

THE DIRECTOR

JANUARY 2019

WWW.NFDA.ORG



2020 VISION FOCUS ON YOUR FUTURE

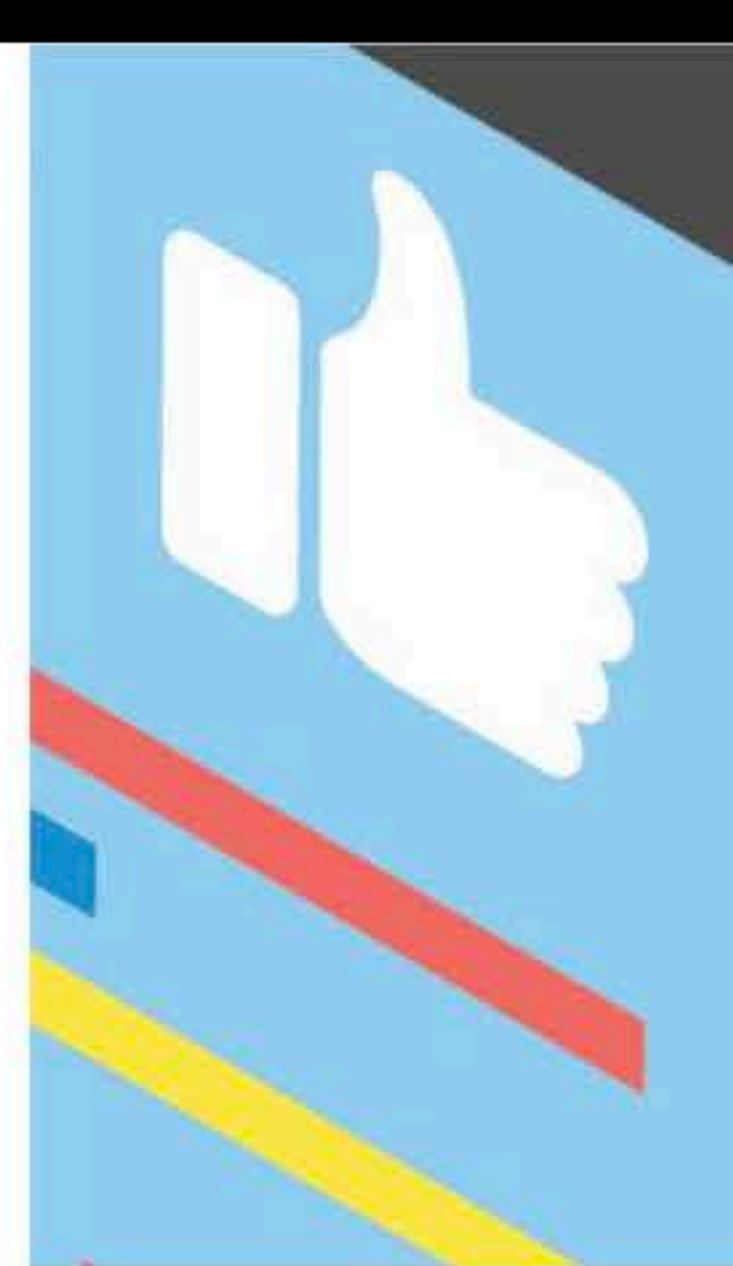
SEEING
THE
FUTURE
28

FROM
STATISTICS TO
SOLUTIONS
32

MAKING
ARRANGEMENTS
ONLINE
36

SUCCESSION
PLANNING
40

WEBSITE
CONTENT
QUALITY
56



Just a Website Isn't Enough

SO YOUR FUNERAL HOME HAS A WEBSITE. BIG DEAL. SO WHAT.

I know this sounds dismissive, and yes, that's the idea. It's not intended to be harsh but simply to point out that too many funeral home owners and directors still believe just *having* a website is sufficient. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Granted, having some sort of website is better than having none at all. As remarkable as it might seem, I've run into more than a few people representing funeral homes that still don't have a website – in 2018. I realize deathcare is decidedly more old-school than most other industries, but that's taking it to the extreme. And while those businesses might be staying afloat for a time given their particular location and demographics (typically very rural and little to no competition), that's not a sustainable plan. Even the most remote areas in America have high-speed internet these days (in most cases).

The world is getting smaller, like it or not, which is why a business website is a necessity, no matter what type of business you have. Today, having a website is like having a phone number. It's a foundational requirement; you simply can't do business without it.

Unfortunately, a number of independent funeral homes pretty much stop there. They largely view their website as a place for contact information (address, phone, fax, email) and a few of the standard elements:

basic services, obituaries, flowers and gifts, etc.

And that's... okay. It's better than nothing, and as I mentioned earlier, I've occasionally seen *nothing*.

On the other hand, as the paraphrased headline of this article already spoiled, simply *having* a website is not enough. It's a building block, a starting point. If you really want to succeed, you must stop thinking of your website as little more than an online illustration of your physical business. You need to start thinking of it as a marketing tool, one of the most powerful you have to offer.

To be fair, I know some funeral professionals reading this article already do that. They have very good websites and have worked hard to turn them into conversion machines.

But if you haven't done that or aren't quite sure you've done enough, it's time to get cracking because if you wait too long, your competitors will beat you to the punch.

THE TRAFFIC TRAP

One of the main things I do for funeral home clients is deliver traffic to their websites. We employ techniques to make that funeral home shine above local competitors in organic search engine results. We additionally showcase them with cost-efficient tools, such as pay-per-click advertising and mobile marketing. All of this works incredibly well – if we're sending these great leads to a website that actually *converts*. If the site doesn't convert, there's really no point in sending traffic there!

Quite a few funeral directors are obsessed with traffic when they first partner with us. They've been told how important it is to get great SEO and rank well. They want tons of traffic coming to their site. More click-throughs! More views! More hits!

We could do all of that but won't – not until we've worked with the client to transform their website into a conversion machine. Generating traffic before improving the website is like putting the cart before the horse. If your website isn't up to snuff, all the traffic in the world won't make any difference. Traffic doesn't turn into revenue. Being ranked at the top of your industry in your location merits you nothing if people "bounce out" from your site shortly after arriving there. Window shoppers don't increase your bottom line. You want clientele. If you're pushing hard to increase at-need calls, you need a website designed to convert at-need visitors. If your focus is on preneed, that needs to be prioritized.

Traffic and a high-converting website go hand in hand. One doesn't work without the other. If you have a great website and virtually no traffic, no one will ever see the site. If you have tons of traffic but a subpar website, you're not going to turn those visitors into clientele.

A NOTE ON CONVERSIONS

I've found it's often beneficial to explain exactly what we mean when referring to conversions. Converting a website visitor doesn't necessarily have to mean finalizing a sale or upselling certain services, although



OWNERS NEED TO START THINKING OF THEIR WEBSITES AS MARKETING TOOLS, ONE OF THE MOST POWERFUL THEY HAVE TO OFFER.

it could mean those things if that's how you choose to define it. A conversion could be as simple as getting a website visitor to fill out a contact form for more information on pre-need options. It could be someone calling your firm in an at-need situation. It all depends on how you wish to define a conversion for *your* business. But it's always some type of action taken by the visitor.

You must determine what you want that action to be and then build your site – or improve, upgrade or tweak a site you already have – to persuade visitors to take that action.

PRINCIPLES OF A HIGH-CONVERTING WEBSITE

A funeral home website alone rarely seals the deal, but it can handle a large part of the workload. Someone in an at-need situation needs to move quickly, of course, and will likely click on one of the top organic listings on a search page. If your website indicates that you're credible and capable, you'll likely get that call.

But there are other factors as well. Does the site include your contact information on every page? Is there a phone number listed where someone can be reached 24/7? Do you make that fact clear on every page?

If generating more at-need calls is a top priority, as obvious as this might sound, put yourself in the shoes of someone in that situation. (You're used to doing that via a phone call, of course, or in person, but you need to put just as much focus on that "interaction" on your website.)

All of the same principles apply.

Think of yourself as a person who has just had a close family member die and you don't have a plan in place. You do a quick search for burial or cremation services in your area and click on one of the options that looks best on the results page. What do you want to see when you land on the site? And just as important: What do you *not* want to see? Let's look at some of these elements individually.

CREDIBILITY

Of course, you want to see proof that this funeral home will take the best care of your loved one, so you want to be assured the business has been around awhile. You want to see good "About Us" information regarding ownership and staff, with pictures (at least) and video (if possible).

You also want to see testimonials and reviews from real families that were well cared for by the funeral home. Reviews are incredibly important these days for establishing credibility. Most consumers now say they trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations, and that's just as true in the deathcare industry as in any other.

SITE DESIGN

If the website isn't designed in a way that's easy to navigate, you'll likely leave and try another one. (Under the circumstances, you don't have time to dig around to find what you need.) You also don't want to have any trouble with directly contacting the funeral home to start making arrangements immediately. Thus, a click-to-call phone number should

appear on every page. This is especially important now that more people are viewing funeral home websites on smartphones; they just click the number and their phone immediately places the call.

PAGE SPEED

Across all industries, one principle is clear: Slow website speed kills conversions. About half of visitors now expect a site to load in under two seconds, and when you're a potential at-need client, time is of the essence. Additionally, Google is now penalizing the search rankings of slow-loading sites, so a fast-loading website is a boon to search engine optimization as well.

MOBILE OPTIMIZATION

Many people in at-need situations now research local funeral homes on their smartphones as it's the fastest and most convenient way to get instant information. If you click on a search result on your phone and the site isn't optimized for mobile, you'll likely leave immediately. The text will be hard to read and the site problematic to navigate. And as with the page speed issue, that's the last thing you need right now. You want to be able to process information quickly and call the funeral home with a single click. ☰

Welton Hong is founder of Ring Ring Marketing (funeralhomeprofits.com) and author of Making Your Phone Ring: With Internet Marketing for Funeral Homes.