



How Tech-Savvy Firms Are Getting Ahead Via Their Websites

A critical revelation regarding the future role of websites in deathcare unfolded further during the NFDA's 2008 Orlando Expo. A number of firms were asking about new features for websites, such as web broadcasting and obituary e-mail notifications. For those paying attention, these particular areas of interest expose a deeper realization by leading funeral homes attuned to their market. Based on increasingly common consumer behaviors, these firms see new opportunities to increase their visibility and generate revenue while earning heaps of praise and thanks from their community.

This message looks at some examples of the fundamental shift, that leading tech-savvy funeral homes are making in the way they use their websites to increase their *visibility* and *proximity* within their community.

Before considering these examples, a quick review of the chief characteristics of earlier generation deathcare websites, will make plain how significant the change in direction is at this time.

First generation deathcare websites were a source of phone numbers, location information and a few pages of sparse facts typically about the firm. Second generation sites grew into small online libraries of information dressed in more attractive graphics, much like an online version of a brochure.

Today, some of these websites offer limited means for the community to act supportively towards grieving families through online guest books and flower programs. Also, most of these websites offer online at-need and pre-need forms by which families can provide the funeral home basic information. But, while the quality of graphics has increased, the primary *function* of most deathcare websites today is unchanged: offer a static collection of information pages with the hope that families will look at these pages and decide to call the funeral home.

What Has Changed

How does that contrast with the new generation of websites that tech-savvy firms are using? Spend just a few minutes thinking about the features and functions mentioned below and you will quickly realize the variety of profitable returns tech-leveraging businesses are enjoying.

Consider obituary e-mail notifications, just one of a growing number of tools for savvy funeral homes. These family-requested e-mails from your business arrive daily in scores

or hundreds of individual e-mail boxes, bearing your current services list and website branding. It's pro-active, service oriented, and creates brand visibility.

Consider Send-A-Meal catering programs that let guest-book signees purchase and send a catered meal to a grieving family. It is a practical, appreciated opportunity for well-wishers that earns you a profit and builds your reputation for service.

Consider website home pages outfitted with eye-stopping multimedia tools, designed to make your firm's image stick in the minds of the thousands of people coming to your site just to read an obituary. That's an advertising bill you aren't paying repeatedly.

Consider other uses for web broadcasting equipment beyond service broadcasting. Firms are letting families and friends send holiday messages and the like to troops overseas. The charitable act strengthens your community and your visibility in it.

Consider dedicated pages within your website where families find recommended/approved caterers to provide meals in your reception facility. You save the family searching time, expand your services and turn a profit on the web page where you sell advertising space to caterers wanting to serve your families.

Consider websites equipped with grief-counselor chat-boards or grief videos that allow your community to find genuine support under your branding 24 hours a day. It engenders gratitude and further recognition of your services.

There is so much more to consider that is already being done, usually to the large advantage of the progressive firm.

As you plan your strategy for winning market share and improving your customer service, don't forget the first place many families visit before deciding who to contact. Building your online business tool will generate profitable community gratitude, as well as a strong position from which to leverage new technological opportunities as they arise. **FBA**

Brian Young is the Marketing Director at FuneralNet, the original and largest provider of custom Web sites to the deathcare industry. He can be contacted at brian@funeralnet.com, or call him at (800) 721-8166 ext. 536.