

USA PICKLEBALL ASSOCIATION ADDS MAXIMUM VALUE, MAKES MEMBERSHIP A NO-BRAINER WITH ACCESS DISCOUNTS

Pickleball is one of the fastest growing sports in the United States with an estimated 2.8 million players.



Thanks to a strategic marketing approach, USAPA crushed its enrollment goal by 400%, signing up 40% of members and saving them \$30,000+ in the first four months alone.

In order for the association serving these athletes to grow right along with the sport – and combat the growing pains that accompany rapid growth – the USA Pickleball Association (USAPA) needed to prove enough tangible value to entice members to pay, and keep paying, membership dues.

Here's how the USA Pickleball Association added an Access discount program to its lineup of member benefits to do just that.

The Opportunity

Pickleball has been around for over 50 years since its start as a backyard game in the Seattle area. It first spread in popularity among the 60+ age demographic, but is trending younger as courts become more accessible.

Since its establishment in 2005, USAPA has secured its position as the official national governing body for Pickleball, facilitating its evolution from game to sport. Already it has developed the features necessary to offer a scoring and ranking system for sanctioned tournaments.

But Pickleball, with its roots as a backyard game, also has a large fan base of recreational players. "One thing we hear is 'well I don't play in tournaments so ... why should I become a member?'" says Justin Maloof, executive director at USAPA.

Also, current membership reflects its origins among older players, with more than 60% of members over 60 years of age. USAPA is dedicated to those loyal members, but also seeks to attract the younger demographics to join. "One of the perceptions that we're trying to shed is that pickleball is a seniors-only activity," says Maloof.

USAPA needed a member benefit that would attract and appeal to players of all ages and dedication levels.

The Solution

USAPA wanted to mimic other associations that advertise a discount program as a way to offset membership costs. After finding great success in contracting industry discounts on things like nets, court shoes and Pickleball Magazine, USAPA wanted more.

Unable to build the discount program he envisioned on his own, Maloof's research led him to Access for both its quality of discounts and its price. And, because USAPA's annual dues are \$20, price was indeed an important factor.

Ultimately, USAPA partnered with Access to create Membership Rewards, a discount program that seamlessly joined travel booking and national dining deals from Access with USAPA's negotiated offers at sporting goods stores and other industry-specific merchants.

"We wanted to make sure it [the membership rewards] was clear and easily visible to members and non-members alike from the home page. Anybody who wants to know what they get for their \$20 can see it and know what those sponsor discounts are," says Maloof.

This premium placement on the website was an important piece of the plan for a strong rollout of the program. Access also helped coordinate strategic promotions to announce the program launch and keep interest high, making use of many of USAPA's current marketing channels including email lists, website placement and Pickleball Magazine, which circulates nationally.

The Results

When the program launched to 20,000 members in February 2017, USAPA set a goal of enrolling 10% of the total membership within the first year, as predicted by industry-standard benchmarks.

Instead, USAPA exceeded its goal by more than 400%, attaining over 40% enrollment within the first 4 months. Within one year, enrollment was well over 50%.

Once registered, members quickly took advantage of the program, saving a combined \$30,000 in the first 4 months alone.

To what can USAPA attribute this success? Partly, it's because the association knew its members and tailored the discounts to meet their needs. Equally important, however, was USAPA's dedication to using multiple marketing channels for continued education.

For example, emails proved to be the primary driver of enrollment and engagement. Members received messages tailored to their status: registered members received promotions of popular offers while unregistered members received messaging about potential savings and a prompt to register. Another important factor was the education of USAPA's ambassador network to spread the word by mouth.

Maloof has reported that USAPA's renewal rate is "way up over the past year." Members have averaged \$17 saved per redemption, nearly covering their annual dues in a single transaction.

"We've got an ambassador network of 1,700 who are all volunteers, and this is a tool they can now use to answer that question of 'why join?' It's 'well, why not? Just use it one time and there's your \$20 back.'"

Going forward, Access and USAPA plan to further promote travel booking deals to its senior demographic. As pickleball's growth and appeal to younger generations opens exciting opportunities with youth groups and other demographics, USAPA will also continue to work with Access to provide value and relevant content online and through the mobile app.

"There are no indicators right now that we're going to have a slow down any time soon. We actually have some massive initiatives aimed at driving memberships even higher over the next year and beyond," says Maloof.

