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**THE FUTURE OF CASKETS
AND BURIAL VAULTS**

IS SOCIAL MEDIA PART OF YOUR MARKETING PLAN?

by Welton Hong



If you haven't been thinking about social media as part of your funeral home marketing plan, believe me, I understand.

On the face of it, combining funeral home marketing and social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter seems as congruous as combining fried chicken and chocolate syrup.

Yes, it seems a bit strange at first. How can something as thoughtful and reverent as burial and cremation services coexist with social media engagement?

Well it can. It just needs to be employed as carefully and thoughtfully as you employ all the services you provide.

To be clear, social media is not going to be the foundation of your internet marketing. Website optimization, search

engine optimization (SEO), pay-per-click (PPC) ads, mobile marketing — those are the sorts of tools that create that foundation. If you're not utilizing those tools presently, that's where you need to start.

But you certainly shouldn't ignore social media. It's not some fad that's going away, and as Facebook, Twitter and other networks continue to establish ways for small businesses to market themselves, they're going to increase in importance.

Establishing a strong presence on popular social media networks will provide you a sizeable advantage over your local competitors over time. That's particularly true now that Google is factoring your company's overall "social influence" more strongly in deciding your relative importance in the industry. The more important Google believes your business to be, the higher it will rank against competing funeral homes in local search results.

With that said, I hope you noticed the part that read "over time." A social media campaign is part of your long-term strategy. If you're looking to build your client base quickly in the short term, you won't see a substantial improvement right away from social media. That's better suited for tools such as PPC ads.

Social media is best for establishing credibility, improving your overall SEO, and creating a digital form of word of mouth that helps you engage with potential pre-need and at-need clients. You know how important such engagement is in the "real" world; the same is true in the digital world.

Another important consideration that most social media is free — and least technically free. It doesn't cost anything to post to Twitter, Facebook, etc. (Yes, you also can do paid advertising through these platforms, but when we're talking about basic posting, it's entirely complimentary.)

With that said, social media isn't entirely free. It requires resources — either the time of your or your staff, or actual money to have an independent contractor create and post updates for you.

Social media is never a one-off deal. You can't just post a few things and put your social media campaign on the back burner. Once you start posting (or tweeting,

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etc.), you need to keep updating regularly. That doesn't necessarily mean every day, but it does mean at least every few days. So, you need to continue devoting resources (either time or money) to feeding the beast.

Honestly, it's better not to have any social media presence at all than to create accounts on these platforms and then stop updating them.

Few things are more injurious to your funeral home's credibility than having a Twitter or Facebook account that hasn't been updated in months. The search engines will knock down your SEO, and people will wonder whether you went out of business! If you don't have the time or money to keep updating, you'd be better off closing the accounts entirely.

However, if you can commit to regularly posting on the major social media platforms, it's a good idea to do so. For one thing, Google now strongly factors your company's overall social influence in deciding your relative importance in the industry. The more important Google believes your company to be, the more prominently your funeral home will appear in local search results.

For more immediate results, you'll see much greater return from initiatives such as Google pay-per-click advertising, which will position your business above organic search engine results. Google PPC ads also can be precisely targeted and very easily modified, letting you tweak your approach on the fly and have a new pitch "live" almost immediately.

So...what do you post? My advice is for funeral homes is to publish the same sort of content I suggest for a blog on your funeral home website. In fact, you can create posts for your blog and then link to them in tweets and Facebook posts if you like.

The subject matter can be trends in your industry, information about how to effectively do pre-planning, what to do in case of an unexpected death (and other at-need considerations), and even health and wellness content. When you think about it, death care touches on many different areas of people's lives, and you can hit all these areas in your social media content. **FBA**



Welton Hong is the founder and marketing director of Ring Ring Marketing, which specializes in helping funeral homes convert leads from online directly to the phone line. The firm has helped many funeral homes, cemeteries and combination operations bolster their online marketing.

Welton also is a speaker at funeral home conferences and the author of Making Your Phone Ring with Internet Marketing for Funeral Homes. Contact him at welton@ringringmarketing.com or 888-383-2848.

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