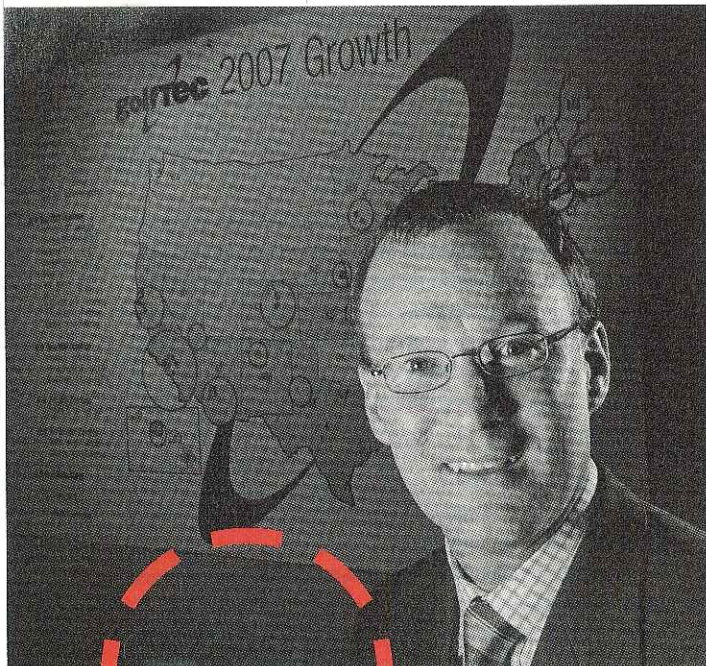


CHECKING YOUR SWING

A new wave in golf instruction adds motion sensors and electronic signals to the teacher's toolbox. Here are three innovators who are leading the charge.
by Max Adler

BIG NUMBERS GolfTEC's Joe Assell thinks his franchise-based business can grow to 1,000 locations worldwide.



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Imagine trucking along on a lengthy road trip. You're hungry, your back's sore, but you don't know where to stop for food. Each exit might have exactly what you're hankering for, or might point you to a diner that shut down six months ago. This is why we love and trust franchise restaurants. The familiar letters and colors of their neon signs are beacons of standardized fare.

Joe Assell is doing for golfers what Ray Kroc, the founder of McDonald's, did for hungry travelers. Because in many ways, the first step to getting better at golf is just as uncertain as trying to find a decent meal in the middle of nowhere.

Hack teachers and clubfitters are out there, and they're tough to spot at first glance. Assell's company, GolfTEC, provides a user-friendly, standardized service for game improvement using modern technologies in instruction and clubfitting, and in July GolfTEC opened its 100th learning center. On July 10 the company taught its millionth lesson. A long way to go before Assell can claim "Over 99 Billion Served," but give the guy a break: He's only 35.

GolfTEC's teaching system is founded on a database of 150 tour-pro swings, collected through a partnership with the former HealthSouth tour fitness trailer. Holding this as the model, a GolfTEC instructor can compare a golfer's swing on an indoor system using motion sensors synchronized with digital video. The golfer wears a vest that's wired to a computer, and the system beeps if the player strays from proper positions during the swing. It's instant feedback for teacher and player.

Ninety percent of GolfTEC instructors are affiliated with the PGA or LPGA, and all have to complete a two-week certification program. Students can keep the same instructor for an entire lesson program (packages start at \$325 for five sessions). Web-savvy students can access video from their lessons online. And because the company is nationwide, students can keep training when they're on the road or if they move.

On the equipment side, GolfTEC can use information from a student's swing analysis to design and build a custom set of clubs from a leading manufacturer. "Other swing-analyzer companies sell one piece of technology," says Assell. "We provide the teaching and equipment, too. If we're McDonald's, then it's like everybody else is just selling grills."

Assell started out as an intern at Cherry Hills Country Club, learning the trade of club professional. Then in 1995 the entrepreneurial spirit hit, and he opened the first GolfTEC in Denver.

"Personal computers, e-mail, cell phones—a whole wave of technology was swelling," Assell recalls. "I thought, *Hey, let's apply this to golf!*"

Bookings for that first location filled right away, and one year later the second GolfTEC opened, in Chicago. Assell projects a worldwide potential for more than 1,000 locations. If a GolfTEC pops up in your neighborhood, rest assured it will be good for your game, unlike, say, a greasy beef patty with fries.

THE APPLICATION

Got an hour on the road? You can get the same lesson at more than 100 golf centers throughout the U.S.