



Entrepreneur Woody Arnold has ironed out the kinks in his online golf business.

Area man takes swing at his online business

BY RICK MALONEY
BUSINESS FIRST

Like any number of successful entrepreneurs Woody Arnold has an interesting tale to tell about how his online business, "ziplinegolf.com" began.

"I lost a stock market bet with my brother-in-law and I owed him two dozen golf balls. I wanted to put the name of the stock on it but nobody wanted to do two dozen balls," said Arnold, who concedes that at age 50 and with 25 years' experience in marketing and selling tires, he was ready for a new and different venture. "There was a market for small quantities of golf balls not being serviced."

Little more than a year later he's enjoying his entrance into e-commerce selling, of all things, golf balls with names of people, places and things on them to golfers.

A 3-handicap player and one of the top amateurs on the area golf scene, it would not have seemed unusual if Arnold had perhaps taken a swing at the Senior PGA Tour. Instead, with the assistance of his wife, Judy, Arnold is working from home processing orders for dozens of golf balls from name-brands like Wilson, Maxfli and Titleist.

The customer is always right

Most golfers have put their clubs away for another winter yet Arnold is teeing it up for the rush of the holiday season. At this time a year ago, business tripled from September through December.

Arnold will do the golf ball design if customers want, but what he's finding is most would rather use their own computers to compose the image of their choosing. That's

an idea he borrowed from another online enterprise that creates greeting cards.

"The customer designs the imprint," he said. "That takes the sales work out of it, puts it on the shoulder of the customer and I think the customer has fun doing it."

The company name goes back to a lesson Arnold learned in the armed services when he got on the "zipline." The Army maneuver uses a rope that extends from a cliff across a stream. From there its hold on with two hands as you slide down into a body of water. Arnold said it is really quite scary.

Global reach

The online golf ball business offers a global reach and Arnold never knows where an order might come from or for what occasion. Earlier this year pro golfers Tiger Woods and David Duval participated in a much-ballyhooed round of golf, broadcast by ABC-TV in prime time. The network typed in ziplinegolf.com to have an order filled for balls to be used in promotional ads for the event.

Tiger and Duval was a one-time promotional buy. Others should last a lifetime, like the man in California who wanted to propose to his girlfriend in a non-traditional way.

"He needed them overnighted, a rush order with 'jeannette will you marry me?' on them," Arnold said. "At the 6th hole he arranged for her pick the ball out of the hole. She fell to her knees weeping and accepted the proposal. The ball is in her purse for the rest of her life."

Wonder what have happened had Woody Arnold won that bet from his brother-in-law.