coordination required so you and your staff can confidently "go it alone" and exceed everyone's expectations.

If you decide it's a little more complex, time consuming and challenging than you and your boss had originally thought there is plenty of professional golf planning and management help available for hire. Here are some of your options:

1. **Golf Event Management Companies** - Every major golf destination has several local Golf Event Management companies that specialize in planning and coordinating as little or as much of your golf event or tournament as you need. This can be a real advantage if your company is just visiting a city for a convention, trade show or an incentive sales meeting. From start to finish an experienced and professional staff will be your contact and act as your local representative and liaison with the course to coordinate the many pre-event details with the various vendors and golf course contacts leading up to the day of play set-up and activities. Their staff will augment and supervise the vendors and golf course staff on the day of play to ensure all goods and services are properly delivered, billed and reconciled.
2. **Meeting Planner (MP) or a Destination Management Company (DMC)** - If you have already hired someone to coordinate other activities, meetings, excursions and team-building events in conjunction with your convention, trade show or incentive sales meeting they may have a golf expert on staff. Ensure their golf expert has the local knowledge, experience and expertise you require.
3. **Golf Resort** - If you have chosen a Golf Resort for your event, they will have their own in-house golf experts to provide you experienced and professional golf coordination help. You may or may not need additional help.
4. **Luxury Hotels** - Four and five star hotels without golf courses will often times outsource their Golf Department planning and coordination services to a MP, DMC or local Golf Event Management Company, so be sure to inquire about what they have to offer. (For example, the Hotel Del Coronado uses our company, San Diego Golf Reservations, to manage all of their client's Tournament and Corporate Golf Events)

A one to two page corporate golf event planning article can not begin to discuss and outline a detailed check-list and roadmap of questions, options, costs, considerations, decisions and details required for planning and executing a successful golf event. Nowadays there are plenty of websites that have detailed information and checklists you can use. Just allow yourself a few hours and search for "golf event planning."

Here's our top 10 list of "insider" planning tips and signs of trouble to look for and avoid at all costs:

1. **Do-It-Yourself or Hire a Professional** - Deciding whether your corporate golf event should be planned and coordinated in-house or outsourced to a professional is your first and most important decision. Outsourcing this project requires the least amount of golf planning research and knowledge since these professionals and their staff will guide and advise you through the many planning decisions that will need to be made throughout the planning and execution process. Typically, you will not need your own day-of-play staff if using these services. (Unlike hiring a MP or DMC, this can also be a great "budget-cutting bargain" as many of these companies provide this service for FREE. They get paid via a commission from each golf course)
2. **References** - Every course will tell you, we're the best, the course conditions are great and our service is unsurpassed! The truth is...there are big differences between courses in regards to conditions and service. In addition, those differences change with the weather, the course maintenance schedule and personnel changes. You can't tell anything about a golf course or its customer service by a few pretty pictures on their

website and their own advertising and marketing. Ask the Tournament Director for 2 – 3 references from groups of the same size and requirements as yours. Ensure the references held their corporate event at the course within the past 6 – 12 months...no longer! The same applies to selecting a professional MP, DMC or local Golf Event Management Company. Ask for references to ensure they have the local knowledge and golf expertise you require.

3. **Your Contacts** – Ideally, you would want one contact. However, you will probably have more than a few if your event is more than a no-frills, have fun and play type of event and you are working directly with the golf course Tournament Director. Golf courses and resorts are usually not set-up to provide such one-stop service. Also, your first contact may be the National or Regional Sales Manager who represents many golf courses. He will provide you information, prices, availability, and then issue a contract. After your contract is signed he will introduce you to the Course Tournament Director who will take over from there. Insist on being introduced to and establishing a relationship with the course Tournament Director BEFORE you sign a contract. He will be your main contact and source of information and coordination and you must have confidence in his expertise. The success of your event will greatly depend upon his planning and execution. Will he be present on the day-of-play? This is an absolute MUST! How many other staff personnel will be dedicated to servicing your group? Does he promptly return your phone calls? Does he take time to explain things you don't understand? Does he put you in contact with the right outside vendor when the course is unable to meet your requirements?
4. **Contracts** – Read them carefully and don't be afraid to negotiate some pen & ink modifications when they don't quite meet your needs or establish a clear enough written agreement as to what services are included. Do you want to ensure the course will have a certain type and adequate supply of rental clubs? Do you want to ensure the course will guarantee two or three dedicated golf bag attendants to assist your 144 VIP players with unloading and setting-up their personal clubs and providing information about the course facilities? Write these types of requirements into the contract so the course can plan for it and give you the proper price quote, especially since you may be comparing their quote of services to other courses. All contracts should include specific agreements about deposits, cancellations, refunds, additional players or reductions – the final guarantee, rain and inclement weather policies, food service and availability of the driving range and practice areas among the many other services that will be required.
5. **Master Account Billing** – Who pays who for what – the company or the player? What goes on the company's tab and who has the authority to make changes? You will need to clearly establish this with ALL your vendor and course contacts - the Tournament Director, the Food & Beverage Manager and the Pro Shop Manager since often times they manage their area of responsibility independently. If you've hired a Golf Event Management Company, they will ensure the right Managers at the course know what's authorized or not and it will be their responsibility to reconcile your bill to ensure the guidelines were followed. Some of the authorizations you will need to make are: Pro Shop Tab - does the Master Account Billing Tab include balls, gloves, club rentals and shirts? Can someone buy a putter on the Company's tab? Food & Beverage Tab - does it include alcohol, exclude hard alcohol or allow for cigarettes and cigars? And lastly, who can make changes on the day of play at the course? You would be surprised to know how many people in your company think they have the authority to make those changes and authorizations! Course personnel must have a very short list of who is really authorized so they can provide attentive service and be confident there will not be any billing disputes at the end of the day.
6. **Make Sure You And Your Staff Arrive At The Course At Least 1½ - 2 hours Prior To Tee Off** – Not only will you need most of this time to organize your staff and duties to smoothly augment and integrate with the course staff to get ready for the arrival of your players - but most importantly – it's your only insurance in preventing a total coordination disaster if the Tournament Director and his staff are not "Everything They Said They Would Be!" Trust me, it happens! Fortunately, it does not happen very often, but when it does, it's a nightmare! You must be present to take-charge, to "light a fire" under the right people at the course and to get it done – NOW! It's your only chance of being ready when your players arrive. You and your staff may have to: help stage carts, do the pairings and cart signs, put out sponsor signage, set-up the contest holes, take delivery of the personal clubs and set-up on the carts along with a sleeve of balls or a goodie bag, set-up the registration and check-in table and other set-up duties that the Tournament Director and the golf course staff are typically responsible for doing. You can point fingers after your players are on the course – your only priority at that moment will be to "make it happen!"
7. **Your Day of Play Staff** - The culmination of a year's worth of planning, decisions, phone calls, faxes and emails comes down to about 15 – 45 minutes of organized confusion as the player's arrive at the course. Despite near flawless planning, they usually arrive a little late or just 10 – 20 minutes before tee off! Here is where you, your staff and the golf course staff will be challenged the most and you will need to have enough knowledgeable and experienced people to assist you. If you did not buy-out the course, you will have to

share the attention of the course's staff with other smaller corporate groups and individual players. Your 40 – 60 players will need to get most of their VIP service from you and your team. Golf courses usually do not provide formal registration and player check-in services for large events. They will set-up a nicely skirted table with chairs and some accompanying poster easels, but you and your staff will need to do the meet and greet, check-in players, hand-out goodie bags and promotional items and service any special requests and situations that WILL arise.

8. **Format, Pairings, Contests, Scoring, Rules Sheets and Last Minute Changes** - You will need to make all the inevitable last minute pairing and scorecard changes required or requested. You can always count on some no-shows and extra-shows. The course staff may be very busy with unloading golf bags, setting up sponsor signage and hole contests or issuing last minute club rentals so you must have a knowledgeable person available and capable of making these on-the-fly decisions and changes. Make sure it's someone who can politely and diplomatically handle the player that thinks he knows everything about golf tournament coordination or the one that can't get the change he is requesting for a variety of reasons. The disappointed and disgruntled player situation may happen despite your best planning efforts. Knowing how to quickly and quietly handle this player-guest with the right decision and the proper "quick" explanation is essential to maintaining the flow and getting the event started on time. Did you know that you, not the golf course, are usually responsible for arranging the delivery of the hole-in-one car and supplying or hiring hole-in-one witnesses if you have set-up this type of contest?
9. **Rental Clubs and Box Lunches** – Most courses will not allow outside food and beverages to be brought onto the course. This includes a box lunch from the hotel. There may be an exception if the course doesn't have the products and facilities to meet your requirements. If your company is in the food and beverage business or you have food and beverage sponsors that are expecting to see their products, you may also be able to negotiate an exception. Be specific and ensure it is written into the contract so there are no misunderstandings and disagreements on the all-important day-of-play. Many courses have a very limited supply of rental clubs and they may not be in the best of shape. Although difficult, try your best to have your players decide on their need for a set of rental clubs at the same time they make a commitment to play. Let the golf course know your rental club needs well in advance so they can rent extra clubs from a local golf club rental company. Additional rental clubs are not something a golf course can typically get just a few hours prior to your group's arrival. Your players will not be very pleased with the idea of sharing a set of clubs with someone and you may even have to rearrange all your pairings just to accommodate this less than perfect solution.
10. **Transportation, Traffic and Being On-Time** – The most difficult part of the transportation process is getting all your players out of the meeting on time and on the bus! Again, if you didn't do a course buy-out your event MUST start on time. Anything short of that requirement and you're flirting with an absolute disaster for everyone, your group, other corporate groups, individual play behind your group and the golf course. Tempers can easily flare and a solution that will please everyone is not always possible. Someone will have to compromise and it may be your group and a year's worth of your planning! Remember, your contract is to begin play at a designated time. What if the group before yours was late and the golf course told you that you will be starting an hour later than you were supposed to? What would your response to the course be? Perhaps..."I have a contract and the other group's problems should not be mine. We expect to start on time and you can work out another solution with the group that is late!" The course may not be able to wait for your group or start them when they do arrive. Your only option may be to end the golf event without finishing all 18 holes or rearranging the schedule for the day's remaining meetings and activities.



Toll Free - 866-717-6552

[www.SanDiegoGolf.com](http://www.SanDiegoGolf.com)

San Diego Golf Reservations has been managing corporate golf events for small and Fortune 500 companies for more than 15 years.