

Questions



With Jon Watters, founding partner of Foresight Sports

By Lisa Goulian

Foresight Sports burst onto the golf scene in 2010, introducing more advanced and affordable camera-based technology to launch monitors and simulators. Founding partner Jon Watters explains why this technology has revolutionized the category and how his company is extending golf's appeal to a tech savvy generation.

1 What is the major difference between radar and camera-based technology when it comes to launch monitors and simulators, and why do you think camera-based is better?

Watters: The proximity to the ball and club, and the ratio of measurements vs. calculations obtained from each. Our stereoscopic cameras measure all of the ball's flight characteristics, and all of the club's characteristics through

impact with the ball at launch. Those measurements are obtained in very close proximity to the ball and club in the launch zone, giving them greater acuity. Radar, conversely, must track nearly all of the ball's flight down field to return data but must calculate many of the values that are not measured. With our camera system, 14 characteristics of ball and club in action are measured with the industry's most precise tolerances. Whereas radar must calculate numerous characteristics, including spin axis, and cannot directly measure any of the clubface characteristics at impact – such as face angle, degrees of loft and lie, the point of impact and clubhead rotation.

With respect to indoor golf simulation, as ball flight is arrested by a screen within three to four meters of impact, radar is unable to track the golf ball throughout its entire flight, thereby reducing the quality of its calculations. GC2 smart camera technology provides the

Foresight Sports revolutionizes launch monitors, simulators



When Foresight Sports uses the copyrighted slogan "Game Changer" in its advertising and marketing materials, the San Diego, California-based company isn't only referring to the way its launch monitors and

simulators can help your golf game.

Foresight has revolutionized these product categories since making its debut five years ago, bringing camera-based technology into a market that had been dominated by radar – and helping drive down the pricing of these products dramatically.

"We introduced technology that matched the accuracies established by radar outdoors, while greatly exceeding the accuracies indoors, all at a lower price that wasn't there before 2010," says Scott Werbelow, president of Foresight Sports. "Prior to our launch in 2010, you could get good technology, but it was really expensive." In fact, the top radar system at the time cost around \$30,000, while the other market leader offered a unit for between \$15,000 and \$20,000.

Compare this to Foresight's initial price of \$6,000, which eventually drove the competitors' pricing to under \$10,000 – even as Foresight's rose to \$6,700 per unit.

"It's difficult to bring new technology to the market and challenge the existing technology, but even more so when you consider our competitors' prices dropped significantly, while ours actually went up about 10 percent," Werbelow says.

It's tough to argue with the numbers: the company, founded by partners Werbelow, Jon Watters and Scott Wilson and later joined by Chief Technology Officer Chris Kiraly, has grown from six employees in the startup year of 2009 to 40 today. The first year they sold 800 units; at press time, they were expecting the total for 2014 to be around 3,000 units sold.

same readings indoors and outdoors, and is the most complete and accurate simulation experience on the market today.

2 When you use the words “game changer” in your marketing/advertising, what exactly do you mean?

Watters: We used the term “game changer” in reference to our GC2 technologies based on four key features:

- Portable and quick – With setup at less than one minute from storage to acquiring shot data, and instantaneous feedback as shot data is reported in less than half of a second.
- Easy and intuitive – Our green light/red light status lets users know when it's time to hit and how to move the golf ball into the ready zone intuitively. The information presented in the daylight viewable screen is easy to read and understand.
- Accurate and reliable – The day-in, day-out performance of our products have exceeded expectations, with the unique ability to measure every shot – from short putts to long drives, and easy chips to the highest flop shots. No other technology can match this consistency and range of measures.
- Affordable and versatile – Priced so professionals can make the most of their opportunities, whether indoors or outdoors, without compromise.

When we came to market, there was nothing that could boast all of these features in one product. Five years later with more than 7,000 devices in the field, we can still say it's a game changer.

3 Why is the kiosk an important new development for your company?

“That's pretty meteoric growth,” says Watters. “We started with the GC2 Smart Camera System, have since added HMT Head Measurement Technology and every year we're expanding on those technologies and will always be looking to bring something new and innovative to the market.”

The latest is a performance kiosk that is an ultra-portable, touch screen driven, simulator on wheels that can be moved easily allowing golfers to practice, compete and play a simulated game of golf from many different locations. That means a golf facility can use it indoors in the colder months and outdoors during the season.

In addition to golf facilities, Foresight's technology is also being applied in the research and development labs of golf OEMs; in many of

Watters: The industry has adopted the \$30,000 to \$50,000 indoor golf simulator for everything from entertainment to clubfitting. However, a key limitation is that they are space-hogs confined to one location and only indoors. The major achievement of the kiosk is that it takes all of the simulator features and shrinks it into one small, easy to move package that can be taken anywhere – from the range, to the golf course to your own back yard. At less than \$15,000 it's an impressive piece of engineering and certainly fits the mold of another game-changing product for the golf industry.

4 Do you think Foresight can bring more young people into the game?

Watters: As a company that serves the golf industry, we think it's our responsibility to help grow the game and our products are designed to capture every type of golfer – whether a beginner or someone who plays and works in the field every day. With respect to younger golfers, our products have a digital aspect that resonates well with those who have grown up with digital devices and expect technology to be a part of what they do for recreation and beyond. Our interactive software engages players with data, game-play, and cloud capabilities that attract new players to the game, while fostering their improvement along the way.

5 What is the single most important thing Foresight Sports has contributed to the game of golf?

Watters: In one word – innovation. We have chosen to innovate rather than copy other technologies in an already crowded market. From the beginning, we have engineered products that perform in ways not previously available. This remains our company's vision and mission. ■



the game's premier testing facilities, including the USGA's; by top golf retailers; by companies providing amenities for their employees; by event coordinators using the technology for special events; and in the homes of avid golfers who want to use it with their friends. If you need further validation, 80 PGA Tour players have purchased the products.

Foresight appears poised for even greater growth, as with the recent acquisition of their critically acclaimed graphics engine, the company is now what Watters likes to call “vertically integrated.” This means all Foresight products, software included, are now designed, engineered and manufactured under one roof — all in the U.S. — which puts them in a position to be able to respond to customer needs and react faster to market demands and changes.

As for a lack of growth in golf participation, Watters says Foresight's technology can only help, as it addresses complaints often heard about the game, including lack of accessibility, cost, time commitment and dress codes. Not to mention technology attracts the younger demographic, the future of golf. “If it attracts new people to the game, eventually they'll get out on the course,” explains Watters. “We're not trying to say we're replacing golf. We're working in conjunction with golf courses, which can transition to simulators in the colder months and give people a reason to come out in the off months. For the younger generation, this satisfies their need for technology and feedback, and it gives PGA Professionals a way to continue to create additional revenue.”