



CREATING A WIN-WIN: ENHANCE BURIAL VAULT REVENUE AND THE FAMILY EXPERIENCE

by Wayne Stellmach

When you last purchased a new car, did you buy the base model? If you are like most car buyers, you added features that enhanced comfort, convenience, performance, or even fun. You personalized that car to make it yours, from the color and trim level to window tinting and changing up the wheels and rims. While all this cost you more, you were satisfied with your purchase because you saw the value in the options that you chose. And of course, your add-ons resulted in additional revenue to the dealer.

While buying a burial vault is certainly not the same as buying a new car, the process of making the buying decision doesn't change and the concept of perceived value still applies. If a family sees value in the protective qualities of a vault versus a gravebox, or sees the value in a vault cover personalized with photographs of their loved one and happy memories with family, cost is secondary. In fact, a personalized burial vault even opens up the discussion of an enhanced graveside service as the family understands the value of the committal service and thinks of various ways to create that special tribute.

Obviously, as families choose higher-quality burial vaults and added services, the funeral service provider benefits from the additional revenue. But here is where the analogy to the new car buying process differs: a funeral professional does not need to sell. A good funeral professional needs only to educate.

People Want to Be Informed

It's likely that most families making funeral arrangements are not aware of all of the options when it comes to services and merchandise. Even if they have made arrangements in the past, things change and education is critical, each and every time. And regardless of the product or the circumstance, people generally do want to be better informed.

Consider for a moment the reasons people turn to the internet and information is paramount. According to the Pew Research Center, eighty-one percent of internet

PewResearchCenter

Internet, Science & Tech

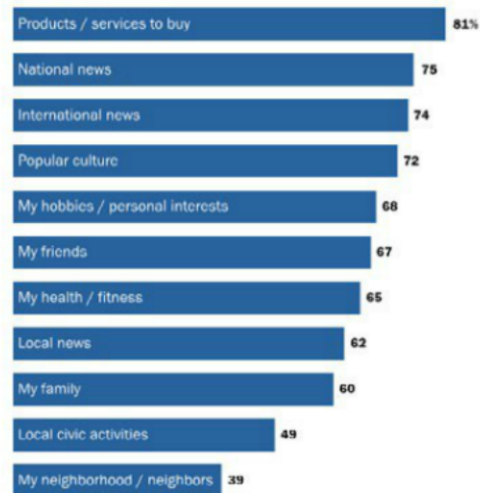
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AMERICANS FEEL BETTER INFORMED THANKS TO THE INTERNET

Internet users say digital tech makes them better informed than 5 years ago

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% of internet users who say the Internet and cell phones helps them be better informed about ...



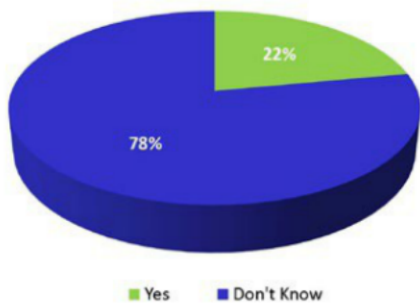
Source: August 2014 Panel Survey.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

users search for information on products and services before they buy. This desire to learn is no different when it comes to funeral products and services, and perhaps even stronger as it is not something people routinely deal with. You have an opportunity, if not a responsibility, to educate your families and let them make their own informed decisions. You may be surprised at their choices.

A 2013 research study illustrated both the need for, and the value of, education pertaining to outer burial containers. When consumers were asked if there was a difference between a burial vault and a grave box, seventy-eight percent said they did not know. After simply watching a two-minute informative video on the differences, only seventeen percent stated they would choose a grave box. Compared to industry sales averages of fifty percent graveliners, one has to wonder why such a marked difference. How much of that is lack of education?

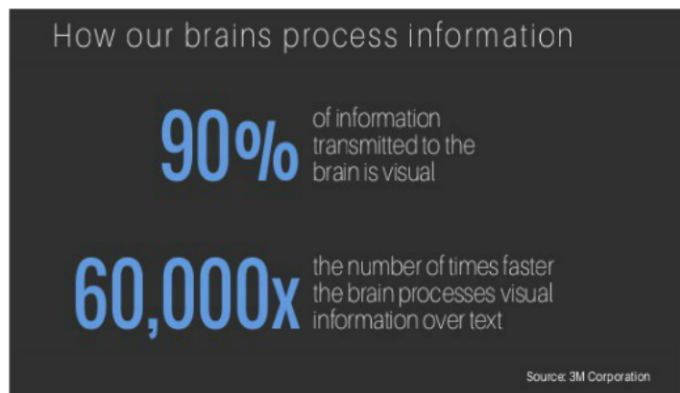
78% of burial families do not know the difference between a burial vault and a grave box



Education Takes Various Forms

Given the high percentage of consumers who use the internet to search for information, your website is your first opportunity to educate. Sadly, many funeral home websites are lacking in comprehensive information on outer burial containers. Some don't even bother to provide any information on burial vaults. A short paragraph on the reasons for OBCs and differences between a gravebox and a lined burial vault would be easy to put together with a phone call to your burial vault provider who could supply you with ready-made copy. Include photos and product details, again tapping your supplier for assistance. Keeping it real simple, ask if you could just cut-and-paste copy and photos directly from their website.

Better yet, add informative videos to your website. As a visual format, video engages with all age groups. 3M Corporation has compiled research on visual information that shows the brain processes information 60,000



times faster compared to text. The popularity of video as an informational resource is demonstrated by the rising internet traffic attributable to video. According to Google, over 100 million hours of "how to" video content was viewed on YouTube in just the first 4 months of 2015, and it is estimated nearly 75% of all internet traffic in 2017 will be video. When consumers need to make funeral arrangements, videos can help them understand what they need to do.

Check with your burial vault supplier to see if they have videos that you can embed on your website. You can also contact this author for a video that presents



non-branded information on burial vaults, as well as a separate video that discusses the value of a committal service.

Video is also an excellent tool in the arrangements conference or at preneed discussions. Whether on big-screen monitors or personal computers, a well-done video can communicate key information quickly and supplement the presentation. A funeral professional once told me that when she played the informational video on burial vaults, she noticed every single person, regardless of their age, stop what they were doing and focus on the video.

Digital programs are another tool being used to supplement the arrangements conference or even entirely change the process. However, many of the out-of-the-box software programs do not adequately address the OBC piece. Some may show some burial vault photos but fall short on education. If you use one of these programs, talk to your provider about incorporating comprehensive information on burial vaults or embedding a video. There are also programs on the market that guide a family through OBC and burial vault education, and present options for personalization. Again, check with your supplier.

Enhanced Revenue Goes Hand-in-Hand with Better OBC Decisions

When was the last time you calculated your revenue stream from burial vaults? What if you could substantially increase that revenue with simple changes in how they are presented to families? Our research has shown that better education leads to better decisions, and better

decisions lead to better revenue. The chart below illustrates this:

100 Calls Per Year with a 50% Burial Rate

	Percent of OBC sales	Number sold	Revenue per OBC	Total Profit
Unlined OBCs (grave boxes)	50%	25	\$400	\$10,000
Lined Burial Vaults	50%	25	\$600	\$15,000
TOTAL OBC PROFIT AT 50% LINED BURIAL VAULTS				\$25,000
Unlined OBCs (grave boxes)	30%	15	\$400	\$6,000
Lined Burial Vaults	70%	35	\$600	\$21,000
TOTAL OBC PROFIT AT 50% LINED BURIAL VAULTS				\$27,000
REVENUE INCREASE				8%

This above example uses modest numbers but if your firm does more calls, or has higher per-unit markups, or has a higher percentage of burials, the impact of a better sales mix may be considerable. But even a modest 8% increase is welcome at most firms if all that needs to be done is an adjustment of the presentation via better education of the family. As stated earlier, participants in the 2013 consumer research did nothing more than watched the short video and stated strong preference for lined burial vaults over unlined graveboxes.

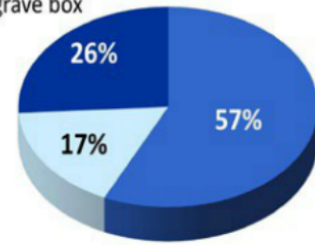
Consider too the value of graveside services, not only in terms of added revenue but also the future value of satisfied families and the return or referral business that can result.



Wayne Stellmach is the Director of Marketing, Wilbert Funeral Services, Inc., where he oversees the development and implementation of diverse marketing programs and brand strategy. Stellmach also assists Wilbert's licensee network by creating marketing tools and collateral that help funeral professionals educate the families they serve. Stellmach has over twenty years of experience in marketing professional services and products. His background includes market strategy development, website management, advertising, sales support, trade shows and media relations.


After learning the difference between a grave box and a burial vault, only 17% chose a grave box

- 57% chose a burial vault
- 26% needed more information before making a decision
- 17% chose a grave box



■ Vault ■ Grave Box ■ Unsure

As challenges to remain profitable continue to rise, it may be worthwhile to look closely at your OBC sales mix and consider how surprisingly simple changes in how you educate families might improve that. Enhance burial vault revenue while enhancing the family experience? Yes, it is entirely possible to do both. Educate families so they can understand differences and options in products and services and choose based on the value that they see. Making their decision armed with all the facts will result in their greater satisfaction and a better experience. And better revenues for you. **FBA**



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Red Apple Capital has developed a consumer lending loan program for At Need Funeral Financing. Red Apple Capital has 3 national lenders that can provide consumer loans as follows:

Loan Amount:	Up to \$10,000
Interest Rates:	13.99% - 24.99%
Terms:	12 - 60 months
Same-as-Cash:	90 days - 12 months
Process:	Fully automated and call in option
Recourse:	None
FICO Scores:	580 - 850

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