

Golf Tournament Management Software:

An Evaluation Guide

Golf Genius Software

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Introduction

Golf Professionals today use many different software products. Most clubs use some combination of:

- Back end accounting software that drives player rosters
- A member website, perhaps including tee time functions
- A separate tee time system, such as ForeTees
- A POS System
- A tournament management system such as Golf Genius, Event Man or TPP
- A Handicapping system, such as GHIN

One of the great frustrations expressed by golf professionals is the difficulty in getting these systems to “talk to each other” (what the IT world calls integration).

The purpose of this guide is to set out the issues in evaluating tournament software. There is no single best solution for all clubs. Some clubs are primarily focused on efficiency in the golf shop, while some are equally focused on maximizing the member experience. Some clubs require very high quality printed materials, and some are satisfied with simple black and white scorecards and cart signs. Some clubs are moving rapidly to live scoring for major events, and some have no interest in live scoring. Some clubs have outings and wish to maximize revenue from these outings, and some do not have outings. In the world of automobiles, there is the Lexus brand and the Hyundai brand, and plenty of buyers for each. Such is the case with tournament software.

Golf Genius has been developing tournament software for seven years and provides a very full function product. We have gained a great deal of experience working with golf clubs in the U.S., Canada and elsewhere, and have a very good sense of requirements. The purpose of this guide is to describe the requirements we have observed at many clubs, so that golf professionals can have a checklist to determine what requirements apply to their club. Literally every item on the checklists that follow was requested by at least six U.S. private clubs, and most of these features are used by a majority of our customers. Our goal is to help golf professionals become well equipped buyers, as opposed to “being sold”.

Desktop vs. Cloud

The world has largely migrated to cloud based systems. Most consumers access banking service and travel service over the cloud, and access retail sites like Amazon over the cloud. The member website system at your club is almost certainly “in the cloud”. A few years ago, the common refrain was, “What if the Internet is down”. Today, most people realize that (a) the Internet is so redundant that it rarely “goes down”, and (b) it is far more likely that a club will lose electrical power. The advantages of a cloud based system include:

- The application can be accessed from anywhere. If there are last minute changes on Friday night, there is no need to drive to the Club; just sign in from home and make changes.
- Multiple people in the golf shop can access the software at the same time. This is very important when entering scores (or bets for the member/guest), or allowing golf professionals to be working on different events at the same time

- Live scoring is simple in a cloud based system and close to impossible to do well on a desktop system.
- Bug fixes can be done in minutes, and there are no “updates” to be installed. Sign in and you are using the latest version of the software.

Existing desktop software will continue to be used for a long time, but making a new decision today to acquire desktop software is questionable, unless cost is paramount.

How Tournament Software is Used

Before discussing how products like Golf Genius, VPAR, and Event Man can be used, we should distinguish between tools for “casual golf” and “organized golf”. Products like Game Golf Book and 18 Birdies are very nice for allowing a golfer to track rounds and performance and to set up simple games within a foursome or perhaps over a few foursomes. That’s a long way from the sort of round robin invitationals played at private clubs, or season long bracket tournaments with consolation matches, etc. These tournaments are the specialty of tournament management systems focused on organized golf

Focusing on private clubs, there are three types of activities besides daily golf that can be managed with tournament software:

1. **Member events.** These range from simple single-round events to complex multi-round events. There are five types of multi-round events that are held at almost every club:
 - Multiple rounds with the same format, such as a 54 hole club championship.
 - Multiple rounds with different formats, such as one round of best ball, one round of alternate shot, and one round of both balls (with decimal handicaps to minimize ties).
 - Flighted round robin invitationals with points per hole, points per match, etc.
 - Bracket tournaments, including consolation matches, often with stroke play qualifiers to determine seeding.
 - Ryder Cups where we have two or more teams playing in a number of matches and accruing team points.
2. **Leagues.** Most clubs don’t have “leagues” - but they have Ladies 9-holers, ladies 18-holers, Wednesday nine and dine, Saturday Men’s golf, etc. Clubs have leagues, to be sure, with season points, scheduling issues and the need to determine who is playing in each round.
3. **Outings.** Most clubs have outings as a source of additional revenue. Generally speaking, these are either corporate outings or charity outings. Managing outings can be as simple as loading a spreadsheet and printing scorecards, to outings with live scoring, TV leaderboards, outing websites, etc.

Live Scoring

Some day there will be no scorecards, and only live scoring, but that will not be for many years. Live scoring is being adopted quickly, however, and there are some clubs moving toward eliminating scorecards. More often, live scoring is used for some events, but not all events.

If we acknowledge that live scoring is likely to be used in some club events but not all, then these clubs need live scoring PLUS excellent printed materials - scorecards, scoreboards, etc. We do see a very rapid trend away from large format scoreboards and toward TV scrolling leaderboards to show results for most events. But for the classic flighted member/guest or member/member, beautiful plotter created scoreboards are part of the experience. Many golf chairs are skeptical of live scoring until they experience it. The golf chair of a prestigious club commented,

“We generally don’t allow cell phones on the golf course. As golf chair, I made the decision this year (with much reservation and skepticism due to the traditional nature of the club) to allow the use of Live Scoring during Men’s Opening Day. We had leaderboards posted on large TVs throughout the club (1st Tee, 10th Tee, in the clubhouse, and at the scoring table). It was extremely well received by the membership, and worked seamlessly. Members loved the ability to know where they stood in relation to the field while still on the golf course.”

The Big Picture

The following chart sets out the options clubs have in selecting software. There is no attempt here to “classify” or pigeonhole products, but rather to set a basic framework to help golf professionals understand their options.



“In the beginning” - about 15 years ago - the first desktop products appeared; these were used to create tee sheets and print scorecards, cart signs, etc. A good example is TPP, which was followed by Event-Man. These were products used by the golf shop to be more productive and to generate basic printed materials - usually pretty simple, and black and white.

Cloud based systems offer the ability to provide live scoring, event websites/ portals, player registration and even payment processing for outings. The various desktop systems do attempt to provide some cloud based capability. For example, Event-Man provides EventNet for registration, and TPP Online can be used in conjunction with TPP to provide live scoring.

In evaluating tournament management products, it's useful to divide the capabilities into basic event management (the essential tools you need to create pairings and run a tournament), live scoring and advanced capabilities required by most clubs. The following checklists should be helpful in evaluating tournament software; it is far better to understand what you need before considering various products. As Lewis Carroll wrote long ago, “If you don't know where you're going, any road will get you there.”

A good tournament management product should result in less work for the golf shop, more fun for members and more outings revenue for the Club due to enhanced capabilities such as live scoring, TV leaderboards, an outing website and more space for sponsor content.

Product Evaluation Checklist

Basic Event Management: Create a tee sheet

Create player roster from spreadsheet or other product such as GHIN, ForeTees.
Create pairings easily - randomly, by team, AB, ABCD, on your own with good tools to organize player in pick list by team, index, affiliation, etc.
Easily set course and tees, support multiple tees, multiple courses.
Easily set up shotguns with good control over starting holes, or set tee times and starting holes (1 & 10 crossover).
Easily change tee sheet - add/remove players, swap players, swap teams, etc..

Basic Event Management: Tournament Setup (see advanced functions for more tournament options)

Create divisions, flights and teams; allow players to compete in multiple divisions.
Create basic single round tournaments: player v. player, player v. flight, player v. field, pair v. pair, pair v. flight, pair v. field, foursome v. flight, foursome v. field, team v. team, team v. flight, team v. field.
Support all the basic formats: stroke, match, Stableford, Quota, Skins (with the usual options), Deuces and Birdies, Nassau's of various types.
Support 9 and 18 hole matches, as well as 3/3/3, 6/6/6 and 9/9 (including dotting the card properly for 3/3/3, 6/6/6 and 9/9).
Support a wide range of competitions - best N balls, scramble, alternate shot; vary balls by hole or par (e.g., 1 ball on par 3's, 2 balls on par 4's, 3 balls on par 5's).
Support basic USGA handicapping, including full support for Section 3-5, and support for half shots.
Ability to setup multiple tournaments in a round (e.g., best 2 balls, plus player gross/net, plus skins).
Support for gross/net such that player can earn purse/points in one but not the other.
Ability to enter hole-by-hole scores, or 9/18 hole totals, and show results preview as scores are entered.
Ability to setup purse and points for each tournament and aggregate to player or team level.
Ability to score tournaments and display a leaderboard for each tournament.

Basic Event Management: Printed Materials

Print basic scorecards: 9 hole and 18 hole, landscape and portrait format, variety of paper sizes; 1, 2 or 4 players per card, optional marker notes, card properly dotted.
Ability to compose card - multiple scoring/text lines and control over location, multiple tees and control over location, multiple logos with control over placement, ability to control size, font and color of every element on card.
Ability to create basic cart signs, bag tags, etc., with logo support.
Ability to produce a variety of reports required by the Golf Shop - team reports, etc..
Ability to create tee sheets in a variety of formats - landscape, portrait, newspaper format, by tee time (hole 1 on left, hole 10 on right); alpha list, combined alpha/ tee sheet; ideally with logos.
Ability to create proximity markers and hole location sheets with logos.
Ability to produce scoreboards and/or to generate spreadsheets to go into Publisher or Excel.

How much flexibility do you need in printed materials? That's something each club must consider. With something as basic as scorecards, there is a wide variety of capabilities, from a very basic scorecard in Event Man to a more advanced scorecard in Golf Genius:

Marker's Notes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Out

OFFICIAL SCORECARD										
2015 Dos Amigos										
Chiricahua	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Out
Blue	429	278	586	387	210	374	416	123	577	3380
Par	4	4	5	4	3	4	4	3	5	36
Handicap	2	18	12	6	4	14	10	16	8	
Joseph Sessa										
Jerry Jurgensen										
Gross Stableford Points										
Net Stableford Points										
Front 9 - Scramble										0

10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	In	Total

Hole: 1A
11:30 AM

<— The Event Man card is basic, but does an excellent job of showing how strokes are calculated in this 9/9 match.

This Golf Genius scorecard demonstrates a more professional look, as well as —> clearly showing handicap calculations and half strokes.

14th Annual Member-Guest										
Round 5 Applebrook Golf Club										
Flight: Holloway, Jr. / Murphy										
Handicap: 90%										
Time: 10:00 AM										
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Total	Stk
475	354	280	380	170	367	457	554	157	3145	
5	4	4	4	3	4	4	5	3	36	
5	9	15	11	13	3	7	1	17		
Zammer, Nicholas										6/5 2.5
Gainer, Kevin										4 2
Match +/-										
Holloway, Mark										11/10 5
Foote, Peter										0 0

Competitor: _____ Marker: _____ Sep 19, 2015
Powered by **Golf Genius Software** Scorecard #1 GGID: 34wq64

Likewise, cart signs can be made to look much more professional with advanced printing capabilities in some products:

Men's Day Champions Cup 2015-2016	
Club Championship: Quarter Finals	
Kane, Michael	
Lindsay, Alan	
Tee Time: 09:00 AM	Hole: 1

Live Scoring:

Phone apps for iPhone and Android, ideally free, and easily downloadable from app stores.
iPad app for score entry from scoring stations, with ability to enter multiple hole scores quickly.
Ability for golfers to sign in to phone app with a short code, instead of needing to have a user name and password to identify themselves.
Ability to enter hole-by-hole scores on phone app and see results of <u>all</u> tournaments in progress, not just a single tournament.
Ability to insert sponsor content on phone between holes - on absolute hole basis and relative to shotgun.
Ability to brand the phone app with specific logos, color theme and content at bottom of pages.
Ability to show handicaps and dots on score entry.
Ability to take photos from app and upload to web application.
Ability to operate properly on low connectivity zones - to hold scores on phone and retransmit as necessary.
Support for TV leaderboards that can display in-progress results, sponsor content, photos, team point standings, etc.
Ability to see live results on an event website, with control by manager as to when results can be displayed.

Advanced Capabilities

While the capabilities described here are advanced compared to what many products can offer, most of these capabilities are required by clubs running the normal variety of member events.

Advanced Tournament Capabilities

Specific support for the five common multi-round formats:

- Multi-round events with the same format in every round. Quick setup and ability to aggregate all scores into a tournament result.
- Multi-round events with different formats, such as best ball followed by alt-shot followed by both balls or scramble. Quick setup and ability to aggregate results over rounds.
- Standard invitational: ability to quickly create teams, then flights, then round robin (RR) schedule; ability to easily re-flight and recreate RR schedule without losing course/tee/tee time information; round robin tee sheets and RR summaries for teams; flexibility in setting points per hole and points per match; creating scoreboards by flight with logos, etc. Ability to do aggregate skins tournaments over two 9-hole matches after all teams have played all holes.
- Brackets: Ability to create bracket tournaments with or without consolation matches; to seed and re-seed in a variety of ways, including prior round(s) qualifying results; ability to automatically setup consolation brackets; ability to print and display bracket diagrams on plotters.
- Ryder Cups: Ability to have two or more teams, setup Ryder Cup matches using any match play format, any number of 9 and/or 18 hole rounds, and aggregate and display team points.

Ability to support any number of tournaments within a round as well as the ability to have any number of tournaments across all rounds or a specific set of rounds. Support multi-round tournaments that are a mix of 9 and 18 hole, or a mix of 18 hole and 9/9 (R1 is best ball on 18 holes, R2 is 2-person scramble on F9 and alt-shot on B9).

Ability to support advanced handicapping: decimal handicaps, half-shots, auto-reduce handicaps if partner range is > x; auto-reduce if total team handicap is > x; ability to set player handicap percentages for alt-shot and scrambles or use % of total team handicap; different handicap percentages for male and female golfers; proper support for Section 3-5 when more than two tees are in use, or when play is over multiple courses; use index as handicap.

Ability to do live scoring of all tournaments in progress; trend Stableford and Quota; stop showing results after x holes for suspense.

Tie breaking, including multi-round events, by USGA 9/6/3/1, as well as other formats and by tee time.

Fine grained control of tournament setup: Examples

- couples member guest: best ball of men on odd holes, best ball of ladies on even holes
- couples 2 day member guest: best ball of each couple of F9, best ball of men + best ball of ladies on B9, best ball of host husband/ guest wife +best ball of host wife and guest husband on F9, best 2 balls on B9
- Best ball of A and B player at gross plus best ball of C and D player at net
- Bookends: all balls on holes 1, 9, 10, 18; best 2 balls all other holes
- skins on specific holes only (e.g., white flags)

Advanced support for teams: team based tournaments where teams are not in same foursomes (virtual teams); support for substitutes - easy to setup and keep points within team.

Support for "through nines" - team plays first match on holes 3 to 11, and second match on holes 12 through to 2. Minimizes times between match rounds.

Ability to support fivesomes and sixsomes in tournaments.

Support for Leagues - ladies 9 and 18-holers, etc.

Round by round scheduling that minimizes repeats - look at all prior rounds to build tee sheet for this round, but allow control over who should be kept together and who should be spread apart.
Round robin scheduler for cases where each team must play every other team once (or more).
Ability to track season points and purse by player and by team.
Support for ringerboards, including when rounds are over multiple courses.
Ability to manage subs, ideally giving team captains the ability to do this without calling golf shop.
Ability to determine who is playing in a given round via email forms or registering on a league website; ability to maintain waitlist; ability to open and close round registration as required.
Ability to allow league members to register for specific tee times (and include other players), or just register to play in the round.
Ability to include "social rounds" for meetings, dinners, etc.

3c. Event and League portals (websites): Portals can display virtually all information about an event before the event, during the event to show live scoring, and after the event to review results, peruse and download photos, etc. When members and guests get the information they need from these portals, the number of phone calls to the golf shop declines substantially (every click is a phone call that didn't happen).

Ability to create a portal for each event, league or outing. <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Easily pull in tournament information such as results, tee sheets, season points, etc.- Ability to include user created pages with images, text, etc.- Ability to pull in pages from other event portals.
Ability to store photos organized into albums; ability to quickly upload photos to portal and ability for players to comment on photos and download photos.
Ability for public vs. private security at the page level.
Ability to register players with password so that they can register for league rounds on portal.
Ability to register for an event from the portal.
Ability for players to access a portal via a specific url.

Integrations. Integration among the various software products used by the golf shop is key to reducing work and keeping data consistent.

Ability to have single sign on (SSO) from member website (e.g., Clubessential, Jonas) to tournament system portals from navigation bar and directly from member website calendar (click on calendar entry in Clubessential and go directly to tournament results or registration page in tournament management system).
Ability to automatically synchronize roster between member website and tournament system so that new members are automatically added to tournament system master roster.
Ability to synchronize tee sheets between member website and tournament management system.
Ability to “push” outing player information to club CRM system.
Ability to organize events and leagues into directories so that members can easily access all portals for leagues and events.
Ability for players to access a portal via a specific url.
Ability to access handicap indexes from GHIN and Golfnet and to post ESC scores.
Ability to integrate with cart GPS systems such as GPSI/Visage for score entry from carts and display of leaderboards.

3e. Registration System: Allowing members to register directly for events is another way to reduce work in the golf shop. This also applies to outings; allowing outing participants to register for an outing removes the need to process player roster spreadsheets at the last moment, and with numerous changes.

Ability to define registration forms with fields required or not required; ability to have different forms for members vs. guests (e.g., Affiliation for guest).
Ability to control the order of fields on the member form and guest form.
Ability to add any number of custom fields to collect whatever information is required during registration (e.g., shirt size, address, preferred playing partner).
Ability to control the makeup of a foursome (e.g., a member can register himself and one guest or three guest, but not two guests; a foursome can consist of one member three guests, or two members and two guests, but the total must be four players).
Ability to set a registration open date/time and close date/time.
Ability to register guests when there are no members (outings) with a password so that they can return and complete or edit the registration.

Pari Mutuel Betting: Many clubs have pari mutuel betting for member/guest and member/member tournaments.

Ability to have multiple betting stations.
Ability to display odds in real-time on TV displays.
Ability to calculate results and display results on TV display.
Ability to generate receipts.

3g. Payment System: The ability to offer payment processing as part of an outings package is another means to generate more revenue from outings.

Ability to define multiple purchase items with different number of golfer (e.g., single golfer, foursome, gold sponsor, bronze sponsor).
Ability to purchase “add ons” such as additional dinners or mulligan packages or donations.
Ability to keep club completely out of the “flow of funds” so that money moves from players registering directly to bank account of outing client.
Ability to generate reports showing details of what items were purchased by which golfers.

Advanced Printed Materials:

Ability to create manager defined reports and store in library (e.g., locker cards, drink vouchers, paid/charge lists, custom cart signs, custom bag tags, etc). Ability to create materials by loading images, crop, resize, position and to add text blocks; ability to create instance of report for each player, each pair or each foursome (i.e., much like Microsoft Publisher, but integrated).
Ability to create, save and retrieve manager controlled spreadsheets, indicating what data should be on the spreadsheet.
Ability to create scoreboards and bracket diagrams for printing on plotters, with customization capability; and ability to create needed spreadsheets to process with Microsoft Publisher formatted scoreboards.

Conclusion:

We end where we started, emphasizing that there is no single product perfect for all customers, just as there is no automobile perfect for all buyers. The tournament software market has evolved from simple desktop systems used primarily to create tee sheets and basic printed materials to fully featured cloud based systems that support member events, leagues and outings at clubs, and is well integrated with other club software.

At Golf Genius, we strive to deliver a product that truly results in less work for golf professionals, more fun for golfers, and more revenue for the club. We also firmly believe that the movement to live scoring is an evolution and not revolution, and clubs require a product today where “technology meets tradition” - clubs need live scoring for some events, but superb printed materials for all events