

SEPTEMBER 2010
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Taking the guess work out of weather

The Club at Mediterra's investment into a weather system provides members with more than just protection from lightning strikes. BY KYLE BROWN



A director of golf is expected to manage every aspect of a course to give members the best possible experience, from the green to sky. No golfer wants to deal with bad weather, and more and more clubs are providing information as a service to members before they even reach the tee. A weather system is a helpful service for director of golf Chris Holtrop at The Club at Mediterra in Naples, Fla., who considers it an investment

Florida where lightning is prevalent. We had guys checking weather.com for notice."

Holtrop called and checked into three different companies before coming back to WeatherBug, which is based out of Germantown, Md. "We investigated our options, called companies and had in-depth conversations," Holtrop says. "I talked to other directors and everyone seemed to like WeatherBug. I was really sold on it after doing

"Anytime I can be more informed about what's happening at my club, I feel more comfortable about it." – Chris Holtrop, The Club at Mediterra, Naples, Fla.

that protects his members' lives.

Holtrop started investigating weather systems when the member-run club decided to protect golfers from lightning strikes, a problem in the tropical, weather-intensive southern state.

"In January, a topic on the table for this season was the need for a lightning detection system," Holtrop says. "We didn't really have any type of system before, even being in

our research."

Though the members originally just needed a lightning detection plan, the weather system ended up being a useful tool.

"The system is just state of the art," he says. "It offered our lightning detection and it covered other weather solutions for us."

Weather information is collected in real time through a system called Stream RT from weather towers throughout the area. Holtrop

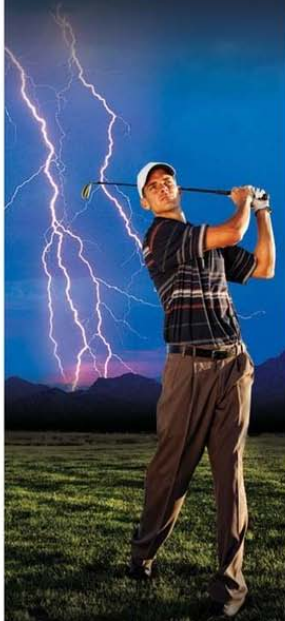


Remote access allows managers to coordinate weather-related activities even when they're away from their facilities.



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Weather information is collected in real time through a system called Stream RT.

can check the updates at any time, and he receives notice when dangerous weather is nearby, even if he isn't himself. For example, he watched warnings coming in during a recent visit to Michigan and was able to connect with his staff in Florida to remotely manage the golf course facility.

"Right now I receive several weather updates coming to me every day anywhere I'm at," he says. "Anytime I can be more informed about what's happening at my club, I feel more comfortable about it. Right now, there's a storm coming in from the east, and looking at the towers, I can see that it'll be here in about 35 minutes. When lightning is detected 15 miles from the club, we can send out a basic warning. Once it gets to 10 miles, we have a beacon in the shop that sends out a weather warning to our PDAs that tells our staff that people need to get off the course and sends them to a shelter. It gives them plenty of time to finish what they need to and prepare."

That forward warning of weather is power for a director of golf, he says, but the system also empowered staff at the facility to prepare for the most unpredictable part of a golfer's game — weather condition.

"It seems to me that we at golf courses are asked to be weathermen quite often," he says. "This system gives us capabilities above and beyond what we'd expected with the information sent to our mobile phones, PDAs, and that we can look right on the website. The fact that the maintenance all have the weather sent straight to their PDAs is so helpful."

Working directly with WeatherBug representatives, the budget took planning, but more than satisfied the cost involved with the amount of information and control provided, Holtrop says.

"It was competitively priced," he says. "It was a significant investment, but it had such a greater value against what you got. You're talking about the safety of your players, first. Also, no golfer likes to deal with the weather. If you're able to predict what's coming to make the experience better and safer, if you can make better informed decisions, it makes you look better and enhances it for the players. They know you're concerned for their safety and trying to help them be prepared for the right weather."

The installation of the system proved easy after all the research was done.

"Once we made the decision, it was easier than we expected. Starting was easier than actually making the choice," he says. "The process of acquiring it was simple. It's just Internet based, so it was literally a matter of just hooking up a few wires. Their problem solving was fantastic, too. We were having some issues for a little bit but they came and helped make certain we had things set up correctly. It turned out we had set something up wrong ourselves, but they walked us through it."

After a few months, the system hasn't had any issues, and Holtrop hopes the system will be able to integrate the information and alerts with the GPS systems in each golf cart, making it even easier to prepare golfers for the weather.

"There's so much info in there, it's amazing," Holtrop says. "It'd be nice to have that available for everyone. We're in the height of our severe weather season right now. With the current weather constantly, we're more ready." **GC1**

Kyle Brown is a freelance writer based in Canton, Ohio.