

## Green to Green

SOLON-BASED VERISHOT IS HELPING AMATEUR GOLFERS EVERYWHERE SEE A LITTLE MORE GREEN ON THE FAIRWAYS WITH A HOLE-IN-ONE MONITORING SYSTEM THAT PAYS CASH FOR AN AMAZING SHOT.

BY KYLE SWENSON  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ERIC MULL



"We sell the excitement of playing for a contest," says Dan Quigg (left), CEO of VeriShot (shown with Steve Hildebrant, director of sales).

Under the pitch-perfect Southwestern weather, golf professionals and enthusiasts alike gathered in Las Vegas in August for the PGA Fall Expo, an industry trade show attracting more than 400 apparel and equipment companies and some 4,000 attendees. Capping the three-day event was the expo's golf outing at the Badlands Golf Club.

As golfers reached the eighth tee of the Desperado course, many were surprised to find a little extra hard wiring — a camera was recording their swing. And after finishing the hole, golfers walked into a tent where 32-inch flat screen televisions looped videos of each golfer's tee-shot.

Whether polished and smooth or badly in need of a little extra practice, the swings had been taped by the Solon-based company VeriShot, whose on-site reps quickly learned even average golfers like to see themselves in action.

"By the time golfers finished the hole, we had a monitor showing everyone's swing," says Steve Hildebrandt, VeriShot's director of sales and marketing. "Everyone that walked through gave us their e-mail [address], because they wanted a video of their swing."

Since opening in 2004, VeriShot has developed wireless camera technologies with hopes of spicing up a game that's seen little fundamental change since the first clubs were swung in Scottish fields centuries ago. Originally called Charitee Golf, VeriShot today focuses on providing a hole-in-one monitoring system that awards golfers prizes for close to the pin shots as a way to add value to the daily round of golf.

"We sell the excitement of playing for a contest, winning money or winning prizes," says Dan Quigg, CEO of VeriShot. "But tomorrow there's a whole host of ideas that we have about productizing the video that we're taking of the golfer, using the Web to potentially package it in different ways," including selling it to the golfer for educational purposes.

The concept behind VeriShot was conceived by founder Mike Burkons in 2003. As a student at Cleveland-Marshall College of Law, Burkons believed a monitoring system for holes-in-one might find potential business at golf courses. After winning a COSE contest for business plans, Burkons

found startup investors and went to work developing the technology. Burkons no longer participates in the day to day of the company, but does sit on the board.

But the concept didn't truly begin to gain ground until Quigg entered the picture in 2006 as an investor and adviser. A serial entrepreneur, Quigg knew a good idea when he saw it — despite the fact that he admits he's not much of a golfer personally.



Shale Creek Golf Club in Medina is using VeriShot's solar-powered system.

"I thought the model was sound. The concept made sense to me," he says. "Part of the big test of a product is *do customers want it? Is it attractive?* I've been here two years, and I haven't seen one course yet that has said that it's a bad idea."

The company offers the VeriShot Challenge at no cost to the golf course. Courses charge golfers \$5 a round to participate in the contest, often including that charge into the green fees (VeriShot and the course split the fee). Golfers then receive a ticket with a personal code. On the course, if a golfer nails a hole-in-one or drops a shot within two feet or seven feet, he enters his personal number into a touch pad on the green. Within an hour VeriShot confirms the shot with its footage from

solar-powered cameras at the course.

Shots within seven feet fetch a \$25 gift certificate to the clubhouse, within two feet \$250 and the lucky few who sink a hole-in-one — there have been nine so far this year — walk away with a \$10,000 cash prize. VeriShot pays out all the cash prizes and has awarded more than 200 this year.

Funding has remained a local affair, with VeriShot securing \$200,000 from the North Coast Angel Fund LLC last year, plus additional financial support from JumpStart and more than 40 private individuals.

VeriShot's technology is currently installed in 21 courses throughout the country. As the company continues to aggressively market, it hopes to raise that number to 30 by the end of 2008 and double that by the end of 2009, Quigg says. Quigg and his team are focusing more on fair-weather locales than local courses.

"The most number of rounds you're going to get in this area is 30,000 a year, whereas I go to Las Vegas or the Southeast, I'm going to get 50,000 to 70,000," he says. "We have four in Las Vegas. We just put our first two in Georgia. We have five in California and a couple in Texas."

Reaction among golfers has been positive, according to Ben Keaty, the general manager of Shale Creek Golf Club in Medina, one of Northeast Ohio's most recent VeriShot courses. "Golf is all about entertainment now, and the more you can entertain the golfer on the golf course, the word spreads and the more people want to play your course."

Quigg and his team are focusing on retooling VeriShot's offerings. Although he declines to unveil specifics just yet, Quigg says the company is currently working on a relaunch of its Web site targeted for November. The site will repackage the video of a golfer's swing, hopefully tapping into the enthusiasm displayed on the Las Vegas links in August. The company is also developing a portable unit that can move from course to course, slated for the beginning of 2009.

Whatever direction the developing business plans may steer the company, Quigg is dedicated to adding value to a day at the links for golfers and courses. "We like to say we sell three things: excitement, revenue and promotion," he says. 