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The USGA is adopting AI and shaping how golfers interact with the game

The United States Golf Association pushes the boundaries of AI technology and uses its expansive golf data to help a growing community access the sport's rules with speed and accuracy.

TEEING UP A STRATEGY FOR **AI** ADOPTION AND ENHANCING BRAND TRUST

THE SITUATION

Humans have played golf, in one form or another, for hundreds of years. Artificial intelligence (AI) is just getting started. What role will it play in golf's future? Given the technology's vast potential, the United States Golf Association (USGA), a leading voice in golf since 1894, was eager to discover how it could implement AI to enhance golfers' and fans' access to and understanding of the sport's rules.

As a proud sponsor and trusted advisor, Deloitte has been at the forefront with the USGA, helping to build seamless, user-friendly experiences for golfers and fans, including [the USGA App built by Deloitte](#). Now, the organizations are engaged in a joint exploration of AI's potential to drive new digital, data-based experiences for the USGA.

The USGA's Rules team and Deloitte identified and advanced an opportunity to use AI to create a scalable way for the organization to convey the official rules of golf to the tens of millions who play the game. As the organizations discussed potential solutions, it became clear they could leverage each other's highly specialized knowledge and unique assets. Beyond having a firm understanding of the AI market edge, Deloitte brought to the project advanced tech capabilities that could render the organizations' shared vision into a tangible reality. The USGA had a team of subject-matter experts with an unparalleled understanding of the rules of golf, coupled with a proprietary database of years and years of past rules inquiries from golfers across the country.

USGA Rules team members realized almost immediately that while off-the-shelf AI engines might be able to provide a response to golfers' questions, they couldn't answer those questions with a level of accuracy equal to or greater than their own rules experts. Together, the USGA and Deloitte created a Rules AI tool, a bespoke query-and-response tool for users to ask a rules question and have confidence they were receiving the correct answer because it was based only on trusted, timely and verified USGA data.



THE SOLVE

Historically, golfers have learned the rules of the game in a variety of ways. In the United States, new golfers may have learned basic rules through conversations with a local golf pro, or from fellow players while on the course, while others may have sought out official materials such as a hard copy of *The Rules of Golf* book from the USGA. *The Rules of Golf* was formatted for the eye, with indentations, italics, and other meaningful elements.

While these provide context that may help a reader understand the principle behind a rule, they don't translate well to supporting a data science solution that's enhanced by information organized in a machine-readable format. The USGA—and *only* the USGA—had another important asset: thousands of rules queries addressed by its specialists over the years. This proprietary data asset was an integral component for the AI solution architecture, providing a deep understanding of specific golf rules through inquiries by everyday golfers and rules officials and accurate responses provided by USGA rules experts.

Take, for example, a question that arises frequently when a ball is moved:
Do I play it as it lies?

Well, that depends on why it moved, who moved it, and what factors may have caused the ball to move. These might be nuances, but they're also important details needed to inform an accurate application of the rules.

The Deloitte team included avid golfers and people who had never played. Despite varying golf knowledge, they had strong data science skills and an ability—informed by [Deloitte Industry Advantage™](#)—to implement AI at the enterprise level to create effectiveness and efficiency. They also had deep experience helping organizations transform their strategic visions into value. To accelerate impact for the USGA, the Deloitte team's first task was an exploratory data analysis of the USGA's treasure trove of data so the Rules AI tool could learn from it, and the database could be integrated into the foundation of the USGA's growing digital ecosystem and leveraged for new value.

This included careful consideration of the terminology used in *The Rules of Golf*, as it often differs from user queries, which may be more conversational, or which may require additional clarification to resolve, such as whether a question relates to stroke play versus match play.

Working with the raw data holistically helped the team get to the crux of each rule: What does it mean? What constitutes an amendment versus a clarification? And how should the tool treat this information?

The USGA aspired to integrate the Rules AI tool with existing platforms. In addition to specific requirements for scalability and security, the USGA called for a level of accuracy that could match or exceed the answers of its own subject matter experts, and it aimed for near-real-time responses. To meet those goals, Deloitte equipped the USGA's rules tool with transparent “chain of thought” reasoning that identifies the assumptions guiding the AI response. This helps users recognize that an answer may not be wrong so much as missing key information, so they can backtrack and provide a sufficiently comprehensive question. The USGA viewed this AI version of “showing your work” as a game changer that illuminated a path toward achieving the high standard of accuracy set forth.

Then, Deloitte worked with the USGA to use better prompt engineering, like editor notes, so internal users could understand how to ask better questions and receive better answers in return. For the USGA, the high standard of accuracy wasn't about advancing technology but about maintaining the trust golfers have in the USGA, the information it provides and the rules it has stewarded since 1894.

Once the USGA and Deloitte felt confident in the rules response-generation tool's technical feasibility they developed a pilot that enabled AI to respond to email queries, which USGA subject matter experts reviewed and refined for accuracy before sending the reply to the user. This work provided an opportunity to further train the AI tool for future implementations by the USGA.

This “learning” has taken place under conditions that don't require an immediate response, unlike a chatbot that needs to react within a few seconds. Ongoing learning and enhancement of the database can continue to increase the tool's accuracy. Even at this early stage, the USGA saw the potential efficacy of the tool, which helped advance the decision to unlock future data-driven opportunities with Deloitte continuing to drive the data science.

TRANSPARENT REASONING BUILDS TRUST WHILE IT MAKES THE RULES CLEARER

THE IMPACT

The successful proof of concept enabled the USGA and Deloitte to validate that the Rules AI tool could provide high levels of accuracy as well as guardrails for questions that may require additional clarification. In the future, the technology has the potential to enable a golfer in Alabama, Connecticut, Hawaii or any other location to pull out a mobile device and access real-time, highly accurate responses to their rules questions. This work is helping advance the USGA's [long-term vision](#) for making the game's rules more accessible while serving as a trusted steward of golf and advancing its impact.

The customized customer service query-and-response model Deloitte built for the USGA could be applicable for any number of organizations that rely on specialized industry knowledge and regulatory components. Their queries, feedback, and reference materials might once have been filed away in a cabinet. That no longer needs to be the case, and Deloitte is helping the USGA and other clients leverage their expertise and democratize access to it.

An organization's expert-level knowledge may be in a variety of formats, from text documents and emails to social media posts or videos. AI can help turn this unstructured data into accessible, relevant information an organization and its constituents may need, whether that's to fix a home appliance, better understand innovative medical technologies, or—just maybe—lower their golf handicap.



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CHAD DEWEESE

Principal
Deloitte Consulting LLP
cdeweese@deloitte.com
+1 678 896 1470



BRANDON MUIR

Specialist Master
Deloitte Consulting LLP
bramuir@deloitte.com
+1 980 376 4045



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