

DRIVE AT-NEED CALLS WITH ONLINE MARKETING

by Welton Hong



It becomes ever clearer that we're living in a digital world, and there's no going back — no matter what some of us might prefer.

The digital revolution has required virtually every industry to adapt. There's little benefit to selling DVDs when people can download and stream HD content into their homes. Good luck selling physical maps when people can access digital maps with GPS location service, directions and live traffic updates in seconds on their phones.

However, even as we progress through 2018, certain industries — in particular, many death care providers — have been slower than others to evolve in this rapidly changing environment.

Few businesses are as traditional and conventional in their approaches as funeral homes, for good reason. Individuals and families want to be reassured by solid, reverent funeral directors with impeccable reputations, whether for at-need or pre-need services.

We live in a time when young adults, and even those approaching middle age, have grown up with the internet as a near-constant companion in adult life. These newer generations are far less likely to research any type of business, including death care services, through traditional means such as newspaper advertising or the Yellow Pages.

Funeral homes must adapt to new ways of marketing themselves, creating relationships and marketing their businesses.

Of course, that doesn't mean all traditional approaches to marketing death care services are gone for good. Community outreach and the establishment of personal, individual relationships remain vitally important. However, these endeavors are more challenging in the digital age.

Now, people of all ages use their highly advanced smartphones constantly. Today, if an adult in America between 25 and 50 had an unexpected death in the family, she almost certainly would go straight to her

phone, tablet or computer to research at-need services.

The funeral home that's easy for her to find and quickly research will be the beneficiary. The one that's hard to find online will see its at-need calls decrease.

Understand that you don't have to change everything overnight. There's nothing wrong with dipping a toe into the digital waters while maintaining a firm foundation on dry land.

However, as you see how powerful online marketing can be for increasing at-need case counts and promoting full-service choices, you'll feel more comfortable with shifting more of the weight of your promotional budget to the internet.

The key is to work with an experienced, considerate marketing expert who understands the care necessary in respectfully promoting your services and supercharging at-need calls.

I'm sure you have a website, but if it exists simply to provide an online presence and fails to actively convert visitors into clientele, it's being wasted. You need a site specifically designed to increase case counts and promote revenue-producing services.

A skilled marketing expert can make your site much more powerful through conversion optimization efforts such as improving site content and spotlighting a clear, persuasive call to action on every page — while always ensuring a professional, respectful tone.

An excellent way to target at-need clientele is search engine marketing, which is essentially the use of major search engines such as Google to promote your business.

When there's a death with no pre-need services in place, a family member will often go online and do a simple search for a funeral home with the location (e.g., "Salt Lake City funeral homes"). The funeral homes that rank highest on that search will have a huge advantage over competitors in getting that call.

Pay-per-click advertising is the name for simple ads that have high visibility on the search engine results page (SERP) for a specific query. You're only charged when someone actually clicks on the ad, sending the person to your website. PPC ads create immediate visibility and go "live" almost immediately.

Local search map advertising ensures your funeral home appears on a map on the SERP. At-need clientele want a provider who is close by, and this lets them see your location at a glance.

Organic search results are the organic, unpaid search results on a given SERP. By improving search engine optimization (SEO) on your website, your funeral home appears higher on this list, increasing conversions.

You also can employ mobile marketing for extremely effective targeting of at-need clientele. This type of

engagement puts your business front and center to mobile users in specific locations, such as a hospital.

Another key consideration is online reputation management. Every business type is now subject to consumer reviews online, and this includes death care service providers. Obviously, it's crucial for a funeral home to have an impeccable reputation online.

Ensuring excellent online reviews isn't as simple as just doing a great job. You should be monitoring your business's reputation on sites such as Google, Yelp and Facebook, mitigating negative reviews, and encouraging positive reviews.

I realize it can seem a bit daunting at first, it's actually not so scary at all. Embracing the digital revolution lets you serve your community while ensuring your funeral home will be a successful business for many years to come. **FBA**



Welton Hong is the founder 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.

**“We have experience,”
they said...**

Let SNL show you a better way.

Guy Winstead
GuyW@SNLpreneed.com
www.PreneedSuccess.com



Your preneed sales program should be managed by someone with years of experience, not by someone you need to babysit. Let SNL show you a better way to preneed success.