



“Nothing matches the accuracy of the 3trak system.”

James Day, Managing Director, Urban Golf

Urban Golf

Urban Golf is an indoor golf venue based in the centre of London currently running three Indoor Golf venues in Soho, Smithfield and High Street Kensington. The company was founded in 2004 by Golf Professional James Day. After the initial placement of another simulator product, aboutGolf Europe now has a total of 22 simulators placed across the three sites, performing as both training and entertainment units while driving Urban Golf's ability to create a larger audience and greater profits through innovation.



James has kindly agreed to discuss the Urban Golf story in greater detail and focus on why he believes aboutGolf is the only simulator suitable for commercial success.

The Story

Urban Golf was founded nearly 10 years ago in 2004. When we started the golf simulators we selected were evolved to a point and I would describe that stage in their development as, just, about good enough to practice effectively on. At this time there were still quite a few infra red club head tracking systems available, I consider these systems as first generation. Club head tracking simulators are hugely limited in their application because they are only able to suggest the reaction of the golf ball depending on the way the club head is moving.

As you would expect we did a good deal of research in 2003 and opted for a simulator functioning with infra red sensors in between the golfer and the screen, reading the golf ball's speed and trajectory as it crossed each web. The system attempted to read spin by taking a third reading as the ball rebounded from the screen; while this did add to performance, it was not a true reflection of the outdoor game in all situations!

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We opened Urban Golf Soho in 2004, the business was successful but as a golfer and as a businessman I felt there was huge potential if the simulators were improved. By better, I mean more engaging in terms of graphics and game play but, most importantly, more accurate in its ball flight readings. I was personally in a unique position to assess the technology through my work in the custom equipment industry; I had been using launch monitors since their introduction and, in 2006, we began using a camera driven launch monitor for our fittings at Urban Custom Clubs. The launch monitor used by the Urban Golf team is designed by a close friend of mine, a leading expert in camera tracking for military and industry. Offering us a unique insight into what simulators could achieve and how it could be done. Most importantly, we knew very early on that it was possible to track a golf ball with complete accuracy indoors using cameras.

Since Urban Golf's inception I have been fanatical in making sure we know everything happening in ball tracking and golf simulator technologies. This has involved building relationships and attending trade shows world wide. When a product has been of interest, I have visited the companies head quarters to fully understand what they are trying to achieve. For us it has always been essential that we are working with the right technological partner.

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I met Bill Bales of aboutGolf a year after we opened our first site. I got along well with him and found it refreshing to speak with someone who shared our belief and passion in the indoor golf model. At this time aboutGolf was using a radar tracking system behind the simulator screen. From the start I was impressed with aboutGolf's graphics and course reproduction, far better than what we were using. The radar tracking was far more advanced but hindered as it requires at least half the flight of the golf ball to deliver accurate and functional ball data indoors. In truth I do not believe radar systems function any better than the basic infra red system indoors. The search continued but I made sure I stayed in touch with Bill. A couple of years later at the Orlando Golf Show Bill showed me the first prototype of the 3trak system and it was very exciting. I have played golf all my life and have been a PGA member since I was 18 year old and on the 3trak system, even in the early stages, I could shape the ball as I would out doors. Even today there is not another simulator which allows this.

At this stage there was still work to be done for aboutGolf to have 3trak ready for commercial installation, it needed to be robust and function on all shots. This is a task in my opinion which has been hugely underestimated by other simulator companies. I can remember how much work it took to make the system read short lob shots perfectly and to cope with the wide variety of shots that would be played on the system. I visited aboutGolf in Ohio four times over the next couple of years, as well as other simulator firms, and one of the things that struck me was that if other people considering buying a golf simulator saw their research and development department compared to the other firms, no one else would sell a simulator. At this time they had a team of engineers working every day on tracking golf balls using 3trak, I had great fun watching them firing golf balls out of a specially designed cannon which could actually generate precise launch and spin conditions. They had a range with tracking devices positioned up to 300+ yards away so they could cross check the balls flight in reality against the system readings.

“I do all my practice on the aboutGolf system”

In 2009 we installed eight aboutGolf 3trak systems in to the brand new Urban Golf Kensington branch. For us it was a huge decision to change, we had been successful with our old simulators and failure was unthinkable given the capital expenditure. I will always remember the team here all walking in a few days after opening with their own clubs and golf shoes. This never happened on the old systems and at that point I knew we had made the right call. At the end of 2010 we managed to change the sims at our other two sites to aboutGolf, again a huge expenditure, and I think proof of how much difference 3trak technology had made to our business.

I do all my practice on the aboutGolf system, I play at least three times per week, even in the summer, and they are truly an exciting edition to the development of golf at a time when time poor lifestyles are making it hard for people to play outdoors. I continue to monitor the other simulator companies and nothing matches the accuracy of the 3trak system. A few firms have developed camera tracking systems but because of the time I have spent learning about ball tracking, I can test them very effectively and not one of them match the realism across ALL shots of the aboutGolf system.