

Loft Conversion with a Difference

Manchester Golf Club once had a dilapidated hayloft used for storing junk that should have been thrown away years ago, but a complete transformation has seen the hayloft become a state-of-the-art putting studio, and new revenue stream

First came the swing studio in the ground floor of the old barn at Manchester Golf Club, five years ago. Once the club, along with father-son PGA professional duo of Brian and Scott Connor, had seen the success of the studio, in terms of attracting new golfers into the pro shop and onto the golf course, and bringing with them new profit opportunities, the redundant hayloft above the swing studio was developed into one of the most comprehensive putting studios in the UK.

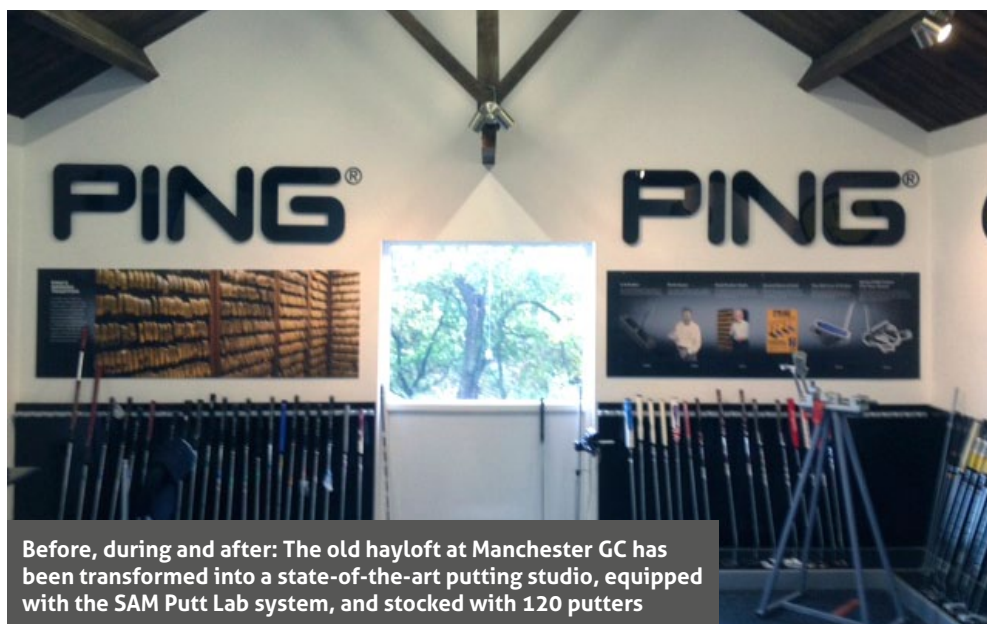
"It was just an old hayloft originally," starts Scott Connor. "It had crooked stairs and an uneven floor, and the club had just used it for storage. Converting the hayloft was a major investment, as we had to level the floor, install a new staircase and the SAM Putt Lab system, and we also invested in a stock of 120 putters.

"It's a long-term investment, but the lab opens up new profit opportunities like custom-

fitting putters, and the sessions we offer can be fitting, tuition or a bit of both, for £49. It brings people into the club from all over the place. Before we renovated the hayloft we wouldn't sell any putters during the winter months at all, but now we do. We used to just forget putters over the winter – people didn't have anywhere to try them out if the weather was bad – so the studio has opened up that opportunity and increased winter sales."

In terms of putter sales, Ping is a dominant force with the Connors' putting studio, and Scott tells GOLF RETAILING that adjustable shafts are proving very popular with his customers.

"Ping putters are doing well this year with the adjustable shafts," he says. "The shaft adds a bit of weight to the putter and they have been really popular. Sometimes we will have a session with a golfer with an adjustable putter, and rather than sell them a new putter, we



Before, during and after: The old hayloft at Manchester GC has been transformed into a state-of-the-art putting studio, equipped with the SAM Putt Lab system, and stocked with 120 putters

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just adjust their existing one. Then the customer is chuffed because they are saving £100 or more for a new putter, and we are okay because the customer has invested in the putting session in the first place, and perhaps they will buy a new grip or weight, or something else in the shop."

Converting Technology into Profit

Manchester GC employed MIA Sports Solutions to provide the technology for the putting studio.

"If a pro has a room, a putting mat and a laptop, and they want to employ the entry level SAM system, the basic system carries a price of £3,100," says MIA Sports Solutions' Andrew Keast. "For that investment, pros would immediately be able to analyse putting strokes and provide this kind of detailed feedback to their customers.

"With the SAM Putt Lab, a simple process of analysing 10 putts will tell the golfer a multitude of information: face aim, face position at impact, consistency, and this is data that starts to tell you exactly what is happening during the putting stroke.

"If a golfer wants to compare different putters, the system tells the golfer which putter they hit most consistently from the centre of the clubface, so ultimately it finds the best putter for any individual. It is clear for golfers to see how their putting will be improved, and so the retailer is presented with a great sales opportunity. If golfers can see, graphically, that they are hitting the ball from the middle, and that their consistency has risen from 75% to 88%, that has got to be a big confidence boost.

"If pros are looking to bring in a camera, a couple screens and lights, then for £7,000 they would be buying a very comprehensive putting system. That revenue could come from tuition, putter evaluations or by increasing prices for a higher level of service. We have calculated that

it would take 24 months to pay back a £7,000 investment by increasing revenue earning time by two and a half hours a week. That's a pretty good payback for that kind of investment.

"It takes 15 minutes for a golfer to receive scientific analysis to show which of three putters is best suited to their game, and that should lead to a sale."



Studio analysis: The SAM Putt Lab system at MIA Sports Solutions' TechExcellence facility near Leeds



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