



Overcoming Social Media Marketing Challenges

Addressing policies and activities that can get in your way when connecting with potential clientele and why it's so important to build a robust email list.

BY WELTON HONG

We are living in a time of extreme sensitivity, especially online. Innocently using a hashtag that harbors an association you didn't know about can set your Twitter account on fire in minutes, and many businesses have a hard time recovering positive brand reputation after this type of fallout.

As a provider in the funeral services niche, you might think you're immune to the fickle nature of social media audiences and platforms. But anyone can stumble into a major marketing faux pas these days, and even if you don't, the platforms don't make it easy to connect with (and stay connected to) consumers to begin with.

Understanding all the speed bumps and pitfalls on the road to social media marketing is one of the best ways to ensure that your efforts have a chance at driving conversions and revenue, and constructing your own exit ramp – in the form of a robust

email list – is an important protective measure in today's online marketing world.

COMMON OBSTACLES TO REACHING AN AUDIENCE

Coming up with content ideas, posting consistently and finding time to engage with your audience – these are all common struggles for businesses marketing on social media. But those are not the type of obstacles I'm talking about in this article.

I'm specifically addressing policies and activities that can get in your way when connecting with potential clientele on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

SOCIAL MEDIA ALGORITHMS

For many businesses, the algorithms are the biggest blocker when it comes to social media marketing engagement. Algorithms refer to formulas and programming that help decide which posts are shown to which users.

And guess what? Facebook and other social platforms aren't really in the business of ensuring that your posts get shown to everyone (or anyone at all). Ultimately, the platforms want to show users the type of content that ensures they stick around, click on ads and drive revenue for the platform itself. If Facebook guaranteed that your free posts made it to a large number of follower feeds, you'd never have paid for advertising on the platform.

Thus, it's no surprise that organic reach on social media for many businesses is hedging toward zero. Organic reach refers to how many of your followers



see a post you make – one you don't pay to boost as an advertisement. If you have 10,000 followers and 3,000 people see a given post, that post has an organic reach of 30%, which is a phenomenal number for most accounts, seeing as organic reach is down to 5% or less on average.

The actual figures depend on such factors as industry, audience type, social platform and how capable your social media marketing team is.

- Depending on the study you look at, average organic reach on Facebook is between 1% and 5%, with most small businesses experiencing reach at the bottom of that range.
- Organic reach on Instagram was much higher on average, reaching up to 20% for businesses with highly engaged audiences. Algorithm changes in 2020 hurt engagement for many accounts, though, with some reporting average organic reach as low as 5% following those changes.
- Twitter numbers tend to be the lowest when it comes to organic reach, with averages barely cresting 3% even for seemingly strong accounts.

PLATFORM POLICING

Over the past few years, we've seen an increase in social media platforms policing content. Facebook and other sites have always had content policies, and they removed content that flew drastically in the face of those requirements, but policing ramped up as public concern over scams, fake news and inappropriate content grew.

If your post is construed the wrong way, it can easily be removed by the powers that be at various social platforms. For deathcare firms, that might not sound like a big deal. You're probably not posting controversial content or fake news, right?

The problem is that the powers that be are often crowdsourced. Instagram, Facebook and other platforms encourage users to report content that goes against community guidelines, is misleading or is illegal. Any business that has dealt with online reviews knows that putting this kind of power in the hands of general audiences can backfire.

GUESS WHAT? FACEBOOK AND OTHER SOCIAL PLATFORMS AREN'T REALLY IN THE BUSINESS OF ENSURING THAT YOUR POSTS GET SHOWN TO EVERYONE (OR ANYONE AT ALL).

Previous clientele dissatisfied with your product or service, your competition, even random internet trolls can decide to attack your social media accounts by reporting almost everything. And because review processes for these reports are handled by a hodgepodge of automated processes, outsourced teams and overtaxed in-house employees, the final decisions on content don't always make sense.

But the danger here isn't just that one piece of your content might be removed. The platforms have also levied other penalties, including:

- Temporary inability to post
- Inability to share content, including your own
- Temporary or permanent inability to place ads
- Locking an account's ability to use marketing tools, such as Instagram's swipe-up in stories
- Inability to post certain types of content, such as pictures or videos
- Inability to message or respond to messages
- Total removal of an account.



5 TIPS FOR OVERCOMING THESE OBSTACLES

How can deathcare firms effectively market on social media in a time of heightened sensitivity and when social platforms seem to hold all the power? Here are some tips to help you reach and engage more people.

1. POST WITH CARE

I'm not encouraging you to get paranoid, but you should consider your posts carefully. What message are you sending, and could the post be read in a less flattering or inappropriate way? When working with social media marketing teams – in-house or outsourced – make sure that everyone creating and posting content is aware of your brand messaging, potential pitfalls in nuance and controversial social media trends to avoid.

2. POST CONSISTENTLY

You don't have to post daily or several times a day. Find a cadence that works for you and your audience and stick with it. Social media is a minefield of distrust, so anything you can do to help build trust with consumers helps.

3. POST VALUABLE CONTENT

Platform algorithms are programmed to show people content that's likely to be valuable to them. Shares and saves are two ways the algorithms evaluate whether content is valuable; if people are sharing it or saving it for later, it must offer something of interest. Tips, helpful links and posts of local interest are all potential content your audience might share.

4. ASK QUESTIONS AND ENCOURAGE COMMENTS

Comments and likes are less valuable algorithm wise, but they do help indicate that people find your content helpful or interesting. Include polls and questions in your posts to encourage people to respond.

5. FOLLOW AND ENGAGE WITH OTHERS IN YOUR NICHE

You may not want to support direct competitors, but you can follow tangential accounts, deathcare publications and consumer accounts that offer advice or information your target audience might be interested in (retirement or life insurance accounts, for example). This activity helps you become part of the online community and might

help indicate to social media algorithms that your account is trustworthy and authentic.

WHY YOU MUST BUILD YOUR EMAIL LIST

Before you put any of those five tips into action, however, I have a more important tip for you regarding online marketing: Set up an email list and start building it.

EMAIL MARKETING HAS AN ENORMOUS ROI

Average ROI is between 122% and 4,000%, depending on which study you look at. Yes, that's a huge range, but the fact is that as long as you're doing email marketing at all correctly, you're likely to get a positive return.

EMAIL MARKETING IS ALSO SUSTAINABLE

Once you create welcome and drip campaigns, they can be automated to run without anyone having to do anything but collect and follow up on leads.

IF YOU GET LOCKED OUT OF YOUR FACEBOOK OR INSTAGRAM ACCOUNT IN THE FUTURE FOR ANY REASON, YOU'RE DOWN ALL THOSE FOLLOWERS, WITH NO OTHER WAY TO REACH THEM ALL.

ENGAGEMENT ON EMAIL LISTS IS MUCH HIGHER

Average open rates for successful email campaigns can range from 15% to 30%.

But above all that, the real reason you need to build a robust list for deathcare marketing is that *you own the list*. You can bring it to any email marketing platform. You also control what you do (or do not) put into an email, and while extreme content can get you dumped into a spam folder, the threshold for problematic content in email isn't nearly as fickle as it is on social media.

If you get locked out of your Facebook or Instagram account in the future for any reason, you're down all those followers, with no other way to reach them all. And the social media powers that be, of course, have no contractual obligation to keep you around; they could dump your account simply because they want to.

Spend some time in 2021 converting your followers to email subscribers so you're able to stay in touch and continue marketing your at-need and preneed services no matter what happens with social media in the future. ☰

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