

PDGA Course Development: Weaving Your Way on the Web



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Introduction

Disc golf... what an amazing sport and impressive growth industry we are now a part of! And most of our popularity is based on the expanding presence of disc golf courses around the world.

The PDGA reports that there are some 2700 disc golf courses now in existence around the globe, which is six times the 1995 count. Such growth is most welcomed by the disc golf community. However, with increased growth comes the need to insure that these new courses adhere to established PDGA guidelines, as well as environmental and community concerns. Using an expertise from members of the Disc Golf Course Designers Group is probably the safest way to make sure the design, proposal, and installation of a course is done properly. With the training and experience a course designer brings to the project, issues can be anticipated and addressed before they become a problem, which is what often happens when using a naïve designer.

This does not mean that disc golfers outside the DGCD Group cannot embark on the planning, proposing, designing, installing, and promoting of a disc golf course! Obviously, including an experienced course designer is the preferred way to approach such a project, but that does not mean they are the only people with the resources and expertise to launch a new disc golf course. A number of sites on the World Wide Web can now be referenced to help you with this important (and sometimes ominous) undertaking.

The focus of this article will be on Web sites that can help with the development of a disc golf course. To better understand the process involved with the launching of a new course, and the information that these sites have to offer, I have delineated five steps in developing a course. These steps are: 1) planning; 2) proposing; 3) designing; 4) installing; and 5) promoting. Clearly, these steps are not all inclusive, and there may even be some overlap between them. However, for the person who is starting from "square one" in her/his attempt to install a course in their community or on private land, these steps do provide a reasonable framework for approaching the project.

Planning

Before any course design, proposal, or installation can occur, a significant amount of planning is necessary. In fact, of all the steps involved in securing a disc golf course for your community or local park this one may be the most important. Extra time that is spent during this phase of the project can eliminate twice as much time that may surface later during other steps of the project. Of course, you should know that starting from "square one" means doing a great deal of research to understand specifically what is involved.

When considering the installation of a disc golf course, the first aspect that must be worked out is figuring out how disc golf can peacefully coexist in your park. If you are like me, then you see great

disc golf holes almost everywhere you look in parks and natural spaces. But our very specialized recreational outlet will not just fit anywhere in open public (and private) spaces. We must realize that some of our most attractive park land is also primary habitat for our local wildlife. The National Parks Conservation Association (http://www.npca.org/wildlife_protection/) is a great resource for finding information to help you achieve that balance between a human presence and maintaining healthy wildlife habitats.

In addition to the wildlife, we must also be aware of the safety of others in public spaces. The Project for Public Safety has developed an outstanding resource for evaluating strategies and uses in public spaces (http://www.pps.org/parks_plazas_squares/info/parkuse/toronto_safety_audit) And while this document primarily pertains to urban parks and squares, disc golf course developers could still learn from some of these land use issues. American Trails also offers a fantastic resource for safety that directly pertains to the way we walk around the woods and parks with its safe trails document center (<http://www.americantrails.org/resources/safety/riskmgmtimba.html>). These Web sites can be referenced to garner some basic ideas about park safety, land usage, and other general concerns that a community may have when proposing a course installation.

Once an area has been identified that would support a disc golf course, the environmental impact of increased activities must be considered. To develop your course's plan to address ecological and sustainable land use, it is worth researching Yahoo's Web Directory on sustainable development (http://dir.yahoo.com/Society_and_Culture/Environment_and_Nature/Sustainable_Development/), especially since these are often the issues used as rationale by opponents of disc golf. Specific issues that may surface when planning a course are the preservation of plants and trees indigenous to the land. To help identify some of the plants that may be found where you are planning to install a course, refer to Texas A&M's Plant guide (<http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/plantanswers/web.html>).

If there is opposition to your new disc golf course, and it's based on environmental impact, then consider forming a citizen's advisory group with your local government to create a spirit of cooperation. For ideas on how to involve the community when constructing an environmental impact strategy, the EPA's section on community-based environmental protection is a great resource (<http://www.epa.gov/epahome/community.htm>).

Once environmental concerns have been addressed, and even sometimes before, the question of cost comes to light. Although the price tag on a disc golf course is a mere fraction of a ball golf course, basketball course, or even a park restroom, it is not trivial. Indeed, this factor alone has kept many courses from proceeding past the planning stage. To find out the costs associated with installing a course, you could refer to Innova's Economic Summary page (<http://www.innovadiscs.com/coursedesign/ecosummary.html>). The Disc Golf Association's Web site is another great resource for determining the costs of an installation (<http://discgolfassoc.com/discgolf-course-design/economic-summary.html>).

Proposing

Once the land has been identified that could support a disc golf course, it is essential to get approval for its use. This may require going in front of a parks department, a city council, or a private land owner to present your case. And although each audience may present a unique point-of-view for how the land should be used, there are still fundamental rules that should be followed for any effective presentation or proposal.

Perhaps the best resource for proposing a disc golf course comes from an updated version of the San Francisco Disc Golf Club proposal (www.pdga.com/files/documents/SampleCourseProposal.doc) covering everything from the costs of a course to the rationale behind why a course is desirable. The San Francisco's Disc Golf proposal section is considered the "gold standard" for potential course organizers who are looking for guidance on how to "pitch" disc golf to the decision makers. A major aspect of garnering support with your presentation/proposal is to stress that disc golf is successfully providing a low-cost, low-impact recreational outlet for all ages in many public parks around the United States (and World!)

But be warned...addressing environmental concerns, determining costs, and drawing attention to success at other courses are not always the most effective components for successfully getting your proposal approved (<http://www.microsoft.com/uk/atwork/work/presentation.mspx>)! Often the little things are what matter most when gathering support for your project. Some call it a "mindset," "your approach," or "your attitude," but the bottom line is that people often pick up on the most subtle aspects of one's presentation and strategy. For some simple, yet profound, ideas to keep in mind during your planning phase, make sure to go to Brian Sullivan's DiscLife.com "Keys for Success" (<http://www.disclife.com/keys.shtml>). In addition, Brian also offers a Proposal Template that can help any course developer stay organized and on target with their draft (<http://www.disclife.com/prop.shtml>). The ideas presented here could go a long way towards getting your project to go "all the way!"

Designing

There may be no greater source of reward (or frustration) when developing a disc golf course than the design phase. This part of the undertaking must combine the unwritten parameters of the environmental landscape with the explicit guidelines and specifications of the Professional Disc Golf Association. Whether using an experienced course designer or not, there are fundamental issues that cannot be ignored. Safety on the course is primary, while environmental friendliness ranks a close second. The PDGA Web site includes a series of course design guides from the Disc Golf Course Designers Group that have been approved by the PDGA (<http://www.pdga.com/course-development>). Any consideration towards designing a disc golf course should start by reviewing this site.

Next, one should consider some of the more general concerns for designing a course. A basic primer on the development of disc courses is found at the Disc Sports Resource Center (<http://www.biotecca.com/discsports/courseinfo.html>). When determining if you want to install a recreational, competitive, or tournament course, refer to Chuck Kennedy's informative list of design elements (http://www.greendiscgolf.com/downloads/design_grid.pdf). John Houck, who is perhaps the foremost course designer in the world, has authored a number of outstanding articles related to course design (www.houckdesign.com/course_design_articles.html). The Disc Golf Association has also published a great introductory article on course design on their site (www.discgolfassoc.com/coursedesign.html).

Installing

Assuming that enough support has been gathered for the installation of your disc golf course and that your local parks and recreation department help you gain community approval, then comes the physical labor associated with actually clearing fairways, constructing tee pads, and planting the pole holes into the ground. Although resources on the Web pertaining to these aspects of disc golf course development continue to grow, there are still some pages worth mentioning.

While clearing fairways and creating usable paths to the pole hole targets, it is sometimes necessary to do some pruning of trees and shrubs. For a super tutorial on tree pruning, visit the TreeHelp.com Web site (<http://www.tree-pruning.com/>). You may also want to determine the best time of year to do tree pruning by consulting Virginia Tech's pruning calendar (<http://www.ext.vt.edu/pubs/nursery/430-460/430-460.html>). Both sites will be an invaluable resource for helping to maintain the course's tree population and aesthetic value and will show the park's maintenance guys that you really know what you are doing. They are also quite helpful for any tree work you may have around the house.

Another important aspect of disc golf course installation is how the tee pads should be designed and implemented. Clearly, there are a number of options available for tee pads: smoothed dirt areas, concrete slabs, cinder-finished boxes, or just nothing. Innova's Web site gives specific dimensions and specifications on constructing an effective concrete tee pad that will withstand use for many seasons (<http://www.innovadiscs.com/coursedesign/teearea.html>). This page is complete with diagrams and specifications that adhere to PDGA standards, so it is certainly worth a look-see. The Disc Golf Association also offers some sound advice on tee pad installation (<http://www.discgolfassoc.com/discgolf-equipment-installation/tee-pad-install.html>).

Once all the clearing and grooming of the course is accomplished, it's ultimately the planting of the pole holes that completes the installation. Since I first wrote this article, the roster of PDGA-approved targets has grown to 28. And while we applaud all efforts to expand the product line of disc golf targets, there are relatively few targets that are widely marketed for use in public parks. The Mach series of pole holes started the trend in specialized disc golf targets, and they are still the most popular. They can be viewed and researched on the Disc Golf Association's Web site (<http://www.discgolfassoc.com/discgolf-equipment/baskets/index.html>).

Innova's Discatcher has gained in market share and is easily recognized by the bright rim around the top of the basket. For more information on this target, including design, dimensions, and cost, visit their site (<http://www.innovadiscs.com/discatcher/index.html>). Discraft's Chainstar is also getting more play (http://discraft.com/prod_chainstar.html). The newest disc golf target approved by the PDGA is the King Pin from Disc King in Wisconsin (<http://www.discking1.com/products>), but it must be modified for permanent installation. For a complete list of PDGA-approved targets visit http://www.pdga.com/files/documents/PDGA_approved_targets_012609.pdf.

Promoting

Once in the ground and ready to be played, a disc golf course is worthy of as much promotion as one is willing to give it. Navigating the four previous steps outlined in this article often must be done with tact, as well as "twisting some arms" with a balance of delicacy and dictatorship; and by messaging, as well as muscling. Simple put, you will have to call on all your resources of personality, patience, and sometimes finances to complete this project. Therefore the successful completion of such a course installation should be a source of pride to which the rest of the disc golf community should be made aware. This necessary phase of successful disc golf course development, promotion, should be conducted on the growing number of outstanding Web resources that are frequently referred to by our players and supporters.

No thorough promotion of your disc golf course is complete without submitting an entry to the PDGA's Disc Golf Course Directory (www.pdga.com/course-directory). This is the be-all, end-all for anyone looking for a disc golf course online, and it has somewhat supplanted the printed disc golf

course directory for supremacy as the consummate guide. The print version of the PDGA Disc Golf Course Directory is still a valuable resource for traveling players, vacationers, or anyone who prefers having a mobile source of disc golf course information. Inclusion in the online (and print) PDGA Course Directory is easily accomplished by completing the online registration form (www.pdga.com/course-edit?action=insert&id=0). If you are willing to go through all the work to get the course installed, you should be willing to go through the relatively painless process of registering the site with the online disc golf directory.

Many clubs today are developing their own Web sites to promote their courses, inform their players about disc golf-related activities, and post results from recent tournaments. If you do construct a Web site, then make sure to get it listed on the original Web site for disc golf fans/players—Disc Golf dot com (<http://www.discgolf.com/>). There is a section specifically dedicated to club listings (http://www.discgolf.com/component/option.com_mtree/task.listcats/cat_id,182/Itemid,131/). Webmaster Marty Hapner has been at the forefront of disc golf promotion by, first, grabbing the most desirable domain name in disc golf, and, second, by keeping the site fresh and accessible to anyone who is interested in furthering the cause of disc golf. Recently, Marty has expanded his menu of online disc golf resources with his <http://www.discgolfcourses.info> Web site. There are currently over 2600 courses listed here, though most entries lack the same complete descriptions found at pdga.com. Including a link to your course on either of Marty's sites will guarantee visitors from around the entire disc golf community see what you are up to.

Regardless of how much promotion you do with your course, the most successful disc golf courses are those with a solid volunteer base to help with the maintenance or operation of the property. Forming a club might be the single most important thing you can do to insure the long-term survival of your course. No one person alone can maintain and operate a disc golf course. Only through collaboration and partnership can disc golf courses thrive, so make sure you recognize this fact and develop some plans to start a disc golf club. And there is support for new, as well as established, disc golf clubs. The PDGA Club Affiliate Program is a tremendous resource for support, as well as discounts for membership to the PDGA www.pdga.com/affiliate_club. Once approved, you can use the pdga.com message board section to communicate all club news both within and outside your club (<http://discussion.pdga.com/msgboard/ubbthreads.php>).

Conclusion

Developing a disc golf course is not an easy undertaking. It requires a solid strategy, statesmanship, and stamina. However, the project of getting a disc golf course installed can be one of the most rewarding of all your disc golf activities. Using the World Wide Web as a resource for carrying this project through is now possible with the plethora of Web sites related to this topic. Consult these sites and use the knowledge of proven disc golf course developers to follow the most efficient and effective path toward getting the project done.

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