



Gold Standard Awards 2009 Secretariat of the Year

"It was recognition from the industry that they were doing a good job - it wasn't just me telling them; it was the industry"

"It's all about relationships, so when a visitor or a tour operator calls, it's not North Berwick Golf Club they're dealing with; it's Norma and Sally"

"You've got to invest in the right resources. If you don't, you're always going to have problems."

Alan Phillips
Captain
The North Berwick Golf Club

Aside from the greenkeepers, the busiest people at the famous links at North Berwick are undoubtedly the booking staff. An open policy that lets visitors tee off between 10am and 4pm on weekdays and from 12 noon at the weekends means the world's 13th oldest club accommodates around 35,000 rounds annually. Bearing in mind the Old Course in St Andrews records around 5,000 more, these are hefty numbers.

The hard work of the busy staff who look after the perennial flood of enquiries to the East Lothian club was recognized at the prestigious Golf Tourism Scotland Gold Standard Awards held at a gala dinner last year. It was a glittering night that saw North Berwick's booking team acknowledged for their sterling efforts.

"I was elated," says North Berwick's captain Alan Phillips, who picked up the award. "We had three nominations that night. The first two had gone by the time we got the Secretariat of the Year award, so it was a great reward for our staff. More importantly, it was recognition from the industry that they were doing a good job - it wasn't just me telling them; it was the industry."

Although North Berwick's slick operation had won praise from the industry, it had in fact been developed over time from a fairly rudimentary system. Through a gradual process of refinements, the club's paper-based process had been transformed through modern technology. "It was an effective system, but there were so many enquiries coming through that it was becoming a difficult task," says Phillips. "The website was introduced in September 2004 and had an immediate impact on the way we conducted our business and communicated. More importantly it relieved some of the pressure on Norma."

Norma Ogg had been with the club for 12 years when the website was launched. She was tasked with responsibility of processing the annual flurry of 15,000 visitor round requests using a basic system of booking forms. Although the website helped, the growing interest in the fabled links meant dealing with visitor enquiries was becoming a sizeable undertaking. "It was a mammoth task," Phillips recalls, "and it was becoming too much for just one person."

In 2007, Sally Hawes joined Norma to form a two-woman booking team. "They are entirely dedicated to booking," Phillips explains. "They concentrate on that fully, because so much can get missed in terms of deposits being paid and cancellations being made. Attention to detail is paramount and Norma and Sally are very much on top of their game because they're solely dedicated to that function."

Phillips believes this dedicated service had a lot to do with North Berwick picking up the GTS award. "It's all about relationships, so when a visitor or a tour operator calls, it's not North Berwick Golf Club they're dealing with; it's Norma and Sally. They're giving a personal service."

And he has this advice for businesses looking to improve their customer service. "We had a paper-based system. We embraced technology, expanded our team and moved forward. You've got to invest in the right resources. If you don't, you're always going to have problems."