



Maintaining Top-of-Mind Awareness – The Key to Staying Power

How do people make their decision about which funeral home to use?

Do you attract prospective clients with a beautifully lit sign in front of your building or because you have the nicest ad in the telephone directory or perhaps a great website? Are these the avenues most families use to decide who will take care of the final arrangements for their loved one? In most cases, probably not.

What information can a prospective client gather from these various sources of advertising?

Driving by your facility they can see the relative size of your business as compared with the competition, and the appearance of the premises gives them an idea of how you will serve them. A well-manicured lawn and immaculate facility says that you are probably a stickler for detail (or that you have a great landscaping company under contract!). Your ad in the phone book will give basic information regarding the range of services you offer. The size of the ad will have an impact on how your business is perceived – the larger the ad, the more stable the company. Interactive websites are helpful because they allow you to convey more information than an ad, as well as give individuals the ability to contact your business via email. All of these tools are important to building your image, but don't rely on them as your only methods of attracting business. The next step is infusing your image with personal elements of caring and concern.

Most individuals select a funeral home based on trust.

In the absence of personal experience, people tend to gravitate to businesses recommended by close friends or other family members. Positive word of mouth from someone who has been in the position of having to make funeral arrangements for their loved one wields great influence over a person who has no other basis for making a decision. The trusted friend may have been a guest at a funeral, had a family member that used a particular funeral home in the past or noticed an obituary in the newspaper noting who was handling arrangements for a prominent local figure. So, all that being said, how do you get that positive recommendation to be about you and your funeral home?

Memorial products and tribute items that go home with your clients and visitors are your most viable means of keeping your name in front of potential clients. Unique and personal memorial folders become keepsakes rather than wastebasket fillers. These keepsakes have your funeral home's name and contact information on them. A hard-bound memorial book on a coffee table attracts attention. As one looks through the pages and re-lives old memories, they will see your name and contact information. You have the opportunity to make an important impression on them and they know where to find you.

Tribute portraits of various sizes and descriptions are a favorite way to memorialize the deceased. Connect your name to these

products by using them as part of your standard service packages. Then when family members enquire about where the family received such a beautiful picture, they can inform them from your funeral home. You gave them something they cherish. You were perceptive enough to foresee the need for items that provide comfort after the services have concluded. The good news for you is that somewhere on each of those items they hold in their hands your name, logo and contact information.

Every gift item included in your service package doesn't have to be handed to the family at the end of the service. Let them take one item with them. Leave the door open to deliver another item to their home at a later time and you will have the opportunity to continue building their trust and loyalty to your firm. This may be a good time to present other tributes and memorial items that family and friends may wish to purchase. This is also an opportunity to present the benefits of pre-need insurance. Leave brochures for them to share with others. Have your name and funeral home's information on each and every piece of information you leave behind, so that anyone can contact you with questions. Schedule a time for a visit to follow up on the items and policies you have presented. You are a friend, not just someone they have hired to handle a difficult task.

Funeral homes have traditionally been about families serving families. With the majority of funeral homes being passed down from one generation to the next, funeral homes are historically an integral part of every community. But communities no longer fit the profile of "if you're born here, you'll work here and die here." Our society is extremely fluid – people have multiple careers and move more frequently. Your customer base has changed from the kids you grew up with, to newcomers - next door, down the street and all across town. You cannot count on personal loyalty alone to bring in business. Providing products that people cherish and giving outstanding personal service are essential to attracting and maintaining customers as well as receiving the benefit of their referrals.

A nice building and signage, a powerful ad in the phone book and a user-friendly website are a terrific start. Developing more flexible, tailored service packages that include personal, printed tributes and memorial gifts bearing your name and contact information, will be the icing on your cake. Start today by adding a choice of one or two tribute items to every service package - products that are keepsakes and can be imprinted with your contact information. By making this small investment, you will reap the benefit of exponential growth. Before you know it, you'll be serving your clients' friends and families and their friends and families. **FBA**

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