



and you're automatically assigned points that appear on the television screen at your bay. The farther the target and the closer you hit to its center, the more points you get. Think darts. (*See sidebar above, "Fun & Games"*)

Add loud Top-40 music, a menu that wouldn't seem out of place in a New York City gastropub, a sleek design, and out pops TopGolf—a self-styled "sports-entertainment facility" that's ascending through the golf industry unlike anything in recent history.

Here for a visit, I quickly become consumed with competing against myself in the series of games. Pretty soon one hour turns into two, and then to three, then I join a group of guys about my age in the bay next to mine. "This is my first time here, and I was skeptical because I wasn't sure how this would be different from a regular range," says Adrian Frasca, a 25-year-old software developer from Austin.

"But it is. This would be a great place to take a date. Well, not if I'm trying to show off. Maybe for a third date or something."

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As the music grows louder and the sun inches lower, the beers start flowing more freely. It doesn't take long for things to get a little fuzzy.

Different-colored lights start to illuminate the 11 targets scattered across the range. And the weather is perfect. I remember a Miley Cyrus song, and something about duck hooks. Wait, how many points for hitting the third-closest circle in the burgundy target? Whatever. One more round for everyone.

THE MORNING AFTER

I wake the next morning to find my golf clubs strewn across my hotel-room floor, and a receipt in my pocket for what I later learned was TopGolf's "Chip 'N' Fluff": five chocolate-chip cookies and three cotton candies. I don't see any leftovers. I'm sure it was delicious.

This scene, one of me stumbling out of bed pitifully grasping for water and aspirin, probably wasn't what Steve and Dave Jolliffe envisioned when they conceived TopGolf in the late 1990s. The identical twins from



we wanted to tear down that image."

The menu, the music, the design, even the lighting—all of it was reimagined to cater to a younger, more vibrant, more diverse demographic. The management team introduced "X Factor"-style hiring auditions, telling applicants to construct potential menus, events and even business strategies on the spot.

The hiring auditions include solo performances, where applicants have a set time to impress a panel of judges. One applicant rapped the entire theme song from "The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air." Another talked about her hopes and dreams. A third belly-danced with a samurai sword that she brought with her to the audition. All were hired.

"That sword-waving belly dancer exemplifies exactly what TopGolf is about," says Tom Leverton, a former FedEx executive who has been TopGolf's CEO since last year. "We want to hire people who are creative, energetic and often quirky, because all of that results in great ideas."

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Less than a year after changing ownership, the TopGolf in Allen, just outside of Dallas, generated more than \$1 million in revenue in four weeks, the first time any of the sites had hit that level. The continuing spike in sales is directly correlated to a shift in the business model: Under the Jolliffe brothers, TopGolf generated the majority of its revenue from the games. Today, food and beverage drive about 60 percent of the business.





course," Leverton says, adding that more than 60 percent of the TopGolf visitors are new to the sport. "We're breaking down all those barriers of entry that surround golf."

So far, because most of its facilities are so new, any evidence that TopGolfers are migrating to "regular" golf is mostly anecdotal. Canvass the range and the general consensus is they will, once they improve.

'LIKE AN ADULT'S PLAYGROUND'

Kelly Anne Johnson is a short, attractive, 24-year-old blonde—the kind of woman you'd expect to see in a television show about Texas. It's Friday night, and she is wearing a tight, black TopGolf shirt as she hops from bay to bay, betting people koozies and Mardi Gras-like beads, Tweeting, Instagramming, laughing and joking, all drumming-up interest for tomorrow's big "holiday"—National Margarita Day.

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"It's kind of like an adult's playground," says Johnson, whose official title is "TopGolf Marketing Champion." She has worked at TopGolf Austin since it opened last May. "The best are the really drunk people, because they always bet they can hit every shot."

I catch Johnson as she walks toward the end of the third-floor range, nearing a group who tweeted at TopGolf's handle a few moments earlier. Each of the 102 bays is packed with people in groups of five, six, seven and more. The shortest wait for a bay today is almost three hours.

As she approaches the bay she whips out a flier for National Margarita Day and starts talking to the group.

"How old are y'all?" she asks.

"Seventeen," one of them responds.

She quietly slips the flier back in her bag, moves her hand past a koozie and grabs a few TopGolf key chains.

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After the key chains are distributed to the happy high schoolers, Johnson heads toward a party in a bay hosted by a platinum member.

Platinum members pay \$250 per month for a host of bonus amenities, among them discounted drinks, higher-quality rental clubs, a staff member whose job is to tend to their every need, and, perhaps most important, the ability to skip the line. That means that on a night like tonight, they walk into the first bay that becomes available, waiting behind only other platinum members. That three-hour line suddenly becomes about 15 minutes.

"It's kind of like my generation's bowling," says Cory Brymer, the 32-year-old host of the group, "except it's



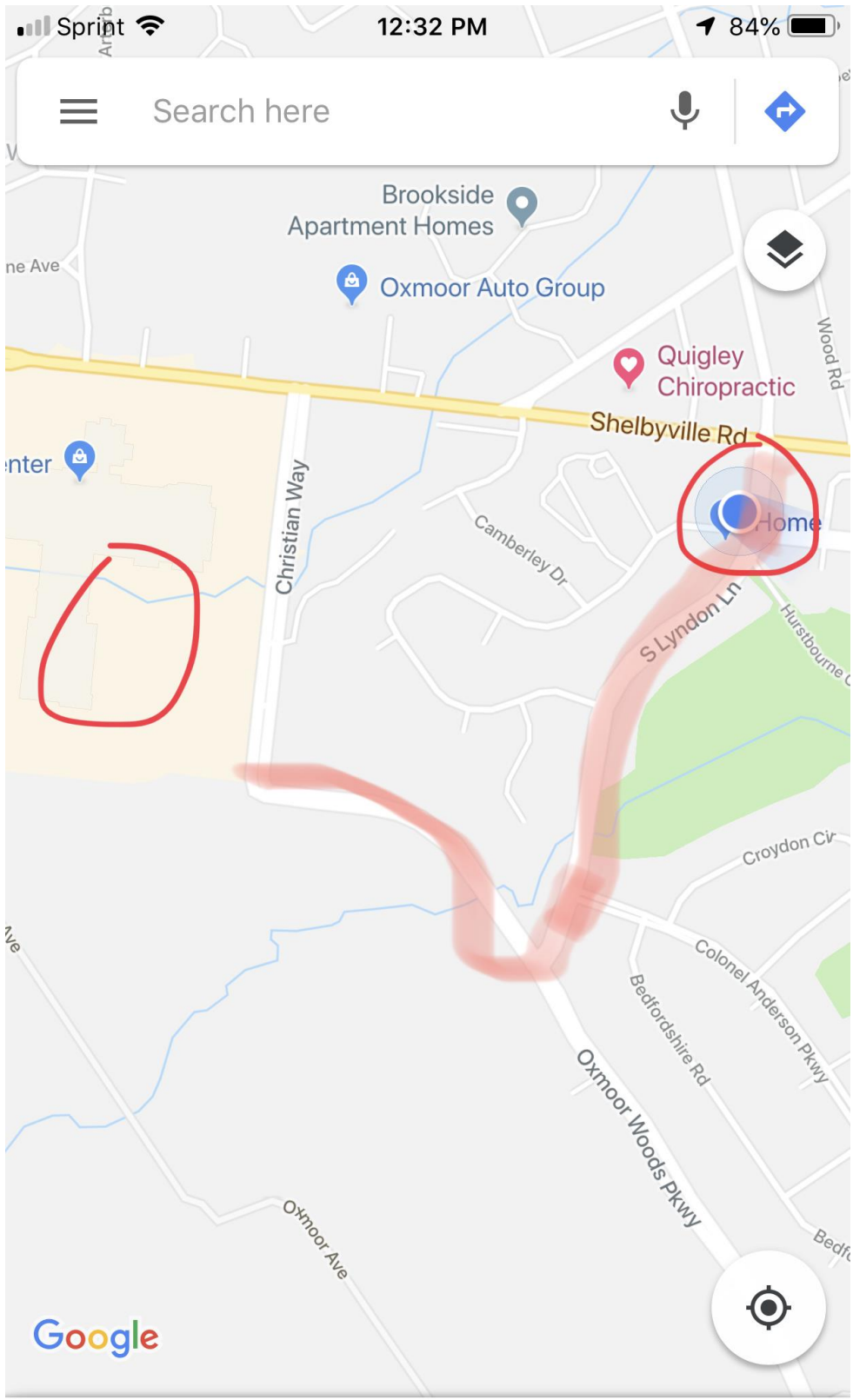


Not Your Grandfather's Driving Range

With bright lights, thumping music and a smoking-hot bar scene, fast-growing TopGolf might be just what this stuffy game needs

By [Luke Kerr-Dineen](#)
Photos by [Brian Finke](#)





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