

FUNERAL

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THE FINANCING EXPERTS

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LIVE OAK BANK®

STRATEGIC MARKETING IN 2018

Marketing has and should be completely changing the way a funeral home does business in 2018. Consumers have changed: they expect different things now than they did 5 years, 2 years and even 1 year ago. Traditionally, funeral home marketing consisted of newspaper advertising, church bulletins, and great service. While great service still applies, it is different now. When people didn't have the Internet, they relied on the newspaper for news. They relied on who their family used before for a funeral home. Times and trends have changed dramatically. Overlooking these changes or failing to adapt could put a lot of funeral homes at a disadvantage.

"Consumers are in the driver seat today, thanks to the Internet: They find answers on Google. They spend their time and use what they see their friends and families use on social media networks like Facebook. Newspapers are distributed less often, yellow pages are thinner, TV commercials are skipped over thanks to people having the power to record their shows, smartphones have changed the way we listen to music leaving little room for radio commercials, and people have a different voice than they had years ago. Now, if families have a great or even poor experience, it's not the people that live close by or a close friend that hears about it, it's the online world that hears about it," explains Ashley Montroy, Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) at FrontRunner Professional.

"If a customer leaves a negative review, the best thing a funeral home can do is be there to respond. One piece of advice here would be to get more online reviews, people actually choose a business from these and especially on Google, these reviews show up front and center. Advice: spend a few minutes and search your business name, a few past services and some common things typed into Google to find funeral services or your firm. Then, take a look at your social media presence. Did you like what you see? This is what families are seeing and it's your reputation. I know every funeral director cares so much about how clean their floors and cars are, but they also need to start thinking about how they look online because that is all part of a company's reputation today," Ashley continues.

Paying attention to your funeral home's online presence is more important today than ever before. If firms want to grow in today's industry, they need to be marketing and advertising where people are reachable and showing families they are current and up to date on the latest trends. Having a great website is one of the most important pieces of the entire marketing puzzle. It is what appears when consumers turn to Google for answers, and it should be integrated into your social media and even offline marketing strategy.

"No online marketing technique will work without the foundation of a great website. That's why we do a comprehensive audit of a potential client's website before we even determine whether to contract with that client. (We won't partner with a particular funeral home unless we can clearly provide a substantial return on investment.) Once we take on the challenge, we focus on ensuring the site is designed to generate premier targeted traffic and—especially—convert that traffic into clientele," states Welton Hong, Founder of Ring Ring Marketing.

Funeral homes that are using the older methods of advertising are in a passive mode. They are putting ads in static areas and

hoping that people either go to that medium (i.e. Yellow Pages) or remember their name (newspaper and billboards). With these advertising avenues, it's a 'sit and wait' type approach. With online advertising, you are immediately jumping in front of someone when they are searching for your specific services.

"The social part of social media is great for nurturing people who have already taken the effort to follow you and/or 'like' your page, but social media is not a great way to find new business. New business is found via search engine optimization and/or paid click ads (via Google or Facebook). With those online methods, you are finding people at the exact time they are searching for a provider," explains Jeff Arnold, President of 4Spot Marketing.

In addition to maintaining a great website, it is also important for funeral homes to utilize social media. Funeral home owners operating in today's industry need to be aware of their online reviews – not checking them or following up is a big mistake. Many funeral homes still don't believe people go online to check them out, but nothing could be further from the truth.

"If you own a funeral home, it's imperative that you monitor and work to improve your business's online reviews. The difference between a 4.1 overall rating and a 3.7 (out of five stars) is massive—it has a huge effect on at-need calls and preneed as well," adds Welton.

Another mistake funeral homes may make is misunderstanding the role of social media in marketing. Social media should be used for educating, providing information, and attracting attention—not for selling services. That comes later in the marketing process. Nothing is a bigger turnoff to social media users than a heavy sales push.

"Many funeral homes and cemeteries view social media as something that's new, flashy and always changing, and they treat it as such. They try to establish a presence with everyone, which is a mistake. The best thing to do with social media is to concentrate on the basics and limit the platforms you use to one or two. If you get the audience, message, creative and timing right, you'll be doing better than most. Others view social media as the answer. It is believed to be the only option to connect with your families, which is short-sighted. Too many funeral homes and cemeteries focus all their efforts on building their following solely on social platforms. Social alone does not work. You need a website, blogs and traditional advertisements as well as public relations," expounds Joe Weigel, Owner of Weigel Strategic Marketing.

There is more opportunity today in 2018 than ever before. There are more options to meet and get to know families online than your business has ever had in person. There are 50 people in a room, but thousands of people online. That is why social media is such a huge advantage for your brand: you have an opportunity to let people know your business and the people behind your business every single day, so they feel like they know and trust you before they even walk in your door.

Learn more about what your funeral home can do to avoid marketing mistakes in this feature editorial. Read on to get tips and advice from the industry's top strategic marketers. **FBA**



"A major consideration in almost all of our funeral home campaigns is that the client would like us to handle all of the online marketing ourselves. In other words, funeral directors don't necessarily want to change the way they do business, and we don't need it to do so. If we've done our job right, they can completely focus on serving their clients, while we focus on supercharging at-need calls," states Welton Hong, Founder of Ring Ring Marketing.

"Of course, we also provide all the information a client wants or needs about exactly what we're doing on the campaign. Funeral directors who want to be substantially more involved with the internet marketing process are welcome to do so. It's their marketing budget, after all: They deserve to know exactly how it's being spent. Ultimately, that's the only major way our strategies impact the way the funeral home itself does business now: Funeral home owners must allocate more of their marketing budget now to online marketing, because the internet's influence in death care decision-making is growing by leaps and bounds every year," Welton adds.

Ring Ring Marketing offers a comprehensive suite of marketing services, from broad techniques such as reputation management, pay-per-click advertising, local search optimization, email marketing and website content generation to more surgical tools such as geotargeting, remarketing and social media marketing.

"That's just a small sample of what we offer, but again, we only employ the specific tools that are right for each particular client. That's incredibly important to me; we treat your money exactly like it's our money. There's no point to investing your marketing budget in efforts that won't solve your needs in a cost-effective way," explains Welton.

Internet marketing for funeral homes really works. That's the most important thing to understand.

"The internet has transformed how business is done, and in 2018, with the ubiquity of mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets, the audience really is online now. And I'm not just referring to the younger generations. More and more people in older demographics make the internet their first choice for researching even traditional businesses such as funeral homes. That evolution will just keep amplifying," Welton emphasizes.

www.funeralhomeprofits.com



Many funeral homes put great strategies together, but they don't follow through with the implementation. Execution done right is a disciplined process, a logical set of connected activities by a funeral home to make a strategy work. Several suggestions to help funeral homes execute their strategies are:

- Set clear marketing priorities
- Collect and analyze data
- Evaluate the strategy on a regular basis

"While there certainly is something to be said about tracking website traffic and social media engagement, at the end of the day, it's all about the bottom line and making the cash register ring. That said, the two most important indicators of success are how many at need calls are you conducting and how many pre-need contracts are you writing," says Joe Weigel, Owner of Weigel Strategic Marketing.

Weigel Strategic Marketing offers a variety of services for funeral homes in today's industry:

Strategic Marketing Plans - WSM makes it their mission to understand each business and can develop a robust marketing and communications plan tailored to grow your business.

Marketing Collateral - Brochures, flyers, sales sheets and print ads that convey key messages in a clear, coherent and visually appealing fashion.

Content Creation - WSM uses their expertise to create both digital marketing and social media campaigns that get posted, retweeted, liked and shared.

Copywriting - Whether it's copy for an ad or content for a website, WSM has the expertise and experience to make your message resonate with your audience.

Public Relations - Writing press releases is a specialized craft. Many people try; few do it well. WSM knows how to create clear, succinct releases that get attention.

Client-authored Articles - When you need a bylined article written that is intended for publication, WSM can provide focused writing that gets the reader's attention.

Media Relations - WSM has earned a reputation among industry peers and the funeral media for securing coverage in both consumer and funeral service media outlets.

www.weigelstrategicmarketing.webs.com