

# FUNERAL

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## BUSINESS ADVISOR MAGAZINE™

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Why Precoa kindly  
demands higher  
standards

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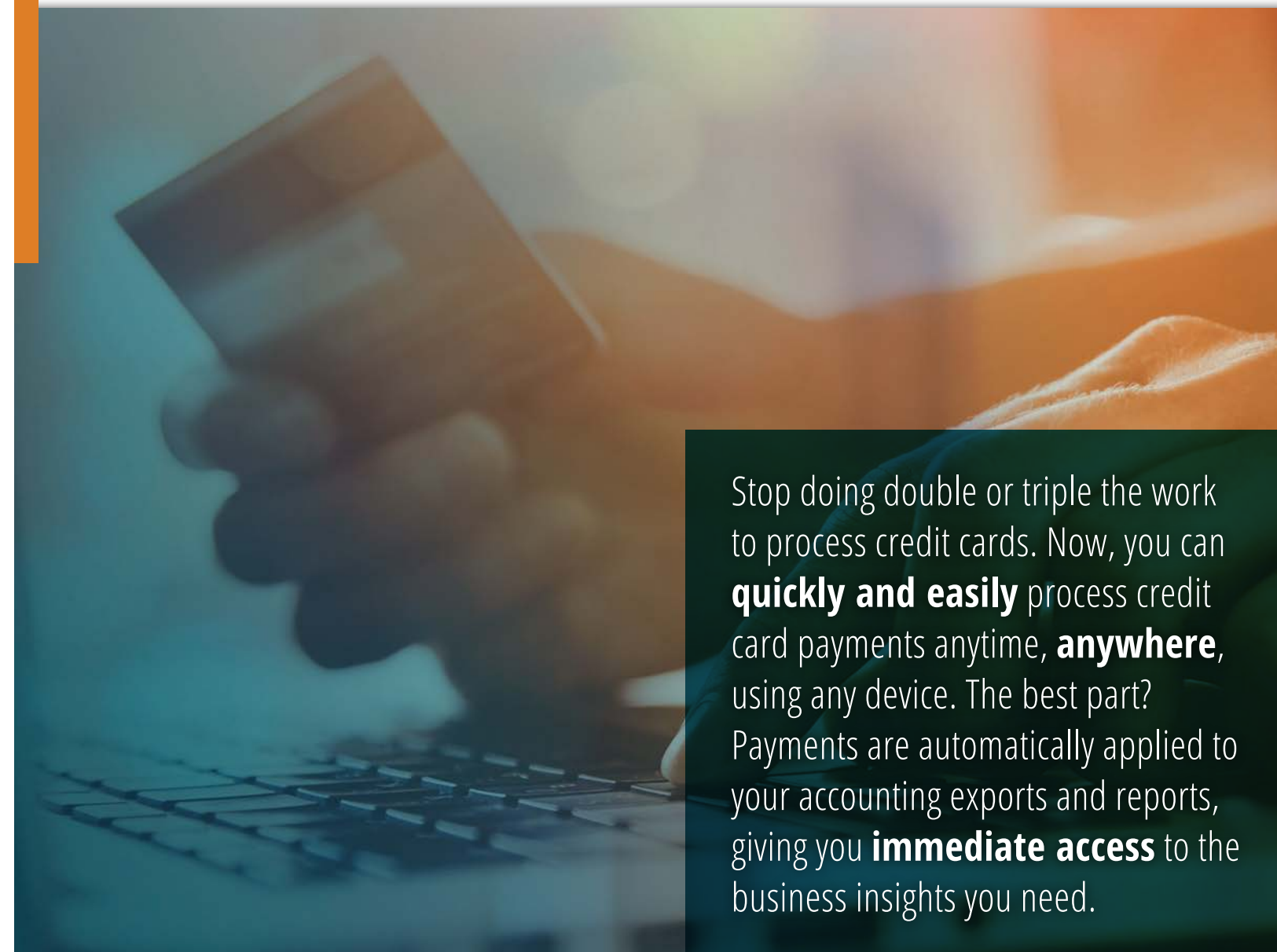
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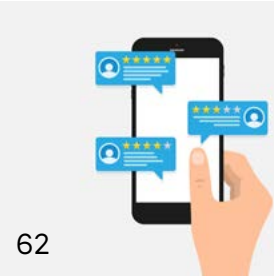
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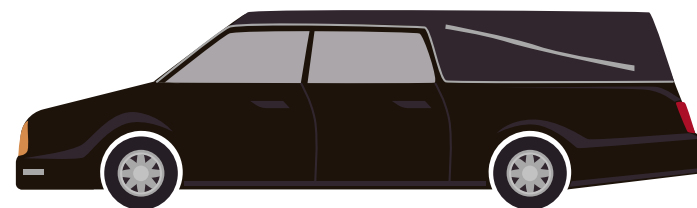
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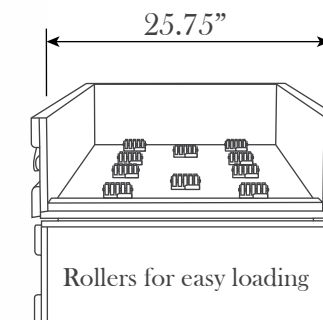
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MAY/JUNE 2019



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Additionally, he assists firms and companies in the funeral industry with their branding and marketing. To connect with George, email him at [gpaul@cherishedkps.com](mailto:gpaul@cherishedkps.com), call 617-971-8590/617-980-1476, or visit his websites [www.chershedkps.com](http://www.chershedkps.com) or [www.seizethebrand.com](http://www.seizethebrand.com)



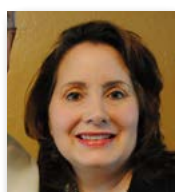
Mike Feazel is the CEO of Roof Maxx technologies. Roof Maxx, a product developed by Mike and Todd Feazel, utilizes soy methyl esters to create an EPA and FDA approved roof treatment that can extend the life of your roof by up to 15 years, and is a fraction of the cost of roof replacement. As shingles last for shorter

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Professor Marty Ludlum teaches business law at the University of Central Oklahoma and is a licensed attorney. He has made numerous presentations to the funeral profession at state and national conventions and has written articles in national and state funeral magazines. Professor Ludlum has a Bachelor's and Master's degree in

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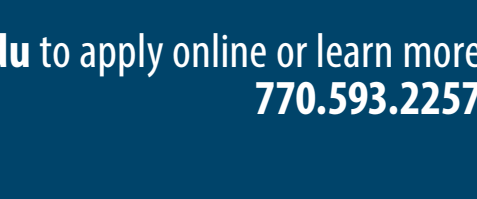
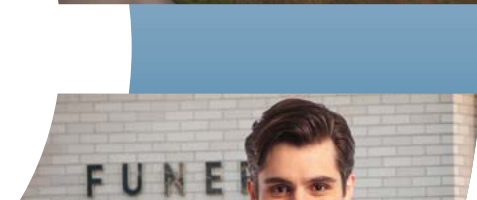
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# INDUSTRY ALERTS



## eFUNERAL® LAUNCHES INTERACTIVE DIGITAL STOREFRONT

West Des Moines, IA — eFuneral® Solutions, LLC, a subsidiary of Homesteaders Life Company, has launched a groundbreaking online planning platform, connecting funeral providers to a new generation of consumers through a customizable digital storefront.

"When we acquired the eFuneral® domain name and assets, we wanted to develop an innovative technology solution that would connect funeral homes with more families," said Homesteaders CEO Steve Shaffer. "eFuneral® offers a resource to help funeral homes serve consumers who want to explore funeral options through a digital platform."

"We partner with funeral providers throughout the country to offer an easy way for consumers to plan and purchase services online," explained Luke Frieberg, President of eFuneral®. "Our focus is on facilitating seamless engagement with families. We are an amplification of the work funeral providers are already doing, helping them leverage their marketing efforts and brand equity in a digital world to generate leads and sales and, ultimately, to connect with and serve more families."

eFuneral's storefront guides consumers through the planning process, empowering them to view, select and purchase their funeral plans online. The goods and services are customized to match each funeral provider's service offerings, and all advance funeral plans are funded with a Homesteaders life insurance policy.

"We believe a growing number of consumers want information and resources to plan and fund their funerals online, which is consistent with many other aspects of our



### Preserving the Value of Funeral Service®

life today," Shaffer continued. "By providing a tool funeral homes can use to serve those families, eFuneral® continues Homesteaders' 113-year tradition of helping families fund their advance funeral plans and promoting the value of funeral service."

The technology company is already partnering with funeral providers to offer this unique service. "On average, funeral arrangements made through eFuneral's platform have a 15% higher face amount than plans made in the traditional fashion," Frieberg reported. "And, with our lead-sharing program, we've been able to pass \$1.2 million in pre-need leads to our early adopting funeral home partners."

eFuneral® offers a variety of pricing models – including a cost-free option – so funeral providers of all sizes can select the plan that best meets their needs and enhances their brand. Additional information can be found at [efuneralpartner.com](http://efuneralpartner.com).

*eFuneral® Solutions, LLC, is a breakout digital solutions company that helps funeral homes maximize market share through optimized online sales. The Des Moines, IA, based technology outfit is a subsidiary of Homesteaders Life Company. Learn more at [efuneral.com](http://efuneral.com).*

*Homesteaders Life Company, a mutual company owned by its policyholders, is a national leader providing products and services to promote and support the funding of advance funeral planning and end-of-life expenses. Visit [homesteaderslife.com](http://homesteaderslife.com) to learn more.*

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## PASSARE® ANNOUNCES NEW BARCODE TRACKING APP



**Abilene, TX** — Passare, Inc. is excited to announce the release of a new barcode tracking mobile app that is now integrated with Passare's arrangement application. The barcode tracking app allows funeral home staff to scan barcodes assigned to decedents, locations, and personal effects quickly and easily using a mobile device. The app is being offered to Passare subscribers at no additional cost.

"Many of our funeral home customers were spending a lot of time manually tracking decedent transfers using a very time-consuming process," said Passare CEO, Jay Thomas. "It's a process that is inherently flawed, and can lead to errors, which opens up a firm to liability. Passare's app gives funeral homes a scalable model for establishing a very reliable chain of custody system that ensures that they are offering the highest standard of care to the families they serve."

The app allows funeral home staff to scan barcodes assigned to decedents and personal items and tie those barcodes to a person, a time, and a location using the phone's map coordinates. Funeral homes can also assign scannable barcodes to locations such as prep rooms, viewing rooms, or refrigeration units. Unlike any other software or app in the funeral profession, Passare's app allows funeral homes to track any disposition type and provides access to vital tracking information anytime, anywhere, using any device.

"Our customers who have tested the app are telling us that it has made their lives so much easier," said Chris Baber, VP and Chief Product Officer. "It adds another layer of protection to an organization and gives families peace of mind about the transfer process. The best thing about this latest version of the app is that it integrates with your entire case management system in Passare. So, any time you need to know the location of a decedent or his or her personal belongings, you can go right to that case and find the information you need in the app or in the main platform."

**ABOUT PASSARE:** One of the greatest challenges in the funeral profession today is communication with today's tech savvy families and access to accurate and timely information when and where you need it. To meet this need, Passare offers the funeral profession's only funeral home collaboration software with integrated business management tools. Through Passare, funeral directors can connect and communicate with families and access case information anytime, anywhere, using any internet-connected device. Offering unlimited users, unlimited devices, unlimited updates, and 24/7 customer support, Passare is helping funeral staff to save time, streamline processes, and spend more quality time with the families they serve and with their own families at home. To learn more about Passare and request a free demo, please visit [www.passare.com](http://www.passare.com).

## iCOLUMBARIUM ESTABLISHES CONTEMPORARY OPTION FOR CREMATED REMAINS

*New Business Will Offer New Service to Families and to the Funeral Profession*



**Miami, FL** — For years, many families have left the funeral home with the cremated remains of their loved ones in a cardboard box. Once at home, these temporary containers then find their way into closets and garage shelves. iColumbarium now provides a contemporary solution by allowing families an option to permanently store their loved one's cremated remains in safe and secure environment.

"iColumbarium offers families an affordable and technologically-innovative choice for the permanent placement of cremated remains," said Igors Mutjanko, chief executive officer and co-founder of iColumbarium. "Families can rest assured that their loved ones' cremated remains are safely and securely located in a climate-controlled environment that they can visit anytime via our on-line portal at [www.iColumbarium.net](http://www.iColumbarium.net)."

iColumbarium's one-step purchase allows families to choose an urn and a niche placement. Families simply make their purchase online and then forward the cremated remains to iColumbarium. After that, families and friends can visit the iColumbarium.net web portal to view the urn, offer condolences, and place virtual flowers at the urn. Families of all faiths and backgrounds are welcome as iColumbarium has urn and niche placement areas specifically for Christian, Buddhist and secular backgrounds.

"Research has continued to show cremation families want options," said Mujjanko. "iColumbarium is a truly unique and affordable way for families anywhere in the US to have a safe and secure resting place for the cremated remains of their loved one."

More information about the new company can be found on the website, [www.icolumbarium.net](http://www.icolumbarium.net).

**About iColumbarium:** iColumbarium is the first virtual columbarium that offers a unique and affordable way for families to provide a safe, secure, and permanent resting place for the cremated remains of their loved one. It offers cremation families a meaningful option for them to consider as they lay their loved ones to rest.

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## LIFE CELEBRATION, INC INTRODUCES A CUTTING-EDGE LINE OF SHAPED AND ENHANCED PRODUCTS CALLED THE SHAPE-IT SERIES

**North Wales, PA** — Life Celebration, Inc Introduces a Cutting-edge Line of Shaped and Enhanced Products called the Shape-It Series with the investment and installation of a LasX Laser Cutter.

Life Celebration, Inc has launched a new line of products adding to their customized catalog of offerings. Starting last month, Life Celebration Community Members began providing their client families with the profession's only laser cut memorial items that are completely customized and delivered overnight. The new line includes pop-up memorial folders and thank you cards, shaped bookmarks and coasters, large and shaped flip cards among many other enhanced products. The Shape-it Series is the latest innovative offering from Life Celebration, Inc.

Life Celebration began looking into the laser equipment over three years ago. The Life Celebration Team traveled to LasX technologies, based out of St. Paul Minnesota, to test out the equipment. They ensured that it was only and exactly what they needed to be able to produce mass-customized laser cut items overnight for funeral homes

*Life Celebration*  
CREATING COLOR AND LIGHT  
IN TIMES OF DARKNESS

all over the country. After years of research, testing, and analysis, Life Celebration felt that 2019 was the year to bring this equipment to the funeral profession.

Life Celebration president Gerry Givnish shared his vision for the series: "From the start, we have been focused on the future and supplying our Community Members with the most dynamic offerings within the funeral profession. The Shape-It Series gives our Members yet another edge in their competitive marketplaces. It also elevates our position as thought-leaders and visionaries in custom print innovation, nothing like you've seen before, you simply can't get this anywhere else. Families walk into funeral homes in some of the most rural area's in the country expecting another 'same-old funeral' and instead they experience a time capsule of memories of their loved one full of engaging takeaways that are branded to the local Life Celebration Home."

LasX Application Engineer, Dr. Garrett Potter spoke about the equipment: "LasX offers some of the highest speed, power, and precision equipment in the laser processing industry. Our systems bring solutions to a wide variety of industries and materials, from textiles to aerospace. LasX is excited to partner with Life Celebration to help bring truly unique and important funeral products into the market. While LasX has established expertise in the digital print market, the Funeral industry is new to us. We love Life Celebration's moto 'Creating Color and Light in Times of Darkness'. In the laser industry, we understand the power of light, and we're always inspired by our customers' drive to create more. Powered by our customers' creativity, LasX systems are here to help build exceptional products that brighten our customers' experience."

Life Celebration, Inc. is a multi-faceted design, print, and consulting company. Driven by a passion to tell stories, share memories, and create experiences, Life Celebration was founded by licensed funeral directors, Gerry Givnish and Jim Cummings. Over 150 funeral homes rely on the robust resources Life Celebration, Inc. provides, including customized printed memorial items, training and consulting services, website design, and promotional and marketing materials. To see examples of the Shape-It Series line and to learn more about Life Celebration's multi-faceted Membership Program and customized products, call 888-887-3782, or visit [www.lifecelebrationinc.com](http://www.lifecelebrationinc.com).

## FUNERAL DIRECTORS LIFE ANNOUNCES NEW FDTV VIDEO SERIES

**Abilene, TX** - Funeral Directors Life Insurance Company is proud to announce the release of a video series that is designed to help funeral professionals grow, succeed, and connect with today's changing funeral consumers.

"As we have spoken to funeral directors and owners across the nation, we have seen that there is a huge need for this type of positive content with a strong message about the future of our profession," said Kris Seale, President and CEO of Funeral Directors Life. "There is too much negativity in the funeral space today, which has led to many funeral directors becoming discouraged. We believe that if we are able to help funeral professionals adapt to the changing market conditions, the future for our profession is brighter than ever! That is what this series is all about."

The series features interviews with company executives, subject matter experts, and industry professionals on a variety of topics of interest to funeral professionals.

"This video series is intended to be a source of information for funeral professionals that offers positive, inspiring, and



insightful messages about how to grow and succeed in a rapidly changing marketplace," said Seale. "Our goal is to address the concerns of funeral professionals today and offer ideas and solutions that will help them better connect with the families they serve."

The first three episodes in the series have been released on [www.funeraldirectorslife.com/blog/media](http://www.funeraldirectorslife.com/blog/media) with more to be released in the near future. To receive notifications as new episodes are released, subscribe to Funeral Directors Life's YouTube Channel and click on the bell to be sure you never miss a new episode.

Funeral Directors Life, based in Abilene, TX, is a leading provider of insurance-funded preneed funeral products and services. To learn more, visit at [www.funeraldirectorslife.com](http://www.funeraldirectorslife.com).

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## KEVIN SMITH JOINS EXPRESS FUNERAL FUNDING AS A NATIONAL ACCOUNT MANGER



Clarksville, IN — Express Funeral Funding, the nation's FASTEST, EASIEST® and largest privately-owned insurance assignment funding company is excited to welcome Kevin Smith as a national account manager.

Smith will develop and maintain relationships with funeral homes and cemeteries nationwide to promote Express Funeral Funding's fast and easy insurance assignment funding.

"We are excited to have Kevin join the Express family. He brings expert industry knowledge along with several long-standing relationships with funeral homes and cemeteries," said Steve Calloway, president of Express Funeral Funding.

Smith comes to Express Funeral Funding, having over 20 years in the funeral profession, of which he spent in insurance assignment funding, providing invaluable experience.



"I am very excited to join forces with Express Funeral Funding. They are the fastest, easiest, friendliest funding company on the planet. I want all my past clients and future customers to try us out on your next assignment," said Smith. Express Funeral Funding has been providing funeral homes and cemeteries nationwide the ultimate funding experience since 2002. Express Funeral Funding eliminated the challenges of working with insurance companies by limiting administration, providing immediate payment and advancing complete policy funds.

For more information on Express Funeral Funding, please visit [www.expressfuneralfunding.com](http://www.expressfuneralfunding.com) or call 812.949.9011.

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## NEW MEMORIALS DIRECT NOW OFFERS 14K SOLID GOLD CHAIN OPTIONS FOR PENDANTS

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Glg Harbor, WA — After numerous customer requests, New Memorials Direct is excited to announce that they now offer 14K solid gold chain options for their pendants. These new chains are available in either

white or yellow gold and in two select styles: diamond-cut rope or box. Each style is available in the following variety of lengths: 16", 18", 20", or 24". The box style has a thickness of 1.0 mm while the diamond-cut rope style has a thickness of 1.5 mm. Each chain features a sturdy lobster style clasp to prevent any accidental opening or breakage. These new chains are designed to be worn with any of New Memorials Direct's solid gold jewelry items. Pricing for each chain will be based on the actual gram weight and can be viewed on the website when logged into a wholesale account.

To obtain a wholesale account or to learn more about their products, please visit New Memorial Direct's website at: [www.NewMemorialsDirect.com](http://www.NewMemorialsDirect.com) or call at: 877-995-8767.

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## WILBERT INTRODUCES UNIQUE "CIRCLE OF LIFE" URN

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Broadview, IL — The Circle of Life is a new and unique cremation urn offered by Wilbert Funeral Services, Inc.

With a round shape symbolizing earth and eternity, the Circle of Life urn is aesthetically pleasing as well as functional in that it is 100% biodegradable.

"The Circle of Life urn originates in the vision of being universal and conveying hope," said Michael Devaney, Merchandising Manager at Wilbert. "We are proud to be the exclusive North American provider of this Swedish-made urn and feel that it will be a choice for families looking for an eco-friendly yet distinctive product."

A beautiful white butterfly on a magnet adorns the urn but can be removed and saved as a treasured keepsake. A silk ribbon in a choice of six colors can be personalized to capture the essence of a loved one.

The Circle of Life urn is available through Wilbert Licensees or on [WilbertDirect.com](http://WilbertDirect.com).

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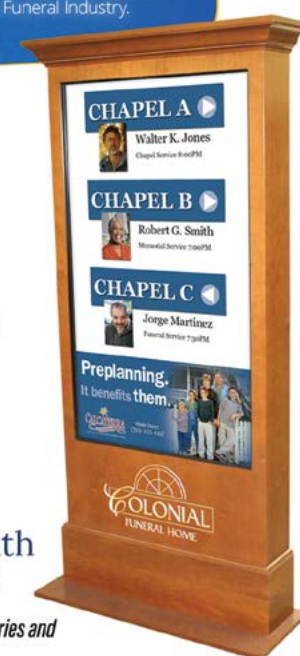
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## O'DONNELL FUNERAL & CREMATION SERVICES



FUNERAL & CREMATION SERVICE

*The O'Donnell name has a rich history in the funeral industry in Massachusetts dating all the way back to 1927. Through the years their firm has built more than just a name for themselves; they have built a legacy that is deeply rooted in their community.*

With funeral homes serving the towns and cities of Salem, Danvers, Beverly, Peabody, Hamilton, Wenham, Topsfield, Boxford and Middleton, O'Donnell Funeral and Cremation Service have gained a reputation with generations of local families for conducting business with grace and dignity, and providing compassionate and caring services. Today, O'Donnell Funeral & Cremation Services include full coordination of the funeral or memorial service and burial, cremation services, death benefits coordination, merchandise procurement, embalming and grief services. As a family-owned business, O'Donnell Funeral and Cremation Services is a resource that families can trust to go the extra mile to make their trying process dignified, meaningful, and personalized.

"I am a fourth-generation funeral director. Third generation on my mother's side and fourth generation on my father's side. Both of my grandfathers were funeral directors and both sides of my family owned different funeral homes," begins Anthony O'Donnell. "My great grandfather, Henry J. O'Donnell Sr., used to own women's shoe stores and when they were bought out by a larger company, my great-grandfather retired at 40 years old. He was very involved with his church and the priest suggested to him one day that he should become an undertaker. So, in 1927 he converted his store front into what would later become one of the premier funeral businesses of the North Shore."

After World War II, the funeral business moved from the storefront operation into a funeral home, when Henry J. O'Donnell Sr. was joined by his sons Henry Jr. and William. They purchased a home on the historic Salem Common, at 46 Washington Square, where the present Salem funeral home continues to conduct business. Henry Sr. passed away in 1960 and in 1968, Henry Jr. was joined in business by his son Thomas A. O'Donnell. When Henry Jr. passed away unexpectedly in 1970, Thomas, at 28 years old, became the owner of the O'Donnell Funeral Home on Washington Square, which he remodeled in 1972 to be one of the most prominent funeral homes on the North Shore. In the 1970's, Tom was one of the first funeral directors in the United States to begin accepting pre-arranged funerals. In



1987, Tom acquired a second location, the Peterson-O'Donnell Funeral Home in Danvers and was ahead of his time, as a young Catholic man serving protestant communities. Currently, a renovation at an additional location on the Salem common is underway, which will be the latest addition to the O'Donnell legacy.

"When building the newest location, we tried to make it as bright and modern as we could with light colors and large windows. We also noticed over the years that families like to congregate in the hall or vestibule, so we made sure to design ours to be large and very open to accommodate for this. We also hired an interior designer to help with the finishing touches," describes Anthony. "I also have a friend that has a wallpaper firm out of New York City called Carleton V, which is a world-famous fabric and wallpaper covering company, and he provided a lot of the wallpaper and decorations. The wallpaper we have is actually the same pattern scheme, as the Tory Burch stores on Madison Avenue in New York City and Rodeo Drive in Beverly Hills, California. Our newest location in Salem is beautiful; its unique style is a composite of modern and traditional design. It will be unveiled late Summer 2019. The new location is an ode to my father and the generations of O'Donnell's before him. My family wanted to make a commitment to our town and our future, and this new venue does just that."

When families choose the O'Donnell firm, they know their expectations will not only be met, but also exceeded. With many years of experience, the family-owned business knows just what it takes to provide services that leave a lasting impression.

"I love my business because every day my team and I are assisting people in their greatest time of need. We always try to put ourselves in the families' shoes. We treat our families like they are our own. My dad, Tom O'Donnell, who was a funeral director for 40 years, died on March 2nd of this year. He had not pre-planned, assuming that I being more equipped than most would know what to do. But when the time came for me to start planning, it was harder than I ever imagined it would be and I quickly realized I couldn't do it alone. Luckily, my amazing staff was able to create the tribute that my family wanted to honor my father—not a single detail was missed. The staff that works here is a huge part of why we are successful. They care deeply about each person that walks through our doors, and it shows. Being on the other side and having them serve me was honestly amazing, there are not words for how grateful I am," Anthony says humbly.

The O'Donnell's want families to leave feeling like the service was the best funeral they have ever been to, but more importantly they make it their goal to capture the essence of their families' loved ones to make them feel like their loved ones are still with them, and are honored in a way they will forever be remembered.

"There are many ways to share memories and memorialize people. At our funeral home we try to use all of the senses – touch, sound, sight, smell, and even taste to do so," adds Anthony.

When families choose O'Donnell Funeral Homes, the care doesn't stop after the service concludes. The family owned firm takes aftercare very seriously. The staff follows up with phone

calls, text messages and offers grief events to support families after the service.

"Four years ago at the Indiana Convention, I met Ellery Bowker with aftercare.com. At that time, we didn't have a very extensive aftercare program. We made follow up phone calls, but Ellery shared with me what aftercare.com was doing and I realized how amazing it was and knew I wanted to utilize their service so I could show families just how much we were thinking of them. It was then that I had the realization that to be one of the leaders and innovators in our industry, we needed to more greatly prioritize aftercare. The best part about aftercare.com is that they manage the process, which is so important for us as funeral directors because we are already balancing a lot. Ellery makes it easy for us to show our families how much we care. We are all about the details here at O'Donnell and that's why aftercare.com was a perfect fit," states Anthony.

The O'Donnell team testifies that funeral services are as much about the people left behind as they are about the deceased. They know survivors can face overwhelming emotions in such a difficult time, and for that reason they work hard to be a trusted resource for families as they attempt to recompose normal life.

"Our pre-planning division is a big part of our success as well. We pride ourselves on our outreach program to educate the community on the importance of pre-planning. After what I just went through with my own father, now more than ever I urge people not to wait on the arrangement process. It's a very emotional time, which makes it difficult to focus and make decisions. I tell my own story and use my personal experience to connect and get people to understand just how important pre-planning really is," Anthony shares.

Looking forward to the future, Anthony is very excited to be in the funeral business. He says, "as we see technology advancing, each day we become better equipped to help families honor their loved ones in new and innovative ways" – and this is what he looks forward to the most.

"I think right now is such an exciting time to be in the funeral business. And that might sound funny to those who are outside of this industry," he laughs. "But there are so many new and innovative ways to personalize services, make touch points with families, and be a better business operator and caregiver. A mentor of mine shared with me a long time ago that it is important to read everything you can about the funeral business. He told me to read every publication, every magazine, every online article. I really took that to heart, and by reading Funeral Business Advisor and other publications out there, it can open your eyes to all the great things that are going on in the industry so you can serve your families in the best way possible," he adds.

Respectfully paying a loved one a final farewell is a difficult but meaningful process, and when families choose O'Donnell Funeral & Cremation, they know they will be taken care of and that no detail will be forgotten. The family-owned firm has been happily serving their community for many years and looks forward to continuing to strengthen their roots in Massachusetts. By going the extra mile before, during, and after each service, the O'Donnell legacy will surely continue for many generations to come. **FBA**



## JOHN MCQUEEN

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## THE IMPORTANCE OF A STRONG SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE & WEBSITE OPTIMIZATION

Social media marketing and website optimization have opened new avenues for funeral homes to reach a broader audience. Not every family stays local anymore — kids, siblings, parents — it's uncommon for them to all be in the same town. So, when it comes to planning a funeral for a loved one, many families must turn to the internet and social media to decide who they want to work with.

"If you don't have a presence online, you're overlooked by these families. Families also want to stay up-to-date on what's happening in their hometowns, and that includes being able to see who has passed away. Families rely on online obituaries for that. There is so much opportunity online to connect not only with your community, but with families all over," explains Samantha Ward, Marketing Manager with Frazer Consultants.

Having a great website and social media strategy has already changed the funeral business. Having a great website is no longer an option — it's a requirement.

"A funeral home's website should be the base of their entire marketing efforts. It should be packed with resources for families and answer the questions that get typed into Google by families to find a funeral home's services. It should have planning tools, grief resources. Some firms are now adding quizzes to their funeral home websites to let families take a quiz to figure out what type of service is best for them. When your website has everything a family would need, your social media marketing becomes easier to educate and inspire the thousands of people on Facebook in your community, and direct them to your website where they can learn more. Having both working for your business is what will be the difference between your funeral home growing in 2019 and staying the same or seeing a decline. I say this confidently because our team has now managed more than 100 funeral homes Facebook strategies and they are seeing incredible results for funeral homes that didn't think it was possible not long ago," outlines Ashley Montroy, CMO for FrontRunner Professional.

The common overarching mistakes that apply to both how funeral homes use social media and website optimization strategies have to do with: getting attention; having a tone or voice that's uniquely theirs; having relevant content and being transparent in dealing with the customer. With regards to getting attention, it's about providing content that people find interesting and different from what others are saying. That in turn is told to them in a manner that resonates with them and is personal.

"Many funeral home websites are full of marketing language and focus on their locations, staff and fleet rather than showcasing real stories from real people. It's important to make it easy for those stories to be shared and exposed on your website," urges Joe Joachim, Owner and CEO of funeralOne.

Content is king. Don't share what everyone else is sharing — be unique to yourself and your firm. You need to try to tell your story and show your community who they really are. Be authentic.

"The content is not about being self-centered to the organization but rather benefit oriented to the customer. And finally, being transparent rather than engaging in game of 'hide and seek' with the audience. It's not surprising that we overwhelmingly trust recommendations from people we know because we expect them to be honest with us. And within businesses, transparency is considered of very high importance to customers when it comes to establishing and maintaining brand trust," Ed Michael Reggie, CEO of Funeralocity explains.

One of the biggest changes that has come about in search engine optimization most recently is that funeral homes need to optimize not only for written text, but for voice.

"Several years ago, we were focused solely on what someone would type into their computer. These were typically pretty thought out or shortened versions of what they wanted to search for. Now, with the introduction of Siri and other voice activated searches, we look to cover a wider range of 'long tail' keywords (longer phrases that accomplish goal). For example, the short/typed version of a search may be 'funeral homes Las Vegas', but the voice version may be 'What funeral homes are in Las Vegas'. Although Google parses out the 'connector words', having these exact phrases in your website will really help boost your rankings for each individual phrase," advises Jeffrey Arnold, President of 4Spot Marketing.

When it comes to social media marketing, the biggest mistake is in expecting social media to do your marketing for you (especially for at-needs). Social media will barely move the needle for at-needs in the short term, and even over time, it's not a big at-needs generator. It's a weapon you use pretty much exclusively for pre-needs.

"As it relates to social media for funeral homes and related businesses, I'd say the most successful approach is to post about topics that aren't specifically about death! People aren't going to follow accounts that are all about death, and they're unlikely to share, like or retweet posts on those themes. On the other hand, if you post about topics that interest that demographic, you typically see much better engagement. It's fine to weave in the occasional post about burial and/or cremation, but you should be very conservative with that," warns Welton Hong, Owner of Ring Ring Marketing.

Continue reading this feature editorial for more tips from industry professionals on how to optimize your website and improve your social media presence for today's fast-moving world.

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4Spot Marketing offers a full range of SEO, Google and Facebook advertising, and business and process automation to help funeral homes collect more leads in the door, and keep those leads engaged until they are ready to purchase.

"Unlike many SEO companies, as are domestically headquartered and we use 100% manual content/link-building techniques that are 'white hat' and effective. We also use a 'radius' system of building out linking structure so that we have the most comprehensive, natural link-building process possible, that produces results," explains Jeffrey Arnold, President of 4Spot Marketing. "By incorporating a holistic view of your marketing efforts, we help our customers put together a cohesive, integrated marketing approach to get people off the search pages, onto our clients' sites, and through their front door. We have a 100% success rate in getting our clients to the top of the search engines," he continues.

4Spot even offers a free SEO ranking analysis for anyone who wants to see where they rank and where their opportunities lie.

"One of the main questions we get is whether customers are locked into a year long-term contract, like some companies require. They are not. We have a 6-month requirement, as SEO is not an instantaneous result. After that, we go month-to-month, because we know that either they client will have achieved their SEO goals and be happy with that, or they'll like where they rank for many phrases but want to continue building on other phrases," adds Jeffrey.

At 4Spot, they know that the most successful techniques today are still rooted in the things that worked in the past, but in a different fashion.

"5-10 years ago, if you wanted to rank #1 in Google you just had to go get a ton of backlinks (links to your website) with the anchor text (phrase you wanted to rank for) and have them point to your site. So, if you wanted to rank for Funeral Home Las Vegas, you would go out and buy 10,000 links from someone that links that phrase to your home page. Buy the links, next week you are #1. Links were king," he explains. "Today, links are still very important, and arguably still the key factor in ranking effectively. However, if you did what is listed above, your site would run the risk of being deindexed (completely removed from Google's database). You see, Google employs people who are far smarter than you and me, so they caught on really quick to what was going on. Today, links are important, but they must be 'organic' ... meaning that they must have a wide variety of anchor text phrases (they can't all be "Funeral Home Las Vegas"), and they need to point to different pages of your site and they must be created in a regular, normal pattern (you can't have 1000 links show up Monday, none the rest of the week, then 1000 the next Monday, etc.). They must trickle in, just as they would if you were sharing content, etc. The most effective SEO happens when you implement a very complex linking strategy that encompasses many layers of links all eventually pointing to the same main site," he adds.

[www.4SpotMarketing.com](http://www.4SpotMarketing.com)



Frazer Consultants offers marketing packages for both social media and SEO/PPC. They have varying levels for these packages so they can be as hands-on or hands-off as needed, depending on the amount of help a funeral home wants from their team. With their social media packages, Frazer Consultants helps get funeral homes set up on social media and optimize their pages.

"We also help with posting and promotion, depending on how much help a firm wants in that regard. With our SEO/PPC packages, we optimize their site based on their audience and their competitors. We also create and maintain pay-per-click search engine ads and campaigns. And if a funeral home just wants to try to do things on their own, we also have a ton of free resources on our site, like eBooks and social media kits with pre-made posts. We will work with you to find the level you need," explains Samantha Ward, Marketing Manager with Frazer Consultants. "Not everyone needs us to take over their entire social media strategy and presence, and that's fine. If you have staff that already do that work, we can work with them. Or we can take it off their plate, if you feel their time is better served elsewhere. It's entirely up to you," she adds.

Frazer Consultants offers varying levels of services so that they can find something within any price range, and they also regularly offer discounts when clients bundle services together. On top of that, they have a lot of payment options that make paying for services more manageable.

"One of the biggest differences between us and our competitors is that we're constantly growing and improving. What makes our services so good is the constant feedback we are getting from funeral directors. We regularly send out surveys, make phone calls, and listen to what our clients have to say. It's the relationships we have with clients that let us offer the best products and services," Samantha states.

One big mistake that Samantha sees funeral homes make is the lack of storytelling. Social media is meant to be social, so just posting obituaries and calling it a day is not a good strategy.

"Posting obituaries is a good starting point, but you should be going beyond that to share your funeral home's story. Talk about your staff, your history, your involvement in the community, or anything else that shows your followers who you really are. It's the same way with a website. You should be creating website content that's unique to your funeral home and your story, not just listing your services and products. Another mistake I see is infrequent or inconsistent posting. You won't gain anything by only posting and interacting once a month, and you won't keep an audience if you don't post reliably. Having a blog and a few social media pages is a good starting point, but you have to encourage people to actually interact with it. Post regularly and consistently, so families know when to expect content from you and are encouraged to interact with that content," she advises.

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FrontRunner can take care of everything from website design, social media marketing, search engine optimization (SEO), search engine marketing (paid Google advertising) to offline brochures, print advertisements and branding.

"Where we see the most success for our clients is when everything is all integrated. So, we'd create them a website with all of the right messaging and tools, make sure it ranks on Google, and completely take care of their social media marketing. For some, we redesign their offline marketing materials to be in line with their brand as well. We build all of our marketing solutions completely tailored to the funeral business," begins Ashley Montroy, CMO for FrontRunner Professional.

FrontRunner's all-in-one software gives firms the technology they need to get their job done as quickly as possible, and the marketing strategies with a dedicated marketing team to grow their business like never before.

"First start where knowing your biggest opportunities are. We can help guide you, so you get the biggest bang for your buck. If there's a low-lying fruit that will generate you new business, we will be the first to tell you. Also, we manage more than 100 firms on both social media and search engine strategies. Our clients experience growth from 22 new calls in 6 months to 300%-700% growth in client families. We are a results-driven company and as your marketing arm, we do everything in our power, learning from what works and doesn't work with other clients, to give you the best possible outcome. Our funeral business software is completely web-based and includes unlimited users and devices. Businesses can use the software and make changes to their website on their mobile device, and can enter data just once, letting the software complete everything in one click from forms and contracts to DVD's and stationery pieces. Families can make arrangements and even pay directly on your website. Having our marketing team take care of your social media and search engine marketing services brings everything into one strategy and the results are much higher because of this," she explains.

FrontRunner was founded by a 30+ year licensed funeral director who served thousands of families, and who still leads the company today alongside his family and 50+ staff.

"FrontRunner's technology solution, used by close to 3,000 funeral homes across North America, is an all-in-one website, management, arrangement, stationery and DVD platform. Our marketing division manages more than 100 firm's social media and search engine strategies with one goal for each: to drive more families to our client's website and manage the social media page just like we would for our own funeral home," Ashley states.

[www.FrontRunner360.com](http://www.FrontRunner360.com)



Funeralocity.com connects undecided families with the best funeral and cremation providers for their needs. When a family enters an address or zip code at funeralocity.com, all funeral providers in the area are displayed along with their GPLs.

Funeralocity is free to families and completely risk-free to funeral providers.

"Funeralocity brings funeral providers more business, higher revenue, greater market share...all without any up-front costs or risk. Online comparison shopping is now the new 'Main Street' for everything from food to travel to funeral care. With Funeralocity, the smart funeral home or cremation service can thrive in this new marketplace," explains Ed Michael Reggie, CEO of Funeralocity.

There is no charge to funeral homes for being listed on Funeralocity. Funeral homes and crematories that show outstanding quality and service are eligible for acceptance into the Excellence Provider Program, participation in which is also free. Only when a call is sent to you by Funeralocity and you have served the family and been paid, is a modest success fee paid. Funeralocity is a win-win for families and for funeral directors.

"Funeralocity is a company whose time has come: a comparison website for funeral providers developed with the guidance and support of leaders within funeral service. When we are in the market for a house, we go to Zillow. When we look for a job, we go to Monster. When we are looking for love, we go to Match.com. And now for undecided families, there is Funeralocity to compare funeral and cremation services in one's community," Ed describes.

Regarding social media, Ed notes that it is critical to the success of any strategy that your firm build an authentic connection with the audience. He explains just how important it is to remember that people don't exclusively go on social media to shop.

"Harassing followers with spammy sales tactics won't work. Instead, understanding what your specific audience uses social media for will help you connect with them on a personable level. Second, being all over the map with regards to frequency of posts and content tone will have your firm be viewed as unreliable by prospective customers. Understand that just because you're posting content, it doesn't mean your fortunes are going to change overnight. So be patient. And lastly, have great content that is keyword-rich. Without interesting content, there's no reason for people to stick around. People want to be informed or entertained...so give them what they want in a way that works for your firm as well. Also, boosting posts and running targeted ads are great and cost-effective ways to expand your reach beyond those local families who already know you," recommends Ed.

[www.Funeralocity.com](http://www.Funeralocity.com)

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## funeralOne

funeralOne is a personalization, technology, and consulting company for the funeral care profession. funeralOne's core services include strategic funeral home web site design, personal funeral service consulting, and funeral tribute video software. Committed to delivering innovation, funeralOne collaborates with its clients to help them reach their full market potential. With deep industry expertise, broad resources and a proven track record, funeralOne can mobilize the right people, skills, and technologies to help clients reach their customers in new ways.

funeralOne is transforming what the world thinks of a funeral. They help funeral professionals innovate, connect with their families in new ways and become more profitable. funeralOne solutions include f1Connect, a leading website platform, The Sympathy Store eCommerce plugin, Life Tributes Personalization Software and more.

"A major mistake many funeral homes make is having an obituary system that doesn't draw traffic to your website. When you allow obituaries to be broadcasted to other places, they lose their value. When obituaries are done right, they can help you build brand awareness and position your funeral home as the go-to resource in your community," Joe Joachim, Owner and CEO of funeralOne points out.

The 2 major trends that Joe predicts will continue to get more influential in 2019 and beyond are privacy and social influence.

"People are putting more importance on keeping their personal information private and are careful about broadcasting their life to the world. The trend is going towards more private social interaction and deeper, more meaningful connections. Social influence carries a bigger weight more than ever in marketing. People are becoming better at tuning out ads and escaping marketing messages, they want real stories from real people," he explains. "Focusing on customer experience and making people happier about the services you provide will lead to real conversations and social proof that will make a bigger impact than any advertisement," emphasizes Joe.

At funeralOne, they do more than talk about customer driven solutions — they deliver them. Through a specialized and focused set of service offerings and a culture that puts customers and their user experiences first, they provide results that are dynamic, technologically advanced, informative, and most importantly, easy-to-use.

For every funeralOne client, their goal is the same — provide you with the tools to challenge your industry and reach your full market potential while ultimately achieving new revenue streams.

[www.funeralOne.com](http://www.funeralOne.com)

## RING RING MARKETING

Ring Ring Marketing offers full-service social media campaigns for clients who are positioned to benefit from their campaigns. That includes every aspect of the social media success cycle, including social influencing, social networking, social selling, and social listening. They handle it all.

"As for website optimization, we similarly offer a comprehensive approach. That includes website design (or redesign), generating lots of SEO-friendly content, inbound and outbound link building, improving site security and site speed, optimizing for mobile devices, on-page and off-page SEO techniques, and so on," states Welton Hong, Owner of Ring Ring Marketing.

There's zero risk to working with Ring Ring Marketing, because they have a 100 percent money-back guarantee for the first two months.

"If you're not satisfied and want a refund, you get back everything you paid us, no questions asked. We can do that because we're so confident in our techniques. We don't work with every funeral home that wants to work with us; we only work with those that are positioned (by size, geography, local competition, etc.) to greatly benefit from our methods. So, if we take you on as a client, we know we can greatly improve your call rate and overall revenue in both the short term and long term. That lets us offer this complete guarantee," Welton says confidently.

Ring Ring Marketing is fully invested in your success: If you don't make money, they don't make money.

"That makes us very different from most other online marketing firms," mentions Welton. "It's why we never lock clients into long-term contracts and why we offer a full refund. It's why I spend a huge portion of my time educating the industry for free through magazine articles, webinars, and blog posts. It's all about helping funeral home owners not just survive but thrive in this challenging time. Everything we do is focused on helping you grow and generate more revenue. It's not about selling our services or making money off our clients. Your success is our success," continues Welton.

It is important to note that Ring Ring Marketing works only with independent funeral homes that average at least 175 calls per year. While they wish they could serve smaller firms, their systems simply work best for businesses of this size. At the end of the day, they don't want to waste anyone's time or money on techniques that won't be extremely effective for the firms they serve.

"It's a lot more work for us to put the client first in everything we do, but that's the only way I'll do business. If you're investing your money with me, it's my duty to produce results. It's my duty to help you multiply capital. So that's my entire focus, and that's true of everyone I employ," Welton concludes.

[www.ringringmarketing.com](http://www.ringringmarketing.com)

# If all insurance assignment companies say they pay fast and are easy to work with, why do twice as many funeral homes choose C&J?

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**Who is Aftercare.com and what product and services do you provide?**

We are a company with a single focus of helping funeral homes provide support and stay in touch with families after the service is over. We offer two innovative programs, The Aftercare Card Program, and the Aftercare-By-Text program. Both programs are automated which means the funeral director enrolls the family with us and they're done. We do everything else.

**How did Aftercare.com get involved in the funeral industry?**

Directors Advantage Inc., our parent company, had been serving the funeral industry for 10+ years as a technology and marketing partner. In early 2015 we started exploring how we could help funeral homes increase preneed and quickly realized that even though previous families were far more likely to prearrange than others, very few funeral homes were doing anything to continue building the relationship after the service was over.

I always knew funeral directors wore a lot of hats, but it wasn't until we started looking at aftercare that it became clear just how hard it is to find time to follow up. The common theme was "as one family is leaving, the next family is on their way in." Nearly every funeral home we talked to admitted that they tried to do follow up on their own but weren't able to keep up when they got busy and eventually stopped altogether.

As software developers with deep experience in the funeral business, we knew we could create a product that would allow the funeral director to follow up with each family consistently without doing any more work.

**What makes Aftercare.com unique?**

I would say two things. The first is our hyper-focus on making funeral directors' lives easier. We believe by doing one thing and being best-in-class, we become a trusted partner to the funeral home which gives them the freedom to focus on the family they are serving today and still let previous families know they are thinking about them. The second is the effortless way we've made it for funeral directors to enroll families in the program. We have integrations with many of the services they already use including the two largest funeral home website providers, Batesville and CFS. The funeral home can enroll a family in less than 30 seconds.

**What are the benefits to funeral homes using the Aftercare Card Program or Aftercare-By-Text?**

The primary benefit of using either program (or both) is that the funeral home is reaching out to the family on a consistent basis and doing so without adding any more work to their already busy schedule. Author and speaker, Patricia Fripp, said it best by saying "It is not your customer's job to remember you, it is your obligation and responsibility to make sure they don't have a chance to forget you." Because our programs are 100% done-for-you, the family will be touched by the funeral home several times during the year, and those touchpoints are essential steps in building a closer relationship.

**How does Aftercare.com provide a solution for funeral homes?**

Aftercare.com solves three big problems funeral homes face today. 1.) They don't have time to follow up 2.) Loyal families are declining and 3.) They are not getting enough reviews. We solve the first challenge by removing the time and resources needed to follow up consistently. The decline of loyal families is combatted by staying in touch and building stronger relationships and, finally, we help funeral homes get more reviews by gently asking the family for a review and making it effortless to share their experiences on Google, Facebook and Yelp.

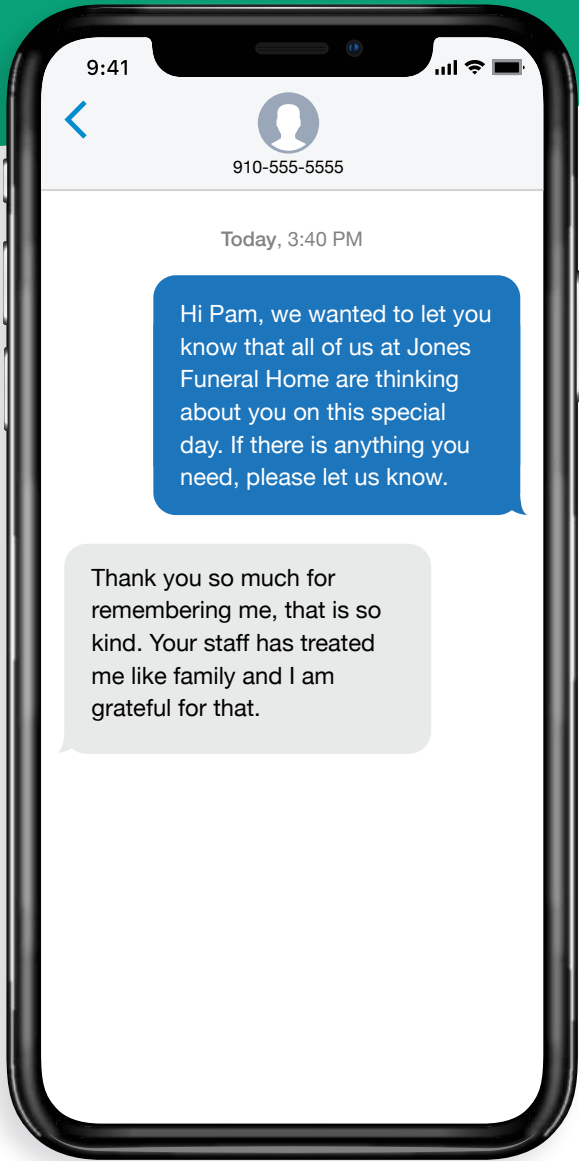
**How can a funeral home learn more about your programs or contact Aftercare.com?**

Funeral homes may call us at 1-800-721-7097 or visit Aftercare.com to learn more about the Aftercare Card Program or Aftercare-By-Text. We encourage directors to request a sample or schedule a demo for a quick overview. The demo is a no-obligation way to learn how the programs work, what the families see when they get a card or text message, how to enroll a family, etc. **FBA**



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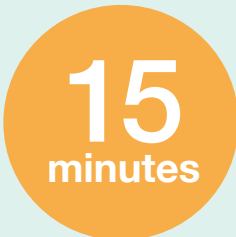


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# HOW TO BECOME A FACEBOOK MARKETING PRO

BY MITCHELL MCLEAN

More and more funeral homes today are discovering the benefits of social media marketing. The problem is, most funeral home staff are either too busy to keep up with it or not sure about how to do social media “the right way.”

I jumped into the world of Facebook marketing two years ago after beginning my career as a web developer with an emphasis on search engine optimization. My new job was to expand our company’s social media marketing and lead generation programs because our initial efforts into offering services in these areas were exploding.

I was interested in not only helping our clients establish a strong social media presence, but also in helping them gain qualified leads to grow their preneed programs. My company could see that the potential for reaching a new, younger audience was there, and we certainly did not want our clients to miss out on that huge opportunity. We also didn’t want to leave room for our clients’ competition to move into and dominate the social media space in their communities.

Funeral homes across the nation are seeing social media engagement increase and the cost per lead go down to as low as \$10 per lead, a savings of over 80% compared to traditional forms of advertising.

I’d like to share four things that we learned as we dove into the world of social media marketing for funeral homes. If you implement these four keys to success in Facebook marketing, you will go from being unsure about what to do with your Facebook page to becoming a social media pro. So, here we go:

**1. Start out with a simple schedule and stick to it.** Heather Guitar, our content manager and her team have assisted us in establishing a steady stream of quality content for funeral homes. “Images and videos do extremely well on Facebook,

so we always try to include a positive, motivational message along with an image, link, or video that we post,” said Heather. “For our clients, we stick to a simple schedule, posting carefully curated content at least 3 times per week. This keeps the page active and fresh and offers regular opportunities for engagement.”

**2. Throw in fun, interesting “local flavor” posts once or twice per month.** Sara Esposito, our lead account success manager for the social media management team, helps funeral home clients post regular “local flavor” custom posts that really give the page a sense of community. “Some of our most successful posts are when the community comes together to support a great cause,” said Sarah. “One funeral home posted on their Facebook page that they would buy girl scout cookies from any troop that showed up on their doorstep. They would then donate the cookies to our deployed troops as a care package with a taste from home. It was a huge success, and they posted pics of every troop that showed up.”

**3. Promote your preneed program through targeted paid ads.** Personally, this has been my main area of focus. As a team, we have developed dozens of successful, targeted campaigns for funeral home clients to choose from, and we have been absolutely blown away by the incredible response from families. While some areas are easier to break into, we have found a sweet spot by offering high quality ebooks as downloads on Facebook, which brings me to my final point.

**4. Give away as much value as possible! With any form of marketing,** you have to give away value to receive value in the form of a contact’s name and information. The same holds true on social media, but our options for giving away value are nearly endless! We have conducted raffle drawings and given away ebooks, planning kits, and a free lunch for attending a lunch & learn, and the list goes on. With every new campaign that we develop, we are constantly asking, what can we give away?

I think we all know that social media is here to stay, in one form or another, and none of us want to miss out on the opportunity to connect with new families and grow preneed and at-need calls. And we certainly don’t want to leave the field wide open for our competition to move in with a strong presence on social media.

I hope this information will help you as you dive into Facebook marketing for yourself and maybe spark some ideas for your own program if you already have one going. Essentially, taking these simple steps will take you a long way toward becoming a social media pro! **FBA**

*Mitchell McLean serves as Director of Digital Marketing for Funeral Directors Life. Mitchell has helped hundreds of funeral homes gain thousands of leads through social media lead generation campaigns. He specializes in developing new and interesting ways to help funeral homes connect with families through digital media. Mitchell has a background in web development and search engine optimization (SEO). He received his Bachelor of Science in Electronic Media from Abilene Christian University and his Master of Business Administration from West Texas A&M. To connect with Mitchell, email him at [mitchell.mclean@funeraldirectorslife.com](mailto:mitchell.mclean@funeraldirectorslife.com), and he will be happy to discuss or review your social media program.*

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# DON'T IGNORE YOUR WARM PRENEED LEADS; NURTURE THEM

BY WELTON HONG

**P**reneeds: What's your approach to closing these critically beneficial contracts?

Are you implementing a complex in-house sales campaign? Do you contract out with a third-party provider to generate preneed sales? Or—as is the case with several funeral home owners we've spoken with the past couple of years—do you just sit back and hope for the best?

Hopefully you're having some luck with options one or two, because as you've undoubtedly noticed, option three doesn't get the job done.

Sure, you might snag a few contracts from family members here and there, but that's not a recipe for continued success.

With preneed sales being so important to your funeral home's future—especially in these uncertain times, with direct cremation disrupting the landscape for at-need cases—you need to create a dedicated plan for growing preneed sales.

**The plan needs to comprise the process of:**

- 1) identifying potential preneed clientele
- 2) nurturing those leads until they're ready to act
- 3) closing the sale

Now, a funeral home owner who puts any effort into growing preneeds is undoubtedly familiar with the first and third steps there—at least the basics of them.

Most target family members and friends/associates of a recent decedent as potential leads. And a hardworking salesperson knows just how to get that signature on the contract.

But step two? That's where the ball gets dropped all the time.

It's as simple as this: The vast majority of leads aren't ready to commit to a prearrangement right from the start. In sales vernacular, they're cold. And that's the best-case scenario. Many of them are ice cold.

They might be vaguely aware of the benefits of preplanning, but they're vaguely aware of the benefits of lots of things: walking for at least a half-hour every day, getting eight hours of sleep, saving at least 20 percent of every paycheck. That doesn't mean they'll commit to any of those things.

And most people certainly won't to commit to something as substantial as an advance funeral plan until they're convinced it's worth their hard-earned money. It's your job to do the convincing.

This is where I acknowledge that funeral directors are not necessarily dedicated salespeople. Sure, some are great at sales. They understand that it's an important aspect of the job. But it's just that: an aspect.

However, when it comes to preneeds, sales can't be just a secondary consideration. It's the whole kit and kaboodle. (And no, I'm still not sure what a kaboodle is. But that's not important right now.)

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When it comes to prearranging, you need to fully adopt a sales mentality. Nurturing leads is one of bedrock concepts in sales, especially when you're selling something that has a significantly long sales cycle. Which is exactly the case for preneeds.

In Homesteaders Life Company's most recent edition of its guide to preneed sales, the agency notes that "many consumers need a couple of years after first considering prearrangement before they are ready to complete an advance funeral plan."

Specifically, of people who had committed to such a plan, 27 percent said at least two years had passed between them first thinking about prearranging and filling out the paperwork.

The time frame was one to two years for another 8 percent, and five months to a year for another 18 percent. Add that up, and a full 53 percent of those surveyed took between five months and two years to finally sign on the dotted line.

Granted, some people make up their minds much faster. A full 19 percent of respondents signed a contract in the first two weeks after considering funeral prearrangement.

So, on average, about 1 out of 5 people decide they shouldn't wait at all. In sales, those are blazing hot leads. They don't require nurturing: You just have to get the papers in front of them and genially accept the check.

Those sorts of sales come easily, of course. But for some funeral homes, those are the only contracts they get. They nail down the blazing hot leads, because doing so requires virtually no effort. It's like being the only open pub in town on St. Patrick's Day.

But that also means about 80 percent of people who eventually prearranged were not blazing hot leads. The amount of time varied, of course, but over half of them took at least five months to seal the deal, and over a quarter needed over two years.

When you're dealing with a long sales cycle, you need to nurture those leads. Some will start off ice cold, some cold, some warm, some relatively hot. If you need to grow preneed sales at your funeral home, you—or your preneed sales director, if you're large enough to have one—need to focus on identifying where each lead is at each step.

Who's cold? Who's warm? Who's hot? How do we move someone from cold to warm, from warm to hot, from hot to signing on the bottom line?

In sales across a variety of industries, it's common that once you've identified a potential group of leads, about 50 percent will never contract with you, no matter what you do. You could

have the perfect solutions to that business's pain points and spend years communicating that fact, but you're simply never going to close that sale.

About 8 percent will be hot right out of the gate. These are leads you can convert into clientele quickly—which we'll say is about three months. They're interested almost immediately, and they don't need a lot of nurturing.

Removing that 58 percent from the equation (50 percent cold, 8 percent hot), we're left with 42 percent. We'll call them warm. That's where your main focus needs to be. It's on getting that 42 percent to heat up, over time, and eventually contract with you for an advance funeral plan.

So how do you warm up that 42 percent? One of the most reliable methods is email marketing. The technique has been overlooked lately as fresher, flashier marketing methods have surfaced, but email still works—and it works well.

That's especially true of the 60-and-over demographic, which remains the core target group for preneed sales campaigns. The Homesteaders study showed that people aged 62–92 comprise 90 percent of all Americans who prearrange.

A successful email campaign educates people of your community in that demographic on the benefits of prearrangement. That's the nurturing process. You're not trying to push people into making decisions before they're ready. You're letting them know how beneficial preplanning can be, letting them come to that realization in their own time.

Another important technique is retargeting. This digital marketing tool lets your funeral home market prearrangement services to people who have visited your website.

How it works is a bit technical, but the short version is that your digital advertisements will continue to be displayed to these visitors long after they've left your site. These ads will show up on many of the websites people visit, sites that are entirely unrelated to death care.

Retargeting campaigns must be carefully managed so people don't feel like they're being "stalked" by your ads, which is why responsible, professional marketers are conservative about how frequently ads appear and how long they will continue to display.

Ultimately, the key is to not just ignore the 42 percent of leads who don't immediately convey an avid interest in signing a prearrangement contract. With a smartly designed process in place, you can generate many more preneed sales; you just need to focus on the nurturing step. **FBA**

Welton Hong is the founder and marketing director of Ring Ring Marketing (FuneralHomeProfits.com), which specializes in helping funeral homes convert leads from online directly to the phone line. Welton also is a speaker at funeral home conferences and the author of Making Your Phone Ring with Internet Marketing for Funeral Homes. Reach him by email at info@ringringmarketing.com or call toll-free at 888.383-2848.




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# 2X YOUR PRENEED

Why Precoa kindly demands higher standards

**MEET TYLER AND TYLER.** BESIDES SHARING A NAME, THESE TWO MEMBERS OF PRECOA'S LEADERSHIP TEAM SHARE A PURPOSE. TYLER HORNIBROOK (TH), VICE PRESIDENT OF MARKETING, AND TYLER ANDERSON (TA), VICE PRESIDENT OF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT, BELIEVE IN THE POWER OF RESULTS-FOCUSED CRAFTSMANSHIP.

In their recent conversation, they reveal how the high standards set by Precoa's ProActive Preneed® system consistently result in doubling preneed growth for partners across America.

#### IN OUR DNA: CRAFTSMANSHIP STEMS FROM A HISTORY OF EXCELLENCE

**TH:** Back when Mark Hornibrook and Bret Davis founded Precoa, they resolved to build a company on the foundation of kindness, progression, and craftsmanship. My father is an architect by trade, so he has always been intentional about how things are built. In architecture, appearance is never more important than function. An elegant building still has to stand. He illustrated this same idea several years ago when he wrote an article about our direct mail testing. Marketing, done right, is more science than art.

**TA:** The bottom line is that craft takes time. We promise to significantly grow and sustain preneed sales for our partners, and we do so because ProActive Preneed is optimized at every touchpoint. But behind this promise, you'll find years of rigorous testing. Every detail matters. I mean, what good is a desk made from solid oak if you can't always count on the drawers to slide open?

**TH:** Over the years, we've been reminded that craftsmanship means different things to different people. An advertisement with impeccable design is great, but if it doesn't get results, what's the point? Knowing how important results are, especially in the business of preneed, we clarified our values still further. In revising "Craftsmanship" to "Results-focused Craftsmanship," everyone understands our aim.

#### MAKING A DIFFERENCE: PRENEED ULTIMATELY IMPACTS FAMILIES

**TA:** In our profession, no one has much choice about craftsmanship. When your funeral home receives calls, you need to act. On average, you have 72-96 hours to memorialize someone's entire life. You immediately become a resource for care, guidance, and support, and you can't afford to make mistakes. You have to be exact.

**TH:** Knowing this, we understand our responsibility. We partner with the best funeral homes in the country, and our marketing efforts need to strengthen them. We hold our lead generation, recruitment, technology, sales management, and Funeral Planning Center (FPC) to the highest standards. They need to function seamlessly because the best homes deserve the best results.



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// TYLER HORNIBROOK (LEFT),  
TYLER ANDERSON (RIGHT)



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**John Horan, President/CEO**  
**Horan & McConaty**

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**2.3X** 2013 **TODAY**



**Tom Belford, Owner**  
**John A. Gentleman Mortuaries**

John A. Gentleman has increased their preneed sales by 2.3X since partnering with Precoa in 2013.

**TA:** When I think about our promise to our partners, I think about substance. Before we even partner with a firm, we provide an in-depth market share analysis that serves as the basis for our marketing plan. The funeral home receives valuable insights into demographics and market share, but more importantly they see projections for what we can do. And what we can't. Our partners need to be clear about our outcomes.

## ELEGANT SOLUTIONS: THE CAPACITY TO INNOVATE FROM WITHIN

**TH:** I think it's easy for some companies to compartmentalize craftsmanship instead of encouraging it at every level. About two years ago, one of our teams planned to update the software for the FPC, but they quickly learned that nothing on the market met their standards. Other software highlighted speed and quantity, not quality, so they built their own. They spent two years from development to launch, a lot of which involved sitting down with our professional planners to see exactly how they used the software, and the results were stunning. The app became more intuitive yet more detailed, the algorithm we developed led to better call strategies, and the calendar became uniquely flexible. When every employee is committed to craftsmanship, it makes a difference.

**TA:** Ultimately, these tools helped more agents build relationships with more families, which touches on what you mentioned earlier about craftsmanship—much of this will never be seen by our customers, but it is crucial that it works well.

**TH:** What testing and analysis show is that you can always find opportunities for improvement. Creating highly visible marketing platforms from scratch is thrilling. But improving what you already do well? That is how you become more efficient and consistent, which has always been our goal. We need to help our partners achieve the preneed results we've promised.

## THE DIGITAL AGE: CRAFTSMANSHIP IS MORE THAN JUST REACTING

**TA:** I come back to the constant need for an objective. With 82% of baby boomers using social media, we knew digital marketing had demand. We also knew that 80% of companies were still unable to quantify the value of their social media efforts. Before we even built

# "WE'VE CONSISTENTLY GROWN PRENEED SALES FOR OUR PARTNERS, OFTEN BY MORE THAN 2X"

our program, we took the time to make sure preneed sales, not likes or clicks or other vanity metrics, would be the outcome for our partners.

**TH:** We're slow. And that's intentional. Our goal is never to be first to market but to arrive with the highest level of quality. Over the past 18 months, we subjected 650 campaign variations to more than 700 tests as we built and launched our digital marketing program. Using the same sales pipeline metrics that we use to track conversions through direct mail, we observed clear results in the digital realm. These weren't just the vanity metrics you mentioned, but hold, set, and close rates that nearly matched our most successful marketing channel. Through validated learning, we've consistently grown preneed sales for our partners, often by more than 2X. Digital marketing simply helps us reach even more customers so that we continue to achieve these outcomes.

**TA:** Again, our funeral home partners trust us with their premier brands. Nothing pleases us more than to hear from our partners and our employees, "Precoa thinks of everything." From the new resources we offer our partners to our sales meetings and incentive trips, our goal is to strengthen every single relationship.

**TH:** If you set out with clear intentions, you get meaningful results. You might sit next to someone for months and never truly know them, yet if you spend an hour intentionally trying to build a connection, the relationship you form can last a lifetime.

**TA:** Precoa begins any relationship by diving into the details. For our funeral home partners, our first step is a free market share analysis. Please reach out if you'd like to get one started.

**TYLER ANDERSON**  
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# FUNERAL DIRECTOR SPOTLIGHT

Funeral Business Advisor sat down with Brett Gerber funeral director with DeMoney-Grimes a Life Story Funeral Home in Columbia City, IN to learn more about his career, experience in the funeral industry, and what he's looking forward to in the future.

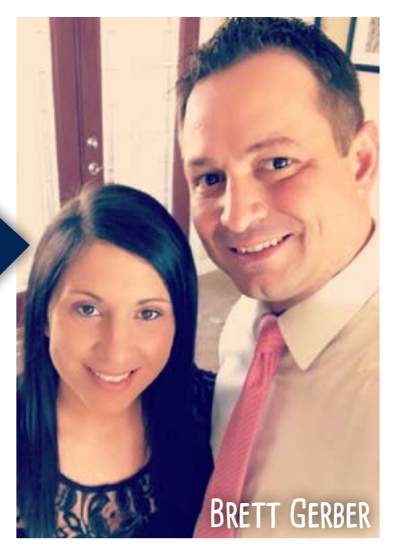
## How did you become a funeral director? What brought you into the industry?

I graduated from high school in 2000. In my first year of college I kept busy with classes and wrestling, but when I was home on the weekends, I helped out at a local funeral home. The funeral director was the older brother of a friend of mine I knew from wrestling and reached out to me to see if I could come in and help out when I wasn't at school. At the time, I thought I would finish up college and open my own motorcycle shop, but my curiosity about the funeral business caused my plans to change.

After spending time working in the funeral home on the weekends and getting to see firsthand exactly what a funeral director does, I officially decided to change my career path and focus on becoming a funeral director. I switched colleges my second year and began attending Vincennes University in Indiana. I completed their program in 2003 and officially became a licensed funeral director in 2004.

## What is your favorite part about working in this industry?

I have always loved the science side of this industry. When I first decided to switch colleges and career



paths, it was the embalming aspect that really pushed me to make that switch. I wanted to stay in the back of the house and be an embalmer. But as time went on, and I began to work more closely with the families, the front of house side grew on me rather quickly. I honestly couldn't ask for a better career. Working with the families is by far the best part about what I do.

## What makes your funeral home unique?

Our funeral home is over 100 years old and family owned. Our staff is what really sets us apart from other funeral homes in the area. We have been chosen as the NFDA Best of the Best three times and received the Pursuit of Excellence Award numerous times. Because we are a smaller funeral home, it gives us time to really get to know the families and create a life story for that person versus just an obituary. Our attention to detail is what makes us stand out and is one of the main reasons our families choose us.

## What are you most proud of in your career as a funeral director so far?

The biggest thing for me is when a family tells me how easy I made the process for them. That's something that always makes me feel really proud of my work. It's an honor to serve the families of my community and I cannot imagine doing anything else.

One woman in particular always comes to mind when I think about moments where I know I did my job. I served a woman who lost her husband because he took his own life. At one point she turned to me and said, "Brett, I didn't think someone could bring joy or laughter out

of such a tragedy, but you were able to do that." I am proud to get to know the families we serve so closely, so that I can give them a service they truly appreciate, value and make such a hard time a little bit easier.

## How do you define excellent customer service?

Excellent customer service is going above and beyond what the families you are serving expect of you. It also means treating them like they are a member of your own family. Because we are a smaller funeral home, we get to take our time with families and really get to know them.

## Looking forward to the future, what are you most excited about moving forward?

Continuing the legacy of this funeral home. I will officially take ownership of this funeral home on January 1, 2020 and that is something I am really looking forward to. I want to make our funeral home the best it can be and hopefully be able to pass it on to my kids in the future.

## Do you have any advice you would share with other funeral directors, especially those who are younger and just now entering the profession?

My advice is to learn as much as you can as often as you can. Use each and every day to grow and become a better funeral director and a better person. You don't have to just work at one funeral home. I have had a career where I worked at multiple funeral homes and if it wasn't for all those experiences, I wouldn't be the funeral director I am today. I've worked at large call volume funeral homes and small call volume funeral homes and I absorbed the best parts of each along the way. Set yourself up to be exposed to multiple ways of doing business and keep an open mind.

## How to you keep residual emotions from following you home? Do you have any tips or tricks for maintaining a solid work/life balance?

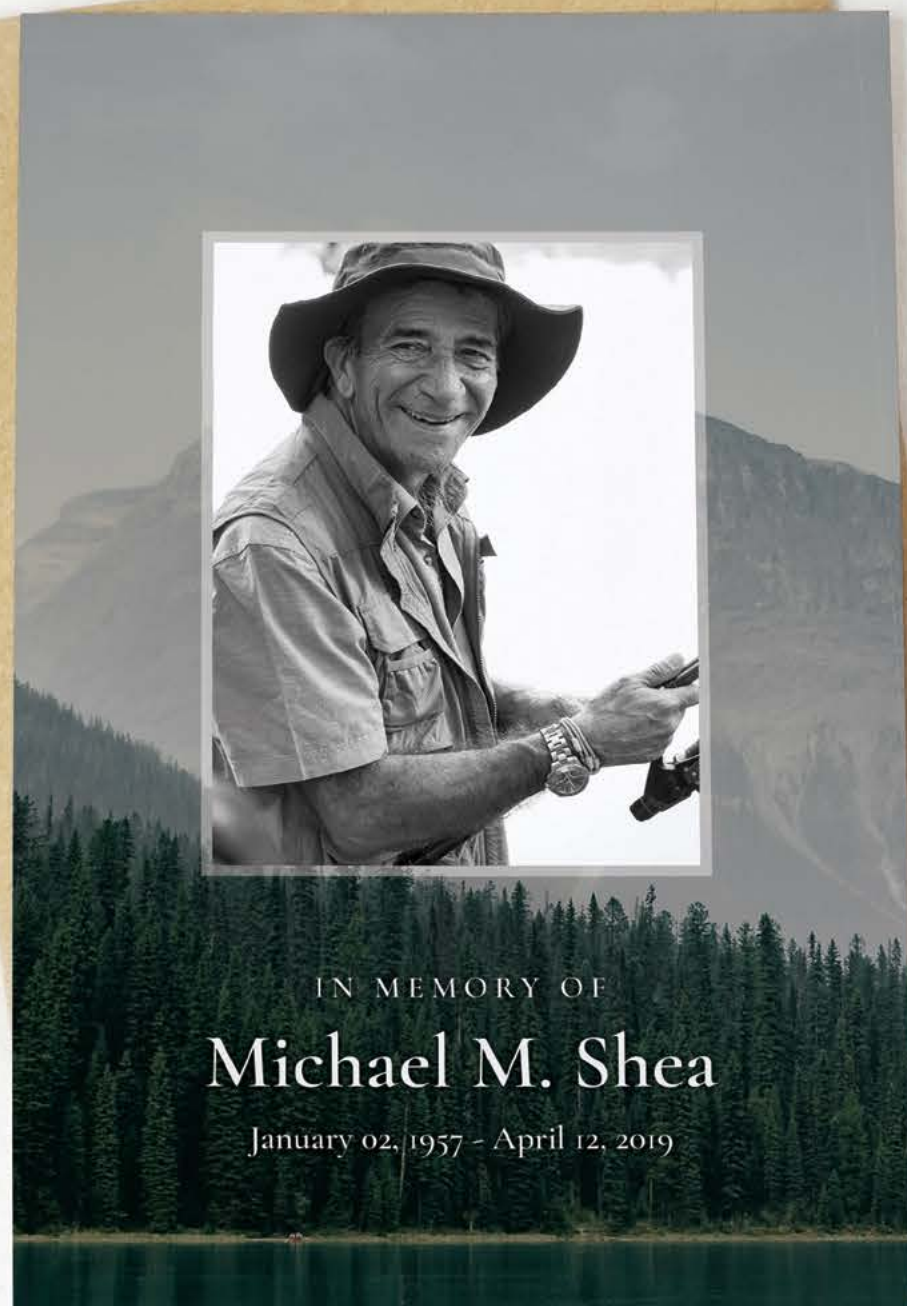
After 18 years in the business, it becomes second nature. I was really bothered by death when I was younger, especially when it was a child or if a young kid lost a parent. But now I look at each case and I feel honored just to help. When you get invested in the families you serve, you learn to see the positive in each day and your focus is on doing the best job possible.

There is not a magic recipe for dealing with the hard cases, your experience will help you tremendously. You want to be strong for the families and make the process go as smoothly as you can for the living. It's never easy, but you learn more about how to process the tough days with each family you serve. **FBA**

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## INDUSTRY PROFESSIONAL SPOTLIGHT: NASEEM KHAN

### Give us a little history on LoveUrns. How did the company become what it is today?

Before we started LoveUrns, I was in the business of producing home decor items. We made small pieces of furniture such as accent tables or decorative items made from metal, wood, and glass. I was working with some of the top designers in the home decor industry when I chanced upon cremation urns. When I first saw them, I realized that most of the urns in the industry were very conservative and I knew there was a need for some freshly designed products.

I created a few designs and contacted major players in the industry and the rest is history.

### What makes LoveUrns unique?

First and foremost, it's the quality. We really focus on the quality of our urns and we take it very seriously. Second, our design makes us stand out. We put a lot of work into each and every urn we produce. We try to keep our designs fresh and use modern colors that are visually pleasing. Lastly, our total customer experience is what really seals the deal. In addition to the design of our products, we also take great care in how we present the urns as well. A lot of time goes into how the products are presented and packaged which has kept our

customer satisfaction very high. Putting in the extra effort when it comes to packaging really shows our customers that we take even the smallest details very seriously.

### What is your design process like? How are new ideas developed and brought to life?

We are constantly thinking about our designs and how we can create something that will appeal to a family in need. With our most popular urn for example, The Wings of Hope butterfly shaped urn, we took something we knew that people loved and found a way to bring it to life in this industry. We always start with a design motif, a theme that we want to bring to our customers. Then we go to the drawing board and make it a reality. We first start with clean and simple lines - we don't want our designs to be complicated. We work as a team to create a final product that is simple, clean and modern. We want all our designs to feel effortless, fresh and comforting.

### What is your favorite thing about working in the funeral industry?

My favorite thing is interacting with the families. We get calls from families telling us that our products have been instrumental in bringing them comfort when they needed it the most. I have so many stories of happy customers that have

expressed how thankful they are and that is very humbling. When we get those calls where a family is explaining to us that something we designed and created is giving them great comfort, we know we are doing our job well. This is never an industry I thought I would be working in, but it is by far the most gratifying work I have ever done.

### What do you feel has been the biggest factor in your success with LoveUrns?

Design and quality. We have our own factories so we are able to deliver products that other companies cannot because we are able to control the quality that defines our work. If you don't have good product, it doesn't matter how great your customer service is - it is not going to work. We create products that are expertly designed, and we don't cut corners - this has been a major factor in our success in this industry.

### Looking forward to the future, what are you most excited about?

We just completed a line of cremation jewelry called LoveUrns Treasure and we are looking forward to expanding on that. Next on the drawing board, we are looking to also include materials such as glass, wood, and marble. We have a lot on the boards right now and we have been very busy designing

new products for our customers and I am looking forward to giving our customers more options with our products. I can't wait to share what we have been working on.

### How do you set goals for yourself? What is the process like?

We aim high and constantly keep working on the ground to make ourselves better each day.

By setting our sights high and pushing ourselves to meet seemingly impossible goals, we were able to find growth and success around the world. We want to keep expanding and aim to be the largest cremation products company in the world.

### When you aren't busy designing amazing products for your customers, how else do you like to spend your time?

My passion is photography. I love to take pictures and that has helped me in doing this business because all the product photography for our catalog and website have been shot by me. This business also gives me the opportunity to travel a lot, so when I am traveling and going to far off places, I never leave my camera behind. When I have spare time on trips, I like to slip away and photograph the area I am visiting. Photography has always been a big part of my life and I am beyond grateful this business gives me the opportunity to continue that passion. **FBA**





# THE #SOCIALMEDIA GUIDE

## 10 Tips to Learning Social Media Language & Culture

BY DEANNA DYDYNski

Have you ever read something on Facebook and been completely perplexed or heard an employee or coworker say something and you have absolutely no clue what it means? If you answered yes to either of these, then this is the guide for you.

Undoubtedly, social media is changing the way we communicate, socialize and interact as humans. The English language is evolving every day, from acronyms (LOL) and abbreviations (Totes) to the #hashtags, Emojis and new Oxford Dictionary recognized words like: Selfie, Tweet, Gif and Photobomb. We have social media to thank for all of these changes and if you do not wake up in the morning and immediately check your notifications, know how to "Dougie" or do not feel #blessed, then you are missing out on a serious culture movement.

As a marketing professional, understanding social media is absolutely necessary and I will admit, I have an upper hand in this arena, because I had a Myspace (2003 social media platform which is essentially obsolete) and am a part of a generation that grew up interacting on many of the first online social media platforms.

Business consultants stress the importance of utilizing social media in your marketing efforts and present how likes, shares, tweets and comments can help brand your business and gain you clientele, however they rarely provide an informational guide on what any of it means.

Understanding the sometimes-complex language and culture of social media can be confusing but if you want to stay engaged in your children's, nephew's, wife's or your current/potential customer base, it is important to learn social media language and these ten tips will help.

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1. Get a Smartphone


While it sounds extremely basic, and some enjoy living the “simple life,” getting a Smartphone is probably the most important tool needed in your quest for understanding social media. After all, nearly all of the social media applications, known as “Apps,” such as Snapchat, Twitter, Instagram and Facebook are mobile friendly and can be viewed anywhere your phone has internet access, which is also key when maintaining a consistent social media presence.


2. Learn the QUAD

We are not talking quadrangles, groups of four people or an architectural structure with four sides. We are talking about the power-four, quad of social media networking sites, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and Instagram. These four are the essential and bare necessity social media platforms to learn.

 Facebook, the largest social media platform and allows you to connect with friends, family and acquaintances across the world.

 YouTube, the largest and most popular video sharing platform which allows for sharing music, videos and live streaming content.

 Twitter, a platform allowing users to communicate with 280 characters or less and also home to the first use of the #hashtag.

 Instagram, now owned by Facebook is a social media platform allowing users to share photos, videos and live streaming footage with unique image #filters.


3. Create social media accounts

Obviously, if you want to learn and communicate the language of social media you will need to have access to them, which will require you to create accounts. Start by going to the “App Store” on your smart device and downloading for FREE, the QUAD and creating user accounts for each social media.

4. Interact on social media

Learning requires a conscious effort and interacting on social media is required in order to learn the language and culture. Each social media platform has “its own thing.”

Facebook the originator of the “LIKE” allows you to post images, videos and text. You can share posts and it offers the ability to interact with other’s posts with a thumbs up, heart, laughing face, wow face, sad tear drop face, mad face, or you can leave a comment.






Instagram is known for the infamous “double tap,” which allows you to  (love) a post. On Instagram you can share 24-hour lasting live streams, share photos and videos with a large selection of appearance filters such as Rise, Hudson, Lo-fi and my personal favorite Mayfair.

Twitter you can  (love), comment, retweet or TWEET your own content, images, GIFS or videos.

It is important to note that while these capabilities are available now, each social media platform has evolved and changed overtime. They have added and taken away specific features, so it is important to “update” your Apps when recommended on your smartphone to keep up-to-date with the latest changes.

5. Learn your Emojis

Emojis are digital icons used to express an idea or emotion. At this point in time, Emojis have surpassed social media platforms and have become a crucial tool in everyday communication. There are even toys and a movie made about Emojis. Most smartphones now automatically include the Emoji keyboard as an option to use when sending any written communication, so use them. There over 3,000 Emojis and according to Brandwatch and Twitter some of the world’s most popular include:

- 1. Face with tears of joy/laughter 
- 2. Loud crying face 
- 3. Smiling face with heart eyes 
- 4. Red heart 
- 5. Backhand index pointing finger 

6. Use MEMES and GIFS to communicate

They say laughter is the best medicine and at times nothing can be funnier than a well-crafted MEME. MEMES are essentially captioned photos intended to be funny and play a large role in today’s communicative culture and comedic relief. Anyone can make a meme now with the multiple MEME creators available online. To create you simply use a picture and write content in the standard MEME white-block letter font, Impact. A couple well-known and commonly repeated MEME subjects you may know would be Grumpy Cat or The Success Kid, see MEMES below:



GIFS, vary in their meaning and are essentially expressive, short, soundless videos used to communicate a range of emotions. Myself, my friends, family and coworkers all use GIFS to communicate with each other. GIFS can often communicate a thought or feeling much better than a



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standard text or Emoji and smartphones have added a GIF option as well on your keyboard when texting.

As the world becomes more embedded in their smart devices, MEMES and GIFS help to create a sense of animation you may have if you were communicating in-person and are essential in social media culture and language.

**7. Use online translation systems and dictionaries**

As mentioned before abbreviations and acronyms have played a large role in today's everyday communication and it can be difficult to keep up with the daily creations. Some standard abbreviations and acronyms are:

- TTYL: Talk to you Later
- Totes: Totally
- DM: Direct message
- LOL: Laugh out loud
- B4: Before
- BRB: Be right back
- Obvi: Obviously
- Cray: Crazy
- NBD: No big deal
- Jelly: Jealous
- Fab: Fabulous
- F2F: Face to face
- Redic: Ridiculous

The best thing you can do if unsure of an acronym or abbreviation is GOOGLE the meaning, use Urban Dictionary or ask a friend.

**8. Speak the language**

When learning a new language, any linguistics professional will tell you to practice and try to use what you have learned in everyday communication. The same goes with social media language. It may feel weird to step outside your comfort zone and use acronyms or abbreviations to communicate, however it may be how your next family communicates and you may seem unrelatable and totes redic.

**9. Create your own hashtags or phrases**

Your funeral home or cemetery staff may have a common phrase you use amongst each other, use it in your next social media post or create a new hashtag and keep using it. You can make anything a hashtag and it could be the next viral sensation.

**10. Appreciate social media and its ability to connect others**

Social media has altered our lives and changed our culture in many ways. Some feel it is ridiculous, a waste of time and is ruining human interaction. In some degree these feelings are true, however social media can bring people together and it has proven to do so. Something so simple as a post of a dress in 2015, brought the world together in an ongoing debate. Is the dress black and blue or white and gold?



Millions of people voted and spoke on their belief of the dress's colors, including scientists, psychologists, newspapers, radio hosts, television shows, news stations, online blogs and social media platforms, and all because of a post on Reddit, which is a social media American news aggregation. The dress proved to be black and blue after finding an actual listing of the dress online, however this started a worldly debate. If you are not familiar with the dress then maybe the #IceBucketChallenge rings a bell, which brought tremendous awareness to ALS, all because of a Facebook post of a gentleman dumping a bucket of ice water on his head. By the end of 2016 the social media sensation, Ice Bucket Challenge raised over 115 million for ALS research.

Say what you will about social media but it is here now and will probably exist, grow and thrive throughout our lifetime. Embrace this cultural change and expand your knowledge on its language and you may find it extremely useful in the future. **FBA**

*Deanna Dydynski serves as Marketing & Public Relations Manager for Express Funeral Funding, the industry's FASTEST. EASIEST.® insurance assignment experts. As a Bachelor of Science from Towson University, she mastered skills in marketing and mass communications. Dydynski has been developing marketing strategies and public relations initiatives within the funeral industry since 2015. She has brought her skills to Express Funeral Funding, which today has become the largest, privately held insurance assignment funding company in the industry. To connect with Deanna, call 812-949-9011, Ext. 108 or email deanna.dydynski@expff.com.*



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# SOCIAL MEDIA AS A WINDOW TO CURRENT TRENDS AND ALTERNATIVES IN MEMORIALIZATION

BY RICK GENTRY



Remember Grumpy Cat? Did you hear “Yanny” or “Lau-rel”? Did you witness the viral video of a passenger being forcibly removed from an overbooked airplane? The ubiquitous presence of social media exposes nearly everyone on the planet to a cacophony of shared information in a matter of seconds. Instantaneous, unscripted, relevant (or not) posts are sent and received by friends, followers or random individuals in a daily barrage that is “background noise” for the 21st century. Political memes, inspirational quotes, amazing sports feats and funny animal videos are interspersed with family pics and dream vacation snapshots for our perusal.

People are no longer bound together by geography, family ties, places of employment or community groups. Circles of acquaintances are ever expanding. Social media keeps millions of people communicating on a daily basis. Prior to the Facebook explosion...did you ever anticipate that you would view regular updates about the new puppy obtained by your high school chemistry partner or your Aunt Agnes’ latest garden plantings? Did the last #TrendingTweet inspire you to add your 280 characters (or less) to the fray?

We’ve heard a lot about the damage social media can do to the fabric of our society. Less than honest posts are taken at face value. An angry tweet may go out before better heads prevail. Vicious bullying or false rumors proliferate within moments which is especially dismaying when the subject is a young teen or other vulnerable target. But on the other hand, there is a lot of valuable information available at our fingertips. For good or bad, we are kept in the know about what’s going on in the lives of others. We are exposed to a whole world of ideas and opinions that allow us to make up our own minds. We are in constant touch with a multicultural, vastly diverse community.

Social media posts touch on all aspects of life, from an adorable birth announcement to the lengthy obituary of a much beloved family member. People post heartfelt tributes to a loved one, or, in rare cases, expose the family skeletons for the world to see. Religious beliefs and ways of celebrating life events have evolved over time to where even members of the same family may regard death in very different ways. Funeral directors have had to become more flexible as to how services are designed and conducted regarding sacred texts, meaningful quotes, philosophical approaches, as well as the recitation of traditional Bible verses. Most funeral directors, especially in large metropolitan areas, have seen an uptick in the diversity of the families they serve.

Justin Crowe reported astonishing statistics in his recent article on ConnectingDirectors.com, “In 17 Years, De-churching Millennials Will Rock the Funeral Industry...The Stats Are Shocking.” He writes,

According to PRRI research, from 1990 to 2015 the number of people who identify as being “religiously unaffiliated” has risen from 8% to 24%. Another study by The Pew Research Center shows that 2012–2017 the share of Americans who describe themselves as “spiritual but not religious” has

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Continued from Page 58

rocketed from 19 percent to 27 percent, while the share of those who identify as “religious and spiritual” has declined from 59 percent to 48 percent. These are dramatic changes for just 5 years.

With about 2.7 million Americans dying each year, that means today well over a half million people pass away annually who do not adhere to any set religious practice. Are you providing those families with options that align with their personal beliefs or lack thereof?

Social media is not just a frivolous way to pass time. Various sites provide a way to research what is currently on trend, as well as find creative and unique methods to commemorate the lives of loved ones. Pinterest is a popular site for people searching for ideas. There are “boards” on Pinterest with Celebration of Life themes, where people “pin” images of various things they like and want to share with others, including music playlists for songs to be played at the event and interesting displays featuring candid photos and personal items of the deceased. Instagram is gaining popularity by leaps and bounds. It focuses on visual sharing through photos and videos, less words. A search for “funeral” brings up a cornucopia of offerings—from paparazzi pics of celebrity send-offs to Lego funeral scenes to macabre Jib-Jab videos. This platform provides an “eye-opening” window into how our modern society views death, with a special focus on the mindset of millennials.

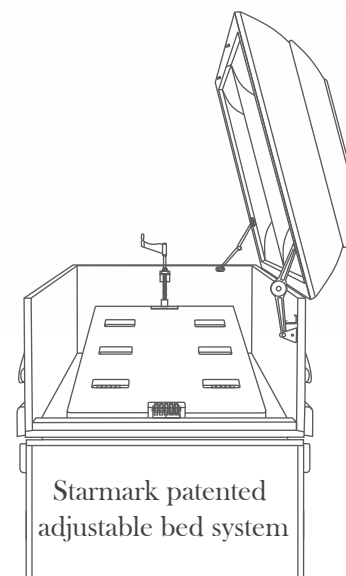
Memorial tribute videos, from amateur attempts to well-polished professional productions, are posted on YouTube for the public to view. Eulogy examples abound online, and it is not uncommon for an especially touching (or scathing) obituary to go viral. Celebrants and funeral directors who are responsible for coordinating an unforgettable service will not lack for inspiration, thanks to social media outlets.

We may be surprised how irreverently, bizarrely or comical others portray death. The solemn pastor at graveside surrounded by quietly sobbing people dressed in black is no longer the norm, but a trope. A memorial service may be a joyous occasion, colorful and loud. There may be traditional ethnic customs observed that are puzzling to the American public in general but may eventually be incorporated and synthesized into future death observances.

There will always be the need to provide the devout Christian family with a traditional service and memorial items featuring comforting Biblical verses and imagery. But most certainly funeral traditions vary for those of other faiths as well as different ages, cultures and social groups. To memorialize the “spiritual but not religious” individual, the first/second generation immigrant, or the unconventional iconoclast, there are customized options for celebrating the ultimate life transition. Social media educates us by providing literally millions of ways to do just that. **FBA**

**Rick Gentry is the Manager of Operations at Lamcraft, Inc., based in Lee's Summit, Missouri. He can be reached by phone at 800-821-1333 or by email at rgentry@lamcraft.com. You may also visit their website at www.lamcraft.com.**

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PREVIEW-FBA-MAY2019



# MANAGING YOUR FUNERAL HOME'S REPUTATION THROUGH ONLINE REVIEWS

BY LUKE FRIEBERG



It should come as no surprise that online reviews – like all word-of-mouth recommendations – factor heavily in most purchase decisions. According to a 2017 report from Northwestern University's Spiegel Research Center, 95% of consumers read online reviews before they make a purchase, and they are four times more likely to buy from a business with at least five online reviews. Simply put, online reviews are a critically important component of your funeral home's reputation. If you want to be the provider of choice for consumers in your area, your web experience must extend to sites like Yelp and Google.

While many funeral professionals understand the need to manage their online reputation, few know how to successfully integrate online reviews into their marketing plans. To truly optimize this segment of your funeral home's digital footprint, you need to master two things: generating reviews and proactively responding to them.

### Generating Reviews

A recent study from Dimensional Research found that consumers who have had a bad experience with a business are 52% more likely to post a review online. It's no surprise, then, that if you don't actively seek out positive reviews, the majority of the feedback you'll receive online is likely to be negative. And those negative reviews can have a catastrophic impact on your brand.

Let's look at the online reputation of a funeral home that served 100 families last year, with a 99% satisfaction rating. Only 3% of them took time to post a review online, and research suggests that the dissatisfied family was the most likely out of all their customers to post a review. So, even though two happy families left perfect, five-star reviews, a one-star rating from the dissatisfied family gave the firm an average 3 1/2-star rating for the year. Unfortunately, most consumers (87% according to a recent survey by BrightLocal), won't consider a business with less than three stars. That means that one more negative rating for the funeral home, without any positive reviews to combat it, would disqualify their business in the eyes of many consumers.

Consider the alternative: That same funeral home asked every satisfied family to post feedback on sites like Google and

Yelp. If those families fell in line with most consumer trends, 70% of them left a review when asked to do so by the funeral home. Instead of three reviews, their business received 70. And, yes, the unhappy family was in that mix. But let's assume that half of the satisfied families posted five-star reviews and the remaining half posted four-star reviews. Even with the one-star review from the dissatisfied family, the funeral home still averaged 4 1/2 stars for the year. That's a significant difference in their online reputation, solely by asking families to review their business.

Keep in mind that, in the examples above, the funeral home served the same number of families and delighted 99% of them. But their reputation – the way they were perceived by online shoppers – was significantly different. And remember that search engines like Google serve up higher rankings for businesses with positive reviews. If only three families review your business online, search engines have no way of knowing that you also served 97 other highly satisfied families. Your search rankings will suffer, which opens the door for competitors to attract would-be customers.

So how do you ensure your online reputation mirrors your offline brand? The best defense is good offense – you need to proactively ask client families to review your business:

- **Start by asking every family about their experience with your funeral home.** You should already be doing this – and many of you are. Some businesses ask for feedback over the phone or in a direct mail survey, but I prefer face-to-face as part of your aftercare follow up. But however you ask, you need to provide time and space for families to share their experience with you before you consider asking for a review. If they were not fully satisfied with your services, you need to ask what you could have done (and could still do) to improve their experience. If the family says they were completely happy, you've created a perfect opportunity to discuss an online review.

- **Ask for an online review, and let them know why it's important.** You don't want to get into a long discussion of search engine rankings with your client families. It's enough to simply tell them that other families who will one day experience

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the loss of a loved one could benefit from the expertise and advice of someone who has already gone through that process. When framed as a way to help others, most families will be more than happy to share their experiences on Google or Yelp.

• **Give specific instructions for how to leave a review, and thank them in advance.** Make sure you address any questions they have about how to leave an online review, and be ready with a few suggestions if they want to know where they should start. Let them know that, while star ratings are important, their comments about your services will be the most valuable to other families. Thank them for the time they will take to leave a review for your business, and let them know how honored you were that they entrusted their loved one to your care. Before you move on, reaffirm your commitment to be a resource to them in the days and weeks ahead.

By far, the most important part of this process is the ask – countless studies have shown that consumers are more than willing to leave a review when they're asked to do so by a business. If you remember nothing else from this article, remember this: You can dramatically improve your funeral home's online reputation and search engine rankings simply by asking your client families for online reviews.

Responding to Reviews

Unfortunately, it's not enough to simply encourage positive reviews – you also need to respond to and manage them. According to a 2018 study by Review Trackers, the majority of consumers expect a response to their online reviews within seven days, and the latest conversation index from BazaarVoice found that 41% of consumers believe that companies that quickly respond to their online reviews care about their customers. What funeral home wouldn't want to underscore how much they care about their client families?

How you respond will depend on the type of review. For positive reviews, it's often enough to thank them for their feedback and reiterate how honored you were to care for their loved one. The key here is to respond to every review as soon as it's posted – especially with negative reviews.

According to the Speigel Research Center, 82% of consumers seek out negative reviews first when researching products and services, and the way you handle complaints says a great deal about your business. A key part of managing your online reputation is putting a process in place to thoughtfully and publicly address negative reviews.

I recently spoke to Brian May, owner of three St. Louis funeral homes. Last year, he and his staff received a lengthy, one-star review from a family they had recently served. The review detailed a number of concerns with the service the family had received – concerns Brian was already aware of from conversations with his staff. He immediately reached out to the reviewer by phone to express his regret that they had failed to

meet her expectations. He then posted a response on the review sites (the original review appeared in more than one place), reiterating his apologies and thanking her for speaking with him over the phone to address her concerns. He also assured her that the feedback had been shared with the rest of the staff.

There are number of good lessons in Brian's response:

• **Maintain open communication with your staff.** Brian was not surprised when he read the review because he and his staff had already discussed the family's experience and taken steps to correct the issues that led to poor service.

• **Respond as soon as possible.** Brian responded to this review the same day it was posted – due in large part to automatic email notifications from the review site. If you haven't already, make sure you go out to Google and Yelp to set up automatic notifications for your business. That will ensure that you know exactly what is being said about your business online and can respond quickly whenever a new review is posted.

• **Take the discussion offline.** Before he typed a response to her review, Brian first tried to diffuse the situation in an offline setting. Firing off an immediate response online before you've addressed the issue in a more private setting will often lead to miscommunication and unnecessary escalation. It's best to address the concerns in a more personal format – face to face or over the phone.

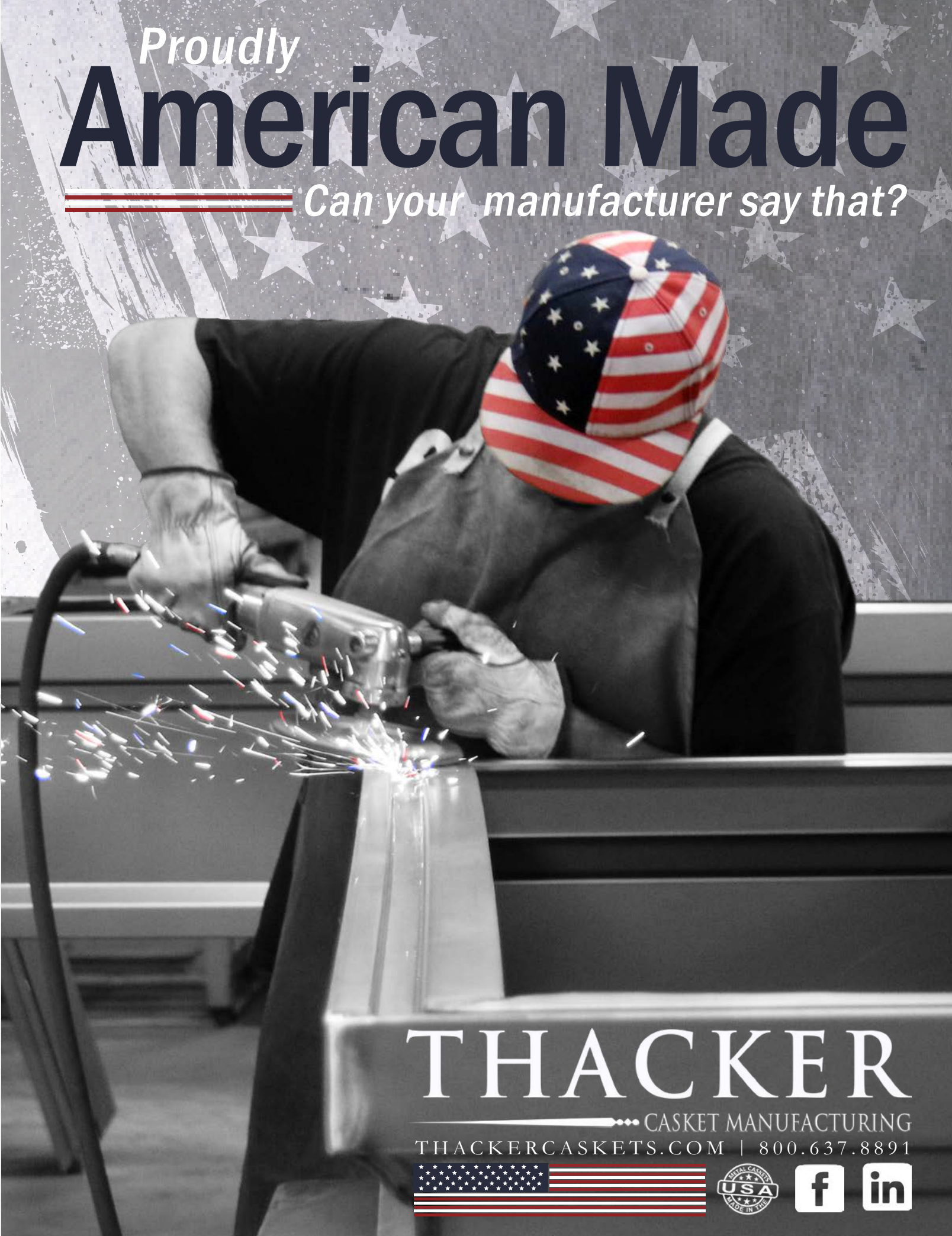
• **Write up a thoughtful, considerate response.** Brian drafted his response in a word document so he could carefully craft his message, double checking the wording and spelling before he posted it online. He also made sure to thank her for speaking to him over the phone – indicating to anyone reading his response that he took her concerns seriously and had addressed them in a personal way.

• **Respond to the review on every site.** This particular review appeared on three different review sites, so Brian copied and pasted his response and posted it to all three. This ensured that anyone who saw the review would also see how professional and thoughtful he was in addressing the concerns.

If this seems like a lot of work, remember that how manage your online reputation has the power to change hearts and minds – 70% of participants in the BazaarVoice conversation index said their opinion about a business changed after the company replied to their review. And don't forget how one negative review (especially one that goes unaddressed) can undermine your online reputation.

The impact your web presence has on your reputation and, by extension, your call volume is significant – and it will only continue to grow. If you don't have a plan to manage your online reputation, it's time to put one in place. **FBA**

Luke Frieberg is President of eFuneral Solutions, LLC, a breakout digital solutions company that helps funeral homes maximize market share through optimized online sales. Prior to joining eFuneral, Luke spent almost a decade in various roles with Principal Financial Group, a Fortune 500 insurance and financial services company. He is a graduate of Drake University where he earned his Bachelor's and MBA. Learn more about eFuneral at [efuneralpartner.com](http://efuneralpartner.com).



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# FUNERAL DIRECTORS' FINANCIAL HABITS



BY RON H. COOPER, CPA &  
RAYMOND L. BALD, CPA

When you look in the mirror every day, do see a good funeral director, one who day in and day out meets the needs of grieving families and one who places the family's needs above your own? If you are like most funeral directors, helping people is why you chose your profession and that should make you feel good about yourself. But how do you feel when you look in QuickBooks and notice there are more bills to pay than there is money in the checking account? Perhaps, your management style of operating your funeral home is lopsided, leaning too heavily on giving and not taking, a caregiver and not a business person. Over the years, perhaps you developed some bad financial habits that keeps your caregiver vs. business person out of balance. It is never too late to learn from your mistakes, but first you need to admit your mistakes and second you need to make changes. Business decisions, good ones and bad ones, are a result of habits. If you listed out your bad business habits, would they include any of the following?

## Basing your General Price Lists (GPL) on your Competitor's General Price List

Unless your overhead and cash flow needs are the same as the one or two funeral homes in your town or service area, which is extremely unlikely, your GPL should be different than theirs. The amounts on your GPL need to reflect your business needs. Prior to updating your next GPL, which should be done routinely, it's imperative that you first determine your overhead and cash flow needs. Knowing your monthly cash flow needs, along with analyzing call volume by types, enables you to prepare a GPL that will

meet those needs. Pricing your goods and services is not a guessing game. Worrying about what Smith Funeral Home charges for direct cremations is not going to help you pay the monthly mortgage or bi-weekly payroll. That is not to say that competition is not important. It is, but a GPL should be more to a family than just the amounts. Effective and clear communication with your families is critical. Families need to believe that the services you provide are worth what you are charging. It is easy to compare prices with your competitor, but it is not easy to compare quality of services. You and your staff need to out-service your competitors. When families mention or hear your name or the name of your funeral home, the first thing that should come to their minds is service-how they were treated and not how much you charged them.

## Inadequate Accounting and Financial System

Your accounting system is a valuable tool. A funeral home's accounting and financial system should be used to paint a financial portrait of your business activities. If your accounting system is not generating current and relevant financial information, your business decisions become a guessing game. Remember, effective GPL pricing demands quality numbers and proper analysis.

With today's technology, like QuickBooks Online with its time-saving features, there are no excuses for not having quality financial information at your fingertips. QuickBooks Online provides 24-hour access for you and your accountant. With a little guidance, if you can read, type and turn on a computer, you can have an effective funeral home accounting and financial system.

Funeral directors do not need a degree in accounting or finance to generate quality financial information or to make prudent business decisions. A funeral home's accounting system should be designed with the funeral director in mind. Your chart of accounts, which is the record for each type of asset, liability, equity, revenue and expense, should be specific and tailored for you. For example, the revenue categories in your chart of accounts should match the descriptions on your Statement of Goods and Services Selected. If you offer packages, like Cremation with Visitation, that offering should appear as a line item on your Profit and Loss Statement (P&L).

Your Cost of Goods Sold should include categories like caskets, vaults, urns, monuments, clothing, memorial packages and jewelry. General categories for expenses should include General and Administrative, Automotive, Facilities, and Salaries and Benefits, with each general category further broken down to effectively paint a picture of your operations. Cash Advance Revenues and Cash Advance Expenses both deserve their own categories.

Producing quality financial reports and basing financial decisions on them is only second in importance to providing quality service to your families. Remember, a funeral home's accounting system should not be designed only so your tax professional can prepare your federal and state tax returns. Your system needs to generate financial reports that enable

you to monitor your financial operations. As an example, the Profit and Loss Statement provides information to determine if expenses are in-line with revenues. It shows if the amounts on the GPL are generating enough revenues to generate profits. The P&L is used to determine if the mark-ups on caskets and other merchandise are generating proper margins. The P&L shows a funeral director if the cost of Salaries and Benefits are too high when compared with revenues.

## Too Much Debt

In February of 2019, the U.S. national debt was reported at over \$22 trillion. Debt may be the American way, but that way may lead a person down a rocky financial path. There is no argument that most funeral directors need to borrow in order to purchase a funeral home business. In addition, many funeral directors rely on 5- to 7-year loans to maintain a quality fleet of automobiles. Debt is not always bad. But, debt without a financial plan to repay the debt can quickly turn dreams into nightmares. Debt is only a funeral director's friend when it is used to increase financial net worth. Before considering a new loan or refinancing, funeral directors need to determine if they have adequate cash flow to support the new payments. When refinancing, the question to answer first is whether the costs of refinancing, like appraisals and bank fees, and the new interest rate saves or costs money. A financial red flag is obtaining a short-term loan to help pay for long-term debt, like taking out a line of credit to pay the mortgage.

Another question to answer is whether additional debt will increase the value of your funeral home. For example, if a funeral director is considering a major renovation, like a new chapel, it is important to determine if the cost of the chapel and the related debt service will be met by increased call volume. Another question to answer is whether business would be lost if no addition was made. During slow months, too much debt can quickly drain a checking account. In the case of acquiring a funeral home, the key is using financial information, like financial statements and tax returns, to determine how much debt the funeral home can support once purchased. Every funeral home owner, regardless of age, should have a debt retirement plan, a financial blueprint that illustrates how and when all debt will be paid off. Retiring while in debt does not make good financial sense.

If you find yourself always behind the financial eight ball, perhaps it is time to rethink your financial game plan by developing new habits. Wasn't Einstein who said that a sign of insanity is doing the same thing over again and expecting different results? **FBA**

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# HOW TO KEEP YOUR FIRM OPEN FOR THE NEXT 10 YEARS

BY GEORGE PAUL III

The one thing that we can always depend on is change. That may sound like an oxymoron, but we all know change happens all around us. Our bodies change. Do you still have the track star figure you had in high school? Don't worry; I won't judge you I never did. Do you still dress the way you did 15 years ago? Is the economy the same as it was 12 years ago? How about, is the community your firm serves the same as it was 10 years ago? You see? We can depend on the fact that things change. Some changes allow us to become better. Some changes drive businesses to closure. The only way to embrace and adapt to change is if our businesses consistently produce the three drivers that resist the negative effects of change: marketing, experience and innovation.

## MARKETING

I mean this goes without saying. Every business must market themselves no matter what industry they're in. I don't care if you think that because you're a niche business you don't need to advertise. It doesn't matter if it's a challenge to market ourselves because of the stigma surrounding death. If no one knows you're out there then they won't use you. Please don't say that people know you're here because they drive by your location or you've been around for years, even decades. Congratulations your firm has been around long. Business longevity is truly praiseworthy, but if you don't want to become another sad story of a firm closing after decades in the community then make sure your name is out there on a regular basis.

Did you know that people need to touch, see or interact with your brand at least 20 times before they buy? You might think that doesn't apply for at-need services, but it does. If you're branding and marketing yourself regularly that happens really quickly. Realistically, it doesn't happen when at-need arises but long before through your website, online reviews, community involvement, formal ads, your vehicle fleet, driving by your location, social media and more. When at-need arises all that's left is for you to pop up when they're looking which invariably are the 18th-20th times they see you. Since you don't know when they're looking because none of us can predict death you have to make sure your brand is out there consistently and cohesively. This fact is still true for pre-need since you're convincing them to buy with you before they even need you. Your marketing has to do an even stronger job convincing them that you're the best choice to care for them when they pass 1, 5 or more years down the road. All of the touches they've had with your brand before they sit with you now reinforce you're the best choice. When you do that you'll be able to leverage the next product of firm longevity—your experience.

## EXPERIENCE

Experience is something you most likely have in spades. However, the key driver to leveraging experience into business longevity is systemizing your experience. If you know the process of onboarding a prospective family

then document it and give it to your staff to implement. You've been doing it for years. You know how to read body language, address concerns, address competition and position yourself as the best choice to families. You also have tricks of the trade regarding embalming, dressing and more. Why keep all that to yourself? If you want to open multiple locations then you have to share since they'll be responsible for growing your firm without your regular presence. You'll be too busy doing other stuff to do it all yourself. You're hurting your team if you don't.

Staff wants to feel like they have growth opportunities within your firm. It doesn't matter the size. In fact, if you're an independent firm you can capitalize on that since they'll be playing a much bigger role allowing them infinite growth. By sharing your experience with them they'll take greater ownership of the success or failure of your firm. You need that to compete with the conglomerates. When I began sharing my experience with my staff I was blown away at the increased loyalty and out-of-the-box ideas I got from them. I wasn't only sharing tricks of the trade to help them better perform their daily tasks. I looked at what they would need to have a successful career and began giving them the knowledge they needed. As a result when things were down, rather than updating their resumes they were coming to me with ideas to help market the business and get out of our slump. It was all because I decided to share my experience rather than treat them like they were going to commit corporate espionage. Experience in your industry naturally fuels the final driver of firm longevity—innovation.

## INNOVATION

The key component of innovation is answering one simple question; what can I do that other local firms won't do or are unwilling to do? I was recently listening to a Podcast, The Common Cents Show, and in it co-host Jonathan Neves talked about one of the things he did that his competitors were unwilling to do which was embrace demanding clients. No one wants to deal with a demanding client because they want more of us and ultimately become a headache. Most people turn their business away or quote them an egregiously high number causing them to go away because you're too expensive. He did what his competitors weren't willing to do which was embracing them as a client. His reasoning was that people rarely tell you when they're dissatisfied with your service. You either get a bad review or never hear from them again. As a result you never get a chance to improve and address issues that will affect other families. Jonathan realized that these demanding customers are doing something very few do and that is tell you exactly how to make them happy. Yes, he did charge them more to compensate for the additional time, but in the end he got a loyal client that will readily refer him to others because they're extremely satisfied. His company grosses seven-figures and is poised to double this year. How was he able to do that? By doing something his competitors were unwilling to do.

Innovation doesn't have to be grand, but it does need to be researched. You need to have a futurist mentality. When I do brand discovery, an in-depth process of discovering problems hindering business growth, I ask my clients two key questions. Where will the industry be in 5 years? And, "What will your families look like in 5 years?" The answers to both those questions are drivers of innovation, brand awareness and brand loyalty. You also need to do something else.

One of my favorite quotes from Gary V. was, "drive yourself out of business, don't let others do it for you." He was referring to taxis cab companies driven out of business by Uber and Lyft. But this isn't limited to one industry. Amazon drove out brick and mortar shops. Online stores killed malls. Netflix killed blockbuster. Deathcare is no different. Some say cremation is killing the industry. Change always comes. If you know your numbers, if you're up to date on what's going on in the industry then you could've seen the shift and been an innovator to delivering families the experience they want when they decide to cremate their loved one. One of the ways to do that is by viewing yourself as your own competition.

I don't know who said it, but the saying goes, "You are your own competition". There's truth in that. If you're constantly looking for ways to innovate—you will. What happens is that while you're playing offense gaining marketshare your competing firms are playing defense trying to keep up with you because all the families are coming to you. The only way you can do that is by being truthful with the current state of your business. Chess players play against themselves to sort out their weaknesses. How well do you know your weaknesses? Do you do a SWOT analysis every year? Your business changes yearly based on staff, culture, economy and neighborhood. These changes give you a chance to be an innovator in your area.

If you constantly look at your firm and your brand and see how you can continue to capitalize on your marketing, experience and innovation then you'll embrace change wholeheartedly always using as a driver to keep your doors open. Until then I wish you much success continuing the legacy you built with your firm. **FBA**

*George Paul III is a branding expert and award-winning designer. He's the founder of Cherished Keepsakes, a provider of memorial keepsakes such as prayer cards, memorial programs, buttons, photo collages and more. Their innovative designs have been sought after by families and funeral homes across the country. Additionally, he assists firms and companies in the funeral industry with their branding and marketing. To connect with George, email him at [gpaul@cherishedkps.com](mailto:gpaul@cherishedkps.com), call 617-971-8590/617-980-1476, or visit his websites [www.chershedkps.com](http://www.chershedkps.com) or [www.seizethebrand.com](http://www.seizethebrand.com)*



# THIS ENORMOUS COST IS RIGHT OVER YOUR HEAD

BY MIKE FEASEL

Minimizing expenses and reducing risks of potential large capital expenses are just a few things that can greatly impact the bottom line of funeral homes. Proper maintenance is crucial to avoiding costly replacement purchases. It is always less expensive to maintain what you have than to replace it. HVAC systems are a common thought of business owners when it comes to a potential large expense. Another item that is easily forgotten but protects the entire building is the roof system. Property owners typically don't pay much attention to it unless there is an issue. A roof can leak for a long time before that leak reveals itself and by then the damage is done. Roof decking, insulation, drywall and even the paint and carpet can be impacted by a leak. Annual roof inspections are cheap and possibly even free with the right vendor. Funeral home owners and managers should know about changes that happened in the roofing industry and can greatly impact large funeral home roofs.

Picture purchasing a brand new shingled roof. Those shingles will keep roofing costs off your mind and your budget. But 10-15 years later your roof is streaky and springing leaks. How did this happen, and why weren't you told to budget for a new roof sooner? A small funeral home could face a \$40,000 to \$50,000 bill to replace it. Large funeral home replacement costs can be in the hundreds of thousands of dollars.

In the late 20th century shingles would have lasted a full 30 years. Shingles purchased then were made of a mixture of asphalt, which is a byproduct of the petroleum refining process, and limestone or other fillers. This creates a shingle

that is durable and hard while remaining flexible enough to withstand harsh weather and changing temperatures.

However, in the early 2000s engineers discovered a way to refine petroleum that results in more gasoline and less byproduct. This development limited asphalt production, consequently increasing the cost of making shingles. Shingle Manufacturers began adding more limestone to shingles to make them cheaper to produce.

The new formula for shingles, containing less asphalt and more limestone, changed the weight and durability of shingles. Every 100 square feet of shingles once weighed 320 lbs., but now weigh 240 lbs. Lighter shingles with less asphalt results in roofs that last half as long as promised. Roofing companies have been undergoing lawsuits as a result; googling "roof class action lawsuit" will demonstrate the amount of cases that have resulted from newer, lower-quality shingles. Light, dry shingles can't withstand harsh weather and thermal shock the way that heavier shingles with more oil can.

Thermal shock occurs when a material expands in heat and retracts in the cold. Roofs experience this on a daily basis, especially in the summer. Roofing shingles can get up to 150 degrees when exposed to direct sunlight, but quickly cool to 60 or 70 degrees when a rain shower pops up. The oils they contain allow them to spread out in the heat and quickly retract again when cooled, undergoing thermal shock without breaking apart. However, the oils from the asphalt evaporate over time, causing the shingles to age and

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become brittle. Less asphalt leads to faster oil evaporation and puts more stress on asphalt shingles, causing them to break apart prematurely.

Once shingles become brittle, harsh winds and hail can break them apart and cause leaks. Studies show that it takes 2-4 years for a leak to show up as a stain on your ceiling. This water has to pass through 12 to 16 inches of insulation, causing internal roof damage that will cost much more than the cost of replacing the roof itself.

Brittle shingles will also begin developing streaks. This unsightly development is caused by a blue-green algae called gloeocapsa magma. Spores of this algae will attach to your roof and discolor the shingles. As your shingles become brittle and crumble, water vapor will more easily settle between your shingles and create a good environment for this algae to grow.

Rather than replacing a streaky roof, many choose to clean their shingles to make them look like new. Most contractors will clean your roof with pressure washing, which puts unnecessary stress

on your shingles. Instead, you could clean the shingles with bleach products, but these aren't environmentally friendly and any runoff could be hazardous to you or even damage your landscaping. A more preferable option is to find one of the few environmentally-friendly asphalt cleaning products currently on the market, though many of these products contain salts that will dry out your roof.

While cleaning a roof can beautify a property it will not increase the life of shingles. Until now the only option for an aging roof was replacement. Since margins can be tight for funeral homes it is not an expense many wish to face. New technology has provided an option to extend the life of an asphalt shingle roof. A quick internet search for "roof replacement alternatives" can provide a funeral home owner with options that are now available on the market that can help maintain and extend the life of shingles. This maintenance also offers a tremendous cost savings

verses a full tear off and replace which means more dollars stay on the bottom line. **FBA**

"While cleaning a roof can beautify a property it will not increase the life of shingles. Until now the only option for an aging roof was replacement. Since margins can be tight for funeral homes it is not an expense many wish to face."

Mike Feazel is the CEO of Roof Maxx technologies. Roof Maxx, a product developed by Mike and Todd Feazel, utilizes soy methyl esters to create an EPA and FDA approved roof treatment that can extend the life of your roof by up to 15 years, and is a fraction of the cost of roof replacement. As shingles last for shorter and shorter amounts of time, innovators are finding ways to solve the problem of expensive, short-lived roofs. With proper maintenance and care, your roof could last its full 30 years - or more! For more information please visit [roofmaxx.com](http://roofmaxx.com).

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# WHAT NOW? HANDLING SEXUAL HARASSMENT COMPLAINTS

BY MARTY LUDLUM AND KARA GRAY LUDLUM

*TODAY: an employee walks into your office and mentions he/she is being sexually harassed at work. What do you do? Do you have a plan? Hoping this never happens is not really a plan.*

This is our third article discussing sexual harassment in the workplace. In part one, we examined the Five Big Myths about Sexual Harassment. A common theme would be: everyone needs to worry about sexual harassment. In part two, we discussed the different types of sexual harassment under Title VII: quid pro quo and hostile work environment.

In this installment we examine an action plan for you firm should you face a sexual harassment complaint. You must plan for a difficult situation. Spontaneous planning never succeeds. The best business advice: Hope for the Best, but Plan for the Worst. You need to plan.

Let's assume the worst has just happened. An employee has come to your office to make a complaint of sexual harassment. What do you do now (besides panic)?

Let's reduce the process into three simple components. The three big steps are: Inform, Document, and Take Action! Let's get to the details.

First, inform your lawyer. (If you don't have one, get one, now.) This process only takes a second, and should not be forgotten. While the primary law on sexual harassment is federal, many states have added additional protection. Your time to react depends on federal and state laws, so you will need a local attorney. Do not wait. Most states have short time limits for your actions/reactions. One of the first things your lawyer will want to see is your employee handbook, to make sure you follow all the procedures you promised in the handbook. (If you don't have an employee handbook, now is a good time to consider one). The handbook is a promise between the employer and the employee on procedures if problems arise. You must live up to your promises to employees. Your local attorney is the best position to protect your interests and to provide sound advice on how to proceed.

Second, document everything immediately and without judgment. Memories fail and witnesses scatter. Gather information while you can. Have everyone who was present at the incident write down what they remember. What if one employee does not remember anything? Have him/her write down that he/she does not have any memory of the event, just in case he/she changes the story and suddenly has vivid memories of the event later.

Everyone should make a written statement with details (who what where and when). Be specific about dates, times, and people's names and actions. Do not worry about the why. That is a different rabbit hole which you do not want to enter. Make sure each person's statement is signed and dated (even if the text is typed). The more witnesses, the better. You cannot have too many witnesses.

In the process of collecting everyone's statements, do not make any judgments. Do not imply one side or another is believed. Do not argue with the victim, witnesses, or perpetrator. Just record all the facts for now. People will have different recollections (sometimes exact opposite versions of the events). Do not worry about the conflicting accounts. Just make sure you record as much of the contemporary facts as possible, before memories start to fade.

You, as the employer, should also document your memories of the event as soon as possible, while the event is fresh in your mind. You are the employer, but might also be a witness.

If people have photos/videos from the time of the incident (and these days every moment is captured by someone's phone), gather and save copies of them on a hard drive.

If this incident results in a lawsuit or discrimination complaint, the contemporary fact statements are invaluable. Without these statements, often times people exaggerate their claims, which affects your firm's liability.

Third, you need to take prompt remedial action. These magic words are from the statute. While the perpetrator is always responsible for his/her action, the employer can minimize their liability by taking prompt remedial action. Prompt remedial action can minimize, reduce, and mitigate your firm's financial liability. Prompt remedial action shows the employer's dedication to reducing sexual harassment in the workplace. Are you dedicated to reducing sexual harassment at your firm? What evidence do you have?

So what is prompt remedial action?

Have you explicitly told your employees of your firm's policy towards sexual harassment? How can you prove this? Usually, this takes the form of training for employees on



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# Funeral Industry CALENDAR OF EVENTS

MAY 2019

**NFDA EMBALMING AND RESTORATIVE ART SEMINAR**  
**May 16, 2019**  
Pittsburgh, PA  
Pittsburgh Institute of Mortuary Science  
[www.nfda.org](http://www.nfda.org)

JUN 2019

**CANA'S CREMATORY OPERATIONS CERTIFICATION PROGRAM**  
**June 5, 2019**  
Seattle, WA  
Washelli and Bothell Funeral Home  
[www.cremationassociation.org](http://www.cremationassociation.org)

**ANGEL PETS CONFERENCE**  
**June 8, 2019**  
Asheville, NC  
Renaissance Hotel Downtown  
[www.eventbrite.com](http://www.eventbrite.com)

**CANA'S CREMATORY OPERATIONS CERTIFICATION PROGRAM**  
**June 12, 2019**  
Nieges Montreal, Quebec  
Centre funéraire Côte - des - Nieges  
[www.cremationassociation.org](http://www.cremationassociation.org)

JUL 2019

**NFDA LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE**  
**July 13, 2019**  
San Diego, CA  
Manchester Grand Hyatt  
[www.events.nfda.org](http://www.events.nfda.org)

**CANA'S 101ST ANNUAL CREMATION INNOVATION CONVENTION**  
**July 31, 2019**  
Louisville, KY  
Omni Louisville Hotel  
[www.cremationassociation.org](http://www.cremationassociation.org)

**CANA'S CREMATORY OPERATIONS CERTIFICATION PROGRAM**  
**July 31, 2019**  
Louisville, KY  
Omni Louisville Hotel  
[www.cremationassociation.org](http://www.cremationassociation.org)

AUG 2019

**SELECTED CONNECTIONS**  
**August 7, 2019**  
Akron, OH  
The Billow Funeral Homes and Crematory  
[www.selectedfuneralhomes.org](http://www.selectedfuneralhomes.org)

**NFDA EMBALMING AND RESTORATIVE ART SEMINAR**  
**August 15, 2019**  
Nashville, TN  
John A. Gupton College  
[www.nfda.org](http://www.nfda.org)

SEP 2019

**CANA'S CREMATORY OPERATIONS CERTIFICATION PROGRAM**  
**September 6, 2019**  
Scottsdale, AZ  
Paradise Memorial Gardens  
[www.cremationassociation.org](http://www.cremationassociation.org)

**NJSFDA FUNERAL DIRECTORS CONVENTION & EXPO**  
**September 17, 2019**  
Atlantic City, NJ  
Harrah's Waterfront Conference Center  
[www.funeralbusinessadvisor.com](http://www.funeralbusinessadvisor.com)

**ANNUAL MEETING —SELECTED INDEPENDENT FUNERAL HOMES**  
**September 23, 2019**  
Nashville, TN  
JW Marriott Nashville  
[www.selectedfuneralhomes.org](http://www.selectedfuneralhomes.org)

OCT 2019

**CANA'S CREMATORY OPERATIONS CERTIFICATION PROGRAM**  
**October 9, 2019**  
Albany, NY  
TBD  
[www.cremationassociation.org](http://www.cremationassociation.org)

**CANA'S CREMATORY OPERATIONS CERTIFICATION PROGRAM**  
**October 22, 2019**  
Atlanta, GA  
TBD  
[www.cremationassociation.org](http://www.cremationassociation.org)

**NFDA 2019 INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION AND EXPO**  
**October 27-30, 2019**  
Chicago, IL  
McCormick Place  
[www.nfda.org](http://www.nfda.org)

NOV 2019

**CREMATORY OPERATIONS CERTIFICATION PROGRAM**  
**November 13, 2019**  
Houston, TX  
National Museum of Funeral History  
[www.cremationassociation.org](http://www.cremationassociation.org)



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