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# 4 TIPS

## to Leverage the Sales and Marketing Potential of Your Website

by *Bill Williams*

The headline accompanying the Foresight Companies' 2023 Funeral and Cemetery Consumer Behavior Study poses a question many in the deathcare profession are asking these days: "Is the Funeral and Cemetery Profession at a Crossroads?"

Here is my take on it: The headline should not be framed as a question but as a statement. Our industry is at a crossroads with how consumers view and purchase our services. We collectively need to move quickly to change the trajectory of how we engage with consumers – or risk losing the close relationships we have built with families who now are seeking more options to celebrate the lives of loved ones.

A few of the highlights (or lowlights) from the Foresight study showcase the work we must do:

- 76% of deathcare professionals believe the industry is honest compared to 54% of consumers
- 70% of consumers say trust decreases when they cannot see prices online

To be clear, our profession has a long history of less-than-stellar consumer perception. Every year there are stories

about price gouging, hidden or misleading costs charged to families, and improper care of decedents. Sadly, it is the actions of a few bad actors that tarnish the reputation of the other 140,000 ethical, compassionate professionals in our industry.

Compounding the challenge is that consumers have more choices than ever before. Well-funded market entrants, like Cake, Empathy, Everplans, and Lantern are winning over families. They are perceived as being contemporary, consumer-friendly, and more transparent about pricing. They care less about profit margins on caskets and more about serving families.

Yes, I believe our industry is at a crossroads, but here is the good news: We have the resources to change the narrative, to alter consumer perceptions about the value of the services we provide. We must shift gears, tap into technology (and the increasing number of digital tools available), and provide families with what they want, how they want it, and when they want it. Here is how you do it:

## 1 Enhance your online visibility

There is a well-known joke about internet searches that goes like this: “Where is the best place to hide a dead body? Page two of Google search results.”

If your funeral home or cemetery is not near the top of page one search results, make it a priority to make that happen. Digital search advertising and related online advertising are surprisingly affordable, so find a way to include the necessary funds to secure your place on page one search results for funeral and cemetery services.

Also, work with a search engine optimization (SEO) specialist and have that expert review your website. An SEO-optimized website embedded with important keywords – the words and phrases people often use when searching the web for funeral and cemetery services – is essential to generate a high rank in Google search results and more sales leads.

## 2 Turn your website into a “go-to” resource

Here is another finding from the Foresight study that stood out: 42% of consumers are not familiar with funeral home and cemetery services. That has to change if you want sustainable growth for your business.

To become a trusted advisor for funeral services, you need to provide families with information that will make their buying journey easier. Your website should be an invaluable

resource that is chock-full of educational content. Publish informational, downloadable PDF brochures, “how to” articles, and videos that help families in your community plan and purchase services. One last point: Make sure top-ranked keywords are included in your educational content to improve search results.

## 3 Offer customized solutions with transparent pricing

The era of transparent pricing is here to stay. There is a proven body of research that clearly shows that consumers will only do business with companies that are transparent about the cost of goods and services.

Expected changes to the Funeral Rule likely will require all funeral homes with a website to post – and make it easy to find – their complete general price list on their website, and not buried deep on an unrelated webpage. But we have to do more.

The travel and entertainment industry learned a long time ago that pricing transparency – combined with the convenience of making it easy for consumers to package various services – led to increased sales. Our profession can do the same thing. Provide examples (with itemized costs) of traditional and non-traditional celebration of life services. The more that families can customize a service – and know the exact price – the better the likelihood they will sign on the dotted line.

## 4 Leverage technology to boost preneed sales

Consumers today are far more tech-savvy than they were a few years ago. They are comfortable using online tools to research, compare, customize, and ultimately purchase a product or service. That is especially true for preneed services, which are expected to continue to increase as more consumers seek peace of mind by planning ahead.

To compete in today’s marketplace, you need a robust pre-need trust platform that allows families in your community to edit contracts and make payments with the click of a mouse from a desktop, laptop, tablet, or smartphone. Banks, for ex-

ample, learned that lesson long ago and now offer customers a wide range of digital tools to simplify managing money.

A top-line preneed trust recordkeeping and administration services platform has another benefit: The technology streamlines data entry, account reconciliation, and payments processing, as well as editing and storing contracts and related documents. It frees up funeral directors and cemetarians so they can spend more time with families and community members and less time performing routine, administrative tasks.

Here’s the bottom line: As the funeral industry continues to see shifts in consumer preferences, your website will become vital to the success of your business and a resource that deserves your undivided attention. Think of your website as a source for leads and ask yourself: If a family member visited my website, would they have the tools to easily complete an online purchase? If not, it’s time to update.



Bill Williams is president and CEO of Funeral Services Inc., a leading deathcare trust administrator and subsidiary of deathcare trustee and fiduciary wealth management firm Argent Financial Group. Under Bill’s leadership, FSI has expanded to offer services in more than two dozen states across the country.