

**Monte Burke** Contributor*I'm a feature-writer at Forbes and a senior editor at ForbesLife*

Opinions expressed by Forbes Contributors are their own.

1/27/2011 @ 11:01AM | 3,138 views

Will This Save the Game of Golf?

[Comment Now](#)

Recently the game of golf has been stuck in the deep stuff, thanks to a perfect storm of events: the overbuilding of golf courses in the U.S. (the number now stands at more than 18,000 tracks); the glut of equipment; the world economic collapse; and, of course, the meltdown of the world's most popular duffer. The U.S. golf industry totaled \$2.5 billion in 2009, a 14% drop from \$2.9 billion in 2008. Not even Jim Nantz's [recitation](#) of the Bette Midler classic, "The Rose," during a nationally-televised tournament last year could bring the game back to life.

But now, alas, the golf industry—at least some in the industry—thinks they may [have found a way](#) to staunch the bleeding.

The magic potion? [Custom-built clubs](#).

Yes, you read that right.

Later today at the [PGA Merchandise Show](#) in Orlando, Florida, the *Sports Illustrated* Golf Group and the equipment-retailer, [Golfsmith](#), will release the findings of an in-depth study concerning "the relationship of amateur golfers and their equipment purchases." According to a rep for the two groups, "the findings are significant and could potentially transcend the industry."

Here's what the study found, in a nutshell: most amateur golfers don't fit their clubs. And if they are made cognizant of that fact, they will get fitted for new clubs and buy them and then possibly buy some other stuff while they are at it.

And this will spur the revival of the golf industry.

The study of 6,000 golfers—commissioned by *SI* and Golfsmith but undertaken by the independent firm, [Sports & Leisure Research Group](#)—did



Maybe Tiger should have custom-fit his clubs last year?
(Image via Wikipedia)

unearth some interesting stats:

- 1) 90% of U.S. golfers may be playing with clubs that don't fit them properly
- 2) 92% of those golfers who were custom-fit realized immediate benefits to their game with their new clubs
- 3) 69% of consumers decide to buy equipment immediately after being fit
- 4) 60% are enjoying the game more after making their purchase

If the study seems a little self-serving (even though it was done independently), well, that's because it is. Beginning in late 2009, the *SI* Golf Group (which includes *Golf Magazine*, *SI Golf Plus* and Golf.com) started emphasizing equipment on both the editorial and advertising side of their media properties. The strategy was based around what they called See-Try-Buy. That is, *see* the equipment coverage in the editorial content and in ads, *try* the equipment out through Golftech and Golfsmith (with healthy discounts for *SI* Golf Group readers), and, hopefully, eventually *buy* that equipment.

And guess what? The new strategy has paid off for the folks at *SI* Golf Group, where, according to the company, revenues were up 20% in 2010, and equipment ad revenue was up 22%. Not bad. And 2011 looks maybe even better: in the first quarter, *SI* Golf Group ad revenue is expected to jump 20%, thanks to new ad buys by Nike Golf and Mizuno, among others.

So will custom-fit clubs really save the game of golf? Realistically, it's a long shot. (Tiger Woods winning this weekend at the Farmers Insurance Open at Torrey Pines would have much more impact.) But if people buy new clubs and get more enjoyment from their time on the course, it will help.

—

Follow me on [Twitter](#).