

THE DIRECTOR

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ceremony matters

FILLING THE RELIGIOUS GAP

PAGES 36-47

48 PARENTS SHARE THE TRAGEDY OF A SON'S SUICIDE TO HELP OTHERS

60 KEEPING TEAM DYNAMICS STRONG: LEARNING FROM THE BEATLES' BREAKUP

50 MISSION PARK'S KRISTIN TIPS AND HER VISION OF FUNERAL SERVICE

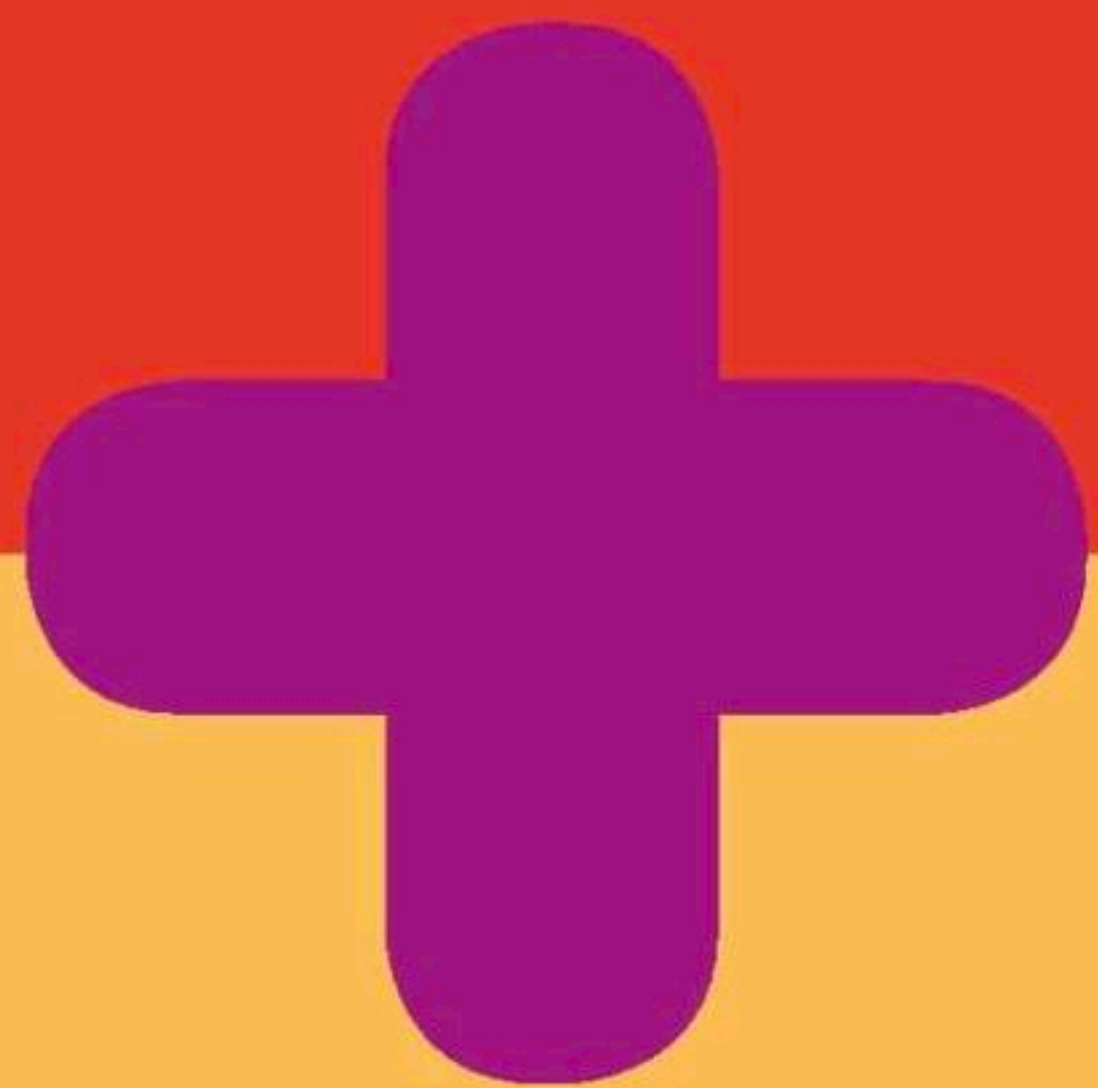
64 COMPANIONING SOMEONE WHO IS EXPERIENCING COMPLICATED GRIEF

56 MULTICHANNEL DEATHCARE MARKETING: IT'S LIKE PEANUT BUTTER AND JELLY

68 THE ART OF COUNTERBALANCE: EMPLOYING THE 5:1 RATIO THEORY

JUST
LIKE

Peanut Butter



Jelly



Paid and organic search go hand in hand in modern, multichannel deathcare marketing.

BY WELTON HONG

It's safe to assume that online marketing is not the first thing you consider as you arrive at your funeral home each day. In fact, close to 40% of funeral directors say they have no specific marketing plan. That's understandable. You have families to care for and daily tasks to handle, which means marketing often gets pushed to the back burner.

But owners of most funeral homes, even smaller ones, do *recognize* the need for marketing. About three-quarters say one of their top challenges is engaging with potential clientele and growing their business.

When you're faced with this quandary – a need you know you have but little time and resources each day to fulfill it – it's tempting to look for one solution to do the trick. This is exactly why some firms end up sticking all (or at least most) of their eggs into the basket of a single marketing strategy, usually either search engine optimization (SEO) or search engine marketing (SEM). But then they wonder why they aren't seeing great results.

The short version is that peanut butter and jelly must both be present to make a yummy PB&J. A peanut butter sandwich is... okay. A jelly sandwich is... well, that's just disgusting. A peanut

butter and jelly sandwich, on the other hand, is a sweet snack we all love.

If you consider SEO the peanut butter and SEM the jelly, you can see why you need both to accomplish your goals.

WHAT IS SEM?

Search engine marketing is paying for advertisements on search engine results pages (SERPs). When you search for something online, Google and other search engines return results pages made up of organic links relevant to what you're looking for, plus a variety of paid advertisements. Those paid advertisements appear due to the SEM work put in by the advertisers.

Many marketers use search ads and SEM in conjunction with other advertising efforts, including display ads. You can often manage both types of ads via the same network (such as Google Ads). Search ads show up at the top of (or within) search results. To most people, a search ad looks like a normal page listing or a shopping link, even though it's marked as an advertisement. Display ads show up on websites before and after videos on sites such as YouTube or even on social media.

Another difference between display and search ads is how they engage people. Search ads are displayed to people already looking for your products. For example, a family searching for funeral homes in its area is likely in immediate need, and a well-targeted search ad lets them know you can help. This is known as "pull marketing," as it pulls in people who are already on a journey toward a product or business like yours.

By contrast, display ads are more like "push marketing." They are shown across the web to users based on demographics and

behavioral criteria. For example, you might set display ads about preplanning to be shown to people of a certain age, income level or geographic location.

Typically, display ads help you build awareness for your firm and retarget people who might be in the early stages of a decision about preplanning or other deathcare services. But they can also be used to reach at-need families, especially when you target websites people might visit at this critical time.

A discussion of all the types of ads and their benefits could fill up its own article. For our purposes here, just know that you can use display and search ads in a combined effort to achieve many of the benefits of search engine marketing.

WHAT IS SEO?

Search engine optimization refers to the efforts taken to show up organically in search engine results pages. It's "free" in the sense that you don't pay Google or another search engine to display your page. You also can't directly pay for a better organic page rank.

But SEO does take time and requires other resources to create content and engage in activities across the web that make it more likely that your page will rank high enough for exposure. Some common components of SEO:

- Text content on your web pages should be of high quality and be relevant, plus use the right keywords.
- Meta tags and titles help people understand what your page might be about when they see the link on search engine results pages.
- Site architecture and performance: If people can't easily

navigate your pages, the site loads slow or doesn't work on mobile devices, your SEO could suffer.

- Reviews and other offsite indicators of authority and trustworthiness, including back links and social signals.

WHY ARE BOTH METHODS IMPORTANT?

SEO and SEM go hand in hand because they offer benefits that balance each other, helping you create a comprehensive online marketing strategy that covers more ground now and in the future. Here's how the synergy works.

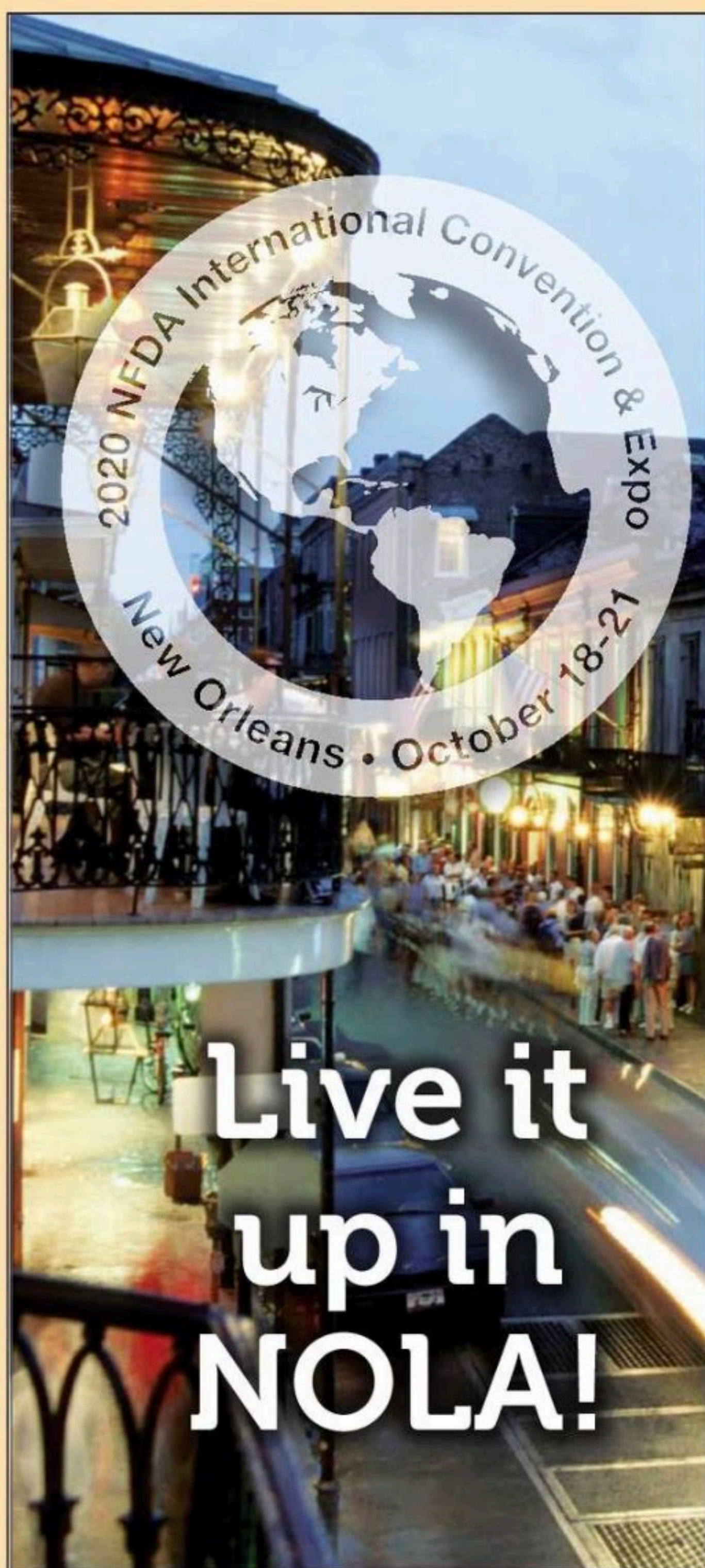
Paid Ads Provide Immediate Connection

By sticking solely with either SEM or SEO, you cut your marketing campaigns off at the legs. SEO is a long-game approach; it takes time to build authority and you can't always count on hitting the top spot on Google for a search right when a family needs your services.

Paid ads do offer this immediate connection. Search ads targeted to keywords such as "making funeral arrangements" or "funeral homes near me" show up as the very top result when someone is looking for services. That significantly increases the chances that families will click through to your page and contact you.

Consider these search ad statistics:

- More than 60% of people say they will click relevant search ads.
- When people search with the intent of immediately engaging services, Google ads get 65% of the clicks.
- People who click through on an ad are 50% more likely to con-



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tact you or do business with you than people who click on an organic search link.

- More than 95% of clicks go to the first four results on search engine results pages; ads ensure that you're in that range.

SEO Delivers Powerful, Long-Term Benefits

Search engine optimization isn't a fast answer to online exposure, but it's a very stable one when you do it right. Plus, it comes with a number of other benefits.

SEO usually promotes better user experience on your pages, which makes it more likely that people will stick around to learn about your services and eventually contact you for an appointment. This can be a huge benefit when you're promoting preplanning options.

SEO is especially valuable for local marketing efforts as it helps ensure that consumers who are looking for deathcare services in their own neighborhood connect with you.

Over time, SEO helps you build credibility in the industry, an important factor when you're dealing with competitors in your area. SEO ensures that people see your name as they're exploring options and related services, so that when they are in need, your funeral home will be the one they think of.

Simultaneous SEO/SEM Efforts Give Marketing a Powerful Boost

If paid ads are so fast and powerful, why don't you just ignore SEO and buy your way into prime real estate in search engine results pages? First, it's because that looks inauthentic; it's also something funeral homes typically can't afford.

In a world in which scams are a way of life and people are

scared to click on links in emails or answer the phone for unknown numbers, do you want your only exposure to potential clientele to be something you paid for? (Spoiler alert: You definitely do not.)

Strong SEO helps ensure that you show up organically somewhere else on results pages, letting people see you're a real, recognized business with enough online history to rank well. It increases the likelihood that you'll get the click, whether it's through your paid or organic link.

Second, integrating SEO into your marketing strategy helps lower the cost of lead generation. Pay-per-click and search ads can be extremely affordable and high in return; the average advertiser sees a \$2 return on every \$1 spent on Google Ads. But if you're paying for every bit of exposure you get online, your marketing budget is likely exploding out of its boundaries. Using SEO alongside SEM helps reduce the cost of inbound leads by up to 60% on average.

It's not a one-way street, in which SEO only boosts SEM. Search ads actually help raise brand awareness, too, by as much as 80%!

The bottom line is that modern marketing is multichanneled. People have such disparate needs, search habits and intents when engaging online that funeral homes that stick to a single way of doing things are going to miss out on potential clientele. That's true right now and for the future. ☰

Welton Hong is founder of Ring Ring Marketing (funeralhomeprofits.com) and an expert in case generation from online to the phone line. He is also author of Making Your Phone Ring With Internet Marketing for Funeral Homes (2019).