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ISSUE SPOTLIGHT:
Cremation & Green Burial



IMPROVE REPUTATION BY SUPERCHARGING REVIEWS

by Welton Hong

You do great work, right? You're proud of the services your funeral home provides. You're honored to be entrusted with the care of a family's loved one. You and your staff work hard every day to cover every critical detail, to be thoughtful and compassionate, to people through a difficult time with professionalism and grace.

Because that's all true, you deserve to have your accomplishments proclaimed throughout your community. That's good not only for your business, but also for locals who will benefit from the spectacular care you provide.

And while advertising is one way to get out the word, there's another very important aspect: online reviews. Thoughtful, objective reviews by satisfied families goes a very long way toward strengthening your funeral home's reputation.

I realize that many businesses, including funeral homes, are somewhat skeptical of online reviews, if not outright unreceptive to them. They worry that unfair negative reviews can undermine the great work they do.

While that's a fair concern, the reality is that generating a high quantity and quality of online reviews is critical to the success of a funeral home. Negative reviews will occur now and then, and there are methods to mitigate their power — and even, sometimes, eliminate them — but that's no reason to ignore the powerful reputation boost positive reviews provide.

These days, most people immediately research a business on Google, Yelp or another review platform before spending any substantial amount of money. A business with a nearly 5-star average on Yelp is in excellent shape. A business with barely a 2-star average will almost never get calls.

That's obviously even more important in the death care industry. You would never entrust a family member's burial or cremation to a company with a 2-star rating, and neither would anyone else.

Online reviews are not going to disappear. If anything, they're just becoming more important as people of all ages transition into the digital age. Work with the system and use it to your advantage.

Of course, positive reviews are far better than negative ones. They bolster your funeral home's reputation, increase excellent word of mouth and establish trust with clients for both pre-need and at-need cases.

However, the overall quantity of reviews your funeral home gets — and yes, this can include even less-than-stellar reviews — is almost as important as quality!

It's really true. The more reviews your business gets, the more legitimate and established it appears — even if not every review is five stars. No one wants to work with a funeral home that has very little recorded history! When you have lots of reviews, people know you're for real — and that you can handle a lot of business.

Having a higher quantity of reviews also is a boon to your funeral home website's search engine optimization (SEO). Search engines look at how often your funeral home has been reviewed when ranking your site against local competitors.

A business that's been reviewed 100 times, even if a handful of those reviews aren't necessarily stellar, will always rank higher on a search engine results page than one with only 20-or-so reviews, even if they're all five stars.

That's why it's important to work on supercharging online review generation for your funeral home. It goes a long way in improving your business's reputation and your website SEO.

However, it's obviously not as easy to encourage reviews from clientele in the death care industry as it is for most other business types. It requires more care, thoughtfulness and subtlety. Being too aggressive or tactless would harm your reputation instead of helping it.

I absolutely realize how important it is to maintain a reverent, professional approach in all business dealings in death care. Don't think you need to be pushy about asking for online reviews. There's a better approach.

For example: In a follow-up email, include buttons and/or links that click-through to your review pages. Don't employ an aggressive call to action such as "Review us on Yelp!" (or Google, etc.). Just place the links at the bottom of the email.

There's another great option, utilize specialized software that makes it easy to manage your online reputation.

This software monitors your online reputation in real time, advising you whenever a review of your business appears online. It also can "head off" negative reviews by routing concerned customers to contact you directly before they criticize your funeral home publicly.

I realize that dealing with online reviews can be stressful. It's always hard not to take it personally when someone is critical of the work you do. But if you approach the online review system in the right way, it can be a major asset in the reputation of your funeral home. **FBA**



Welton Hong is the founder and marketing director of Ring Ring Marketing, which specializes in helping funeral homes convert leads from online directly to the phone line. The firm has helped many funeral homes, cemeteries and combination operations bolster their online marketing. Welton also is a speaker at funeral home conferences and the author of Making Your Phone Ring with Internet Marketing for Funeral Homes. Contact him at welton@ringringmarketing.com or 888/383-2848.