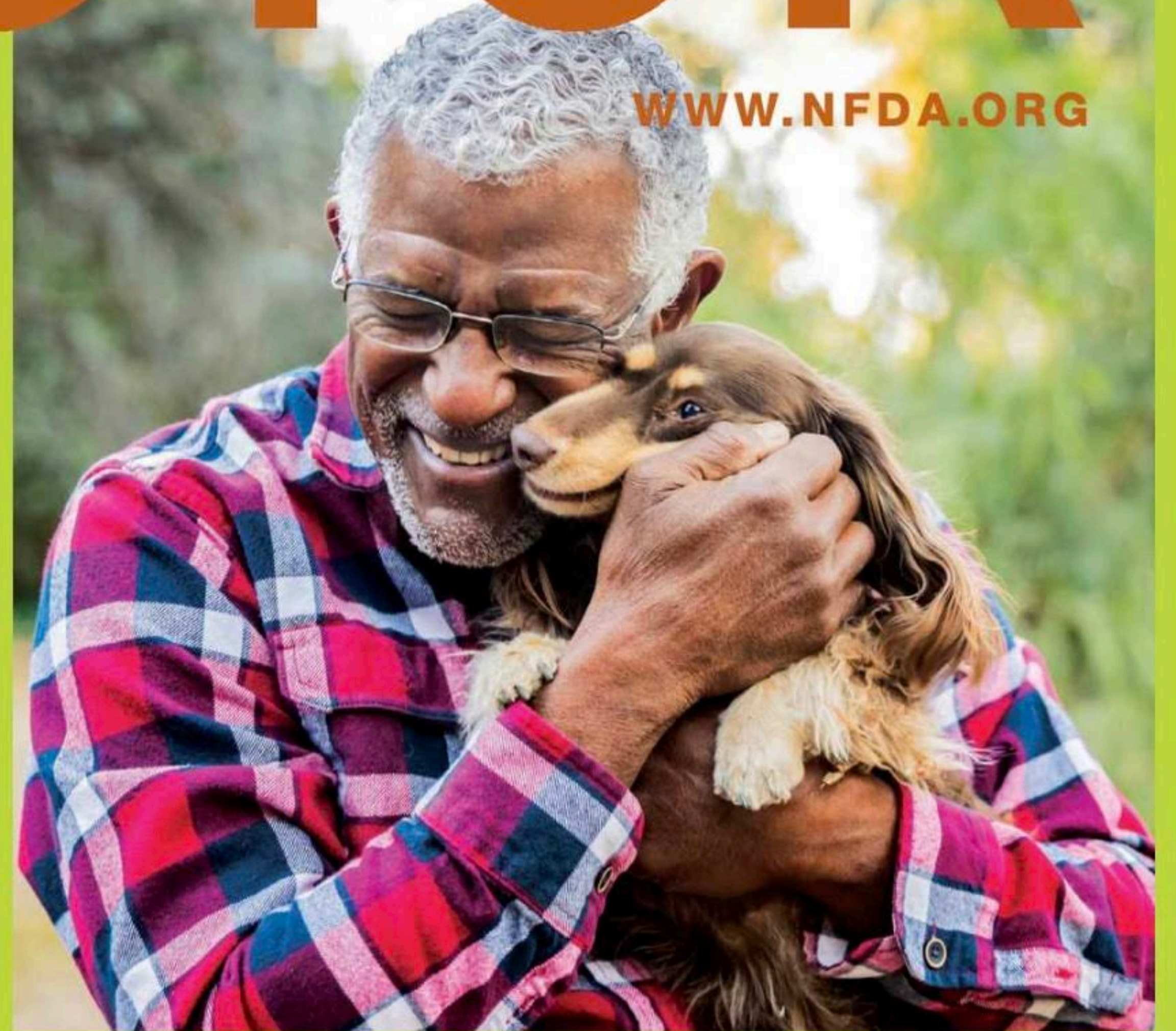


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HELPING FAMILIES TELL LOVED ONES' LIFE STORIES





THE BIGGER

PICTURE

Employing a comprehensive marketing strategy that includes remarketing.

BY WELTON HONG

What is the last impulse purchase you made? Maybe it was a candy bar at the cash register or perhaps an online app or that kitchen gadget that keeps popping up in your social feed.

Impulse spending isn't a weird habit. Statistically, you're very likely to engage in it from time to time, if we consider that 84% of Americans admit to doing so.

Gum, candy, a cup of coffee – in the grand scheme of personal finance concerns, these are small potatoes. But did you know that half of the people who admit to spending impulsively say they've made unplanned purchases of \$100 or more? A full 25% have acknowledged spending \$500 in one go on an impulse buy. About 80% of shoppers in younger generations report making impulse deci-

sions when browsing online; common purchases are food, clothing, household goods and shoes.

What's not on the list? Funeral services (obviously).

Of course, you know people don't buy a casket, urn or pre-planned cremation services on a whim or because the right deal hits their inbox at the ideal time.

But some funeral homes and related deathcare businesses handle online marketing as if this *is* the case, in part because they're applying pieces of online marketing wisdom without a comprehensive strategy customized to the needs of their firms and target audiences.

At Need or Preneed: Not Impulse Decisions

Yes, families must sometimes act

quickly to make decisions about deathcare services in times of unplanned need. However, these are not technically impulse decisions. With the chart on the facing page, let's consider some differences between impulse buying and at-need deathcare decisions.

Historically, families made both at-need and preplanning decisions based on a previous relationship with a provider or on traditional options given heritage, church affiliation or ethnicity.

Today, a greater number of families don't make funeral decisions in this manner and most probably don't have a relationship with a single provider of deathcare services. They're more likely to rely on word of mouth, online reviews, information from a Google search or their existing overall

general perception of local death-care firms.

Most of the time, if the deceased preplanned his or her final arrangements, the family will honor those decisions.

But in either case – an at-need family deciding about deathcare or a person looking for a provider with which to preplan – impulsive purchasing is not part of the equation. You can't simply show up with a great deal on funeral home services or an eye-catching image of an urn to get someone to click the buy button without much consideration.

Comprehensive Online Marketing Strategy

The picture is bigger for death-care service providers because it's bigger for their potential clientele. I've seen numerous funeral directors note that planning final arrangements takes more than 125 decisions or tasks, ranging from securing all the right documents to deciding on such details as cremation or burial and who should speak at a memorial service.

In short, pulling the trigger on which deathcare firm to use for all or any of these many decisions can be daunting, which means people are looking for a service provider they can trust to walk them through the process.

Funeral firm marketing should look to build that trust, even if the consumer doesn't necessarily realize trust is being built. Comprehensive online marketing creates authority and trust that helps ensure that someone turns to you when they're ready (or have a need) to start working through those 125-plus tasks.

Comprehensive strategies look at the entire picture of death-care service purchases. Whether someone is in an at-need situation or wants to preplan, they go through a buying journey. The former may be much quick-

er than the latter, but the stages are typically the same.

AWARENESS

The person becomes aware that they need or want a service. In an at-need situation, this stage is short and obvious. For preplanning, this stage might kick off because a friend preplanned and shared his or her satisfaction with the process or because the person is experiencing anxiety about leaving their family members to handle arrangements in the future. Many turn to mobile devices or computers during this time to conduct preliminary searches.

CONSIDERATION

The person begins to actively look for solutions and services. The at-need family might ask friends for funeral home recommendations or turn to Google. The potential preplanner might start reading about preplanning online.

DECISION

Potential service providers are whittled down to one, and a decision is made.

The owner and/or operator of a funeral home must market with all of these stages in mind. If you don't show up during the "awareness" phase, when people turn to social media and search engines, you won't be in the running in the later stages. And if you don't show up *again* when people begin to consider and make a decision, they may forget you're one of the contenders.

Opportunity may not knock twice, but deathcare firms definitely should, which means:

- Publishing trustworthy, relevant and quality content on your

Impulse Buying Decisions	Typical At-Need Deathcare Services Decisions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Made in the moment; often based on little data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Made shortly after a loved one dies; often based on the input of other loved ones, emotional ties or known information about providers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Happen at the point of product introduction, such as when someone buys something from the register aisle or an endcap in a store 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not prompted by a product or deal of the moment; need drives the family to look for you
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buyer might be converted by the urgency of the deal: "Discount good only until noon" or "Only two left, so act fast!" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urgency is not associated with the "deal" but with the need to have someone trustworthy take over the situation

website and following SEO best practices to help ensure that you show up on search engine results pages, especially Google

- Ensuring that people can engage with your content in positive ways that keep them coming back to your site or help them remember you when they're ready to consider a provider

- Creating a social media presence that resonates with your target audience and helps people see your deathcare firm as a compassionate, trustworthy and expert option

- Using resources such as Google My Business to increase your reach online

- Providing educational content that removes some of the stress from making the many decisions involved in planning final arrangements

- Using paid advertising to boost awareness of your firm in search engine results pages and on relevant webpages and social media platforms

- Using paid advertising to ensure that your business knocks when someone is actively looking to open the door to a death-care services provider.

Remarketing for Preplanning Services

Remarketing is a great way to "knock" multiple times while ensuring that your marketing ef-

forts and spend go toward people who have already expressed a desire for your services.

Remarketing basically works like this: Someone is interested in a deathcare service and conducts an online search. Because you've invested in strong SEO and have put time into social media and resources such as Google My Business, your firm shows up when they search.

They click through to your site, but they're in the "awareness" or "consideration" stages and are not ready to make a final decision, so they leave your site without making an appointment, calling you or completing a purchase.

You can remarket (or retarget) these potential consumers with ads, so they see your offer or message as they browse other areas on the web. Those ads help them remember to return to your site

when they're ready to make a final decision.

This online marketing tactic comes in numerous flavors. You can retarget with ads in the search engines; on digital channels, such as other websites or social media platforms; or via email. You can even use something called contextual retargeting, which displays your ads to people who have visited websites highly relevant to yours. For example, if someone has looked up information about cremation but hasn't actually landed on your site, you can show up as an option to them via ads.

The usefulness of remarketing is a bit more limited for at-need services. If you choose to run remarketing campaigns for those services, they would need to be very brief because you obviously must not keep "knock-

ing" when a grieving family has already decided and is now moving forward with or has already held a funeral.

But remarketing can be extremely powerful in persuading people to consider and choose your firm as their preplanning provider. First, it drives more consumers to your website. People who see retargeting ads are 70% more likely to click. The average click-through rate for these types of ads is 10 times the av-

erage click-through rate of standard display ads.

Second, it's a powerful tool during the "awareness" and "consideration" stages since it increases the number of times someone sees your products or business.

About 60% of consumers say they are more likely to notice an ad when they've already seen the message or product, which means that knocking more than once draws their attention to you.

With so much information available on any given webpage across the internet, anything you can do to aim the spotlight in your direction is important.

Finally, remarketing drives up conversion rates – the number of people who click through to your website and actually call you, make an appointment or fill out a contact form. The average conversion rate more than doubles on advertisements when someone has seen those ads five or six times.

Remarketing isn't rocket science. People are busy and likely to start the awareness phase of a buying journey and then veer off track to handle other obligations.

When the buying journey is about something that seems complex and daunting, such as preplanning final arrangements, they may put it off subconsciously even if they really do want to take care of these matters.

Remarketing is your way of sliding back onto consumers' radar and prompting them to act now. And each prompt – if you're running high-quality ads and campaigns – moves the person a little closer to deciding on whether to employ your services. ☰

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

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