



KIP 2018 Awards for personalized services and products:

**Cedar Memorial
funeral director
memorialized her
lost baby by helping
other families**

**Before I Die Festival
brings community
together to discuss
life and death issues**

**Loyless plans a fitting
sendoff at golf club**

**Jackson
Lytle & Lewis'
field of flags**



Aftercare via texting

A walking stick + urn

Also in this issue:

- How to put your operation on the map
- Due diligence when buying a cemetery
- Being a great listener

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ICCFA Magazine spotlight



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► **Ring Ring Marketing** offers a comprehensive suite of marketing services, from broad techniques such as reputation management, pay-per-click advertising, local search optimization, email marketing and website content generation, to more surgical tools such as geotargeting, remarketing and social media marketing.

MARKETING & TECHNOLOGY

You don't see people using phone books and fold-out maps to find places anymore. Addresses, maps and directions are easily available on a smartphone, which is why you need to make sure your location as well as your organization's name and phone number are easy to find that way.

How to put your operation on the map—literally

Few technological advances in the past decade have been as beneficial to everyday Americans as online maps and their coordination with GPS navigation.

No more pulling out an enormous paper map to figure out where you're driving—or having to figure out how to refold it when you're done. No more stopping to ask a stranger on the corner where to find a destination in a strange city. No more presumably heading east for an hour only to discover you were actually driving west all along.

Instead, GPS lets you know exactly where you are at all times. If you're using automatic navigation, either through your smartphone or your vehicle itself, it will let you know when you're going the wrong way—and immediately find the best route to get you back on track.

And if you're in a strange place and need a repair shop to replace a flat tire? A hotel? A bank? A place to eat?

No problem. Just ask for the type of business you need and the map app will get you there.

Obviously, that's why it's critical for your business to show up on a digital map if you have an auto repair shop, or a hotel.

What's not as obvious is why you need to appear on a map if you're a death care business.

Why would a cremation provider need to appear on a digital map? Is anyone driving around and suddenly needing to navigate to a crematorium, a cemetery or a funeral home?

Of course not. But that doesn't mean death care businesses are exempt from needing to show up on online maps. In fact, it's critically important for search engine optimization and your organization's overall visibility.

Also, let's be honest: No matter what type

of business you have, it's pretty important for people to be able to find you. If you're not showing up on a physical map of their local area, won't that seem a little strange to potential clientele?

Number one in maps: Google (of course)

Google isn't the king of the hill for everything, of course. Google has never made your favorite pizza or produced an Oscar-winning movie. (But give it time. Outside of Amazon, there's arguably no more ambitious company in the world.)

However, for most aspects of promoting your organization online, Google is always the place to start. And that's true of its Maps function as well.

While the crowdsourcing-powered Waze has rapidly grown in popularity in recent years for the basic function of getting around town—thanks to its ability to identify accidents, road closures, alternative routes, etc.—there's one important thing to keep in mind: Google actually owns Waze. Google purchased the GPS navigation app for \$966 million in 2013.

It's also notable that the feature people love most about Waze—the ability for drivers to report incidents in real time, alerting fellow travelers of paths to avoid or watch out for—soon will be coming to Google Maps, as well.

Last year, Google Maps also added restaurant recommendations personalized for the user—which is pretty easy for Google, frankly, because it's constantly collecting data on what you search for, and thus what interests you. Additionally, Google added its Assistant capabilities to Maps in January 2019, letting you execute voice-controlled options such as adding a stop on your route.

All of that means Google Maps just keeps

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getting more powerful, and it already owned about two-thirds of the smartphone app market share at the time of a large summer 2018 consumer survey.

That's not even including Waze (Google's own product), which had 12 percent of the market share, followed by Apple Maps at 11 percent and MapQuest at 8 percent (per the same survey). If we combine the usage of Google and Waze, Google-owned map apps are preferred by about four out of five users.

Ranking higher in Google Maps

If you're steadily working on improving the SEO of your death care business—and I certainly hope you are doing that—you will naturally start ranking higher in Google Maps over time. However, if you want to speed up that process (which I also recommend), make sure you're incorporating the following tactics:

Verify and fully complete your Google My Business page.

Every single business needs to ensure its GMB page is optimized. If you're unsure about your GMB status, rectify that problem right now.

The link is <https://www.google.com/business/>, but you can also get there by simply Googling "Google My Business." Verify your business site, if that hasn't been done already, and make sure all the information there is filled out and accurate.

Crank up business citations.

Citations are simply online references to your business that include your NAP, which is marketer-speak for the business's name, address and phone number.

To get more citations, make sure your funeral home, cemetery or cremation-specific business is listed in as many relevant online directories as possible. Look for additional places where your business could be logically listed online. The more citations Google discovers about your operation, the better you'll rank in Google Maps.

One additional tip: It's incredibly important that the name, address and phone number be consistent across all references. That is, you must ensure they're styled the exact same way.

If your business address is on W Main St., make sure it's "W Main St." everywhere, not "West Main St." or "W Main Street." If there's a unit or suite number, either include the term "unit" or "suite" in every reference, or simply use the # sign everywhere.

It's all about consistent styling in every citation. Typically, it's best to use whatever format the U.S. Post Office defaults to for your address.

If you have multiple locations, look for ways to increase citations for all of them. You won't get as much SEO juice as you would if all that SEO were concentrated on one location, but as long as the citations are consistent, you'll still do OK.

Ensure your business website is optimized with meta tags.

This area can get a bit complex, but the short version is that Google will be associating your business website with your address in its mapping technology. The data on your website becomes a relevance factor in how Google determines your ranking in Google Maps.

For this reason, optimizing meta tags on your site such as title tags, meta description tags and headline tags becomes critical. Find ways to (organically) include location-based information in these tags. The more "location authority" you have in these places, the more transfers over to your Google Maps listing.

Improve location references on your business website.

In addition to improving references within meta tags, you need to reference your location regularly in your website text content itself. However, having said that, I need to sneak in a warning: I'm not recommending jamming a ton of location-based keywords into your copy.

Google has been cracking down on that sort of thing for years. It can tell if you're "keyword stuffing," and it will punish you with a lower search ranking overall, in addition to hurting your SEO with Google Maps.

For example, if you have a cremation business in Sarasota, Florida, you definitely want to organically work in phrases such as "Sarasota cremation services" and "cremation in Sarasota" where they should *naturally*

occur in copy. As long as the references are natural and conservatively incorporated, you're fine.

But you don't want to be stuffing those long-tail keywords (and/or related phrases) into the copy throughout your site. Every word on your site must read as though it's intended for human visitors.

That's especially important for businesses in the death care industry, because the copy on your site must convey trustworthiness and reverence. If it's packed with keywords intended only to boost your SEO (for Google Maps or organic rankings in general), you'll immediately turn off visitors, and they'll bounce out rapidly.

Create local-focused content.

The key to great SEO is having lots of great relevant content, and when you want to rank well in Google Maps, you'll do especially well if the content is highly localized.

In other words, while it's certainly beneficial for your website to include short articles and/or blog posts about cremation-related topics in general, you'll do even better if you include local references as well.

Google wants to see that your business has a lot of credibility in death care, but it also wants to see that you have a lot of relevance to your local area. When you've "proven yourself" to Google in both areas, you'll be considered one of the most important providers in local search results *and* in Google Maps.

Of course, I know that many funeral homes, cemeteries and cremation-specific businesses aren't set up to regularly create text content in-house, which is why I strongly suggest contracting with a good marketing company or a veteran freelance writer to strengthen your onsite content.

At the end of the day, how your website ranks in both organic listings and in Google Maps—which naturally turns into more at-need calls and more revenue overall—depends on how much relevant content your site includes.

Analyze your local competitors' sites and look for ways to produce a greater quantity and quality of relevant local content. 