

# Sporting chance

Developing new business via local sporting clubs can reap rewards – and you don't have to be a sporting pro yourself to make the most of the opportunity

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**W**orking with sports clubs and teams can be a lucrative way to network with existing and prospective clients and has proven so successful for Abbotts Travel that it's become a major focus for the agency.

"Sports clubs are now our target area for generating new business," managing director Julian Abbott says. "It seems sportspeople are generally high earners and have good disposable incomes. They'll book golf weekends and family trips, and many are retired and love to travel."

Since March 2017, the agency has held three "incredibly successful" events for members at London's Chigwell Golf Club, with themes including South Africa, the Abbotts Travel Golf Collection, Indochina and Italian food and wine.

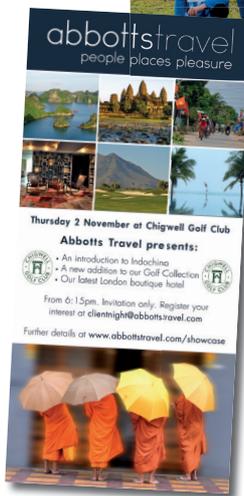
## Par for the course

Its relationship with the club stemmed from suggestions by numerous Abbotts clients who played on the course.

"Golf clubs have suffered with membership numbers in the past 10 years, so the club wanted partners to work with, where it could be mutually beneficial," Abbott says. "They've got a good catchment area, so we've been inventive with ideas for events, and the business we've generated has been unbelievable. Customers are returning from trips and telling other members, who come into the shop asking for what their friends have done."

The benefits go beyond bookings, as the Abbotts team have a social membership and are able to use the club's facilities themselves.

The agency also hosted an event for businesses through the local



chapter of Business Network International. "It was fantastic for the golf club and great for us to be the ones getting all the local businesses together," Abbott adds.

Elsewhere, sponsoring the kit of an under-10s football team has helped Deben Travel in Suffolk gain bookings and reach a new audience. For £1,000, the agency's branding appears on the home kit of Kesgrave Kestrels FC youngsters' team for a year and a

half, and banners are positioned around the stadium. Deben Travel is also given an editorial slot in the team's regular newsletter.

"It doesn't matter that the team are under 10," Deben owner Lee Hunt says. "We've had numerous long-haul family bookings from it, and locals like to see us supporting local things."

## Paying off

Since opening in 2012, the agency has also worked with the nearby Seckford Golf Club. Hunt spends £1,200 a year for Deben Travel's logo to appear on the club's scorecard, and to sponsor the ninth hole, where players will spot a sign for the agency. He explains: "I'm not a golfer, but this means everyone who plays sees our name. Customers often comment on it, and without a doubt it pays for itself and more."

The Off Broadway Travel team in Welwyn agree you don't need to play a sport to network with its players. Partner Natalie Bennett generated new clients after trying boules when she joined a local club. And until partner Mark Rice joined the agency last May, none of the team were golfers, but have now run charity golf days and a monthly hot desk in the bar of a local club for the past three years.

Off Broadway Travel founder Tricia Conroy Smith says: "You don't need to play to understand a sport – you just need to know a bit of the terminology. Lots of our clients are members of the golf club, so it's just reminding them we're here. Regulars often drop by our hot desk for a chat, and they bring friends they're playing with. Agents spend a lot of time and money getting new clients, but it's important to look after the ones you've already got too."

## Pictured

1. Off Broadway Travel team, Welwyn
2. Kesgrave Kestrels FC team, sponsored by Deben Travel

## 5 tips for: Networking with sports teams



### SOCIAL WORKOUT

Off Broadway has a corporate membership at a popular local gym, enabling the team to keep fit while socialising with clients at the same time.

### SAVVY SPONSOR

Deben Travel's Lee Hunt always asks what access is provided by sporting sponsorship, such as permission to contact clubs' databases.

### CRUCIAL CONTACTS

Get to know a club's key figures. Off Broadway's team are friendly with their golf club's ladies' and men's team captains.

### WORD SPREADS

News of successful relationships will spread. A private members' sports club approached Abbotts Travel after hearing of its golf club events.

### SPORTING FOCUS

Having a dedicated staff member is useful – Abbotts Travel's business development manager works on all events held at sporting venues.