

CREMATION EDUCATION FOR FAMILIES

by Mark Klingenberger



The evolution to cremation continues to challenge many, but as with the tide and weather it is something we need to deal with as opposed to lamenting about the “good old days”. How have funeral businesses successfully adapted to serve cremation families? What can we learn from other businesses that have had to adapt to changing consumer trends and behavior?

With the overwhelming number of purchasing options consumers have today, new terminology has emerged describing this sensation: “Overchoice” or “Choice Overload”. According to Wikipedia: Overchoice, also referred to as Choice Overload, is a term describing a cognitive process in which people have a difficult time making a decision when faced with too many options. The advantages of diversity and individualization are canceled by the complexity of the buyer’s decision-making process.”

Almost all Funeral Professionals pride themselves on being of service to the family and profess how they will provide “any service” the family wants. They then go on to explain that since cremation is being chosen there are virtually limitless options for the timing of the service and where it can be held, as well as an incredible number of merchandise options. Just google “cremation options” and you will receive 10,500,000 search results! Does it sound like there may be a choice overload issue?

Here are three things to consider to make cremation arrangements easier for you and the family:

First think about where most families are getting information today and that is on the web. Take a few moments and google some common phrases you think families might use in their online searching. For example, “urns for sale” results in 3,700,000 hits while “cremation” gets over 26,800,000 hits! Besides choice overload,

this exercise also shows you what comes up on the first page and gives you a good idea of what your families are finding and reading. Many search results showcase things on the outer edge of the norm because they are interesting or odd, yet too often families assume these things are the norm because they came up on the first page of their search.

Knowing what people are seeing on the internet and also knowing what families in your community need to know, you need to consider where they should be getting a realistic education and insight: on your website. Your website is the most critical educational tool you

can provide to families in your community. Also, given that the population has become so transient, where else will children who live out of town learn about your business?

You should take the time to review your website from the perspective of a family. Too often, websites are built around promoting the firm and their history or focused on selling products. Look objectively at your site and ask yourself how many of the pages are dedicated to providing education for families. Review the information to see that it is organized and easy to find. When reviewing your website look carefully at the information and ask yourself

if you would read what is there. What you may find is that too often sites are filled with content that most will not completely read.

YouTube is the number two website for visitors, second only to Google. What does that tell you? Try using video to better engage families. There are a number of product and service videos out there you can link to or ask your webmaster to download and embed on your site. People will more readily sit and watch an informative two-minute video than read an article. Video demonstrates a more up-to-date and interactive

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website. Also, people are more likely to forward a video to others than a written article.

Second take a step back and consider how the decision to buy anything is made. When anybody goes to purchase something, they go through a cognitive process to make the purchase decision. They have to:

- 1) Know what they want
- 2) Understand the options
- 3) Make tradeoffs between the possible options

To make it easier for families to make decisions you may want to simply begin with the end in mind. Instead of offering many products and services, simply ask "where will the cremated remains be permanently placed". Many families cannot answer that simple question as they have not considered or discussed it and came to a conclusion. By staying focused on the answer to this one question from each of the participants in the arrangements, it gives you the ending point. It also keeps them focused on the final outcome.

Sometimes families react to this and are not really sure what they want. Once again, you want to keep this simple and explain there are really only four choices for the remains to ultimately go to:

- 1) Burial in a cemetery (permanent)
- 2) Placement in a niche (permanent)
- 3) Scattering (permanent)
- 4) Home placement (temporary)

By getting the family to first focus on the final resting place, you will find it easier to discuss these four options for placement.

This moment also presents a great opportunity to ask a question that can really help a family: "Are there other family members who have been cremated who are still in a home that should be placed in a permanent location as well?" Think of how many cremations have happened in your area over the past ten years. Odds are there can be more family members and the service can include a final placement for more than one urn. This opportunity to help the family can help elevate you above your competitors as you are solving a problem that families have.

Burial in a new or an existing grave provides a permanent and cost-effective opportunity for permanent memorialization. Most cemeteries are happy to sell a second rite of interment to a family member. Burying the urn in an existing family member's grave is something

the average person does not realize they can do and if you offer this suggestion you will be seen as a problem solver.

Niche placement is another permanent solution for families. Have you looked around in your market and found properties or locations that would work with you? Ask about church affiliations of other fraternal organizations. There are places outside of the traditional cemetery that you may be able to help the family find and still provide them with permanent memorialization.

Scattering is often portrayed in a romantic and dignified light when this is not always the case. Too often people do not consider how things will change. Think about adding these simple words to your arrangements: "the use of land and water will change over time so consider this when determining where you want to scatter."

Third you need to make the decision to buy easier by offering packages with popular cremation services and merchandise. Keep choice overload at bay by setting up packages that put together common services and merchandise options the families in your community are selecting today. Having three to six packages gives people the opportunity to simplify decision-making based on their desires for memorialization as well as their budget.

Further, inside of the package it is important to allow families the latitude to personalize the package selected to make it relevant to their situation. For example, make sure there is a credit toward the purchase of an urn, or perhaps six to eight urns for them to select from inside of the package. Include an urn vault inside of the burial packages with a choice between a regular urn vault and a short unit that can go onto an existing grave. Choices such as these allow them an opportunity for expression and personalization.

If the family is going to have a memorial service you certainly want to offer your facilities, but don't penalize them if they want to go to a church, club or other community center for the event. Allow them to be creative and use a venue that is important to them and still includes you and your firm.

In the end you can make choosing easier for families by pursuing one of these three strategies or a combination of them to assist cremation families. What is most important is that you continuously work to improve the education made available as well as make decisions as easy as possible for those you serve. **FBA**



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