

# What Makes Indoor Golf Facilities Succeed

A Guide for Modern  
Operators



# How Today's Indoor Golf Operators Win

Indoor golf is growing fast. A few years ago, a new facility in your city was rare. Now, new facilities are opening every few months. With more options, customers are not just asking “where can I book a sim” but “where do I actually want to spend my time and money.”

This playbook is not about trends for the sake of trends. It is about where we see the industry moving based on real usage data across hundreds of facilities, and what separates the spaces people try once from the ones they keep coming back to.

You will see a recurring theme: the facilities that win are the ones that design an experience, not just a bay. Food and beverage, atmosphere, technology, and marketing are all tools to support that experience, not replacements for it.

Where helpful, we highlight how Golf O'Clock supports these ideas on the software side so operators can focus on running the facility, not juggling systems.

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## In This Guide

- 1. Know What Business You Are Actually In**  
The four main indoor golf models and how their numbers behave.
  - 2. Define Why People Choose You**  
Pinpoint the role you play in someone's week so decisions stop feeling random.
  - 3. Design The Experience End To End**  
From Google search to walking in the door, and why the "first impression" starts online.
  - 4. Build Simulator Bays That Customers Love**  
The critical buildout factors operators overlook and how specialists like OnScreen Sports help you get it right.
  - 5. Use Food And Beverage As A Revenue Multiplier**  
How F&B shifts your entire value proposition and boosts revenue per visit.
  - 6. Be Honest About "Passive Income" Models**  
The reality behind unmanned facilities and where they fit.
  - 7. Stay Top Of Mind In People's Plans**  
Practical marketing that keeps you in the rotation without being noisy.
  - 8. Build A Tech Backbone That Actually Holds**  
Why integrated systems are becoming baseline, not a bonus.
  - 9. The Path Forward**  
How to align your positioning, experience, and technology so you can grow with the industry.
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# 1. Know What Business You Are Actually In

Before you can position your facility, you need to understand what industry you are actually in, because “indoor golf” is not one business model. It is four.

## Unmanned Facilities

These are the check-in and play operations. A door code, a clean bay, and a simple in-and-out experience. They attract golfers who want reps, not an outing.

Return rates commonly sit in the 25 to 30 percent range. They work best when convenience is the primary value and expectations are clear: this is a self-serve studio, not a lounge or bar.

## Performance Centers

This model is built around improvement. Launch monitors, coaching, fittings, structured programs. Customers here are serious players who want measurable progress and are willing to pay for it.

It is a strong niche, but smaller and more intentional than casual social play. These facilities live and die on coaching quality, data trust, and reputation among regular golfers.

## Sports Entertainment Lounges / Golf Bars

These facilities are designed around social time: food, drinks, TVs, events, and a comfortable atmosphere. Guests might play a full round, half a round, or not swing at all. They come to hang out, and the sim is part of the night, not the whole point.

In our data, these venues often see return rates up to 55 percent. The market here is much larger because you are no longer limited to golfers. Anyone looking for something fun to do with friends can be a good customer.

## Hybrid Facilities

A typical hybrid might feel welcoming for beginners and casual play during the day, then lean into a more social, food and beverage-driven model in the evening. Some add unmanned convenience windows early in the morning for commuters or early risers.

Hybrids work best when the schedule is intentional. Where we see them struggle is late at night. Unmanned hours after 10 p.m. tend to attract a very different crowd with different expectations. Customers think they are walking into a lounge but find a self-serve studio. Staff are thin, the experience is inconsistent, and reviews show it.

As always, clarity is your friend. Customers should be able to answer “what kind of place is this” within seconds.

## What The Data Actually Shows

Manned facilities consistently outperform unmanned ones in return rates, in some cases nearly doubling them. It lines up with one simple fact from the National Golf Foundation: about 51 percent of simulator visitors are non-golfers. They are not coming to grind their swing. They are coming because it is fun, social, and easy to say yes to.

This is why the model matters.

People are not just “going golfing.” They are going out, and golf happens to be the activity they pick. The facilities that recognize this shift and design around experience, comfort, and social time are the ones seeing stronger loyalty, bigger groups, and more word-of-mouth growth.

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## 2. Define Why People Choose You

Location can get someone to try you once. Being close by or on the way home is enough for that first experiment. After that, people start choosing based on something else entirely: how your place fits into their actual week.

Every facility solves a specific problem for a specific type of customer, whether it was designed intentionally or not. For example:

- Some spaces make beginners feel relaxed and not judged.
- Others become the reliable spot for groups that want food, drinks, and something to do.
- Others become a training base where serious players practice with a clear plan.

The key is figuring out which moment you are trying to own.

Ask yourself: when do people think of us first?

- When they want a place to hang out after dinner?
- When they want a quiet morning session before work?
- When they want coaching and progress tracking?
- When their group needs an easy spot for a birthday or company event?

You do not need to pick only one customer type, but you do need a clear center of gravity. When a facility tries to be everything at once, the experience becomes harder to read. Customers leave feeling like it was “fine” but not quite for them, which is another way of saying they have no strong reason to come back.

Once you understand the role you play in someone’s week, decisions around staffing, hours, pricing, and food and beverage get much simpler. You are not just filling a calendar. You are building for the specific moments you want to own.

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### **3. Design The Experience End To End**

There are two first impressions: the digital one and the physical one. Most operators obsess over the space and forget that customers meet them online first.

#### **Your Digital First Impression**

Your Google Business profile is your real storefront. People read reviews before they look at your menu or your pricing. Collect as many as you can and see them as part of the experience, not just a checkbox.

Pictures matter more than most operators think.

- If you cater to a casual crowd, show real people having fun. Unpolished photos often work better than staged ones.
- If you present yourself as a higher end lounge, your first few photos should signal that immediately. A customer should understand your vibe before they read a single word.

Your website is the next step. It is the digital version of walking through your doors. Navigation should be simple and booking even simpler. Clear paths, fast load times, and a straightforward checkout flow set the tone long before anyone arrives.

From Google to booking, the path should feel like one smooth motion:  
search → website → booking → confirmation.

Automated confirmations and reminders make the whole thing feel organized and trustworthy.

#### **How Golf O’Clock Helps**

Golf O’Clock supports this first impression with automated review requests, clean booking flows, and reminder systems that keep customers engaged without overwhelming them. The goal is to make the online side feel as polished as the space they walk into.

## Your Physical First Impression

The second first impression happens when someone steps through the door. This is where your online story either lines up or falls apart.

If your photos show a high end lounge, but customers walk into bright overhead lighting and folding chairs, the disconnect is immediate. The same is true the other way around. If your online presence feels casual and playful but the space feels stiff and serious, people feel like they walked into the wrong place.

A few clear examples:

- **Sports bar with simulators:** big screens, cold beer, game day energy, groups talking freely, background music.
- **Indoor golf clubhouse:** warm lighting, clean lines, leather seating, clearer focus on the sport itself.
- **Speakeasy style lounge:** dimmer ambience, curated cocktails, smaller plates, slower pace.

None of these is better than the others. What matters is that the physical space matches the expectations you set. Coherence builds loyalty. Inconsistency breaks it.

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## 4. Buildout & Bay Quality

### Why Your Physical Setup Matters More Than You Think

Your simulators are the heart of the experience. But *how* they're installed, the room design, the layout, the dimensions, the lighting, the screen quality, often has a bigger impact on customer satisfaction than the simulator brand itself.

A great buildout makes your space feel intentional, premium, and safe the moment someone walks in. A poorly executed one creates doubt. People hesitate before swinging. Ball flight looks distorted. Lighting feels off. The energy of the room drops.

For operators, this is one of the most overlooked sources of competitive advantage.

## What a High-Quality Buildout Actually Requires

A proper setup comes down to a series of technical choices that most first-time operators underestimate:

- **Ceiling height and bay width** that allow players of all heights to swing comfortably with every club
- **Correct projector throw distance and alignment** so visuals stay crisp and immersive
- **High-quality impact screens and hitting surfaces** that can handle wear without degrading the experience
- **Enough depth between tee and screen** to maintain realistic ball flight
- **Smart spacing between bays** so groups don't feel cramped or unsafe
- **Lighting design** that avoids glare and makes the screen feel like part of the environment

When these elements are done right, players feel confident, relaxed, and willing to stay longer exactly what drives return visits and revenue.

## Where Operators Usually Go Wrong

Most of the issues we see across facilities come back to the same few mistakes:

- Trying to make a low ceiling or narrow room work at full swing speeds
- Using consumer-grade projectors or screens
- Guessing at dimensions instead of planning them
- Under-estimating how much room a bay really needs
- Designing bays in isolation, rather than as part of the overall customer flow

These mistakes don't just create minor friction, they directly affect return rates. When the environment feels improvised or unsafe, people don't come back.

## A Look at a Proven Specialist: OnScreen Sports

In Canada, [On Screen Sports](#) is the leader in golf simulator buildouts, distributing high-quality Golfzon systems and delivering complete turnkey installations. What sets them apart isn't just equipment, it's **their attention to the details that most operators don't even know to ask about.**

They help facility owners make the right decisions from day one:

- Assessing ceiling height, bay width, and room dimensions
- Designing the layout for both accuracy and customer flow
- Installing impact screens, enclosures, hitting mats, and safety padding
- Calibrating projectors and ensuring proper image geometry
- Providing guidance on lighting, spacing, and long-term durability

Their approach helps operators avoid expensive rework and ensures that the experience *feels* premium the moment a customer steps into the bay. For new facilities especially, that kind of expertise prevents the buildout mistakes that quietly limit growth for years.

## Why Buildout Quality is a Growth Lever

A clean, professional buildout communicates something customers feel instantly:

**“This place is legit.”**

It influences:

- **Return rate**
- **Session length**
- **Group size**
- **Pricing tolerance**
- **Food and beverage sales**
- **Reviews and word-of-mouth**

When the room feels good, people trust the experience. When they trust the experience, they stay longer, book more often, and bring friends.

A well-designed simulator bay isn't just a product decision. It's an experience decision, and one that sets the tone for everything else in your facility.

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## 5. Use Food And Beverage As A Revenue Multiplier

Food and beverage is one of the clearest growth levers in indoor golf. According to NGF research, facilities that offer food and beverage see up to a 73 percent increase in revenue per visit. Sessions tend to be longer, groups are larger, and people are more likely to return with friends.

The important part is not just the extra dollars. It is the shift in how people use your space.

When customers can eat, drink, and settle in, they stop thinking of your facility as “a place to rent a simulator” and start seeing it as “a place to go out.” That is a different category in their mind. They are not slotting you next to other golf options. They are slotting you next to bars, entertainment venues, and social experiences. Done well, that is a major advantage.

Whether you are a restaurant adding simulators or a studio adding a kitchen, the shift is the same:

You move from “let’s go play golf” to “let’s go out tonight, and golf fits perfectly into that plan.”

### The Systems Behind It

Food and beverage only works at scale when the experience feels organized. If your POS and booking system do not talk to each other, staff feel the friction. And when staff feel it, customers do too.

Tabs lost between bays, orders sent to the wrong group, delays at the end of the session, three separate systems for the same visit. These are the tiny moments that drain energy from the night and show up quietly in reviews.

Smooth operations need smooth infrastructure.

### How Golf O’Clock Helps

Golf O’Clock integrates directly with Lightspeed POS so reservations and tabs live in one flow. A reservation opens the tab, customers order throughout their session, and see a single clear bill at the end. No manual cross checking, no back and forth between systems. When the tech stack supports the experience, the whole night feels effortless, which is exactly what makes food and beverage such a powerful multiplier for the business.

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## 6. Be Honest About “Passive Income” Facilities

Unmanned facilities have their place, and the idea behind them is attractive. “Open 24/7” and “passive income” sound great in a deck.

In practice, there is no such thing as a hands-off indoor golf business.

Even with full automation, you are still dealing with:

- Customer questions and support
- Cleaning and maintenance
- Simulator issues and hardware failures
- Reviews, reputation, and marketing
- Chargebacks, access problems, and policy disputes

The work does not disappear. It just moves behind the scenes. The 30 percent return rate we see for unmanned models is not a disaster. It is more like the realistic ceiling for a model built entirely on convenience.

### How Golf O’Clock Helps

Golf O’Clock supports unmanned facilities with integrations for door access, simulator launchers, and automated workflows so the operations can run with fewer manual steps. These tools make the model more viable. They do not replace the human attention a business needs to grow.

Automation reduces friction. It does not replace presence.

Even the most streamlined self-serve facility still requires care, consistency, and a plan to stay visible in the market.

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## 7. Stay Top Of Mind In People’s Plans

Getting the experience right is half the game. The other half is being remembered when people are deciding what to do this week.

Indoor golf is still new for a lot of consumers. When people make last minute plans, they default to what they already know: dinner, drinks, a movie, watching the game. Your job is to become one of those automatic options.

This does not require aggressive marketing. It requires steady, thoughtful touchpoints that feel natural.

Use a mix of channels, each with a clear role:

- **Email** for simple updates about leagues, events, seasonal promos, and new features. Inform, do not overwhelm.
- **Text messages** for booking reminders, last minute openings, and offers based on actual visit history. Keep them timely and relevant.
- **Physical mailers** for key moments. A clean postcard with a seasonal league invite or holiday promotion stands out in a way digital content rarely does.
- **Targeted ads** that look and feel like your brand. When past customers see them, they instantly recognize your space. You are just nudging yourself back into their mental rotation.

The goal is to stay present without becoming noise.

You want the thought to be: “We have not been there in a while. Let’s book something this weekend.”

### **How Connect O’Clock Helps**

Connect O’Clock, our marketing platform, runs in the background and syncs with your customer activity so emails, texts, and review requests go out at the right time. It keeps your facility top of mind without adding more manual work to your day.

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## **8. Build A Tech Backbone That Actually Holds**

Behind every strong indoor golf operation is solid software. A booking and management system with real integrations for POS, marketing, and simulator launchers is not a nice extra anymore. It is the foundation.

Integration matters because it removes friction:

- Reservations land in the schedule automatically
- Confirmations and reminders send without staff touching them
- Tabs open when guests arrive and close when sessions end

- Usage data, return visits, and spend patterns all roll into one set of reports

A typical night should look like this:

1. A customer books online.
2. The reservation drops into your calendar with the correct bay, time, and price.
3. A confirmation email fires instantly.
4. Reminder texts go out before arrival.
5. Their tab opens on the POS when they check in.
6. The session ends, the bay closes, and the bill is ready with sim time and food and beverage together.

Staff are not hopping between platforms. They are in the room, talking to customers.

This is where the industry is going: toward operators who anticipate needs before they show up as problems. When competitors look at your website and booking flow just to see what they are missing, that is when you know your tech stack is working.

A well integrated system is no longer just convenient. It is a competitive edge.

### **How Golf O'Clock Helps**

Golf O'Clock brings bookings, POS integrations, marketing workflows, and simulator launchers into one connected platform. Instead of stitching together five tools, operators get one backbone that supports the experience they are trying to create.

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## **9. The Path Forward**

Customer behavior will keep changing, but the core truth stays the same: people want to have a good time.

For some, that means working on their swing. For others, it is sharing drinks with friends while the game plays in the background. For many, it is learning golf for the first time in a place that feels comfortable.

Your success comes down to clarity and consistency.

The facilities that thrive are the ones that:

- Understand their market and choose their positioning intentionally
- Create a coherent experience from first Google search to last drink of the night
- Recognize that customers are paying for the experience, not just the bay
- Build community through personal touches, leagues, and repeat visits
- Use technology to make operations smooth and predictable

Indoor golf is moving from novelty to habit. It is becoming part of people's social routines, training rhythms, and weekend plans. The operators who lean into that reality, and build systems that support it, will define the next chapter of the industry.

Golf O'Clock was built for this future. Our platform supports the facilities that want to turn "let's book a sim" into "let's go to our spot."

The tools exist. The demand is here.

Now the real question is: what do you want your facility to be known for?

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## Sources

1. National Golf Foundation. (2025). "Golf Industry Facts – 2025 Graffis Report." Over one third of the U.S. population (47.2 million Americans) engaged with golf in 2024, a 45 percent increase since 2016.
2. National Golf Foundation. (2025). "The Golf Simulator Opportunity" White Paper. 51 percent of simulator users are non golfers; facilities offering food and beverage see up to a 73 percent revenue increase per visit.