

STORYTELLING: A DEATHCARE MARKETING MUST

How to use it in your firm's content.

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When it comes to purchasing decisions, consumers are driven as much – or more – by emotions as they are by logical considerations about price or quality. That's especially true when it comes to deathcare goods and services.

While you'd certainly never take advantage of grief, connecting with the emotional needs of potential clientele via marketing that tells a story can be a powerful way to boost conversions for your firm. Let's dig deeper into narrative-based content marketing and how to use stories to connect with more potential clientele.

Storytelling in Marketing

Storytelling here refers to creating a narrative that includes emotions as well as facts and figures.

For example, you could write a blog post detailing average funeral costs. Or you could tell of a family on a budget that wanted to best honor a loved one and how they did that by learning about funeral costs and making the right decisions for their situation.

You could write a how-to for giving a eulogy – step one, gather facts about the deceased; step two, outline your thoughts... and so forth. Or you could tell the story of Mr. Smith, a taciturn man not given to emotional displays who has a deep desire to honor his creative wife with a lovely eulogy.

How does Smith accomplish this? By learning and implementing the steps to writing a eulogy, of

course. Reading about those steps alongside Smith's journey may create a deeper connection for your audience than reading fact-based steps without context.

Why Can Storytelling Boost Conversions?

Why does emotional storytelling create a deeper connection (and lead to more conversions)? According to Gerald Zaltman, author of *How Customers Think: Essential Insights Into the Mind of the Market*, 95% of the brain's effort behind any decision takes place in the subconscious. So, while a person is rationally weighing the price of various caskets, for example, the subconscious is filtering through emotions and considering a host of other factors of which the consumer may not even be aware.

An adult child planning a funeral for his father might actively be thinking about casket quality and cost, but subconsciously, emotional factors are at play, perhaps a vague remembrance of his dad's love of mahogany or a deeply planted need to prove himself a worthy patriarch. There are always emotional factors that might connect with narrative-based marketing.

And it's more than conjecture; researchers have demonstrated that the premise works in practical application.

For example, researchers who sought to determine if storytelling could add a "premium" to what people might pay for goods purchased random items from thrift

stores, paying a few dollars or less for each. They listed the items on eBay but didn't pair them with fact-based product descriptions. Instead, creative writers were tasked with composing a short story or essay about each piece, imbuing each with emotional significance.

The team purchased a wooden bottle for \$1.49, but instead of listing it as expected (wooden bottle, with cork, 8 inches tall, polished), they paired a picture of the bottle with a small essay about a romantic relationship and the role the bottle played in it. The bottle sold for \$126.39!

The stories in this experiment, of course, were fictional. Obviously, there should be no fibbing in your deathcare marketing.

But the takeaway stands: The research team converted its initial input into around \$8,000 in sales with just the power of story.

Tips for Deathcare Marketing Content That Tells a Story

You know you can't just make up emotional stories, so how do you use this tactic for deathcare content marketing? Start with some of the tips below.

Work on people-first marketing.

The point of storytelling is that it puts readers/listeners first. It's not just about what you want to convey or the action you need them to take; it's about understanding who they are so you can tell them the right story the right way.



For example, a parent doesn't tell a bedtime story to children the same way they tell work colleagues a story over lunch. Know your firm's target audience, what they want and how you can meet those needs. Then think about what stories you can tell (and how) to demonstrate that.

Create a character arc.

The emotional value in a story is typically tied to change and/or resolution. Don't tell someone about a grieving widow and just leave it at that. Sure, they might feel compassion, but their emotional tie is with the widow, not your services or business. Instead, create a story arc demonstrating how the widow found peace or closure through services provided by your firm.

Think of your favorite movies or TV shows. Chances are they have something in common: They show you a character with whom you can identify on some level and then take that character on a journey emotionally and physically. You go along for the ride, and that – more than suspenseful plots or top-notch stunts or effects – is what keeps you tied emotionally to the story.

You can create the same connection when you think of stories in parts:

The beginning: Who is the story about and how does it start? What problem or need is at play and why is it important? Someone who wants to be buried next to their spouse because they spent their life together and want their legacy to be together forever is the beginning of a story.

A challenge to overcome: Good stories put characters against challenges. In theaters, those often come in the form of villains, but deathcare marketing stories need not be so dramatic. The couple wanting to make an eternal ro-

mantic gesture with side-by-side burial plots may run into a lack of inventory or budgetary concerns that make it look like they won't achieve their goal.

Plot resolution: Bring the story together at the end with a satisfactory resolution. As much as possible, make sure your products or services play a role in that resolution. For example, perhaps a local cemetery helped the couple find the ideal burial spots right below an old oak tree.

Be vulnerable.

Consider telling your own stories occasionally. Opening up and being vulnerable with your target audience, when appropriate, demonstrate the humanity behind your firm, which can be a huge edge in the deathcare niche. Showing others that your staff has been where they are and can empathize makes it easier for consumers to trust you.

You might create a feature in which staff members tell their own stories of loss or share experiences of attending funerals. You could also share obituaries you've written for your own loved ones or occasionally post memorials to people you've lost.

Target common emotional drivers.

Some emotional factors apply to almost every consumer to some degree, which means they can be powerful when you include them in storytelling. Here are the five most common emotional drivers and thoughts on how they might apply to deathcare marketing.

Fear: As an unknown, death is scary. People may also be afraid of messing up how they honor someone or letting down other family members.

Guilt: Guilt often accompanies loss. Someone might feel guilty that they can't "do more" to honor a loved

one. They may also feel guilt over how they treated the person in the past.

Pride: Pride in a familial connection or loved one might lead a person to want a certain type of memorial, burial or funeral. The same can be true for pride in traditions or customs.

Greed: Often, it's less about greed and more about the desire or need to save money

Love: Love of self, the deceased or other family and friends all play a role in how people preplan or engage in at-need planning.

Think about how these types of emotional factors might work for your target audience and how you can use stories to alleviate fears or show people a positive way to funnel those emotions.

Ask others to share their stories.

Keep from making it all about you and your business by inviting others to share their stories. Testimonials are powerful because they tell a story. Ask clients to leave reviews, prompt people to share stories on your social media channels or work with people you've helped to create blog posts or videos that share a longer version of these stories.

Try different types of media.

Not everyone connects well with text-based stories. Auditory and visual learners may get a more emotional connection when you tell stories via video. Test different media – text, photographs, videos and audio – to discover what works best for your audience.

Storytelling involves some creative thinking, but it's well worth the effort in deathcare marketing. Try it soon on your website or social media pages to connect with more potential clientele. ☰