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Does Social Media Have a Role in Your Marketing Plan?

By Welton Hong



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I've worked with a lot of funeral home owners and funeral directors, but I can count on one hand the number who indicated a strong interest in marketing their business through social media.

Social media, for the most part, is certainly not a popular concept in this industry. It probably doesn't sound like an exciting idea to you. You likely don't believe there's a huge role for social media in marketing burial and/or cremation services.

This is usually the point in a given article where I say that's a misconception, that you're missing out on a great opportunity that you need to get really excited about a particular tool or strategy.

Not this time. If you have concerns about social media, they're largely warranted. Frankly, social media is a bit of a strange fit with the death care industry. This isn't the type of business that lends itself to a lot of Facebook posts or tweets. You don't see a big Instagram or Snapchat presence for many funeral homes, and for good reason.

Some firms attempt to use an identical online marketing approach for all business types. They're doing it wrong. (Really, really wrong.) Certain industries can leverage social media to accomplish a variety of business goals, but not death care.

With that said, there is a place for social media in your industry. (Otherwise, I wouldn't be writing an article about it for you to enjoy.) It's just a more limited, specific place than it is for most other business types.

To successfully capture both at-need and pre-need contracts, you should be sure other aspects of your business are optimized before even concerning yourself with social media.

You should ensure your website is optimized for conversions and top search engine rankings, and that it looks just as good (and works just as well) on mobile devices as on desktop displays. You should be employing pay-per-click (PPC) ads to quickly generate at-need calls in a cost-effective way.

You should be utilizing powerful business generating tools such as mobile marketing and remarketing. You should ensure your business has lots of high-quality reviews on platforms such as Yelp, Facebook, and Google.

All of those things are much more important to your bottom line than social media. If you turn your attention to social media before acting on those other tools, you're putting the cart before the horse.

However, if you're sure everything is looking good in those other areas, it could be beneficial to consider venturing into social media. The key is to employ it as thoughtfully and carefully as you employ all the other services you provide.

Establishing a strong presence on popular social media networks could provide you an 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. If your competitors are ignoring social media altogether, social media could be the edge that elevates you above them.

However, there's a reason I emphasized "over time" a couple of paragraphs ago. A social media campaign is part of your long-term strategy.

If your main goal right now is to generate a lot of contracts quickly over the short term, social media is not the tool for you. Fast generation is much better suited for tools such as PPC ads.

What social media does best is establish credibility, improve your overall SEO, and create an online type of word of mouth to engage with potential clients—especially ones interested in preplanning.

One key benefit of social media is that it's free, at least technically. It costs nothing to post updates on Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and related platforms. Granted, these companies also allow for paid advertising, but I'm just talking now about basic posting.

Although social media doesn't cost money, it does require the time of either you or your staff, which is an important resource itself. And if you hire someone from the outside to run your social media to save you time, that obviously will cost money.

A critical thing to remember is that if you do start posting to social media, you have to keep doing it on a regular basis. You need to provide updates at least every few days. Sporadic updates make your business look bad.

The reality is this: It would be better not to have any social media presence at all than to create accounts on these platforms and then stop updating them. So once you start, you need to stick with it.

You're probably wondering what content you (or someone you contract with) should post. My advice is to publish the same sort of content you would in a blog on your funeral home website. You could even create posts for your blog and then link to them in tweets and Facebook posts.

Welton Hong is the founder of Ring Ring Marketing® and a leading expert in creating case generation from online to the phone line. He is the author of Making Your Phone Ring with Internet Marketing for Funeral Homes. For more information, visit www.FuneralHomeProfits.com.

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There's More To It... Advance Funeral Planning

By Christopher Kuhnen

ORDER TAKER, LEAD JUNKY, OR SELF-SUSTAINER: Do any of these describe you?

Not long ago, I received a phone call from a sales agent who was grouchy that his funeral home owner would no longer provide him with walk-in and/or call-in pre-need sales leads. He shared that his boss had the nerve to say he needed to start securing his own, self-generated sales leads and stop relying on the funeral home. He called me in a panic and asked, "What am I supposed to do now?" My answer was frank and simple. "Find another way to obtain your sales leads."

This phone call got me thinking about all the diverse types of pre-need sales agents working in the profession today. After careful thought, I was able to narrow them down to three primary types. You have your basic Order Taker, the always popular Lead Junky, and finally, the atypical Self-Sustainer. Let's look at some of the various characteristics of all three.

The Order Taker is an individual who is generally sales passive by nature. This agent struggles with the ability, or

the inherent desire, to do in-depth sales discovery, up-sell, engage in active prospect recruiting, or remember to ask for sales referrals. This agent genuinely appreciates the income that is derived from pre-need insurance commissions, however, does not fully comprehend and/or appreciate the complete process by which these sales leads are oftentimes generated. The Order Taker has the ingrained mindset that "asking for the sale equates to high pressure sales" and they just can't or won't do it. They assist individuals by listening to exactly what they say and providing just what they interpret to hear. If a consumer contacts the funeral home and requests that a funeral prearrangement plan be made, (usually due to a Medicaid spend down) they will gladly and happily assist them. Otherwise, they usually don't promote pre-need planning by any of the conventional marketing and/or sales referral methods.

The Lead Junky is a sale agent of an entirely different breed from that of the Order Taker. They largely are high energy, sales savvy, and know their product inside and out. They can be extremely good sales closers, but not too good at really listening to what is being said by the consumer and doing proper sales discovery. They enter each presentation already knowing the sales track they will take their prospect down. They will stick to their script right through the close of the sale. They customarily rely heavily on being provided a steady supply of direct mail, internet based, or telemarketing sales leads. They have no time to generate leads for themselves, because they are far too busy running up to five or more sales appointments per day, provided to them by others. They can easily burn through excellent quality sales leads because their focus is usually on closing the sale in one visit. When you run as many sales leads as they do, who has time to call someone "who is thinking about it" back?

The Self-Sustainer is the rarest sales agent of them all. They are self-driven, highly competent, and compassionate agents who actively promote pre-need. They tend to set personal and professional career goals and continually strive to meet

and/or exceed them. Customarily they are self-guiding and highly motivated individuals. They view themselves on a mission to help people properly plan ahead. Sales training is welcomed, because they are always looking to improve themselves and their skill set. They tend to treat each sales lead they generate as precious and will work those leads long after others have given up on them. They easily maximize outside the funeral home generated leads. If they get no lead assistance from a funeral home, they are unaffected. This is because they are skilled at generating their own self-referrals, engaging in social media marketing, networking, and other community engagement. They effortlessly socialize throughout the community, reaching and talking to all kinds of people. This natural circulation generates more than enough sales leads for them to make a very good living.

Christopher Kuhnen has been actively engaged in funeral service for over 32 years. He is best known as an industry go-getter, a captivating professional and progressive leader. As an insider into excellence, he is a trusty advisor to numerous funeral home and industry professionals. Kuhnen provides regular comprehensive consultation and support and additionally trains and bolsters leading death care professionals concerning profitability, management, pre-need sales and marketing, family service follow-up, and much more.

Over the course of his celebrated career, he has directly contributed to the success of many award-winning funeral homes, pre-need sales and marketing organizations, as well as an acclaimed pre-need insurance company. Kuhnen is a Kentucky Licensed Funeral Director, Life Insurance Agent, and member in good standing with the Funeral Directors Association of Kentucky. Additionally, he is a Certified Marketing Specialist, as bestowed by the National Marketing Academy and a Certified Funeral Celebrant as bestowed by the distinguished Insight Institute.

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