

# Case Study

Eight Years on from the Christchurch earthquake, Avondale Golf Club is leading the revival of golf in the east with a growing membership and increasing participation at the club.



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## Introduction

It is no secret that the worst impacted parts of Christchurch after the earthquake in 2011 were the eastern suburbs with a number of golf clubs on that side of the city suffering damage to their courses, infrastructure and clubhouses. Eight years on, Avondale Golf Club is leading the revival of golf in the east with a growing membership and increasing participation at the club.

## Background

Avondale Golf Club has a proud history of being a golf club that has been representative of its local community since its inception in 1919 and the club spirit and culture that underpinned the growth of the membership in the early days is a continuing trait within the club today. Like a favourite sports team, the members commonly refer to Avondale by the nickname 'the Dale' which is indicative of the affinity members have with the club.

Golf clubs across the country have been dealing with a challenging environment as societal changes influence the way in which people engage in the sport. Post-earthquake, Avondale Golf Club faced a number of additional challenges with extensive damage to the clubhouse and vast areas of residential land in the surrounding suburbs being red zoned forcing local residents to relocate to other areas of the city. With membership on the decline, it was understandable that the club's woes could be attributed to the earthquake and a situation that was seemingly outside the club's control. With a new clubhouse on the horizon, it was recognised by the Committee that a wider programme of improvement was required to reinvigorate the club and attract people back to golf at Avondale.

## Leading the Revival of the Dale

Developing a strategy to revive the club meant refocusing on the core business of golf. While the rebuild of the clubhouse was going to take time, making incremental improvements to the condition of the course was identified as one of the keys to improving the member experience leading to better retention of existing members. This combined with the Committee's courageous decision to invest in a skilled General Manager to lead the club's revival, better positioned the club for future success. The final pieces of this strategic jigsaw saw the completion of the fantastic new clubhouse in March 2018 and golf professional, Andy Sams, coming on board.

The club's focus on sustainability and improvement is led by an innovative approach to the member experience. When designing the new clubhouse, the club took the opportunity to create an interactive and inviting environment that would attract members and visitors to maximise use of the facility. This included investment in two state of the art golf simulators which have proven their worth in appealing to a younger demographic of adults while also being central to increasing the value of membership.

Balancing the traditions of a golf club with the expectations of an evolving society is one of the challenges many clubs struggle to overcome. Avondale Golf Club has taken a proactive stance by addressing many of the barriers that can detract from the overall member experience and put some prospective members off joining a club. The club has relaxed the dress code for casual play and in the clubhouse, which makes it easier for members and golfers to come and enjoy a game of golf or a drink after work. The requirement to remove hats in the clubhouse has also been relaxed. The old adage 'there is a time and a place for everything' holds true as Avondale members benefit from more freedom to enjoy their membership while continuing to respect the core values of the game.

The introduction of a trial membership has removed another barrier by giving prospective members an opportunity to try before they commit. With this comes a focus on integrating new members into the club by introducing them to like-minded members and communicating the array of opportunities available to get involved at the club. NZPGA Professional Andy Sams has also been central to growing participation through his introductory programmes and creation of the Shoot Par Kids Club which helps young people develop their skills and confidence on modified course lengths.

Richard Sinclair, General Manager, highlights the importance of telling the club's story and making use of social media platforms to effectively communicate with members, golfers and the wider community. The club's Facebook page covers a range of content from club history to junior golf to human stories and is used to convey the unique value of belonging to Avondale Golf Club in a way that resonates with and engages the target audience.



## Results

Membership  
has grown 26%  
in the last 12  
months

Rounds played  
increased 34%  
over the last 12  
months

160 new Facebook  
followers gained  
in the last 12  
months

## Conclusion

In a culture of value creation, the emphasis is on growing and evolving the member experience. Rather than adopting a discounting approach to attracting members, Avondale Golf Club's decision to invest and add value to membership has paid dividends with the club's best advocates for joining being satisfied members.