

Burial Vaults 101: Families Truly Do Want the Education

{ by Wayne Stellmach }



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In a recent television news series, a veteran's widow was extremely distraught when she learned — after her husband's burial — that the government-furnished graveliner provided as part of the Department of Veterans Affairs benefits was not a burial vault and thus was not protecting against water or other elements. She recalled being told that it was a vault and said if she knew what it actually was, she would have declined the free grave box and purchased a vault for the protection and her own peace of mind. Other individuals interviewed for this series echoed dismay to learn that graveliners were taking on water and felt that people should be told more clearly about the differences between graveliners and sealed burial vaults.

How many families have you spoken with knew the difference between a graveliner and a burial vault? How many even came in knowing that they needed an outer burial container at all? Research has shown that number at only 42% -- and how many of those actually understand the differences between burial vaults and grave boxes are unknown. But 58% had no awareness at all.

Educating families, not only on vaults but on all the myriad

products and services that a family must consider, is a responsibility that Funeral Professionals fulfill day-in and day-out. Yet it can be challenging for the Funeral Professional, mindful of the need to inform, yet sensitive to the family's time, emotional state and ability to absorb too much information. That's where additional tools can help.

Video is one educational tool that can make a significant impact. A concise video can communicate and educate in a unique way, cutting to the chase and telling families what they need to know within a minute or two. Video is engaging and readily accepted by today's consumer. Information is presented thoroughly and consistently with no sidetracking that is common in verbal presentations. Pertaining to burial vaults, videos are being used successfully by many funeral homes to succinctly inform families about:

- The function of a burial vault
- Differences between burial vaults and basic grave liners
- Differences among types and styles of burial vaults
- Personalization and memorialization choices
- The importance of graveside service

Don't let your Aftercare be an Afterthought.

What are you doing for Aftercare? Maybe you have an answer, maybe you do not, but it's probably not a major part of your business plan.

What are you doing for Marketing? While there are many answers, you're probably spending 4% to 6% of your revenue, and this is a major part of your business plan.

— Are you willing to see how the first two are really the same question? —

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Not only are families essentially educating themselves, they are making measurably better choices. And the likelihood that they later regret a decision and perhaps even question the Funeral Professional is reduced.

Videos can be utilized and shown in numerous settings... at the funeral home, on your website, linked to a trusted third-party website video, sent via email link to families, on your Facebook page or YouTube channel, on a mobile tablet device or laptop for presentation in a family's home. Understanding all of the potential customer touch-points from pre-need research to at-need situations can guide your decisions on placement and presentation of videos and other educational materials. Prudent advice would be to make videos accessible in as many places as possible.

Digital presentations are another tool used to present information and help families make educated decisions on burial vaults. Like video, a digital presentation is flexible in terms of when and where it can be shown to families. Some digital presentations are available as part of an interactive monitor that also houses video, placed on a selection room wall or in an arrangement conference room. Other presentations run on a tablet or laptop, which can be particularly helpful for in-home presentations such as pre-need. Also like video, you might consider a presentation residing on your website. Speaking of online, you might even consider utilizing social platforms that lend themselves to photographic presentation

such as Pinterest, formatting a digital presentation as a series of slides, for example.

During at-need arrangement conferences, the best time to use a burial vault educational tool is often at the beginning of the discussion. Many Funeral Professionals have found it very effective to introduce families to the digital presentation and/or videos, leave the room to allow the family uninterrupted time to watch or go through the material, and return to address additional questions and finalize the details. This approach removes any pressure from the family and positions the Funeral Professional not as a salesperson, but as the helpful counselor that was likely one of the reasons you entered the profession.

Educating families on burial vaults, and utilizing any tools that can help that process, is simply good business. Families are well served as is your hard-earned reputation. Utilizing available video, interactive monitors, digital presentations as well as traditional printed materials to fully and consistently convey all of the critical information ensures that you've done your job and that the family can make an educated decision. On a practical level, education lessens the potential for later regrets or even public complaints that they were not told the complete story, like the woman cited at the beginning of this article. By the way, that woman's husband ended up being disinterred, relocated and buried in a lined, sealed burial vault. **FBA**



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