

CREATING QUALITY CONTENT

Working with outside writers and editors on your firm's marketing? Start them on a solid foundation with a content brief.

BY WELTON HONG

Content marketing trends come and go, but I always tell people that the stable ground on which they can stand is quality content. Google shakes up things with every algorithm update, but its aim is always to rank high-quality content relevant to searcher intent.

Consumer needs and their deathcare preferences evolve over time, but trustworthy, informative content will always help you connect with families and increase your chances of converting them into clientele.

And there's another thing that never changes: Creating that high-quality content on a regular basis can be difficult. It takes time, creative energy and writing talent – resources busy funeral directors often find themselves short on.

According to the most recent NFDA statistics, the

average funeral home has about seven employees, with only about three of those working full time. Consistently writing blog posts, social media posts and other content for deathcare marketing can put a burden on smaller teams and even potentially impact the quality of service provided to at-need families and those preplanning.

Outsourcing content creation or writing reduces the burden you place on in-house staff. It also lets you benefit from a larger well of creativity and writing talent, increasing your chances of publishing high-quality content that may help your pages rank higher in search engine results.

These benefits are more likely if you start with a solid foundation when working with writers outside your team. That foundation comes in the form of a content brief.

WHAT IS A CONTENT BRIEF?

A content brief is a guiding document for anyone working on marketing content for their business. It tells writers, editors and others who your target audience is, what your value proposition is and what types of preferences you have for content.

You can create content briefs at three main levels:

BRAND BRIEFS define the voice and style for your firm, so all content across all channels is consistent.

PROJECT BRIEFS define specifics for each project, as what you need for blog posts might be different than what you need for social media or email marketing.

TASK BRIEFS provide specific instructions for an individual piece of content, such as an outline for a blog post.

Comprehensive briefs ensure that writers and editors have the information they need to create consistent copy that sounds like it comes from the same source – your funeral services firm.

If you work with anyone outside your internal team to create content for social media, your death-care blog, emails or even direct-mail brochures, you need a content brief. Even if you write all content in-house, a brief can help your team stay on the same page with content requirements.

BRAND BRIEFS

A brand brief should provide everything writers need to create content that matches the normal voice and tone for your firm's marketing content. Include the following in your brand brief to achieve this:

TARGET AUDIENCE When content creators know who the target audience is, it's easier for them to write content that meets reader needs. A business-to-business firm that sells deathcare supplies to funeral homes creates content that sounds different than content for a funeral home marketing to potential clientele. A funeral home specializing in unique/luxury memorial options shouldn't have marketing content that sounds the same as one specializing in cremation options.

UNIQUE VALUE PROPOSITION Let content creators know what makes your firm unique and what sets you apart from the competition.

IMPORTANT INDUSTRY SPECIFICS It's always good to work with content creators who understand your profession, but don't assume that people outside your internal team will know important deathcare specifics. For example, you might want to

include a basic description or links to information about the FTC's Funeral Rule or include a glossary of niche words such as columbarium, grave liner or cremation retort if you expect writers to use these phrases.

VOICE AND TONE CUES Provide guidance about voice and tone. Let writers know whether you want formal or conversational content (the article you're reading right now is conversational, by the way). You can also provide words that describe your preferred tone, such as serious, professional, humorous or playful. Voice and tone can be difficult to describe, though, so include links to content that demonstrates the voice and tone you want. This can be content on your pages or on another site you like; it doesn't even have to be content related to deathcare.

GRAMMAR AND STYLE PREFERENCES Finally, detail any grammar and style rules you wish to keep consistent across all content, including:

- Do you use the Oxford/serial comma?
- Should titles and subheadings should be in title case or sentence case?
- How to treat numbers/measurements
- What style conventions do you follow (e.g., Chicago Manual of Style or AP Stylebook)?

PROJECT BRIEFS

The project brief offers information writers need to create a specific *type* of content, such as social media posts or blogs. You should have a project brief for each type of content you hire people to complete.

If you only work with others on one type of content, such as blog posts, you can combine the brand and project brief into a single document for convenience. Either way, the project brief should include:

TYPE OF CONTENT AND ITS PURPOSE Let writers know whether they're working on blog posts, landing pages, marketing emails or social media posts. Include your goal for the content type so writers know how to position the content to help you achieve desired results.

WORD OR CHARACTER COUNTS Let writers know how long you expect content to be. This is especially important if you're paying by the word because you need writers to stay within appropriate word counts for your budget.

DESIRED STRUCTURE Give a basic overview of the structure you want. For example, you might say you want a social media post that includes a hook, question or interesting fact, along with a link or call

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to action (CTA). Or you might ask for a blog post that includes an introduction, supporting points and a conclusion with a CTA.

GENERAL DETAILS Provide information about any details you want included in *all* content that falls under this project. This might include:

- Use of primary or secondary keywords in certain locations, such as the first paragraph or subheadings
- A certain number of subheadings, such as at least four for 1,000-word blog posts
- Calls to action, such as a link to your “contact us” form or preplanning sign-up page at the end of every blog post
- Internal links to other pages on your site
- External links when a writer includes specific statistics or facts that might need backing up.

TASK BRIEFS

Task briefs should be short and include only the specific details writers need to complete the project parameters. Some examples of items you might include in task brief are:

- Keywords for that piece
- Internal or external links to include
- Research or inspiration links to help the writer get started
- Talking points or outlines for the piece
- Quotes or stats you want included in the piece.

The task brief fills in all the blanks left in the project brief. For instance, if the project brief notes that writers should include the primary keyword three times and include the required internal links in the body copy, the task brief must provide that keyword and those links.

If you have more than one target audience or service option, you can also let writers know what’s most relevant to the task at hand. For instance, you might want three blog posts that all follow the same project brief, except the audience is slightly different for each. Let writers know in the task brief that one is about preplanning targeted to luxury spenders, one is about preplanning for millennials and one is about at-need budget services.

A FEW LAST TIPS

While it’s important to cover your preferences completely, you should also keep all content briefs as concise and user-friendly as possible. Use bullet points, tables and subheadings to organize instructions so your team and external writers/editors can scan them quickly when looking for a specific point.

Remember to maximize whatever resources you decide to use for deathcare content marketing. If you work with external writers or writing teams, ask them for feedback about your content briefs and instructions. They can help you dial things in to ensure that you’re providing everything writers need to create copy that aligns with your business and audience needs. ☰

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

