

# FUNERAL

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## BUSINESS ADVISOR MAGAZINE™

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no, seriously



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QUALITY LEADS

MEET WITH  
MORE FAMILIES



GROW YOUR  
FUNERAL HOME

How to 2X your preneed with Precoa's  
end-to-end sales and marketing

# Why Funeral Directors Life?

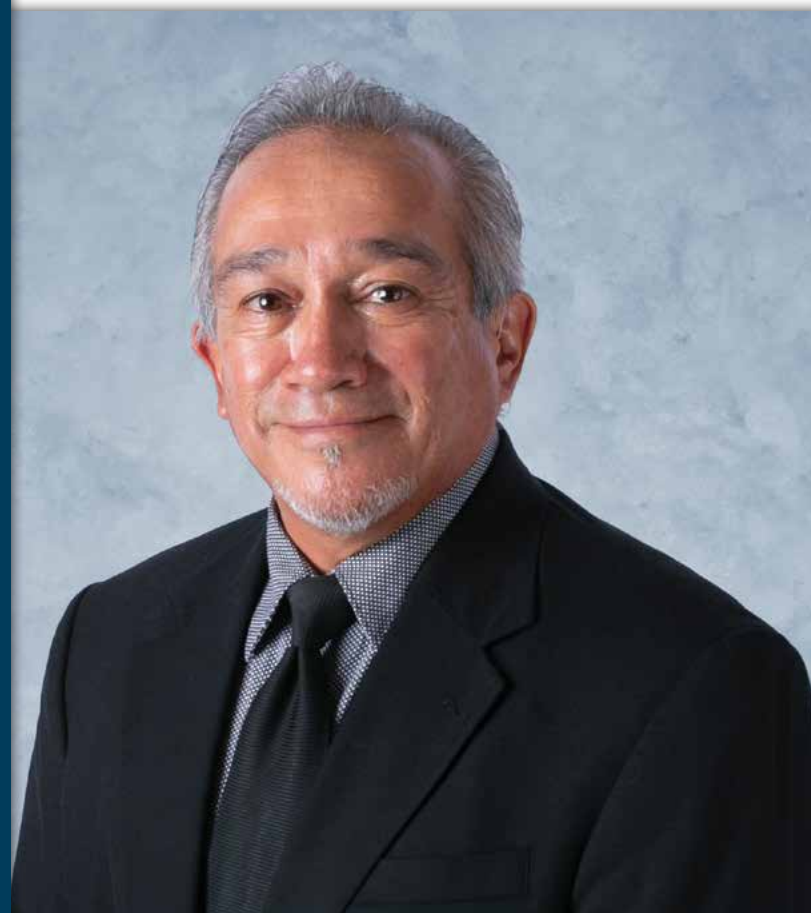
*"Since starting with FDLIC, our preneed sales have grown. Everything is so easy – contracts, DIGicon, marketing, social media, accounting – it's all very well organized and very well done. FDLIC is 100% committed to the funeral industry, and they know every aspect of the funeral business. I can't say enough about FDLIC. If you are in the funeral business, FDLIC has everything you need."*

*Joe Ramos*

## Joe Ramos

Owner  
SUNSET FUNERAL HOMES  
El Paso, TX

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*"With COVID-19, everything changed. A lot of families didn't want to come into the funeral home, so it was easier to send documents and work on services through Passare's Collaboration Center. A lot of our colleagues were asking us, 'What are you doing? We're not ready for this.' We had already signed up with Passare before COVID-19, so everything was there at our fingertips. We were prepared. We were at that next level, and that took a lot of stress off of us."*

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Jose Amezcua  
Manager, Funeral Director/  
Embalmer  
Sunset Funeral Homes  
El Paso, TX



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PRECOA

# WE'LL DO IT ALL.

How to 2X your preneed with Precoa's end-to-end sales and marketing

GET MORE  
QUALITY LEADS

MEET WITH  
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## SIMPLE TIME-SAVINGS

Time is tight during funeral arrangements, but you can't be tight with information families need to know. Wilbert's simpliFi program can help with both challenges.

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[wilbert.com/simplifi/webinars](http://wilbert.com/simplifi/webinars)

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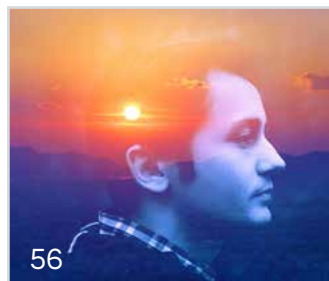
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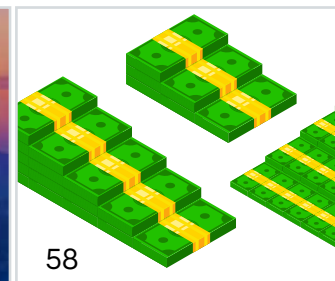
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## Ready Capital Small Business Specialty Finance

*We can help you with your funeral home financing needs*

Ready Capital, through its subsidiary ReadyCap Lending, LLC, is a nationwide direct lender that specializes in financing uniquely successful businesses that require specialized industry knowledge. Our Small Business Specialty Finance Team are industry specialists that have 10-20 years of experience lending to the Death Care Industry. Our loan programs are designed to maximize business cash flow and the creation of wealth for our clients.

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Homesteaders is proud to be the preferred funding provider for thousands of funeral professionals across the country who rely on us for secure funding and exceptional service. We adopt a comprehensive approach when designing our products, balancing security with profitability and offering the best fit for funeral homes, agents and client families.

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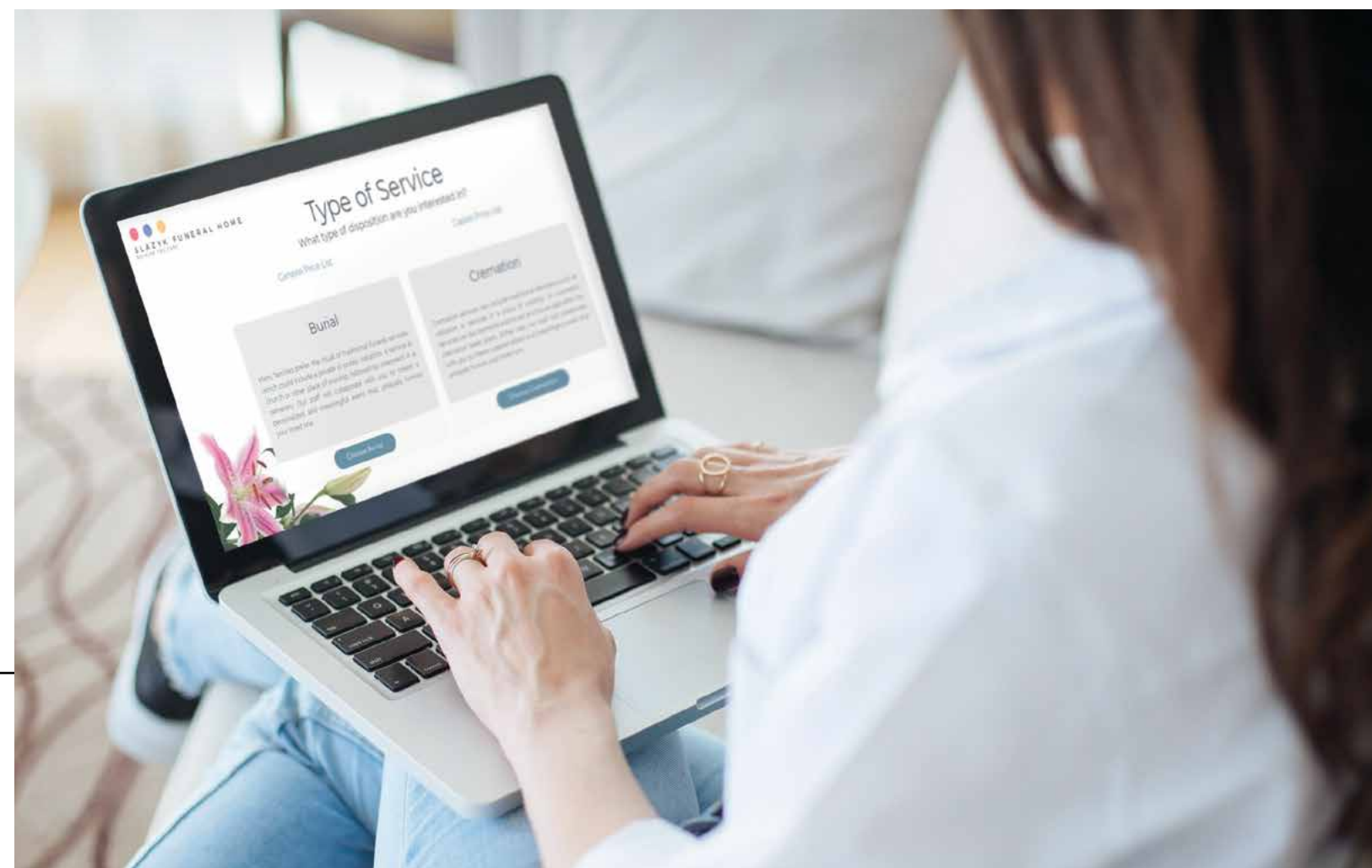
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## Help Families Make Online Arrangements with **FAMILY CONNECTIONS**



With Family Connections, your firm can provide each family with a private, password-protected planning website that allows them to:

- ✓ Preview and select choices for creating meaningful funeral services
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# INDUSTRY ALERTS



## LINK'S WIDER DD2000-XLC DOUBLE-DECK SYSTEM ENHANCES DIGNITY WHILE BRINGING A NEW LEVEL OF PROFESSIONALISM, CONVENIENCE AND CAPACITY TO THE WORK OF TRANSPORTING REMAINS

Link's DD2000-XLC Double-Deck System is an industry first that maximizes vehicle productivity, improves operational integrity, increases safety and makes the disposition of remains by just one operator easier and more manageable.

**Sioux Center, IA** — Link CMP, the leader in professional human remains transportation technology, today introduced its new DD2000-XLC Double-Deck System. The newest in Link's long line of innovative transport products, the DD2000-XLC doubles the carrying capacity of the cargo vans it is designed to supplement.

A direct response to customer feedback, the DD2000-XLC is the industry's first double-deck system and the first capable of accommodating today's ubiquitous oversized cots. The system will allow loading of one standard and one oversized cot or cremation container on each of its two levels, or four standard cots, four cremation containers, two air trays or two caskets when fully loaded. "Link's DD2000-XLC increases worker and vehicle efficiency, effectiveness and productivity by maximizing capacity while minimizing labor and mileage costs," said Lynn Blake, national account manager CMP products for Link Manufacturing. "As a practical matter, end-users across the nation asked us to address their ever-increasing need to transport oversized cots."

The DD2000-XLC Double-Deck System features an electric-powered upper deck that can be raised and lowered in seconds with just the flip of a switch, allowing one person to easily load, transport and unload — with the utmost respect and care — all unassisted. The upper deck has a 600-pound load capacity, and is engineered with a reinforced frame and simplified lifting geometry. The upper deck includes an integrated safety latch that locks it in place, preventing it from lowering if both its powered actuators fail.

Loading cots, cremation containers, air trays and caskets is made easier with the system's intelligently engineered features. A rugged fold-down ramp protects the rear of the vehicle and allows easy access to the decks. Interchangeable

**Link** Cargo Management Products  
Mortuary Equipment



and adjustable bier pins enable a single worker to stow, secure and manage different containment formats on both decks. The decks are also fitted with recessed, cast-aluminum cot cups that help assure container stability and peace-of-mind during transport.

An engineered deck frame maintains structural integrity during all phases of loading, transport and unloading. The system's durable, but lightweight all-aluminum decks are fitted with ultra-high-molecular-weight polyethylene strips that protect their surfaces and minimize friction, allowing containers to easily glide for smooth and effortless container positioning.

The DD2000-XLC Double-Deck System is purpose-designed and helps users meet and maintain the highest standards of professionalism and integrity while carrying out their duties. The system is designed to fit today's most popular cargo van makes and models, including: Chevy Express, Dodge ProMaster, Ford Econoline, Ford Transit, Nissan NV and Mercedes-Benz Sprinter. The DD2000-XLC weighs a mere 750 pounds and fits vehicles with a minimum wheelbase of 140 inches. The system is compatible with 12-volt electrical systems, and professional installation is required.

For details on purchasing and installation of the new DD2000-XLC Double-Deck System, please call (800) 248-3057 or visit <https://www.linkcmp.com>.

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\*The 2.5, 3.5, or even 9 times greater increase on the death benefit is based on an internal overview of the potential returns a funeral home partner may receive, depending on its face amount and policy year count, with a death benefit in Year 10. GWIC's calculations are based on a 71-year-old Voyage policyholder who paid all premiums and had them returned in the death benefit.

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"Our funeral home has always sold GWIC insurance, and we could not be happier. The growth on the Voyage plan has kept up well with our charges throughout the years. We recommend using the Voyage plan to fund your preplanning needs. We have had several families that have welcomed the growth of their policies and having a credit with us."

— Joe and Rachell Rudd  
Rudd Funeral Home  
Garland, Utah

"Memorial Park Funeral Homes have been using the Voyage product for the last 18 years, and the growth for our firm is second to none. Just recently, we fulfilled a Preneed that was written in September 2012 for \$8,200. When she passed away in March 2020, the death benefit was \$13,572. It grew \$5,372 in eight years. In the past, we had entertained the idea of using other products, but there is just nothing out there that can compete with Great Western's Voyage plan. When using the Voyage product, we don't have to ever worry about eating a loss on our at-needs, and I fully recommend any funeral home to use the GWIC Voyage product."

— Kevin Wetzel  
Memorial Park Funeral Homes  
Gainesville, Georgia



## SICH CASKET AND RING RING MARKETING ANNOUNCE PARTNERSHIP



Sich Casket, a leading provider of burial and cremation caskets to funeral homes throughout North America, announced that the company is partnering with Ring Ring Marketing to create the Sich Casket Co-Marketing program that provides Sich distributors with free digital marketing tools for their company and discounts on Ring Ring Marketing services for their funeral home customers.

"We have long realized that the key to the success of Sich Casket is tied to the success of our independent distribution network. Without our distributors, Sich would be unable to deliver our quality caskets to funeral homes," commented Sirius Chan, president of Sich Casket. "That's why I am so excited to announce our Co-Marketing Program to give our distributors another marketing tool to build sales in their local markets."

The program offers Sich distributors the opportunity to receive assistance in several digital marketing areas such as building a new, state-of-the-art website. Also, as part of

the program, the distributors will receive monthly updates to their websites at no additional cost. The program also allows distributors to carry out advertising campaigns on Facebook and to employ a remarketing program with Google.

"I'm very excited to contribute to the continued success of Sich Casket and their distributors," commented Welton Hong, CEO of Ring Ring Marketing. "In recent times, everyone in funeral service has faced major challenges. With cremation rising, revenue per call declining, and the current challenges brought on by the pandemic, funeral professionals need to evolve to be successful and the online tools that are part of the Sich Co-Marketing program will be a great resource."

Also, as part of the program, Sich distributors will be able to offer their customers discounts from Ring Ring Marketing on marketing services such as Search Engine Marketing, Social Media Marketing, and Websites. Also, Sich distributors will have the opportunity to have Welton Hong from Ring Ring Marketing speak at a continuing education seminar that they host, sponsored by Sich Casket.

"We are committed to providing our distributors with best in class tools to help build their businesses," stated Scott Weisenbach, National Sales Director for Sich Casket.

For more information about Sich Casket, visit the website at [www.sichcasket.com](http://www.sichcasket.com). To learn more about Ring Ring Marketing, please visit [www.ringringmarketing.com](http://www.ringringmarketing.com).

## NEW INNOVATIVE ONLINE PLATFORM MODERNIZES OUTDOOR FUNERALS

With Ecorial™, you can now record the exact GPS coordinates, date, and time of a memorial event in nature, as well as easily create and share an interactive online memorial of a loved one.



**Greenwood Village, CO** – Biolife, LLC, the developer of The Living Urn®, America's leading bio urn and planting system, and other market leading eco-friendly urns, is excited to announce the launch of Ecorial™, a new app and web platform that serves families placing or scattering a loved ones ashes in nature.

With Ecorial™, families can quickly and easily "mark the spot" of the final resting place of a loved one's cremated remains when scattered or buried in nature - in the mountains, in the ocean or other body of water, with a tree burial, or at any special place! The easy-to-use app permanently records the time, date, and precise GPS coordinates on the Memory Map™ with a simple touch of a button. In addition, Ecorial gives families the ability to create an interactive online memorial with ease and share photos and videos of their loved one and their final resting place with friends and family. Ecorial is available for families all over the world to use and can be found in Apple's App Store (for iOS), Google Play (for Android), and on the web at [ecorial.org](http://ecorial.org).

Mark Brewer, Biolife's CEO, commented, "We're extremely excited to introduce Ecorial to serve families who use our products, including The Living Urn®, Eco Water, Eco Scattering, and Eco Burial, as well as other urns and green burial products available in the market. We believe this fills a significant need in the funeral industry - Ecorial™ is the first and only platform that provides a permanent record and secure databank of people who are memorialized outdoors. These special memorials can be shared with friends and family today in addition to being accessible for future generations to find, view, and even visit."

Brewer continues, "Until now, many families simply guess where their loved one's resting place is in nature - the location information is passed to family and friends by word-of-mouth at risk of being lost forever. Now, Ecorial™ makes it easy for them to create a permanent record of their loved one's exact memorial location, along with the date and time of the event, and quickly design and share an interactive online memorial."

About Ecorial™: Ecorial™ is the leading new way to memorialize and honor a loved one as they Rest in Nature™. When scattering cremated remains on land or in the water, burying remains at a special place, or planting cremated remains with a tree, use the Ecorial™ App to "mark the spot" by recording the exact GPS coordinates plus the time and date of the event. You can also upload photos and videos of your loved one's forever resting place and create a beautiful interactive online memorial with ease. This special location can be found forever on the Memory Map™ and shared with family, friends, and, if you choose, the world to see! The Ecorial app can be found in Apple's App Store (for iOS), Google Play (for Android), and on the web at [ecorial.org](http://ecorial.org).

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## INC. MAGAZINE UNVEILS ITS ANNUAL LIST OF AMERICA'S FASTEST-GROWING PRIVATE COMPANIES — THE INC. 5000

DISRUPT Media Ranks No. 2319 on the 2020 Inc. 5000  
With Three-Year Revenue Growth of 180.85% Percent.

**New York, NY** — Inc. magazine today revealed that DISRUPT Media is No. 2319 on its annual Inc. 5000 list, the most prestigious ranking of the nation's fastest-growing private companies. The list represents a unique look at the most successful companies within the American economy's most dynamic segment—its independent small businesses. Intuit, Zappos, Under Armour, Microsoft, Patagonia, and many other well-known names gained their first national exposure as honorees on the Inc. 5000.

"It's a great honor for DISRUPT Media to be included on the Inc. 5000 list. This achievement is a testament of our dedication to completely changing the way the entire deathcare profession looks at marketing. It is a long and hard climb but our team is committed to the mission." — Ryan Thogmartin, CEO, DISRUPT Media

Not only have the companies on the 2020 Inc. 5000 been very competitive within their markets, but the list as a whole shows staggering growth compared with prior lists as well. The 2020 Inc. 5000 achieved an incredible three-year average growth of over 500 percent, and a median rate of



165 percent. The Inc. 5000's aggregate revenue was \$209 billion in 2019, accounting for over 1 million jobs over the past three years.

Complete results of the Inc. 5000, including company profiles and an interactive database that can be sorted by industry, region, and other criteria, can be found at [www.inc.com/inc5000](http://www.inc.com/inc5000). The top 500 companies are also being featured in the September issue of Inc., available on newsstands August 12.

"The companies on this year's Inc. 5000 come from nearly every realm of business," says Inc. editor-in-chief Scott Omelianuk. "From health and software to media and hospitality, the 2020 list proves that no matter the sector, incredible growth is based on the foundations of tenacity and opportunism."

The annual Inc. 5000 event honoring the companies on the list will be held virtually from October 23 to 27, 2020. As always, speakers will include some of the greatest innovators and business leaders of our generation.

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### More about DISRUPT Media

DISRUPT Media is a full-service social media agency built for the now. We partner with deathcare companies to drive deep-rooted brand loyalty and measurable leads through social media. Learn more: <https://disruptmedia.co/> or contact Ryan Thogmartin, CEO, by email at [ryan@disruptmedia.co](mailto:ryan@disruptmedia.co), 1-800-215-2713.

### Methodology

The 2020 Inc. 5000 is ranked according to percentage revenue growth when comparing 2016 and 2019. To qualify, companies must have been founded and generating revenue by March 31, 2016. They had to be U.S.-based, privately held, for profit, and independent—not subsidiaries or divisions of other companies—as of December 31, 2019. (Since then, a number of companies on the list have gone public or been acquired.) The minimum revenue required for 2016 is \$100,000; the minimum for 2019 is \$2 million. As always, Inc. reserves the right to decline applicants for subjective reasons. Companies on the Inc. 500 are featured in Inc.'s September issue. They represent the top tier of the Inc. 5000, which can be found at <http://www.inc.com/inc5000>.

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## BOGATI URN COMPANY MORE THAN DOUBLING OFFICE/WAREHOUSE SPACE

Continued, Notable Growth Prompts Company's Fourth Move in 11 years.



**Sarasota, FL** — After just over a year at its current location, Bogati Urn Company is on the move again. The company closed July 17, 2020 on its fourth location in 11 years and will officially make the move over Labor Day weekend.

"It didn't take long at our current location to realize that between new products, a significant increase in new customers, and brisk sales we would soon need even more space," said company founder, Andrea Bogard LeBlanc. "When a larger space I'd been eyeing for a while became available, I knew I had to jump on it to continue Bogati's growth."

Bogati is headed back to Northgate Business Park in Sarasota, FL, which is where the company was located for nine years prior to moving to its current location. The new building is 30,886-square-feet, more than twice its current space of 14,400-square-feet. Most notably it features an air-conditioned warehouse, which will help keep products free from humidity, and three loading docks, which will greatly ease the unloading of containers.

The new office also offers plenty of room to work while keeping safe distances with 15 private offices for both current and new staff. Team growth has already begun with the addition of two new employees - a full-time warehouse assistant and a full-time IT manager - who've come on board within the last couple of weeks in preparation for the move. Bogati also plans to hire at least two more full-time employees, one for customer support and one for new customer sales.

Bogard LeBlanc is also working with a contractor to modernize the office space overall, as well as create two dedicated showrooms for its wholesale customers, one for funeral directors and one for pet crematories. "The new and larger space is really going to allow us to better serve our customers and, in turn, the families they work with," Bogard LeBlanc said. "We will have room to grow in both staff and product offerings. The Bogati team and I are ready to begin the next phase of the company's growth."

Founded in 2004 by Andrea Bogard LeBlanc, Bogati Urn Company offers funeral homes and crematories unparalleled service and wholesale pricing on an equally unparalleled variety of urns, scattering tubes and related products. Its original lead crystal line has expanded to feature a diverse and hand-selected product line from trusted manufacturers and skilled artisans worldwide. Its inventory now includes hundreds of memorial urns for adults, children and pets in varying materials, including glass, marble, wood, porcelain, brass and metal. Custom options are also available.

## GRIEF SUPPORT IS MEETING PEOPLE WHERE THEY ARE

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**Hopewell, NJ** — Chaplain Joe Immordino, also a licensed funeral director for over 20 years, has been running grief support groups in person and individual support for 15 years. In order to serve more people in more areas, Joe began emailing sessions from his faith based program he created directly to family members in other states. Now, with his trademarked program GriefMessages, Joe is reaching grieving families through funeral homes and churches around the country.

Joe received his Masters in Theological Studies and Doctorate in Biblical Studies in Counseling. Then, as an ordained minister, Joe went on and received his certification in Thanatology from Association of Death Education and Counseling and is endorsed as a chaplain by Liberty Baptist Fellowship. He dedicated years of study to become a leader in loss support.

GriefMessages is a comprehensive faith based, distance grief support program that anyone can be a part of no matter where they live. If you have an email address, you can be a part of our group. When you sign up a family member into our email based program, they will be guided through an interactive support program for the next 15 months for a small tax deductible donation. With feedback from our participants and insight from Joe's program, the information is always fresh and up to date. Right now in this era of Covid-19 a program like this is even more important. If you're looking for an aftercare program that will show your families you truly care and provide real, helpful information that they can participate in from an experienced grief professional.

For more information please feel free to reach out to us. Email [joe@griefmessages.com](mailto:joe@griefmessages.com) or call at (609) 209-6046.

## NATIONAL MORTUARY SHIPPING AND CREMATION ANNOUNCES THE SUCCESSFUL TRANSFER OF OWNERSHIP FROM DIANE SMITH TO HER PARTNER ANGIE BERWALD



National Mortuary Shipping and Cremation (NMS) has completed years of intentional planning for Diane Smith's transfer of ownership to her current business partner Angie Berwald. Angie and Diane have worked on a seamless transition for themselves, management, employees, customers, and vendors.

Diane Smith stated the following about this transition: "I know that Angie with her 33 years of industry knowledge and with her NMS team are ready for the next chapter of successful ownership, leadership and growth in the industry. I have complete faith in Angie, our team, and our clients. With Angie as the CEO and President, NMS will continue to be a leader in our industry and this transition will be seamless for our team, customers, and vendors."

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**FUNERAL HOME  
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**Corey Gaffney**



**Jennifer Gaffney**

The Gaffney Group owns and operates in and around Pierce County, Washington. It all started in 1883 as C. L. Hoska Undertakers in Tacoma, Washington. Conrad Hoska was the founding member and the first coroner for the growing city of Tacoma. Mr. Hoska moved from Minnesota to Washington State, eventually settling in what would become Tacoma. Buckley and King were two understudies of Conrad, and they purchased the firm when Mr. Hoska suddenly died of a stroke at the age of 52. At that time, they renamed the firm Buckley-King to carry on its status as the premier funeral home in Tacoma, Washington. Corey's parents, Larry and Ellen Gaffney acquired Buckley-King in 1987.

Lawrence Michael Gaffney started out in New York before moving to Arizona while working in the industry. After a short time, he moved to San Jose, California and started a firm there in 1884. But during a visit to Washington State he fell in love with the Northwest, and upon selling his home in San Jose, he moved to Tacoma, Washington. He started Gaffney Mortuary in 1905.

The modern-day Gaffney Group consists of 4 funeral homes: Gaffney Funeral Home, Powers Funeral Home, Price-Helton Funeral Home, and Sumner Voiles Funeral Chapel. In addition, the lineup includes the Cremation Society of Washington, and Woodlawn Abbey Mausoleum, a 10,000 square foot facility with all indoor crypts and niches, with 2 crematories located inside.

Corey Gaffney is President and CEO and his wife Jennifer Gaffney is Vice President and CFO of the Gaffney Group. We recently visited with Corey to discuss his business, how the Gaffney Group came about, and what he feels about the future of the funeral industry.

Corey is a fourth-generation funeral director and is the great grandson of the founder, Lawrence Michael Gaffney. Corey got his start in funeral service approximately 19 years ago after he decided his chosen career in the IT field was not as satisfying as he had hoped. In 2004, he began the course work on his funeral directors license and completed it in 2007. It was during that time that he noticed that cremation rates were rising in his market and he looked at his parents' funeral home and saw nothing but opportunity. He started off as General Manager of the business, but as time as passed, he expanded his role to what it is today. Corey's wife Jennifer Gaffney, is also a licensed funeral director. Together, as Corey says, "We make a great team and play off each other's strengths."

The current Gaffney Group we see today came about when they acquired 5 funeral homes from an SCI divestiture deal in 2017. Just recently in the summer of 2020, the Group sold off 2 of the funeral homes that were in Central Washington, thus cementing the current lineup as it is today.

"All our businesses are now located in a 20-mile radius of our home office," commented Corey. He continues, "The clustering of the businesses in proximity was very important to us and the operation of the group. It allows us to share staff and pool resources, something the profession learned from Bob Waltrip, founder of SCI. It has been a key driver in the ability to increase







profitability for the Group.” Corey goes on to quip, “Having all the businesses close has eliminated the one to two hour drive it required to reach the other homes. And anyone who is familiar with the winters in Washington know that inclement weather can make that drive exceedingly difficult.”

During the process of purchasing the additional properties from SCI, the Gaffney Group received the assistance they needed from SCI. A grateful Corey stated, “SCI was a pleasure to work with and made it easy. We were given a liaison for 12 months to assist us in the divesture. At the end of the day, it worked out great!”

The sale of the two SCI homes that were acquired in the divesture was also made easy with the assistance of Dan Bywater of Ready Capital. “The 2 firms were sold to our location manager of those funeral homes and it turned out to be a win-win for both of us. I am incredibly pleased with the way it all unfolded,” says Corey.

Today, the Gaffney Group performs about 1,100 cases per year. “We feel blessed to have the market share that we have, because in our market cremation is the tip of the spear,” states Corey. He continues, “Cremation rates in our market are 83% and growing each year, but we continue to overcome that challenge. The bottom line is families still need to be taken care of, they still need someone to walk them through their options and we feel we have the right team to be able to help families with their needs.”

When discussing his team, it was easy to feel Corey’s pride. “During the purchase from SCI, we dipped into our local pool of talent,” Corey says proudly. “My wife and I are immensely proud of the team we have assembled. We have phenomenal people helping us run the business and they work extremely hard. They care deeply for the families they serve, and those families respond very well to them. The feedback we constantly receive due to our terrific staff is fuel in the tank for us. We wouldn’t trade them for the world.”

What else makes the Gaffney team successful? Another undeniable factor of the team’s success lies within the experience level of each member. Corey boasts that each member of the licensed staff has an average of 23 years in the business. This experience gives the group a decided advantage over the local competition and continues to help the Gaffney Group grow.

The Gaffney Group believes in a basic philosophy of being able to ‘serve all’ in the community. In Washington State, only about 25% of the funeral homes have the ‘back end’ to do all the work. At Gaffney Group, they are a full-service firm that can do anything and everything a family may need. They have their own embalming rooms, their own crematory, and their own fleet of hearses. They infrequently have a need to use a trade service for any portion of their business, which is a rarity in the market.

In addition to being able to service anyone, Corey believes that an important differentiator for the Group is the top-notch facilities and equipment they provide. “I pride myself

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Their cremation brand is an example of the variety in their service offerings. Located near Seattle, Corey jokes that they like to say they are the Amazon of cremation. "We do business with a lot of employees of Amazon and they have commented our process is like Amazon," jokes Corey. "Our website for cremation is very robust. An individual can make arrangement online in 5 minutes. After the purchase, our website automatically sends out the legal documentation through DocuSign®. So, you can arrange a cremation and never have to meet with anyone."

The Gaffney Groups' focus on a multi-level brand approach is paying off. They have seen a substantial increase of working with families that have become dissatisfied with their

competitors. "The national average is that an individual will have the need to use a funeral home once every 7 years," Corey commented. "We are starting to serve families that were previously using another funeral home but are now reaching out to us because they are not satisfied with their current experience and are not having their expectations met."

Their focus on investing in their business to make it the best and the desire to keep making these investments is paying dividends. As Corey stated, "That is the fuel that feeds the fire. It makes me smile when I see our efforts of positioning our brands and the results that we are now seeing."

With all the success the Gaffney Group has experienced, nothing quite prepared them for what they would face with COVID-19. "When COVID-19 hit, we knew the business would change dramatically," says Corey. "Besides becoming a new line item on our income statement, we knew many changes needed to be made. But we saw it as an opportunity. Today, we provide personal protective equipment (PPE) to all our employees to keep them safe. We also provide masks to all visitors who do not have a mask of their own. And we placed inside the door each of our homes a touchless station where they can sanitize their hands."

But the challenge of COVID-19 has only emboldened Gaffney to continue to focus on client needs. As Corey states, "Even with COVID-19, the touch points of our profession have not changed." He continues, "People will always have to deal with a death of a loved one. And they will need that individual to be taken care of by however they personally define that. People will always need a business that is staffed by quality individuals, who are caring, compassionate, and conscientious. They want someone who can bring all their wishes to fruition. And that excites me about the future, and it is what that gets me out of bed each morning and keeps me going."

The future is moving forward, and so is the Gaffney Group. FBA

on having the best of everything," Corey emphatically says. "We use the best late model hearses, the best service utility vans, all the way down to the best in basic equipment that allows us to perform our job safely and to be efficient for our client families."

But when it comes down to discussing what he feels is the easiest way to explain their success, Corey cites two things.

#### 1. Stay on top of the industry with regular communication.

"I keep a line of communication open with my colleagues in other parts of the country," he says. "Funeral Service is going through a transitional period and I enjoy discussing it with senior people in the industry with more experience than I have. I like to ask them about their struggles and challenges, and what they have done to overcome them. This has been invaluable to me."

**2. Know what you are worth.** Corey discusses how they offer a premium service and are not shy about charging a premium because they feel like they are the best in class. "Three of our funeral homes are the highest priced in the market," he comments. "We are unabashed about charging what we are worth and actually proud of that. We think that people still get what they pay for and that people appreciate this fact."

Besides the premium service Gaffney offers, they have a brand that serves those in the middle. For those families that want to have an in-person funeral experience but do not need the best of everything – and their cremation society is the low-cost, high volume portion of their business.

As a fourth-generation funeral director the various brands have taken getting used to, but instrumental in their success. Corey explains, "Just like Infinity and Nissan or Toyota and Lexus, we felt the need to give our families what they need. We have bifurcated our brands so that we can serve more families."



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# SPECIALTY VEHICLES

## A Challenging Year Leads to New Opportunities

As COVID-19 continues to cause ripple effects throughout the U.S. economy, the outlook for the specialty vehicle segment of the funeral industry remains somewhat mixed. In looking at the entire landscape, the industry has many challenges, but great opportunities at the same time. Businesses, much like consumers, are feeling the effects of COVID-19 in a variety of ways. The uncertainty of the virus has presumably put a lid on demand in the short term, but increased optimism about the decline of the pandemic as well as a potential vaccine on the horizon will likely lift that demand over the coming months. For businesses, their spending and budgeting is a direct correlation to consumer demand. And as we all know, the funeral industry is affected by consumer spending as much as any other industry.

The effect of COVID-19 has been somewhat muted on the side of the manufacturers and suppliers, but not completely non-existent. While demand seems to be flat for the most part, the supply chain disruption and governmental mitigation efforts are the most noticeable changes. "Our business has been effected by COVID-19," says Courtney Wagers, Marketing Manager for Eagle & Federal Coach Company. "The most substantial effect is specifically related to the sale and usage of Limousines. With the social distancing requirements and limited attendance allowance at funerals, we have seen Funeral Directors restricted in the usage of their limousines."

In discussing the supply chain disruption, Steve Kellerman, Sales Manager of Platinum Coach, has also felt the effects. "Our biggest retraction has been our suppliers," implies Steve. "Trying to get chassis and parts have been slightly difficult. Our sales have been strong since we have been the only ones delivering the new XT5. So, our biggest challenge is to have everything we need to build and deliver the new cars."

While COVID-19 is on everyone's mind, most suppliers of specialty vehicles seem to think that the sales outlook will be positive. Although, there are other challenges that will make the segment challenging. One of those suppliers echoing this sentiment is Platinum Funeral Coach's Steve Kellerman. "2020 looks to be a much better year than expected," says Steve. "Although there have been some setbacks with COVID-19 impacting chassis, vendors, and daily operating safety guidelines. This is also a body style change year with Cadillac, so all the manufacturers have to re-tool the new Cadillac XT5, and possibly other chassis." Steve continues, "Fortunately for Platinum Funeral Coach, we planned and prepared much faster than the other manufacturers. We have



been delivering the ALL-NEW 2020 XT5 since early Spring. Sales and production have stayed strong, and we haven't had to lay off one employee this year."

Other suppliers have repeated a similar feeling of optimism. "We are optimistic that the economic environment for the demand of specialty vehicles in 2020 will be secure," comments Courtney Wagers of Eagle & Federal Coach Company. She continues by saying, "With the exhaustion of the XTS chassis and a new platform introduction, we believe Funeral Directors will be eager to purchase and upgrade their fleet. With the status of the industry it is hard to predict whether there will be growth or retraction, however, we are sure that by providing a new, reliable platform for specialty vehicles we will be able to generate a sense of eagerness and excitement within the industry."

So as the divergence between predicted growth and trepidation caused by potential supply chain disruptions is going to impact how suppliers see the industry, the end result will come from demand that may be generated from replacement cycles of a product that has a definitive and measurable lifespan.

Some suppliers view an upgrade cycle coming in the year ahead. Dustin Campbell, the Director of Product Development

for Springfield Commercial Group predicts this may be the case. "With Cadillac and Lincoln ending their livery programs indefinitely, this is a hard question to answer. I would expect to see the growth slow down assuming traditional builders will run out of 2019 chassis and have to come up with competitive warranties for non-livery program cars," says Dustin. "It will be a transitional period for anyone who is building on a Cadillac or Lincoln chassis. We have seen this several times in the limousine industry over the last 10 years or so." Dustin ends by saying, "With livery programs at an indefinite halt. I would expect to see buyers hold out hope for as long as they can hoping these programs come back while traditional manufacturers scramble to offer better warranties, leasing options and competitive pricing."

"I think the industry growth will be a little flat overall for 2020," echoes Steve Kellerman of Platinum Funeral Group. "The market has been getting flooded with the last model XTS chassis, so customers have been limited of what they can purchase in the 2020 lineup. So, they might wait for the 2021."

As usual, many things can contribute to growth in an industry, even during times of economic uncertainty. Innovation in the overall automotive industry continues to be a hallmark of the American built products. There are 3 three basic types of innovation in business - product innovation, process

innovation, and business model innovation. All 3 lead to improved industry performance and a better product for the consumer.

In most instances, the need for improved products and innovation will lead to new partnerships and relationships among suppliers. Even without mergers and acquisitions, the ability to see what competitors develop causes a constant desire to innovate.

A byproduct of innovation is productivity improvement. Productivity improvement will inevitably lead to reduced costs by the manufacturer, and those reductions should trickle down to the consumer of those products. Innovation is a key dynamic in fostering competitiveness among suppliers, thus pushing them to further innovate and increase the industry's overall product offerings. Innovation contributes to the turnover or replacement cycle, as funeral homes need to always have the latest and best innovation in product offerings, including specialty vehicles.

Innovation is often a closely held secret and often announced prior to the launching of new products. Whether it is due to COVID-19, or because of the uncertain economic environment in the near-term future, that seems to be the prevailing thought for 2021.



In discussing innovation, most suppliers see similar changes on the horizon. As Steve Kellerman says, "All manufacturers are in the same predicament. We all have to re-tool cars for the body style change that occurred in 2020. Our company has been extremely successful at retooling this new chassis and have many plans for new or updated models in 2021."

Courtney Wagers of Eagle & Federal Coach companies repeats a similar outlook, "The most significant design innovations come from the change in chassis platform. The XTS has been the Cadillac Hearse and Limousine platform for nearly 7 years; the upgraded platform is much needed in the industry." She continues, "While the Hearse product will remain mostly the same for all Coachbuilders, we do see a significant change in the design of the limousine. While the XTS was a sedan chassis, the XT5 platform is a larger – more SUV type platform, including changes such as a hatch door for the rear cargo."

Technology has a major impact on of our lives. Our daily use of technology is seen in every aspect of what we do, from the televisions we watch, to the phones we use, and the vehicles we drive. This is important in the specialty vehicle market as well. However, it seems to be customer service that matter most. "While technology is ever changing, we find the most significance in the durability and usage of the vehicle, says Courtney Wagers. "The OnStar systems and CUE screens are great features in the Hearses and Limousines, however, it's more important to us that the vehicle helps serve the Funeral Directors as best as possible. Vehicle features such as: the ability to showcase the casket with rear compartment glass, increased rear interior lighting, as well as a durable church truck compartment are more significant to us than upgraded technology."

Technology is always evolving and helps promote and even build our products," says Steve Kellerman. "But, for the most part, most customers want to kick the tires of the car before they make a purchase. And, we build cars the old-fashioned way, by hand. Technology and computers are great, but from our experience when tooling a vehicle, it is much more cost efficient to do what we have always done."

The takeaway is the future for specialty vehicles is optimistic but has its challenges. Innovation, technology, and COVID-19 will all have an impact in the coming year, making 2021 a year of change. Dustin Campbell says it best, "I feel that it's important for funeral industry professionals to show families they really care and offer a state-of-the art-service. I also feel that offering families the ability to escort their loved one to their final resting place in the same car is a great avenue of service enhancement. This can be achieved with our combination limo/hearse. It also eliminates a smaller firm's need for multiple cars and maintenance costs."

As Steven Covey once said, "If there's one thing that's certain in business, it's uncertainty." But one thing is always a constant. The constant is the American drive and ingenuity in everything we do, and that uncertainty will most certainly bring out our best. As we move into 2021, the American spirit will prevail as always it always does! **FBA**

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## EAGLE & FEDERAL COACH COMPANY



Eagle Coach Company & Federal Coach Company are dedicated to producing the highest quality professional vehicles to reflect the image of Funeral Home's that use them. Combining attractive styling and reliable construction with the most sought-after features, our specialty vehicles are some of the best-selling models in America.

Eagle Coach & Federal Coach continue to work with the approved Cadillac Master Coachbuilder XTS Chassis, with plans to release an XT5 line-up of Funeral vehicles near the end of the year. The new line-up will look similar to the models offered today including: Eagle offerings of the Echelon, Kingsley and Kensington models. Federal Coach will offer the Renaissance, Heritage, and Kensington models. While the chassis' have changed, the durability and elegance our models offer will remain the same. With a larger rear compartment and increased lighting, our XT5 Funeral Hearses will provide your Funeral Home with the most functional vehicles in the industry.

Although the XT5 Limousine is not available until early next year, Eagle Coach & Federal Coach are able to provide your Funeral Home with an XTS Limousine supported with Cadillac Warranty. While the XTS offers two different stretch points, the XT5 Limousine will only be offered at one stretch length. Eagle Coach & Federal Coach provide the only limousine in the industry that features Powered Center Windows, 3-point Seatbelt in the Center Seat and Standard OnStar Navigation.

For over 70 years combined, Eagle Coach & Federal Coach have served the Funeral industry with the transportation needs the Funeral Homes require. Although the chassis is changing, our dedication to you and the families' you serve remains the same.

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## PLATINUM FUNERAL COACH



## PLATINUM FUNERAL COACHES

Platinum Funeral Coach is a family owned and operated Manufacturer located in Amelia, Ohio. We specialize in building Cadillac hearse and limousines. We offer several different models of hearse including our Phoenix, Phoenix-R, Phoenix-C, MasterCoach, and our specialty flower car, the Cortège. Our manufacturing and quality process is modeled after the philosophy of Mike Kellerman, a true pioneer in innovation, design, and production of what is now the Kellerman Family of Professional Vehicles. We are one family with 3 business offerings....Platinum Funeral Coach, MK Coach, and K2 Vehicles.

There are products that are built by necessity. Then there are others that are built from abundance. Then there is the final product, one that is built from skill and heart specifically for one person, one place, one job. This is one of those products. Our cars are built by hand, individually, specifically for you.

Platinum Funeral Coach may be a new name to the industry, but our experience started in 1985. Joe Kellerman, the CEO of Platinum, was just 14 years old when he started washing and detailing hearses for his uncle Mike Kellerman. Our company is centered on one main principal, a principal Joe learned from his uncle: the value of family. Joe decided to carry on that same idea in his own business. The majority of our employees are family members, and the other half we consider family.

At Platinum Funeral Coach, we do things differently – not only do we care about quality – we deliver quality. We strive to build a product we are truly proud of, one that is a tool and aide to those who use it. At Platinum Funeral Coach, we do things our way...the Kellerman way...where excellence is the goal and family is the inspiration.

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# MARKETING YOUR FUNERAL HOME IN THE MIDST OF A PANDEMIC

BY JOE WEIGEL

If you're like many funeral home owners out there, the coronavirus pandemic has rocked your world. COVID-19 has changed the lives of families and businesses alike. And, with this major change and a "new normal" comes a new way to market to families.

To pivot your marketing amidst the coronavirus and help keep your funeral home thriving during trying times, consider using these ten pandemic marketing tips:

## 1. Be Nimble—but Don't Drastically Cutback

It may make sense to remove some of your scheduled marketing activities; in other cases, it may make sense to revise them to make them more relevant or to show how your funeral home is supporting your families and the community in challenging times. But remember, extensive withdrawal in marketing efforts can create opportunities for competitors who are more nimble to adjust messages and take market share from you.

The key is to be smart about your marketing mix and message; adjusting efforts as needed, while maintaining adequate levels of marketing to support your business objectives. A hyper-reactionary pull-back in marketing during a pandemic can not only create an opportunity for your competitors, it can send the wrong message to your families. Being perceived as stable, conscientious, and available is key when families may feel broader national circumstances are unstable.

## 2. Revise Your Content and Message if it's Appropriate

Know that your families are adjusting to a new set of conditions. Your marketing mix and message may need to adjust accordingly (sometimes very quickly). Apparent examples of adjustment exist for local businesses directly impacted by COVID-19, such as funeral homes.

If scheduled social media posts or planned communications are affected by virus concerns, content should be appropriately re-worked. However, social marketing activities (and really most marketing activities) should continue. Along these

lines, be sure to check information on business listing sites like Google My Business to ensure they reflect what is going on at your funeral home. (And make sure that once the crisis has passed, this contact is again updated if warranted.)

Make sure your social media team is able to monitor and react to posts and communicate effectively with your market. Do what you can to keep your service levels high and your families happy even in troubling time. Be cautious that you don't appear to be callous or ignorant of difficulties your families face that are caused by the crisis. Remember, how you react to a crisis can impact how your funeral home is seen well into the future.

## 3. Remove Your Marketing From Preset Mode

In a crisis situation, the timing and content of your marketing messages to your families are more important than ever. You do not want to appear to be either insensitive or an alarmist. Automated emails, tweets, blogs, and social posts may need to be adjusted for timing and message. You want to avoid appearing flippant in a time where media posts are serious and families are focused on more important things.

How you communicate in a crisis shows your families and prospective families who you are as a company. It may make sense to stop some activities and increase others. As mentioned earlier, I don't suggest you stop marketing; rather you have firm control of what you are putting out and when you are putting it out.

Aggressively evaluate the message you are sending to your families to ensure it is supportive, appropriate, and well-timed.

## 4. Postpone Testing or Manage Test Expectations

Because the market place is not functioning the same way it normally would, you can expect marketing campaigns may produce results that are not likely to be predictive of future results when the crisis is over. It may be better to push testing efforts out to a time when the market is more stable and more "normal". Instead, increase efforts toward proven techniques

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or specific communications opportunities directly related to the state of the market.

### 5. Reassure Your Families

No doubt your funeral home will be receiving additional calls at this time. It's vital to train your staff members who answer the phones on how to best answer questions, offer solutions, and calm concerns. Callers who may have just lost a loved one now are concerned not only about their care, but unsure what can be done to memorialize their loved one. In uncertain times like a pandemic, they need empathy and reassurance from a trusted resource more than ever. You and your staff should be there to provide this care and compassion.

### 6. Consider All Media Channels

In-home advertising such as television, direct mail and newspaper can be a real winner during this time as folks "shelter at home". In a pandemic, families are staying put and increasing their news consumption on a daily basis as they seek the latest information about the virus. With more audiences watching than normal, TV is more critical than ever before. Out-of-home advertising such as event advertising, transit and outdoor will not be as effective. If you can adjust your ad spend to move your marketing out of those channels and into in-home media channels, you should.

### 7. Steer Clear of Exploiting the News to Promote Your Funeral Home

Don't be the funeral home that jumps on every headline to stir up hype for your own benefit. That lack of authenticity and the long-term impact of acting opportunistically will be far more negative to your company than simply acting with integrity and respect in the near term.

Also, this is not time to be cute with your message. Ensure that your communications are appropriate for the times. Families look to funeral homes as a caring and compassionate resource. Don't disappoint them with advertising or posts that are insensitive and indifferent to the situation.

### 8. Investigate New Marketing Tools

Think about the latest innovation in digital marketing. For one, video continues to grow as a means of communications. Videos are much more personal than some of the other communication options. And you can use video on your

website, as content for emails to families and use them on a YouTube page that you create for your funeral home.

No doubt you've added livestreaming to the services you offer. In addition to using it for families who must curtail their visitations, why not create a weekly update with the latest news on the pandemic and stream it to your community?

### 9. Evaluate Using Public Relations and Publicity

As the pandemic spreads, there's going to be a market for stories that take people's minds off their troubles. Instead of worrying about protecting themselves or when toilet paper will be available again, people will seek out interesting stories as a means of relief.

As people get burned out and begin to turn away from the bad news, the media will be looking for ways to change the narrative so they can keep their audience engaged. You may be able to provide just such a lift with a positive news story about something going on at your firm or a community outreach program you are doing.

### 10. Utilize Communications Inside Your Funeral Home

In addition to signage that explains that your firm is following the guidance of the government on topics such as social distancing, this is a chance to reiterate what safeguards you have instituted in your operations. Ensure that the messaging is clear but also compassionate. This is a good time to explain how your normal cleaning routine and other similar procedures have been enhanced during the pandemic.

In conclusion: Pandemic or not, marketing to your families is always an important aspect of running your funeral home. Now is not the time to put the brakes on your marketing efforts. It's your opportunity to be more strategic than ever, put yourself in your customers' shoes, and better market to your families. **FBA**

Joe Weigel is the owner of Weigel Strategic Marketing, a marketing firm that delivers expertise and results across three interrelated disciplines: strategy, branding, and communications. You can visit his website at [weigelstrategicmarketing.webs.com](http://weigelstrategicmarketing.webs.com). He also can be reached at 317-608-8914 or [joseph.weigel@gmail.com](mailto:joseph.weigel@gmail.com).



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### Who is The Domani Group and what product and/or service do they provide?

The Domani Group provides best-in-class business solutions for funeral homes. From award-winning aftercare to online review generation and reputation management, to preneed appointment setting and state-of-the-art CRM solutions for growing funeral homes. Funeral homes across the country trust Domani to help them operate more efficiently.

### How did The Domani Group get involved in the funeral industry?

The Domani founders and several team members have a background in preneed, and from that experience, gained a passion for funeral service and, in turn, the importance of aftercare. That passion, combined with a desire to innovate and progress, led to Domanicare, the funeral profession's first aftercare text message program.

### What makes The Domani Group unique?

Domani is different because of its desire to innovate and improve continually. Domanicare was the profession's first text message-based aftercare program. They are constantly releasing updates and upgrades to their programs so that funeral homes can rest assured, knowing that they are getting the absolute best of the best.

### What are the benefits to funeral homes using The Domani Group?

When it comes to aftercare, the benefit of using Domani is that your aftercare program is now a well-oiled machine. Their turnkey solution runs in the background allowing you and your staff to focus your time on at-need families. Every message is sent and responded to by a highly-trained Domani responder,

### COMPANY SPOTLIGHT

The Domani Group  
801-655-5039  
[www.thedomanigroup.com](http://www.thedomanigroup.com)  
[info@thedomanigroup.com](mailto:info@thedomanigroup.com)

so each and every interaction is authentic and human. Domani and escalates any questions or concerns from families right away so you can rest assured knowing nothing, and no one is slipping through the cracks.

As part of the aftercare program, Domani generates Google Reviews, which allows your funeral home to stand out from your competition online and win more at-need business. Over 93% of consumers read online reviews when looking to work with a company, and it's no different when it comes to funerals. Online reputation is a large blind spot for many funeral homes. The average funeral home in the US only has 6.1 reviews and 3.6 stars. Contrast this with the average Domani funeral home, which boasts 25.4 5-star reviews. Those numbers make a big difference when someone starts their funeral home search by Googling, "funeral home near me."

### How does The Domani Group provide a solution for funeral homes?

Domani recognizes that the priority of every funeral director is and should be at-need families. However, because at-need families are the priority, it doesn't mean that aftercare families should be forgotten. That's where Domanicare comes in. Their turnkey solution gives funeral homes a dedicated aftercare team. This benefits your staff by allowing them to focus on at-need families while Domani focuses on the aftercare families.

### How would a funeral home contact The Domani Group for more information on your products?

To learn more about Domani and their suite of solutions for funeral homes, visit [thedomanigroup.com](http://thedomanigroup.com). You can schedule a demo right from the website or chat your questions to a Domani representative. You may also call their Utah office at 801-655-5039.



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Domani-partnered funeral homes have an average rating of 4.8 stars on Google

the average Domani-partnered funeral home has 25.4 5-star reviews on Google

[thedomanigroup.com](http://thedomanigroup.com)



Domani Founders, Jon Lefrandt & Riley Facer



The Domani Team



# NO, SERIOUSLY, WE'LL DO IT ALL

## HOW TO 2X YOUR PRENEED WITH PRECOA'S END-TO-END SALES AND MARKETING

Preneed never quite comes together for most funeral homes. Maybe it's marketing that keeps sputtering, a preneed counselor that keeps falling short of their sales goal, or a competitor who moves in next door.

Whatever the reason, it can start to feel like you're constantly plugging leak after leak just to keep from sinking.

Preneed shouldn't *have* to be like this.



### Download "Preneed By the Numbers"

This free guide unlocks Precoa's secret to dialing in your performance so you can 2X your preneed.

Get your copy today → [precoa.com/2x](https://precoa.com/2x)

## 💡 A Better Way

The truth is, growing with a traditional preneed program is a lot of work. You need to invest in your marketing to generate high-quality leads, continually train and manage your sales team, and develop and maintain effective follow-ups. Not to mention you still have the rest of your business to run.

Wouldn't it be better if preneed never required additional time, money, or resources? At Precoa, this is our mission. We manage the entire preneed pipeline so funeral home owners can confidently grow through preneed and stay focused on their core business, and we help you succeed by doing three important things.

### FUNERAL PLANNING CENTER & CRM

## Never Let A Lead Fall Through the Cracks

At the heart of the preneed experience is the process for managing leads and following up with families. On their own, advance funeral planners often struggle to manage follow-ups on top of the time spent meeting with families. And leads that are not carefully managed are bound to drop off and disappear. Indeed, most companies lose 4 out of 5 leads due to lack of follow-up.

Precoa's solution is the Funeral Planning Center. They have spent the last 15 years mastering the delicate art of the follow-up, and with their support advance planners can spend more time meeting with families and less time playing phone tag.



**TOM LORD**

Lord and Stephens Funeral Home

"The support Precoa provides behind the scenes is amazing. We could not hire anyone on our staff to do what the Funeral Planning Center does. It's just an extension of our firm, and that's what we want."

- ✓ Build brand awareness
- ✓ Connect with every family
- ✓ Provide better customer service



### LEAD GENERATION

## No More Wasted Marketing Spends

Most business owners believe at least 26% of their marketing budget is wasted. This is money being spent that will never deliver results, which must be incredibly frustrating.

Yet at Precoa we're dedicated to improving our efficiency to guarantee the best results. Every lead source, from direct mail to digital, is tested, tweaked, and optimized to generate high quality leads. We also cover the cost, so we're incentivized to make sure it works.



**SCOTT SYTSEMA**

Sytsema Funeral & Cremation Services

"We know that Precoa will always be at the cutting edge. We know how much research, testing, and development they put into everything they do. They always make sure they're doing it right."

- ✓ Multi-channel marketing
- ✓ Fully tested and optimized lead sources
- ✓ Keep every lead we've ever generated for you





## RECRUITING & MANAGEMENT

# Dedicated Performance Coaching

Getting your advance funeral planners to perform at their peak is a challenge, let alone finding the right talent. It takes time to recruit and train the perfect candidate, and it's hard when the entire enterprise is left up to you.



**KEITH WALKER**  
Walker Funeral Home

"Nobody gets results like Precoa. My people are getting the support they need, and our salespeople can be out there actually selling."

Thankfully, Precoa's recruiting and management team handles everything. They are fully dedicated to recruiting and coaching advance funeral planners so you can stay focused on your funeral home. Each candidate is carefully vetted and is continuously motivated by supportive coaches.

- ✓ Receive onsite support and management
- ✓ Get detailed reports of your growth
- ✓ Recruit the most talented candidates in the profession



## There's Still Time To Reach Your End-of-Year Goals

The only way to grow your market with total confidence is when preneed is all tied together. With Precoa, you get all the benefits of a carefully managed preneed pipeline without the trade-offs of your time or resources. No, seriously, we'll do it all.

We stand by our program.

- ✓ Keep every lead we've ever generated for you
- ✓ No long-term contracts
- ✓ We'll pay for all the marketing so the risk is on us

And we're happy to share a few of our secrets. In "Preneed by the Numbers," we highlight the three metrics we use to begin getting 2X results for our partners.

Improving these metrics will directly impact sales, and you've probably already guessed that they're interconnected. Improve one and you'll get results; improve all three and those results are sure to multiply.



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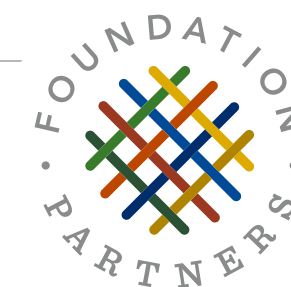


Before joining Foundation Partners Group, we were always preparing for the unexpected. However, none of us could have anticipated what we're facing today. From employee safety and protective equipment to finding new ways to serve families remotely, having an experienced partner supporting us ensures we can continue to serve our community safely and without interruption.

Being part of Foundation Partners has given us access to the resources and expertise that have helped us not only survive these challenging times, but continue to grow. With experienced operations, HR, legal, marketing, and technology resources, they provide support when we need it and trust us to do what we do best – serve our families with compassion and care. With Foundation Partners, we feel more supported than ever.

**Foundation Partners Group**  
4901 Vineland Road, Suite 300  
Orlando, FL 32811

**Get in Touch**  
1-800-399-4635  
FoundationPartners.com







### What is Homesteaders, and what product and/or service do you provide?

Homesteaders is proud to be the preferred funding provider for thousands of funeral professionals across the country who rely on us for secure funding and exceptional service. We adopt a comprehensive approach when designing our products, balancing security with profitability and offering the best fit for funeral homes, agents and client families. Our commitment to excellence is one of the many reasons we are the most often-used preneed funding company in America.

### How did Homesteaders get involved in the funeral industry (History)?

Homesteaders formed in 1905 as a fraternal society focused on providing insurance for final expenses. By 1910, we had provided secure funding for more than 20,000 members. We mutualized in 1939 into what is now known as Homesteaders Life Company and have been owned by – and accountable to – our policy owners ever since.

To date, Homesteaders has helped hundreds of thousands of families gain peace of mind through secure advance funeral plans. In more than a century – through two world wars and the Great Depression – we have never failed to pay a claim.

Homesteaders has emerged as a national leader in funeral funding and is the trusted, reliable and secure choice for thousands of funeral providers across the country. We are proud to work alongside those professionals every day, helping them design a better farewell for the families they serve.

### What makes Homesteaders unique?

Homesteaders is the only nationally ranked preneed provider that can boast both a sole focus on funeral service and more than a century of experience providing secure funeral funding. Preneed is all we do, and that focus ensures that our advance funeral planning solutions truly work for funeral professionals, agents and consumers.

Our industry-leading account executive program ensures that every Homesteaders customer has direct, personal support from a representative who knows their business and

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Homesteaders Life Company  
800-477-3633  
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their goals. Homesteaders' investment in smart technology solutions like eFuneral's online sales and lead generation tool and Domani's text-based family follow-up program sets us apart from other providers. Our reliability, coupled with innovative and creative marketing and operational solutions, gives our customers a competitive edge, helping them increase market share and safeguard future business.

### What are the benefits to funeral homes using Homesteaders?

For Homesteaders, being a good, long-term partner to our funeral home customers starts with offering the highest standard of customer service at every touchpoint. From agent on-boarding to new business issue, phone support and claims, our service teams provide the very best to our customers – in person, on the phone and online. It's one of the many reasons we have a 99% customer satisfaction rating year after year.

Our customers benefit from more than a century of experience in the funeral space, coupled with the proactive problem solving and investment in innovation that continue to position their businesses for success.

### How does Homesteaders provide a solution for Funeral Homes?

We offer smart, secure preneed solutions that result from more than a century of focus on funeral funding. We also provide comprehensive marketing and operational support to grow an active preneed program, including everything from lead generation and DomaniCare's text-based family follow up to appointment setting and eFuneral's remote preneed sales engine. Our solutions all center around a robust CRM, custom-built through Salesforce. Homesteaders' products and services are fully integrated, helping providers ensure a better farewell for the families they serve.

### How would a funeral home contact Homesteaders for more information on your products?

Our account executives can provide additional details about our products and services, starting with a free, comprehensive market analysis. To connect with your local representative, visit [homesteaderslife.com/account-executives](http://homesteaderslife.com/account-executives).



The traditional customer isn't traditional anymore.

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# FUNERAL PROFESSIONAL SPOTLIGHT

KIM SIMONS  
Co-Founder, SRS Computing



Kim Simons, and her husband Scott Simons, founded SRS Computing in the basement of their home of Wexford, Pennsylvania in 1999. Scott is the son of a 4th generation funeral director of a funeral home that originated in 1895.

The name SRS was derived from the initials of Kim's husband, Scott Robert Simons. Scott's father, G. Scott Simons, developed the original software by writing the code himself. At the time, Scott was a medical physicist, but became dissatisfied for various reasons in his chosen profession and returned to school earning his M.B.A. Kim and Scott discussed the potential financial hardship that the loss of Scott's income would create as he pursued furthering his education, and together they came up with a plan. Scott would take his father's original software and improve upon it by writing new code. They would then sell it to other funeral homes in the Pittsburgh area.

The original plan would make this only temporary, long enough to meet the additional income needed until he graduated with his master's degree. Early on, Kim and Scott decided to evaluate each other's strengths to determine which role they would assume for their new business. Scott, as a self-taught programmer, took on the role as software developer. Kim decided that she would be best suited for sales and marketing for the company. Little did they know at the time, but 21 years later SRS has grown into a company that has over 4000 installs that covers all 50 states, all provinces in Canada and most states in Australia.

We sat down with Kim to discuss both her personal success and business success.

## What is your favorite thing about what you do?

I enjoy the consultative aspect of what I do at SRS. The many tools of SRS's software often require that I work closely with clients on problem solving and create efficiencies that work best with the business. I tell clients that I have two rules. One, we are only going to type things once. And two, I am going to help them go paperless. While many clients are hesitant at first, I get a lot of satisfaction when I observe clients getting excited as they begin to achieve these goals.

## What is something that you know now that you wish you knew when you first started?

I wish I had known how websites were going to become such an integral part of our business model. Early on during the inception of SRS, we decided to provide both websites and management software. But we realized that websites can be very subjective and require a lot of customization. It was very hard to create a turn-key product that would work with similar businesses. The amount of collective data and customization for each client created challenges. After about 9 months, we decided to eliminate the website development portion of our business and focus solely on the management software.

But about 18 months ago, we realized that we could develop business partnerships that would allow us to leverage these relationships and grow our businesses in other ways. These partnerships have allowed us to develop integration opportunities that, up until this point, had not been available. All of this has allowed us to expand our business offerings, which now include SRS Websites. Having entered into this portion of our business

that we gave up early on, SRS has truly come full circle after 21 years.

## What is the most challenging aspect of your career?

COVID-19 has become the biggest challenge of my career, but not in the way most think. Ironically, by challenging, I am referring to the increased demand for our services. Our workload has nearly doubled due to COVID-19.

Clients have realized how important technology is to their businesses and are now looking to implement all the new features that we provide. It has forced funeral homes to change their habit and become more efficient.

They now find that they need to do online arrangements, take payments online, or have documents signed electronically. All of these require a technological solution that SRS can provide as part of our management software. Many were on most funeral homes' wish list, but with the emergence of Covid, these features became not just a luxury, but a requirement - and they needed it quickly to maintain their businesses.

We felt the need to give clients the tools they needed and found a way to get it in their hands immediately. We took our Family Link feature, a type of online arranger, and made it better. We originally gave it away for free





for 6 weeks so they could evaluate it. We performed a webinar to help them get started and created a tutorial to assist them in using it.

Another tool that we are proud to offer is a proprietary electronic signing tool that gives funeral homes a way to receive electronic signatures while integrating with the SRS management software.

We also offer credit card processing within their software which has also enabled customers to become more efficient in their payment processing. These tools created a workload this year that was unexpected but very necessary for our clients. It was challenging, but at the same time, very rewarding.

"Clients have realized how important technology is to their businesses. It has forced funeral homes to change their habit and become more efficient. "

**What do you feel has been the most important factor in your success?**

I feel that there are 3 things I have always felt contributed to our success.

- 1. Client retention.  
This is my highest priority. I knew that if we keep clients happy, that would correlate directly to our success. A satisfied client would ensure that SRS would be successful.
- 2. Vertical ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning) that has no limits.  
It has always been our philosophy that the only limits we had at SRS were 'if' we wanted to create something, not 'could' we could create it. The only limits are what they want to create, not if they can create it. Helping our clients in this way has been a core principle of our business.

3. Develop a top line support team that implements all aspects of our business model.  
We could not be successful without the support of our phenomenal team. Without a team to implement our product, train our clients and continue to work with them, we could not have been successful. Our team has made our success possible.

A final note on client retention, the thing I hate to hear most is having a client tell me that they love our product but confess that they only use 50% of its capabilities.

To ensure complete usage, three years ago we developed a new position, a Client Implementation Specialist. This individual has the sole responsibility of contacting our

existing clients and conducting audits to make sure they are using all the tools and using them well. By doing so, we help our clients eliminate inefficiencies.

I am very proud that we maintain a 98% retention rate because we do not give our clients a reason to leave. We give them all the tools to run their businesses efficiently. These tools help our clients by assisting them in performing the following tasks: creating forms, scheduling their staff, barcoding bodies, using mobile phone apps, storing documents, using our cemetery and crematory modules, and many others. All of these have had a significant impact on our phenomenal retention rate.

**What are you most proud of so far in your career?**

I would say that I am most proud of the fact that we are self-made and developed our business from the ground

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up. What started out as an opportunity to supplement our income has turned into SRS Computing becoming a leading software company. I am also proud of the team we built and the 100% commitment to great service we give our clients every day. This commitment was never greater than during this challenging time of COVID-19. Our team exceeded my expectations.

I am also proud that I was able to have a career and raise my two children at the same time, balancing work with responsibilities at home. Starting your own business takes passion, commitment, and a lot of hard work. But owning our own business gave us the flexibility we needed to allow me to do both.

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

I am excited to see my team again. COVID-19 has required that we all work from home, but I miss working with them. I often say that my team is like my children, and with any family, you miss them when you do not see them.

I am also very excited that we have a new office building that is nearing completion. We put a lot of thought and time into our new building and wanted a building that would help us maintain the great talent that we already have and help us attract new talent.

The building is designed to help SRS employees feel like they are working from home. People have gotten used to working from home because of COVID-19 so our goal was to create a similar environment, an office that feels like home.

We have included a full working facility that includes a rowing area, ellipticals, and free weights. We also purchased Peloton bikes so our employees can compete against each other. To help clear their heads, there is, yes, a steam room and shower to help relieve stress. Outside there are fire pits and inside we have a fireplace and pool table where we can do team building. We also built a full kitchen and a library area where we can read, listen to music, or just sit and have a conversation.

**And finally, do you have any advice for other business owners in this industry?**

Don't try to be an overnight success. Find something you are passionate about and start slowly. We purposely did not try to grow too fast. We concentrated most at being great at what we do and then let the growth happen naturally. We were very slow and deliberate when we started our business and did so with absolutely zero debt! We waited for a few years before rebranding ourselves and making large investments into the business. You will know when the time and opportunity are right to make a larger investment in your business. **FBA**



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# SHARING: IT'S A MINDSET

BY PETRA LINA ORLOFF

The ramifications of COVID-19 are far-reaching. This pandemic has every industry reframing their conversations with customers. So, for an industry that has remained unchanged for decades, there is a sudden and acute need for a difference, particularly in the language you use with your clientele.

Since 2004, social media has been reworking our definition and our understanding of sharing. For the last 16 years we have been taught, on a daily basis, that sharing is no longer a face-to-face activity, but one which is done at a distance, and often, with strangers. We share what we eat, how we feel, what we buy, where we are, what we think, and so on. Because so much of our connecting has been done virtually, in every client, you have someone who is perfectly primed to think about memorializing differently than what was done before the quarantine.

While you ask your clients to reframe their memorial experience and you reframe the services you offer, you should also reframe your discussion with those clients. Right now, when it seems as though opportunities to celebrate are dwindling, you have a remarkable opportunity to speak with families about one singular activity which can reframe their entire conception of memorialization: sharing.

Your clients may be thinking that you have very little to offer them in terms of ceremony and memorialization because they simply cannot conceive of how ceremony and memorialization can work outside of the standard to which they are accustomed. Sharing, however is key because it can be done intimately, in person, or at a distance, with the same results. You know your products better than I. You know what works best in your home. You know what your clients want. What I'm offering is a better way in which to describe your services. Your initial discussion has always been about educating your clients and creating an experience which connects people emotionally. Right now, your clients don't understand how that experience can transcend space and time, but you do, and it's through sharing.

They already share in many of the same ways you may ask them to share a life celebration. They are live streaming on Instagram and Facebook, video conferencing for work, listening to and watching podcasts and videos on their phones, communicating with friends and loved ones through apps and in social media. This is what sharing means to us. While memorialization once meant a service, a gathering, and a meal, sharing means something else entirely. So, using this word, discussing sharing, reworking your conversations around a verb which makes sense during this pandemic will have a

great effect on helping your clients conceive and create a memorial which makes sense for them and also, which benefits you.

Ask them to share the celebration of life they are planning. Ask them to share the memorial. Ask them to share their loved one's life with others. And then, show them how you can do that meaningfully and thoughtfully with dignity and respect. Asking your client how they want to memorialize their loved one will most likely be met with: "how can I memorialize my loved one right now?" Instead, ask how they want to share their loved one with friends and family. This is an entirely different mindset. Your clients understand the benefits of livestreaming and Zoom now more than they have in the past. Of course, they aren't just limited to sharing in that manner. Videos can still be shared. Life stories can be shared. Photographs can be shared. Memories and tributes can be gathered in one place and shared. You know your products: most anything that would have accompanied a traditional funeral or memorial can be shared online. In some instances, these mementos can also be physically made and put in the post. Instead of investing in the space in your home, clients are now invested in sharing as much as they can as quickly and efficiently as they can.

Right now, more people are using social media than ever before, as a gathering space to celebrate life and confront death, and with the advent of this pandemic, social media has become an essential space. Here, we have already shifted to thinking beyond boundaries and borders. We have already transcended time and space. Here, we know that sharing has no limit.

We have been searching for a way to discuss this pandemic. We have been searching for a way to describe the kind of memorialization that we are now performing, and that word is sharing. Talk about sharing. Use the word share. Leveraging this verb in the conversations you have with your clients gets your clients thinking about memorialization in the manner in which you want and need them to be thinking. Although, right now, we cannot gather for funerals and memorials, the changes in memorialization are much less radical than your clients expect. After all, they already practice sharing at a distance. **FBA**

Petra Lina Orloff is the president and CEO of Beloved, which creates custom, creative, personalized obituaries and eulogies, and the founder of Death Talk, an ongoing series of public discussions on death and dying. She has been a professional writer for nearly 30 years and completed her doctoral studies in English at Wayne State University. To connect with her, you may email [petra@beloved-press.com](mailto:petra@beloved-press.com) or 248-894-7076 or visit her website at [www.beloved-press.com](http://www.beloved-press.com).

## WONDERING WHAT YOUR NEST EGG IS WORTH?



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As a funeral professional, many of the services you provide your families are to protect their "peace of mind" during a difficult time. But what about your peace of mind? As a business owner you have questions about your financial future; often these questions relate to the value of your business. What is it worth, can family members or staff raise the money to buy the business, and if not, who else would be interested in my business? If you want to know what your business is worth, give us a call.

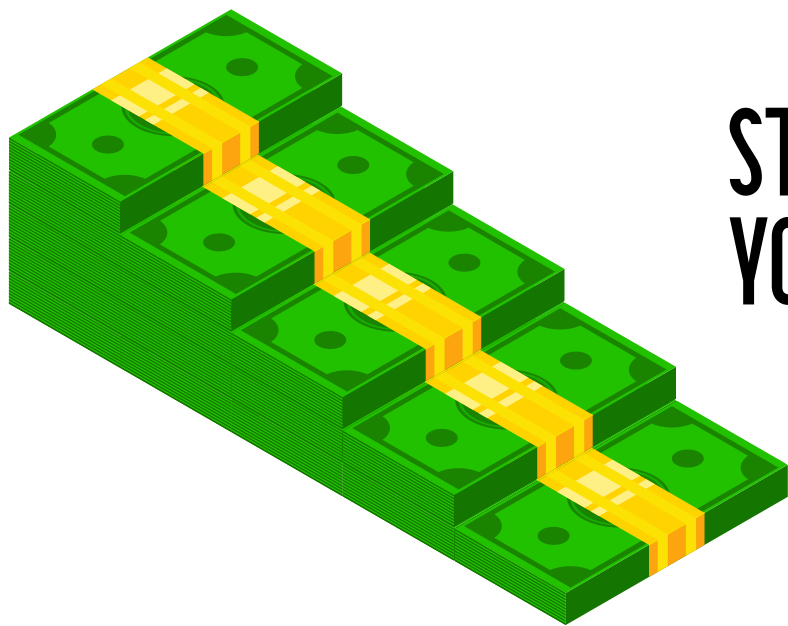
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# STEPS IN MANAGING YOUR CASH

BY RON COOPER, CPA  
& RAY BALD, CPA

Managing your funeral home's cash and understanding cash flow is essential to maintaining a financially healthy funeral business. If your cash flow management consists of only checking your bank accounts online or looking at the balances in QuickBooks, it's time to step-up your financial game. It is not good enough just to look at how much cash you have today. You need to forecast how much money you will have at a specific date in the future. No! You do not have to be an accountant or financial guru to understand or implement quality cash flow procedures. All you need is a little financial sense and guidance.

## Step 1-Admit your Problem

The first step towards healing a struggling funeral home is to admit that your business has a cash flow problem. If you can answer yes to any of the following questions, you might just have a cash flow issue: (1) Are you ever late on mortgage payments? (2) Do you miss out on discounts for casket or vault purchases? (3) Does your accountant harass you for not paying your federal or state income tax estimates? (4) Do you put into savings or a retirement account less than 15% of your yearly earnings? For example, in 2018, if your funeral home's S-Corporation reported \$50,000 profit and your gross wages reported on your W-2 was \$50,000, did you tuck away less than \$15,000? (5) Do you use funds from a line of credit to pay your mortgage or vehicle debt? Again, if you answered yes to any of the above, it's time to act.

## Step 2-Determine Monthly Cash Expenditures

The second step is to determine on average how much money flows out of your checking account on a monthly basis. Throughout each month the balance in your checking account is reduced by checks or debits to pay for the following: Cost of Goods Sold (caskets, vaults, urns, register books and cash advances); Facility Expenses (building insurance, cleaning, heat, repairs and maintenance, rubbish, utilities, water and sewer etc.) General and Administrative Expenses (advertising, dues and subscriptions, liability insurance, office supplies, postage, professional fees, telephone, internet, etc.); Salaries and Benefits (casual help, salaries and wages,

payroll taxes, health insurance, workman's compensation, etc.). Notice that the above items are expenditures found on your income statement (Profit and Loss). Also notice that only expenditures that reduce the checking account are included. Expenses on the income statement like amortization and depreciation are not included because they do not reduce the cash in the checking account. This second step can be made very easy by using an Excel spreadsheet. Remember that all you are trying to do is find out on average how much money flows out of your checking account on a monthly basis.

## Step 3-Prepare Debt Schedule

The third step is to prepare a debt schedule. For many funeral homes, monthly debt payments cause the largest drain on their checking accounts. Normal debt payments consist of principal and interest. For income tax or financial reporting purposes only the interest is deducted, but for cash flow purposes both principal and interest reduce the checking account balance.

## Step 4-Determine Owner's Draws

The fourth step is to determine on a monthly average how much money is taken from the checking account by the owner in the form of dividends, distributions or non-deductible withdrawals.

## Step 5-Prepare Capital Expenditure Schedule

The fifth step is to determine how much and when money will be paid for large capital expenditures that do not qualify as repairs and maintenance. Expenditures that do not qualify as repairs and maintenance are not included on the income statement and would not be included in Step 2 above. Remember, the goal is to determine what reduces the checking account balance. For example, if you plan to upgrade your flower van in December by making a down payment of \$5,000. and financing \$30,000 over a five-year term, the checking account will be reduced by \$5,000 in December. The amount of the monthly payments, which includes principal and interest, should be included in the debt schedule.

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### Step 6-Prepare Schedule for Funeral Revenues

The sixth step is to determine the amount of average monthly revenues from funeral and other sources like trade work. Cash or checks deposited into the checking account increases the balance. This step is also a great time to evaluate your overall collection policy. Lenient and inconsistent collection policies will sabotage your average monthly inflow of cash. There is a direct correlation between high accounts receivables and a faulty collection policy. During the time of each at-need arrangement, it is imperative that the funeral arranger communicate to the family that payment for the services, merchandise and cash advances are expected by the day of service. Exceptions to this policy could include families that had prepaid through a mortuary trust or insurance policy. When it comes to collecting money from your families, your funeral home must be viewed from a businessperson's eyes. Remember to tell yourself that you are not operating a bank. If a family does not have the resources to pay you before the date of service, what makes you think that they will have the resources later?

### Step 7-Putting it all Together

A schedule showing the expected amount of cash coming in and cash going out for a specific time period, like monthly, quarterly or annually, is the foundation for all major and minor business decisions. If your funeral home's net cash flow is generating less than 25% of your net funeral revenues (funeral revenues minus cash advance revenues), it's time to determine why. That is why a cash flow analysis is so important. A properly prepared cash flow analysis will serve as a financial blueprint, highlighting financial issues that need attention. A cash flow shortage is normally a symptom caused by many small issues that add up to major financial problems. Addressing the small issues is key to gaining financial control of a funeral home. A cash flow shortage can occur from any of the following and is normally a combination of all: (1) using an ill-prepared or outdated General Price List; (2) too much mortgage or automobile debt; (3) wages and benefits, including owner's distributions, greater than 30% of net funeral revenues; (4) not paying attention to small individual expenditures and expenses that quickly add up, like travel, entertainment, credit card processing fees and trade work. A cash flow analysis is a financial tool that maps the financial blood flow of a funeral home. But, like the information generated from your accounting and funeral reporting systems, if they are not used to make sound financial decisions, it is useless, except for preparing tax returns.

Remember, this is not your grandparent's funeral profession anymore. What Bob Dylan started singing back in the early 60s applies to the funeral profession today. The Times They are A Changin'. **FBA**

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# WHAT'S A HYBRID ONLINE MARKETING APPROACH, AND DO YOU NEED ONE?

BY WELTON HONG

You know what they say about putting all of your eggs in one basket. The metaphor is used a lot when talking about investing or retirement funds: diverse portfolios are more likely to weather financial storms better than portfolios that contain a single type of investment.

But diversification isn't beneficial only when it comes to growing your money. When investing in funeral home online marketing, you also want to spread your eggs out to multiple baskets—and for many of the same reasons.

Relying on multiple channels (the "baskets") lets you connect with more potential clientele. It also helps ensure that if one channel isn't working out, you still have a steady flow of leads from other efforts.

Multichannel marketing is also called hybrid marketing, and it combines a handful of tactics that work best for your firm to drive as many leads as possible. But the approach does more than diversify your "marketing portfolio" so you can weather a storm. You can also get a stacking effect that makes your overall marketing strategy more powerful.

## The Stacking Effect of Hybrid Marketing

The traditional marketing Rule of 7 says a prospect needs to hear or see your message seven or more times before they make a purchase. Obviously, conversions sometimes come before and after those seven touchpoints.

An at-need family might convert after arriving on your website following a Google search, for example, whereas someone considering preneed services might see your messaging for an entire year before making the final decision.

While seven might not be a magic number, studies have repeatedly shown that the more positive interactions you can have with a consumer, the more likely they are to become clientele in the future.

That's where the stacking effect of hybrid marketing comes in. If you rely solely on a single channel, you limit your connections. For example, if all your eggs are in the SEO basket, you only connect with prospects when they come to the search engine to query relevant deathcare topics. And then, it's only if your pages happen to show up organically for their query and they choose to click your link.

By adding paid ads, social posts, and review marketing, you make it much more likely a consumer sees your firm's message online more than once, resulting in multiple benefits:

- You reach those seven (or more) positive touch points faster, potentially driving up your conversion rate.
- The fact that your firm appears via multiple channels can help foster the perception of authority and expertise, helping ensure consumers choose your funeral home when they're ready to make a decision.

## What Channels Should You Include in Funeral Home Hybrid Marketing Strategies?

No secret formula exists for maximizing your benefits from hybrid online marketing. Every deathcare firm is somewhat unique, and you have to find the balance of various types of online marketing that work best for you. That being said, there are definitely some baskets you want to consider placing a few eggs in.

### On-Site Search Engine Optimization

This is where you create compelling, relevant, and authoritative content that speaks to the things people are searching for. The goal of SEO is to connect with people who are hitting the search engines to gather deathcare information, which requires solid keyword research so you know exactly what your target audience needs right now.

### Website Marketing

Many businesses stop at SEO without considering the rest of the website marketing job. If all your content does is drive traffic, you could be paying for impressive page view numbers without ever converting anyone to clientele.

Good website content does two things: It serves the immediate need by providing answers to questions or concerns while also providing a compelling roadmap for taking the next steps. The first positions you as a trustworthy expert consumers can rely on; the second helps turn those consumers into clientele.

### Search Engine Marketing

Search engine marketing involves paying for your place in the search engine. By targeting specific keywords, user demographics, and geolocations, you can help ensure your firm shows up for at-need families that turn to Google or

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people simply browsing for more information about topics such as cremation or planning final arrangements.

#### Other Paid Advertising

Not everyone starts with search engines. More than 70 percent of people report using social media to find out more about businesses and services. Social ads let you get your message out on platforms where people tend to congregate online for all types of reasons.

In other cases, someone might have started with search and even ended up on your site. But they clicked away or got distracted without moving further into your funnel or making a purchase or appointment. Ads that retarget those users can show up across the web as they browse.

Either way, paid advertising that reaches outside of the search engine can help you get your message in front of potential clientele more often.

#### Review Marketing

Review marketing is the act of bolstering the number of online reviews you get, especially on Google. More reviews can equal better performance in search engine results. Plus, people are more likely to believe what reviewers say about you than what your firm itself publishes.

You can't control the content of the reviews (Google and other review sites frown upon this, and Google will even delete all your existing reviews if it thinks you're attempting to do so). But you can ask families if they would leave a review for your business to help increase the number of reviews you have.

#### Organic Social Media Marketing

Organic reach (when people see your normal social posts—the ones you don't pay to sponsor or boost) on some social networks is dismal. For many businesses, organic reach on Facebook is approaching zero.

But that doesn't mean organic social media marketing is useless. These types of social updates can humanize your firm, which is critical in a people-centric business such as deathcare. When people do interact with you on social, a warm, professional profile presence can persuade them to click on your links or contact you for more information.

In a diversified financial portfolio, your various eggs work together to support stable growth despite what one area of the economy might do. In funeral home marketing, your hybrid approach helps create stability despite the ebb and flow of online trends. An integrated approach also makes your marketing smarter and stronger, resulting in more leads and conversions. **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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# HOW TO FAIL IN THE VIRTUAL WORLD OF FUNERAL DIRECTING

BY ANN MARIE ST. GEORGE, CPC



To say the least Covid-19 not only turned our profession inside out, upside down and sideways, but it also created a virtual world we may or may not have seen coming. Some of us that did see this coming may have hoped it would happen far after they retired. Face it, we are all naturals when it comes to the face to face aspects of this profession; It is the easiest way for us to create a bond of trust with the families we serve. These days due to Covid restrictions we need to be more resourceful in finding ways to connect with our families. The world of online funeral arrangements and meetings has been born.

Here are 10 ways that you can ensure epic failure in your quest to achieve greatness in the virtual world of funeral arrangements.

- 1. Time** – when setting up a meeting make sure it is more convenient for you than the family. After all, why should you be inconvenienced?
- 2. Place** – you never want to hold one of these calls in the funeral home, it is way too depressing. Choose somewhere more familiar like your favorite bar, possibly somewhere sunny and warm like a crowded local beach or maybe even get creative and use your man cave or she shed at home- a place where you will be comfortable.
- 3. Who** – Don't encourage the family to let all the decision makers know about the call, it is much easier to have less people on the call, no big deal if you have to set up 10 more calls to make sure everyone is on the same page.
- 4. What** – If the family offers to give you any helpful information before the call insist on them waiting until the virtual get together, there is no sane reason to be that efficient.
- 5. Clothing** – Make sure you dress comfortably, think of lounging around the house on a Sunday during football season. LOL I hope you didn't think I was going to tell you to dress for success, please....
- 6. Script** – the best way to lead one of these meetings is to fly by the seat of your pants and go for it, just make sure you let the family know you have never done this before and that we are all in this together. There is nothing family loves more than making a funeral arrangement for their loved one with someone that sounds like they do not have a clue.
- 7. Noise** – Check to make sure everyone has their mic unmuted so the family can talk over each other while ignoring you to ensure pure chaos- just like a live meeting.
- 8. Lighting** – if you are having a bad hair day sit in a really dark space during the call, the family will be more than comforted by just your voice even if all they can think of is, "whether you are still there."
- 9. Excuses** – If after giving the family 3 different times and they cannot make up their mind give them your competitions number and let them deal with these knuckleheads. We all have better things to do- like take another online seminar about Covid-19.
- 10. Ending the call** – When you start to get tired and feel hungry, politely let the family know you have something else going on and that they are out of time. If they have any



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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 66

questions tell them to call back tomorrow and ask for the office manager because you have sold the business and they will certainly be in good hands with whomever will take care of them. Make sure they see you roll your eyes for affect. I find the "eye roll" speaks louder than words, just ask my husband.

Once you get the hang of these calls here are a few things to make the calls more fun –

- Be late getting on the call while dressed like the grim reaper
- Make up nick names for each of the family members and then use them on the call
- Make random noises throughout the call while looking around like you see ghosts
- Get so close to the camera that all they see is your forehead
- Laugh for no reason
- Make sure to eat during the call so your stomach does not growl, how embarrassing would that be!!
- If you are not comfortable drinking alone encourage the family to get drunk with you.
- Take the laptop into the bathroom with you and pretend you are.... Blowing your nose silly, what did you think I was going to say....
- Put on a different outfit every time you leave and come back into the room
- Better yet, leave the room during the call and never come back

My goal was to get a smirk out of most of you and a true belly laugh from a few. The bottom line with making virtual arrangements is practice, practice, practice and never let them see you sweat. You will get better at it and hopefully knowing we are all on the same stage will encourage you. There are places to get help if you need it, Google around or look through your trade magazines. There are seminars and trainings available that will walk you through every step of making funeral arrangements online with your families. Do not panic help is out there!!

A special thank you to everyone in our profession; We stepped up to the plate and in true Babe Ruth fashion hit it out of the ballpark!! Traditionally, we are a little slow on the uptake but when push came to shove, we did not miss a beat. Thank you again for being there for all of us. Both my husband and I lost family members during the last few months and I am so grateful we had all of you to help us through a tough time. **FBA**

Ann Marie St. George, CPC, a first-generation funeral director has worked for the past 20 years as a Regional Manager for Cooperative Funeral Fund, a preneed and cemetery care fund management company. She is a Mortuary Officer for both DMORT Region II and Kenyon International Emergency Services. She encourages anyone reading her articles to reach out by email at [AnnMarie.StGeorge@cffinc.com](mailto:AnnMarie.StGeorge@cffinc.com). Suggestions for topics are always encouraged. For more information, visit [www.CooperativeFuneralFund.com](http://www.CooperativeFuneralFund.com) or call (800) 336-1102.

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# TRENDS 2021

## UNIQUE CREMATION MEMORIALS GROW IN POPULARITY

BY MARK BREWER

*With more Americans now choosing cremation over burial and over 78% of Americans projected to choose cremation by 2040, funeral homes must adapt to the changing times and provide families with a variety of options to capitalize on this paradigm shift.*

For most purchases these days, we have abundant options. When it comes to shopping for a car, clothes, groceries, even a phone or computer, the choices can seem endless. Why? A key reason is simply that people are different and want options that appeal to them personally and express their individuality.

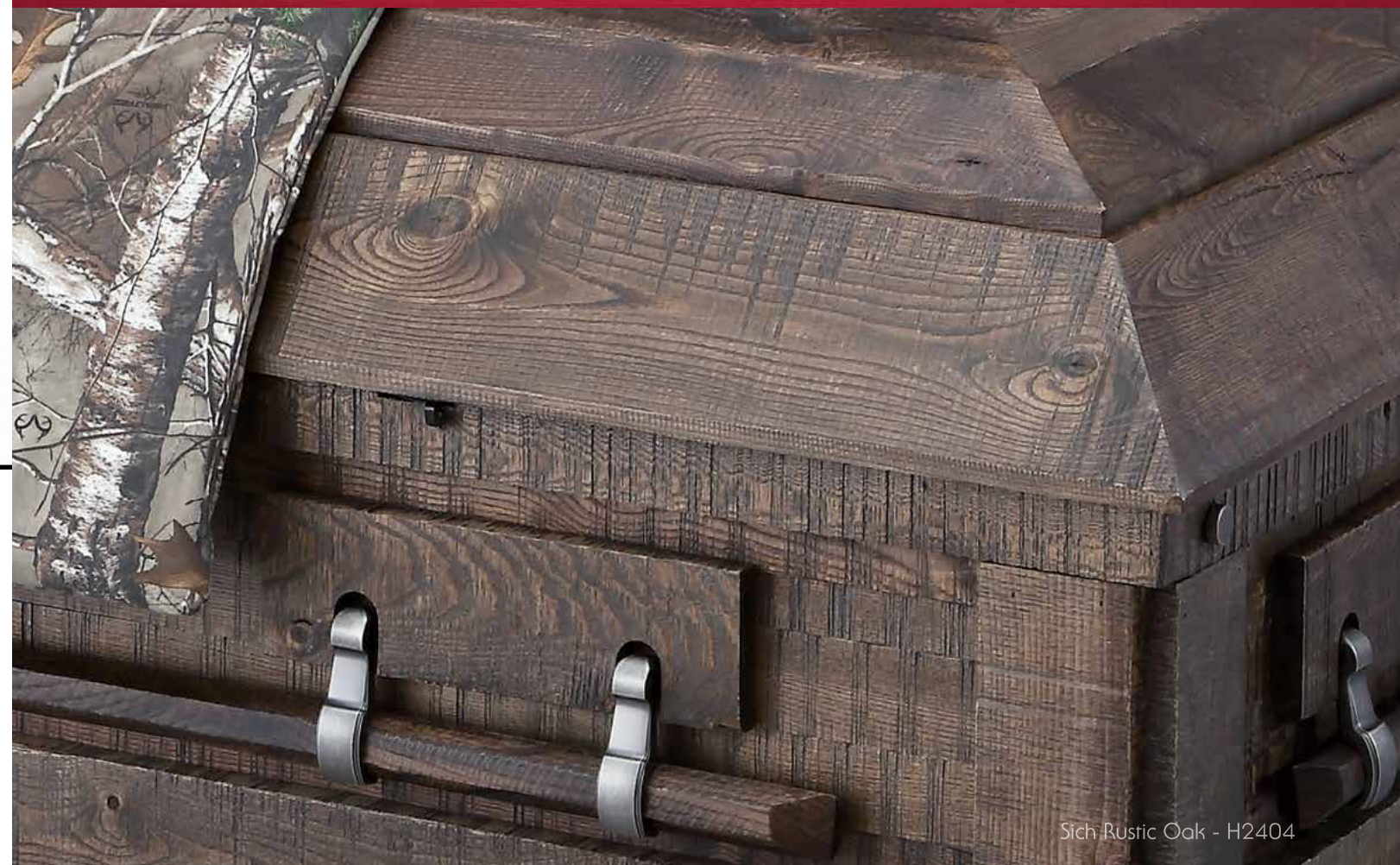
In many funeral homes today, however, the options for cremation urns and memorials that incorporate cremated remains are limited. This is surprising considering the fact that cremation surpassed burial as the leading choice of Americans in 2015, and the demand for cremation continues to increase. The consumer demand is growing for simpler, less ritualized funerals, and many families are taking cremated remains home with them to do what they wish. This significant market shift toward cremation is putting pressure on funeral homes to adapt and make up lost revenue from fewer burials by generating income from products and memorials for those who choose cremation.

The good news is that more and more interesting and creative products are being developed to help funeral homes generate additional revenue from cremation. So, what kind of options are out there? What are cremation customers looking for?

How can your funeral home actually make more money on cremations?

Let's go back and first understand why Americans are choosing cremation over burial. Baby boomers (and their children), in general, are less traditional than their parents and for many, being buried in a cemetery is less important to them. Other factors contributing to the growing cremation trend is that religion is playing a less important role in the decision and the cost of a cremation is generally lower than burial. In addition, many people prefer cremation as they view it as being a more environmentally friendly option than a traditional burial.

To capitalize on the growing cremation trend, every funeral home has the opportunity to offer a wider selection of urns and memorials that incorporate cremated remains. This includes both, traditional and eco-friendly urns, as well as experience-oriented memorials that can be personalized. One option is offering a biodegradable living urn that allows a family to grow a memorial tree from an urn containing cremated remains. This type of system comes with a 2 to 4 foot young tree with more than 50 tree options available throughout the country. There are also a number of new



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and interesting eco-friendly scattering urns available for funeral homes to sell to cremation clientele. Screen-printed cardboard tubes have been available for years, but there are now scattering urn cylinders made only from bamboo, a truly sustainable resource. These urns are becoming more and more popular as they are affordable, eco-friendly, and visually appealing. In addition, a number of biodegradable urns have been developed in recent years to disperse ashes in a dignified way, including special urns that float like a buoy for a short time before freeing the remains below in the water and even a floating urn made from ice. Another interesting option is a service that places cremated remains in an artificial 'memorial' reef in the ocean to become part of an amazing underwater eco system.

In line with the growing cremation trend, a number of cemeteries have dedicated some space as a 'memorial garden', which gives families the ability to have their loved one's cremated remains scattered at the cemetery. In addition, some cemeteries are starting to take it a step further and are offering ongoing care related to growing a 'memory tree' from a biodegradable living urn holding a person's cremated remains. This gives families peace-of-mind that their loved one's memory tree will be cared for long past their lifetime. It also helps families who want to plant a tree know that if they move, the remains and tree memorializing their loved one will still be a place they can visit. There's an opportunity to capitalize on this by not only selling cremation clientele the biodegradable living urn product, but to also offer a service to

plant and care for the tree, or offer a tree planting ceremony on the property of the cremation clientele or at the cemetery.

All of these options are gaining in popularity as many of the over 1.5 million American families who choose cremation each year are not just looking to place their loved one on the mantle, but instead, do something special to commemorate them in a more meaningful and personal way. By offering such options and alternatives, funeral homes can capture additional income that would otherwise be lost. It also creates a happier client base that is more likely to refer friends and come back to your funeral home the next time their family needs your services. **FBA**

Mark Brewer, based in Denver, Colorado, is the CEO of Biolife, LLC, a developer and producer of market leading, eco-friendly and experience-oriented products for the funeral industry. Biolife's innovations include The Living Urn®, a patented biodegradable urn that gives a family the ability to grow a tree from cremated remains; Eco Scattering, a line of patented eco-friendly scattering urns made from bamboo; Eco Water, a new urn designed to let families do water burials with ease; Flow the Ice Urn, and a series of indoor urns that grow houseplants, bonsai trees and succulents. Biolife also recently developed Ecorial™, a new app and website designed to give families and funeral homes the ability to easily record the exact location of a memorial in nature and create a permanent interactive online memorial. Mark can be contacted at [mark@TheLivingUrn.com](mailto:mark@TheLivingUrn.com) or by phone at 800-495-7022.



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# THE F WORDS OF COVID

BY  
GLENDA STANSBURY

Since the world tilted on March 11th, we all faced the realities of the overwhelming dangers, the unknowns and the complete change of life as we knew it. There were a myriad of frustrations and a lot of expressive language as we tried to navigate a completely new way of doing business. From national shutdown to staggered reopening, to navigating mixed messages from national and state leaders as to best practices and requirements, we never stopped working. Our work never ends even when everyone else is sheltering at home. So, let's stop and consider some of the F words in Funeral Service in dealing with the pandemic and its continuing impact on our lives and our firms.

## FEAR

The first reaction, of course, was fear. What was this invisible enemy? How do we know if we have it? How do we safely deal with the dead and with their families? How can we continue to serve without complete information and protective equipment? What is going on? When will it be gone? And where can I find toilet paper?

## FLEXIBILITY

Funeral Service as a whole has never been known to be a flexible or facile profession. We deal in tradition, in past practices, in what we've always done. Overnight, we were faced with learning technology—what exactly is a zoom?—upgrading computers and phones and software and physical facilities. While your chapel might have served your community for 100 years, suddenly it is not set up for cameras and screens and streaming and social distancing. And we had to respond... yesterday.

In the beginning, as I visited with funeral providers all over the country, some of them turned on a dime and embraced what would be required to continue to offer services in a pandemic. Some just advised their families to wait, optimistically hoping that this would all be gone by summer. So, no need to rethink business practices. I was told by one firm owner, "We're a traditional funeral home. We are not changing".

As days stretched into weeks and then months, it became clear that the only way to protect revenue and fulfill the needs of the families was to adapt and adjust. Facebook Live, Zoom,

professional streaming companies, sanitizer stations, deep cleans, new protocols for the prep room, posting services on the website, microphones and speakers at graveside, drive through funerals, drive in funerals, broadcasting to the parking lot on an FM channel, masks sitting on the register stand. Flexibility, doing what it takes to keep the doors open in a safe environment, became the mantra. Many funeral professionals had to first find those creative muscles and then stretch them to keep providing the services that their community expected

## FIND A CELEBRANT

As soon as we realized exactly how immense this new journey was going to be, the Celebrant community came together to brainstorm how to best serve their funeral homes and their families. We put together a resource book titled Ceremonies Together from Afar, which included ideas for offering services, words to acknowledge the hard experience of grieving in isolation and ceremonies that could engage virtual viewers. I told Celebrants in that very first week, "we are built for this time". Being creative, working in difficult situations, dealing with the unfamiliar is right in our wheelhouse. We provided the resource book to any and all who requested it. It was posted on all the national association web site Covid resource pages, it was picked up by NPR and CBS and many other media outlets who were seeking information about death in the time of Covid.

Some of our Celebrants found themselves being called upon to conduct many more services. The funeral directors/owners/managers recognized that this group of professionals was uniquely suited to work in unknown territory. And, with all of the churches closing, and many remaining closed, clergy have been unable or unwilling to conduct services. So, this has been a time of growth and partnership with Celebrants and funeral professionals.

## FAMILIES

Traditionally funeral service has prided itself on always saying "yes", doing our best to accommodate a family's wishes and desires and plans for a service. The most challenging aspect of this time has been that "I'm sorry, we can't" has become part of the professional language. How to explain to a family who lost their 32 year old son to suicide that they are only allowed to have 10 people in the chapel when there are 50 members of the family and all the friends who want to come stand in support?

The financial burden only adds to that challenge. Fewer services or smaller services for many firms means no opportunity to sell catering packages, or flowers or paper goods or all the elements that create revenue as well as satisfied families.

Recently, we have been focusing on those "waiting families". During the shutdown, many families decided, or were advised by their funeral director, to postpone. So, they had an immediate burial or cremation and promised to come back for a service. I talked to the owner of one large funeral home in June and he indicated he had 80 pending services on the books. I told him, "you'll be lucky to get 20 of those." Later becomes when becomes maybe becomes never. It is difficult for families to go back, to revisit that loss and pain, to gather people back together. So, it becomes easier to just not have a service. When I visited again with that owner a week ago, he said he was having to write refund checks on pre-need contracts. This is not a great business plan.



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We must reach out to our families in a way that invites them back for a reason. Calling and asking “are you ready to have your funeral?” invites a negative answer. So we wrote some words of invitation:

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,  
You have been in our thoughts since the passing of \_\_\_\_\_. We know that experiencing a death in such an uncertain and unsettling time meant that you had to make difficult decisions about where and when you could gather to honor this life.

Experts in the field of grief all agree that one of the most important steps in the grief journey is the act of gathering. Grief delayed is not grief diminished and the most important thing that can be done is to create a time for remembering. Giving voice to the stories, seeing the pictures, hearing words of comfort and special music are vital components of creating a safe space to express your loss.

Perhaps you put your plans for a funeral on hold and are now wondering if it is necessary or valuable.

Our experience in walking with families tells us that it is never too late to have a time to remember.

We invite you to contact us to discuss how we can create a sacred space for remembering your loved one. It could be a celebration of life service, or a placing of the urn, hallowing the ground at the cemetery, or a time of sharing and communing with others. This can be in person (depending upon the restrictions in your area) or we can stream it so that all your friends and family can participate.

Your journey is our journey and we stand ready to walk with you as you find meaningful ways to say goodbye.

Funeral directors have taken versions of this invitation, printed it on a beautiful card with the obituary picture on the front to send to families, providing guidance and opening the door to creating a service.

**FUTURE**

So, what does it look like? Hopefully the lesson learned is that we must continue active engagement with creating new and different ways to reach families, that unique and personalized services are now the standard and that everything that we depend upon for conducting business can be gone in a day.

Continue to offer streaming, continue to offer off-site experiences, continue to reach out to Celebrants and other professionals who are suited for new approaches to service, continue to ask every day how can we set ourselves apart as the funeral home with the staff and the vision for meeting the needs of every family. This should be a time of reflection and repurposing and refusing to go back to thinking inside the box. The box is destroyed. Now what? **FBA**

Glenda Stansbury, MALS, CFSP is a licensed Funeral Director/Embalmer in Oklahoma, the VP of InSight Books, Inc, the co-founder and Dean of InSight Institute Celebrant Training, a full-time instructor in the Funeral Service Department University of Central Oklahoma, and a practicing Certified Celebrant. If you have questions about Celebrants or aftercare or ceremony resources, contact her at [glenda@insightbooks.com](mailto:glenda@insightbooks.com) or 405-810-9501.

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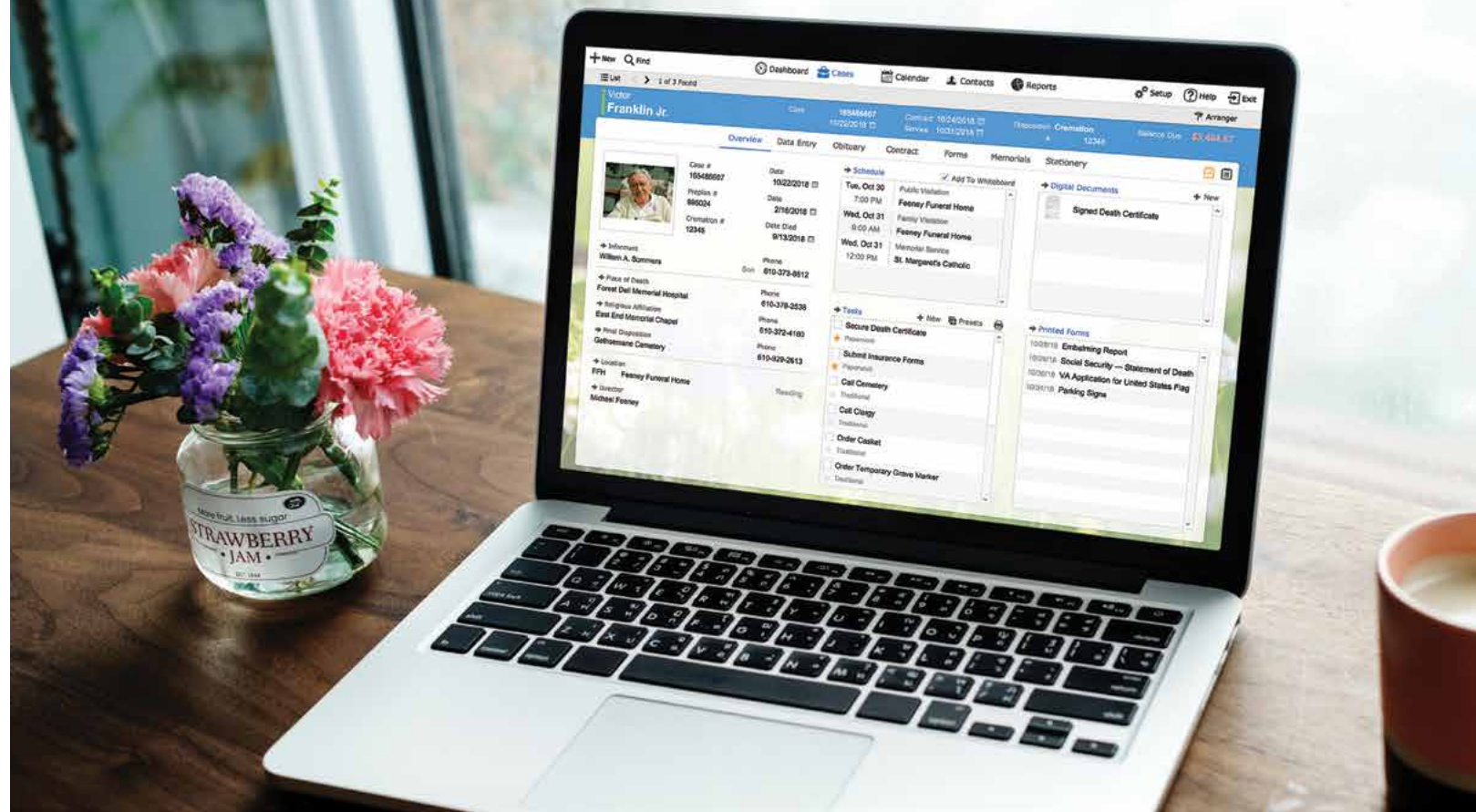


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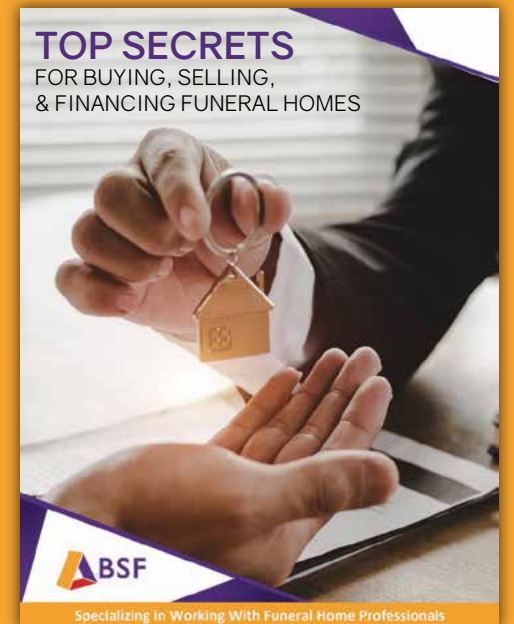
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on buying, selling and financing a funeral home.



A toddler with brown hair and a white bow, wearing a grey business suit and black shoes, is sitting in an office chair at a desk. The child is crying with their mouth wide open. On the desk, a computer monitor displays a blue error screen with a sad face icon and the text: "Your PC ran into a problem and needs to restart. We're just collecting some error info, and then we'll restart for you." A desk lamp, a potted plant, a clock, and a framed photo are also on the desk.

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