

Recycling Innovation

From an original concept made from beer cans and rebar, to a company with a 20-year history of quality and performance in the golf industry

Q&A with DryRainge President, Bruce Rempel With Editorial Director, Tony Starks

Golf Range: There's an interesting story behind the first unit, tell us about that.

Bruce Rempel: *The first DryRainge unit we actually made out of rebar and Budweiser cans. We were just trying to get the initial shape of it. I'm also in the construction business, so we got a front-end loader and we had one guy in the bucket and the other guy threatening the needle with the Budweiser cans and rebar – using the bucket on the loader to create the curved shape. Essentially that's how the first DryRainge unit was born. We had an idea of what we wanted, and if we had to drink a few Budweisers for the cause, we were prepared to take one for the team.*

GR: Where is that original unit now?

BR: *The original unit I think has been recycled, but the first unit we actually built from sustainable materials is still kicking around. The first unit we ever manufactured, we sent a picture of it and the design to David Leadbetter – who at the time, 20 years ago or so, was the Golf Digest teacher of the year. He responded, saying if we were serious about this and we wanted his help, then we should come down to his house at Lake Nona (Orlando, Florida) and set it up for him. So the first unit we ever made was a two-person unit that we sent down to David. Myself and another business partner went down to his place and set it up for his personal use. That's the story of the first unit that wasn't made of beer cans and rebar.*

GR: How did that manifest into a full-blown company?

BR: *After the Budweiser rebar escapade, we decided that maybe wasn't the best way to do things. So we enlisted some engineers to help us with the design. The first concept was similar to a collapsible baby stroller, so it could go up and fold down on windy days. The problem with that was there were too many moving parts, which presented some structural issues in terms of how sturdy the product was. That idea sat for almost two years before I decided we should give it another go. There's an inventors program provided by the Canadian government, so we talked to them and were able to get some further engineering insights through that program. Ultimately, that led to the design you see today. We got it patented shortly after that. It's been a neat experience to take it from mind to market, and still be around to tell the tale. Although it hasn't been without trials and tribulations. The first check we received was approximately 18 years ago, so about 20 years ago we started on this journey.*

GR: So how did the relationship with Leadbetter pan out?

BR: *Right away David liked the product, so we entered into a sponsorship agreement. He ended up moving to ChampionsGate, where the David Leadbetter Golf Academy is still based, with our product. It was the opening of that facility at the time with him and Greg Norman, who designed the course. It's funny, I remember we were setting up the DryRainge unit and Greg Norman dropped down in an apache helicopter. We had saved up enough money just to get down there, so we were kind of sleeping in our car. The contrast was pretty apparent, needless to say! But it was a cool experience. David helped us a great deal, and stayed with us for the first five years or so. When we went to the PGA Show in Orlando, the first couple of years he came and would be at our booth signing copies of his book. While eventually we went separate ways, David was a huge help in getting us started in the industry.*

GR: You mentioned trials and tribulations, what are some of the biggest challenges you face as a company today, both from a production and sales stand point?

BR: *With production, we have a lot of capacity for growth. From the sales perspective, one of our biggest challenges is getting more people to know about the product. We need to make a more dedicated marketing effort. We've been at Demo Day and at PGA Shows, and when people see the quality and the strength of the structure we get very positive responses. With our product you have to see it, touch it, use it to really understand the benefits and how well it works. We're trying to address that right now by getting involved with PGA Magazine and the various conferences they host – we want to expose ourselves to more and more PGA Professionals in a face-to-face setting.*

GR: What are your largest markets? Or where are the majority of your customers based?

BR: *New York is pretty good for us. It's hot in the summer, yet they have a lot of sporadic rain. So we sold quite a few there, and then our sales started to grow because other professionals would see it at their buddy's facility and they got to touch it and see the quality. In addition, Florida and California have also been big for us in the United States. We do well in places where there's a lot of sunlight, because our product blocks 95 percent of UV rays – which is very important for teaching professionals who spend hours at a*

The original concept for the Canadian-based company, DryRainge, was built from Budweiser cans and metal rods. The real question: Why not Molson?



time outside. We're protecting the guys and girls who are in the trenches. Being a Canadian company, we also have a strong following in British Columbia. They get a lot of rain, so for teaching pros there the benefit means not having to cancel lessons because of rain. Because that's been a good area for us, we're looking to start seeding units in Oregon, Washington and the Pacific Northwest where there's also heavy rainfall over the course of the year. We produce in Canada, but we drop ship all over the world. The UK has also been a good market for us.

GR: Being a Canadian-based company, are you anticipating any increase in import taxes or a change to your business at all with the new administration of American government?

BR: *I was a little concerned about it initially. But from what I've been reading and what I understand, the changes are less impactful than many people first imagined. I look for our customer base in the U.S. to continue to grow and for interactions between Canadian businesses and American customers – and vice versa – to continue being positives for both sides.*

GR: How can range covers help facilities attract more golfers and grow revenue?

BR: *Our goals are to help facilities prevent the loss of lesson revenue because of weather, as well as protect teaching professionals and golfers from the beating sun. Courses can also earn more bucket revenue by offering shaded hitting areas. If it's a hot summer day, and someone has to choose between hitting in sun or in the shade – it's an easy choice. From the private club perspective, it certainly adds value to the range, but it also prevents the teaching pro from having to cancel lessons due to weather. From the teaching professional perspective, the range is their office. We don't want their office to be dangerous, and we don't want them to have to close it down because of weather. And from the consumer point of view, the course is delivering added value when they don't have to reschedule a lesson or practice in uncomfortable conditions (blaring sun or in the rain).*

