NGCOA

Guidelines for Online Agent Distribution of Tee Time Reservations
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

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What took so long in developing these guidelines?
In the simplest of responses, it's complicated. That said, the reason the process took more than 18 months is that we owed it to members—and the industry—to explore all options.

Initially, the NGCOA's intent was to build its own tee time reservation system and influence the market by creating more competition. After extensive research, we determined it was not financially viable to create our own system. We also explored collaborating with several online agent companies (aka, third-party tee time resellers), but concluded it was not the right thing to do for the membership and the industry.

Ultimately, the tee time task force determined the NGCOA could best serve the needs of members by educating them, and the industry as a whole, not only about the trends and opportunities of online booking, but the pitfalls as well. By doing so, the NGCOA can help members avoid the mistakes made by the hotel and airline industries as they entered the online booking arena in the late 1990s.

In June 2015, the NGCOA issued guidelines, which have the full endorsement of the PGA of America, for online agent distribution of tee time reservations. The guidelines set forth a framework for third-party, online agents and golf course owners and operators to conduct business together.

Why involve the PGA?
This is not a NGCOA issue—it's an industry issue. As such, everyone in the industry has a stake in making sure any solution benefits the course owner, operator, online agents and, most importantly, the consumer. The endorsement of the PGA signals that the entire industry is behind this effort and helps improve the chances that these practices will be adopted by all online agents and software vendors.

Whatdo the guidelines accomplish?
The NGCOA guidelines are designed to help golf businesses leverage the benefits of online tee time distribution. Some key points include:

- Allowing for better control and price integrity of tee time inventory, including barter rounds
- Clarifying alternative payment modes for services
- Delineating independent and bundled services, including POS, tee sheet management and tee time distribution
- Restricting online agents from purchasing course names and other keywords and terms for SEO
- Requiring online agents to post only approved tee times on their networks while prohibiting representation of availability and pricing for tee times not on their networks
- Emphasizing yield management and mobile-optimized solutions
- Promoting consistent technical standards for connectivity and content
- Offering methods to clearly and simply share data

Ultimately, the guidelines seek to create an open marketplace that fosters choice and competition.

Why don't the guidelines go further?
At the risk of sounding "lawyerly" or making excuses, it comes down to anti-trust issues. Our goal is to educate, not mandate. Each member and vendor should make their own business decisions, but we hope our members will use the suggested guidelines when entering into contractual agreements with online agents and software vendors.

Have the online agents agreedto these guidelines and will they incorporate them into their contracts?
The NGCOA and PGA have had discussions with many of the online agents, which is part of the reason this process took 18 months. We are confident that the majority of the online agents will adopt the guidelines.

What does it mean if a company "agrees to the guidelines"—what are the real-world implications for course owners and what's the NGCOA's role in the process?
If an online agent agrees to these guidelines, the company is agreeing to operate by the standards and best practices set forth in the document.

The NGCOA's role in this process is to work with golf course owners and operators to ensure they have the understanding and tools they need to make informed decisions

and work effectively with online agents for the benefit of the end consumer. This is an ongoing effort that the NGCOA will remain focused on in our quest to help owners and operators run more efficient, profitable businesses.

By agreeing to these guidelines, you're suggesting that the online agents change the way they currently do business. How will you enforce that?
Each online agent and each golf course owner or manager is free to negotiate terms and conditions of their relationship as their business strategies dictate. However, we hope both parties will consider these guidelines as they enter into a relationship. Naturally, there will be success stories from those course owners and operators that implemented these guidelines and perhaps missteps from those who do not implement the guidelines. As an association, we can and will publish and communicate those successes and missteps as part of our ongoing training.

Moreover, in the coming months, the NGCOA, in conjunction with the PGA of America, plans to introduce a comprehensive training initiative and a guidelines compliance program.

What's next?
To assist NGCOA members in implementing the guidelines, the organization will soon host a series of webinars. Topics include distribution basics, data processes and marketing, reputation management, alternate distribution channels and contract structures, yield management and search engine optimization.

Why is the NGCOA even involved in this process?
Booking online tee times is inevitable. The NGCOA's goal is to educate its members to the benefits and pitfalls of online distribution while ensuring each member continues to have complete autonomy in negotiating the terms and conditions of any agreement with any software vendor or Online Agent.

Why is pricing integrity so important?
You need only look to the hotel industry to understand the importance of price integrity. In the early years of hotel online booking, consumers would find different rates on different websites for the same room on the same day. As a result, the consumer lost confidence in the hotel brand's website. Still today, the average consumer looks at five to seven websites booking a room. We do not want consumers to follow a similar route and lose confidence in our members' websites.