

A man in a blue and black polo shirt and dark trousers stands on a lush green golf course. He is holding a blue and black POGO sensor horizontally across his chest with his right hand. The sensor has a black cylindrical top with the POGO logo and a blue tube with three prongs at the end. In his left hand, he holds a small green object. The background features palm trees and a golf cart.

# Precision and Perfection in Thailand: A CASE STUDY

**POGO**®



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## Abstract

This case study condenses a series of interviews with Golf Course Superintendent Brian Distel and General Manager John Blanch of Thai Country Club near Bangkok, Thailand.

- The golf club has always struggled with high salinity due to their location and sources of water.
- The color-coded Visual Insight reports permit Brian to instruct his staff to target only the stress spots indicated on the reports.
- Automated irrigation is no longer used, in favor of targeted hand-watering only. This has saved 20% on electricity costs.
- Despite the salinity challenges, the condition of the turf on the golf course is now consistently excellent, with the course able to host a major tournament within 2 weeks.
- POGO provides peace-of-mind when Brian and John are away because they can see data being collected through the cloud-based app, and can remotely see that the proper actions have been taken based on early morning readings.
- Members and guests consistently re-

port high satisfaction with the turf conditions.

- Brian and John have seen a steady increase in turf quality since acquiring POGO two years ago.
- Being able to see problems coming before symptoms appear saves the team time, effort and money.





## Introduction

In September of 2016 we received a letter from John Blanch, General Manager of Thai Country Club in Bangkok. John wanted us to know that he was an emphatic supporter of POGO. In the letter John described the salt issues on his greens which were due to the poor quality of water they were using. After purchasing the POGO system in May 2016 he could see the effects of the high salinity in real time, which was invaluable in notifying his staff exactly when to flush the greens to reduce the salinity levels. With “immediate and positive” results from this tool, his team was now able to react to the information and take preventative measures before any visible deterioration occurs.

In October of 2018, John invited us to Thai Coun-

try Club to speak with his team about how POGO has helped him reduce his electricity costs and maintain consistently high-performing green conditions which have increased guest satisfaction in the last few years.

One of Thailand’s most prestigious golf courses, Thai Country Club is just under an hour outside of Bangkok. The picturesque course is renowned for its immaculate conditions, a neoclassical design and its variety of holes along with an abundance of water as well as flora and fauna.

The award-winning club is regularly voted one of the top clubs in Asia and has hosted numerous international and domestic tournaments featuring the world’s best golfers.

While John hired Brian as Thai Country Club’s new superintendent, we were familiar with Bri-





## Thai Country Club Case Study - POGO



### Thai Country Club

September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2016

To: Golf Club General Managers  
Golf Course Superintendents

Dear Fellow Industry Professionals,

I am writing this testimonial for the POGO Turf Pro soil insight tool which measures moisture, temperature and salinity index of greens and others areas of a golf course. Along with this it has a GPS device for outlining the areas and Wi-Fi capability enabling us to retrieve data immediately no matter where we are.

Thai Country Club, one of the premier golf courses in Thailand, is located on the Bangna-Trad Highway just east of Bangkok in a low-lying area that was a former rice field. The golf course was built over 20 years ago on marine clay in an area known for high salinity and with less than desirable quality water - which is coming from a nearby industrial estate.

Prior to purchasing the POGO Turf Pro we were sending soil and water tests to labs for analysis semi annually but this process, although scientific, was less than desirable due to length of time involved to shipping to reputable labs. The salt issues on our greens would be compounded daily, weekly and monthly due to the poor quality of the water we are using. Once we purchased the POGO in May of 2016 we could see the results of high salinity and in real time. Having that data was extremely valuable in notifying our staff exactly when to flush our greens with gypsum and fresh water to reduce the salinity levels. Results were immediate and positive as we now had a tool that could see what the turf was seeing daily through an easy method of testing on the green itself. We are now able to react to the information and take preventative measures before any visible deterioration occurs.

We were considering long-term investments in more fresh water lakes on the property to protect our greens health, but since purchasing the POGO we now do not need to spend these funds.

Our greens to date are in very good health and condition even through this monsoon season, as we know exactly when they are drying out and or the salinity is increasing to take immediate action that day to rectify the situation before it becomes a problem and our greens become weak. Our members are very pleased at the result which is very comforting as the General Manager of the Club. I am now able to focus my attention on other areas of improvement instead of dealing with member concerns regarding greens and other salt affected conditions.

I would high recommend looking into POGO and am extremely pleased with the follow-up, after sales service and support of Tony Taylor, CGCS and Quality Golf.

Sincerely yours,

John Blanch,  
General Manger

Owned and Managed by the Peninsula Hotels

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John Blanch's letter from 2016.



an's experiences as he first started using the POGO system while managing Xili Golf and Country Club in China. Brian describes Thai Country Club as "a destination". Being close to an hour from Bangkok, with Bangkok's famously "intense" traffic making it difficult to get to the property, he must deliver exceptional conditions every day in order to entice clientele to make the journey.

## 1: Salinity Challenges

Thai Country Club was built on an area near the Bang Pakong river that used to be covered by ocean water. The lakes used to store the water to irrigate the course are not lined, causing salts to wick up through the clay and dissolve in the water. In addition, the secondary source of water is from an area with a lot of manufacturing, which creates high mineral content water. This water had historically caused problems with turf stress and made it very difficult to manage the salinity.

Before Brian joined the team in 2017, John had purchased a single POGO Pro and POGO Turf Pro Cloud subscription, and had his team use it on a daily basis, with John accessing the graphical representations of the day's data via POGO's Visual Insight reports.

Since high salinity can't be seen until stress symptoms appear, POGO has become an invaluable tool. "[Brian] knows he can see things through the POGO before his eye does, and his eye is far better trained than mine."

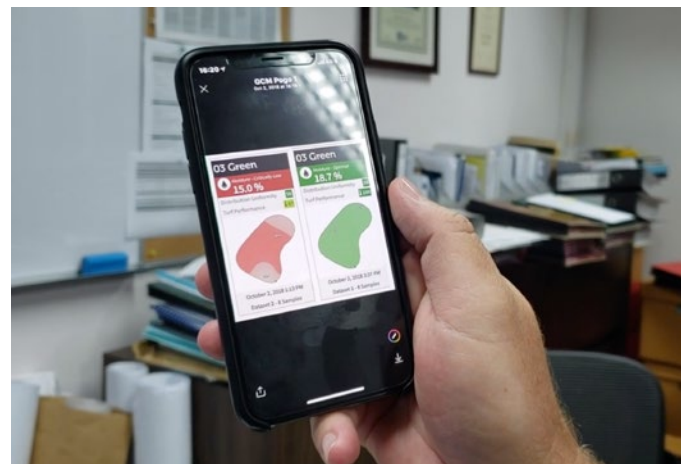
## 2: Managing Water Effectively & Saving Resources

Brian has his team use two POGO Pros to capture data twice per day, which takes 45 minutes to capture the entire 18-hole course. The first data capture is done at 4:30am.

"It identifies 'the red spots', so they go out and target just those dry spots," explains Brian. "Consistently they would water greens every single night here. Whether they needed it or not—obviously if it rained they wouldn't—but for their peace of mind they would run the irrigation no matter what. It was affecting my root depth, algae on the greens, and playability."

"Now the staff is more comfortable using the POGO and knowing where to water and how to water. It's very easy to see the effects with the color changes in Visual Insight." Brian takes comfort in being able to see, through the color-coded visual reports on his smartphone, that the second daily POGO analysis shows consistent, uniform moisture across the greens, confirming his staff has applied water correctly. "It's peace of mind, knowing the greens aren't going to burn. And they haven't burned since we have been using POGO."

"POGO has helped us because we no longer run irrigation where we don't need to" says Brian.



Brian shows us yesterday's Visual Insight moisture report for the #3 green, with the early



**"All our greens are watered by hand now, which allows us to be more accurate in the watering and produce better quality of green, but at the same time it's cut down the amount of water that we use. So far this year we're 20% below budget on our electricity usage for the golf course, which is a huge amount of money to us."**

morning's measurements forming a wide red area through the middle of the green indicating critically dry conditions, bordered by light red areas at either end where it is only slightly dry. Applying automated irrigation on the entire green would likely have led to too much moisture at the ends, but hand-watering only the

critically dry areas has brought the entire green to a uniformly perfect level of moisture by the afternoon (indicated by the color green).

As General Manager, John Blanch is delighted with the savings in electricity costs that this targeted approach affords. "All our greens are watered by hand now, which allows us to be more accurate in the watering and produce a better quality of green, but at the same time it's cut down the amount of water that we use. So far this year we're 20% below budget on our electricity usage for the golf course, which is a huge amount of money to us."

Bangkok is very similar to other humid areas like southern Florida where water has huge repercussions for turf, like diseases and algae growth. Precise moisture control is a key factor for overall plant health, and POGO gives Brian this control. "That's one of the things POGO has



Visual Insight in POGO Turf Pro Cloud



**"By not running the irrigation we save on power and water because we're not watering all the spots that don't need to be watered. The staff is focused on just the dry spots, which POGO identifies. It's an overall win-win for us."**

done: making sure we apply the correct amount of water, and that we don't over-water."

"It's allowed us to be more environmentally friendly. By not running the irrigation we save on power and water because we're not watering all the spots that don't need to be watered. The staff is focused on just the dry spots, which POGO identifies. It's an overall win-win for us."

### 3: Control Over Conditions

"I hear about moisture, I hear about salinity, I hear about EC...I hear these things but I don't actually know anything about them. Since we've had POGO for two years, it's been something that I've been able to look at on a regular

basis and see how we're doing." Not fully understanding the science behind turf health is not an issue for any POGO user, since the analysis is done by the system, and the action needed is clearly shown with clever color-coding on a satellite map of the property.

The insight gained into the turf conditions allows John's team to maintain consistently perfect conditions that allows them to be ready for a tournament within just 2 weeks.

"We've gone through stages before where we've come in the next day and we've lost some turf in some areas. We haven't in the last two years lost any turf on the golf course. Is it a coincidence that the last two years we've been using POGO? No, it's not."

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## 4: Peace of Mind On and Off the Course

Both Brian and John mention “peace-of-mind” as being a major benefit of POGO. They cite the fact that collecting data is easy enough for all staff to do, and the cloud-based system makes all collected data available instantly to them wherever they are.

Brian explains “It gives me peace of mind knowing that my staff is walking the greens, and that the greens are being watered. If I have a meeting in town or I’m off, I know that the staff is here and that they’re POGOing...I can see it. It gives us the peace-of-mind that the greens aren’t being burnt in the afternoon, because it can be quite intense with heat here, and the winds.”

“I don’t need to be here from 4:30am to 6pm, 7 days a week...I can be home and not worried because I can watch it on my phone, which shows

the morning’s POGO readings. Then the guys go back out [to take more readings] after they’ve been watered and I make sure they’ve been watered. So now I have the comfortability of staying home and enjoying more of my life instead of having to work 14 to 16 hour days.”

**“It gives me peace of mind knowing that my staff is walking the greens, and that the greens are being watered. If I have a meeting in town or I’m off, I know that the staff is here and that they’re POGOing...I can see it. It gives us the peace of mind that the greens aren’t being burnt in the afternoon.”**



## 5: Consistent Playing Conditions and Guest Satisfaction

Consistently high-performing turf and knowing his customers see Thai Country Club as one of the top courses in Asia is the number one result that John attributes to their implementation of the POGO system.

“We’ve seen an increase in play. People are coming back...people are talking about it. We’ve held the Thailand Open for the past two years. Last year we held the Thailand Open on two weeks notice. We got the course into a very playable condition, a condition that the players

were very satisfied with. It was the best that they played on up to that stage of the tour. We held it again this year and they said the golf course was even better.”

Even with constant improvements to the course from using POGO and learning how to take advantage of all the power it offers, John believes they’re not even scratching the surface of what he has heard the POGO is capable of doing for them.

He comes back to the satisfaction of the guests. “Our members are really, really satisfied at the moment. I would say at the moment we are one of the best-maintained golf courses in Thailand, if not in Asia.”

The key, he says, is being in control of turf conditions, which comes not only from having a large amount of current data, but having the data interpreted and presented visually, instead of having to wrestle with analyzing the data himself.

Brian also has seen a steady increase in the quality of turf conditions since he has been here. “By using POGO the ball roll is much smoother because of the consistency of water in the greens. We have determined what our wilting point is—originally it was around 10%, and now I think we’re down below 8%...I don’t really stress over it anymore because our root depth is starting to increase.”

## 6: Predicting the Future with Technology

“You can see the salt levels [in POGO] before you can see it with your eyes” states Brian, when asked how he uses POGO to mitigate the salinity issues the course has been plagued with.

“Exactly!” confirms John.

Brian continues: “This tool is identifying the





**“This tool is identifying the salts where you cannot see it with your eye until it’s too late. We no longer have to wait to see it with our eyes, we can see it before the fact, which is saving us time and effort and...money!”**

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POGO trend charts are a powerful tool for Brian and John given the amount of data that is captured every day. They help pinpoint where conditions are becoming right for stress spots to appear. Not just the moisture content, but the confluence of moisture, salinity, temperature, ambient weather conditions, foot traffic, etc.

“We know when the greens are weak or when they are going to be weakening by looking at the POGO reports.” states John.

Brian continues “We no longer have to wait to see it with our eyes, we can see it before the fact, which is saving us time and effort and...”

“Money!” adds John with a grin. “Time, effort... complaints...”

We’re now starting to understand why John was so appreciative back in 2016 when he wrote that letter, but John adds one more thing to drive his point home. He exclaims with a wide smile and two thumbs up: “Thank you POGO, I can now sleep at night!”

## **7: Standard Tools: Hoses, Mowers and POGO**

“I think for any general manager who has a local superintendent, POGO is a really important tool to have. You can get the information at the touch of a button. You can look at it on your phone, on your iPad, and even when you’re on vacation you can see what’s happening with the golf course.”

John believes that POGO should be a standard piece of equipment for every golf course around the world—as much as hoses and mowers are. “If I move today to another golf club, the first thing that I would buy would be another POGO. Or two.”

“POGO is the best thing since sliced bread. Every golf club should have POGO.” ■





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John Blanch  
General Manager  
Thai Country Club



Superior insight | Better decisions | Healthier turf

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