

CONSTRUCTION

A Tangled Web

You've got courts, you've got questions... just don't rely on the internet for answers. Go right to the experts.

BY MARY HELEN SPRECHER

One of the great things about the internet is the amount of information it has put at our fingertips. Want some esoteric battery you can't find in a store? Go to Amazon. Need pet food delivered? Go to Chewy.

But one of the not-so-great things about the web is the same thing that makes it great: It has put a world of information at our fingertips—but that information, to put it kindly, is not always accurate.

Go to YouTube and you'll see D-I-Y videos for everything you can possibly think of. When it comes to the racquet sports industry, you can check Google and YouTube and find all kinds of information about how to fix or maintain a tennis court, or to add lines to an existing space to create smaller courts.

And that's where people are getting into trouble. Club employees are following YouTube videos and putting down tape on tennis courts to temporarily mark lines for other sports—but when they pull up that tape later, they discover the surface coating has been irreparably damaged. People are trying to fill in cracks on courts using everything from driveway products to toothpaste to paint. They're buying LED lights from pop-up ads and getting shoddy equipment manufactured outside the country and not backed up by proper customer support.

See what I'm getting at? We're starting to bypass in-person conversations and expert relationships in favor of taking the word of Google or YouTube. You're a businessperson: In what universe does that sound like a good idea?

Courts represent a sizeable investment. You want the best return on that investment, and to get it, you have to create relationships with actual people, not online entities.

Court contractors are a great example of the people you need to contact instead. They are steeped in their profession. They work on courts every single day. They build them, they repair them, they improve them and all year long, they counsel owners on the best course of action for whatever situation they're facing.

The American Sports Builders Association (ASBA), the national organization for design professionals, builders and suppliers of materials and equipment for athletic facilities, has a full list of members that can be accessed free from its website, www.sportsbuilders.org. It also has a voluntary certification program that includes the designation of Certified Tennis Court Contractor (CTCB)—as well as a certificate program for those who work on pickleball courts. It also has publications and other services for those who want more information from a verifiable source.

Look at it this way: If you sustained an injury on the court and it required surgery, you wouldn't D-I-Y that surgery or have it done by someone who wasn't a board-certified specialist. You probably wouldn't want parents to turn to random YouTube videos, rather than to certified coaches, to teach their kids how to serve or hit a backhand.

So don't settle for less with your tennis courts.

If you want advice, don't rely solely on the internet. Instead, form actual relationships with the experts in their profession. It's a path that, once taken, you won't regret. ■

RSI Contributing Editor Mary Helen Sprecher is the managing editor of Sports Destination Management. She has been a technical writer for more than 40 years with the ASBA, and has written for a variety of magazines in the sports and fitness industry.

We welcome opinions and comments. Email peter@acepublishinggroup.com.

