

New Study Shows Consumer Knowledge Gap and Surprising Preferences Regarding Burial Vaults

{ by Wayne Stellmach }



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We talk a lot within the funeral service industry about the value of memorialization and how personalized products and services can support that. But do families really buy into the concept and value of personalization? Specifically, do they show interest in personalizing the burial vault? A recent intriguing study says yes, they certainly do.

This study, conducted online in late 2013, sought to gauge consumer knowledge about outer burial containers as well as their level of interest in key burial vault attributes such as protection against underground elements and personalization of the carapace. The results were enlightening.

HOW THE STUDY WAS DONE

Independent research firm Product Acceptance & Research (PAR), based in Evansville, Indiana, was commissioned to conduct an online survey of consumers who were inclined to choose burial if making funeral arrangements for a loved one. PAR constructed the study to achieve the standard 95% confidence level with a $\pm 5\%$ margin of error. Put another way, if the survey were repeated 100 times one could expect that 95 out of 100 times the responses would be the same, in a range of $\pm 5\%$.

No provider was identified by name or products in the study. Fifty-three percent of the respondents were male and forty-seven percent were female. All were 18+ years old with sixty-four percent over 45 years of age, the demographic which is more likely to have made or will be making funeral arrangements in the nearer term. Seventy-three percent of the respondents were residents of the United States and twenty-seven percent were residents of Canada. Eighty-four percent identified themselves as Christian, five percent Jewish, five percent "other" and six-percent as having no faith affiliation.

KEY STUDY FINDINGS

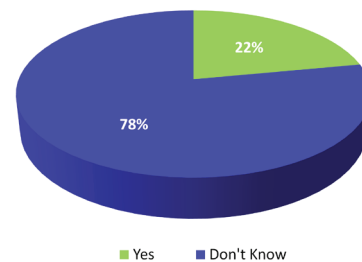
► Families' knowledge about outer burial containers is very limited

Most funeral professionals already know this is true in general, but what really came out in the study was particular confusion regarding grave boxes versus burial vaults.

Predictably, many were unaware that an outer burial container was required by most cemeteries, with thirty-six percent believing that neither a grave box nor a burial vault was required. However, twenty-seven percent thought that both a grave box and a burial vault were needed.

But the most compelling insight was that seventy-eight percent of burial families stated that they did not know the difference between a burial vault and a grave box. This basic knowledge is crucial for families to make educated choices. And as illustrated by the following finding, just a little education goes a long way.

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



Q. Is there a difference between a burial vault and a grave box?

► After learning the difference between a grave box and a burial vault, most did not choose a grave box

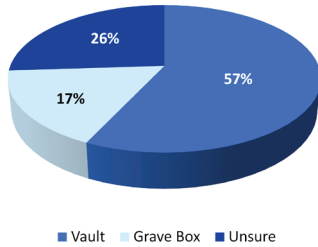
Study participants were asked to watch a brief video that explained differences between a grave box and a burial vault. Basic construction, protective properties and personalization capabilities were addressed in the two-minute video.

After viewing the video, participants were asked if they would choose a grave box or a burial vault if making funeral arrangements. Only seventeen percent said they would choose

a grave box. Fifty-seven percent would choose a burial vault based on a simple video. This clearly demonstrates the value of basic education. The remaining twenty-six percent stated that they needed additional information before making a choice, presenting the opportunity for funeral professionals to further educate.

After learning the difference between a grave box and a burial vault, 83% did not choose a grave box

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

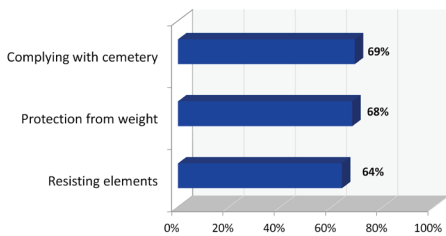


Q. After having viewed the educational video, if you were making burial arrangements in the future would you choose a burial vault or a grave box?

► **Protection of the casket and the loved one is important to families**

Sixty-eight percent of the study participants stated that the protection from the weight of the earth that a burial vault provides is important or very important to them. Sixty-four percent said that protection from underground elements such as water and insects is important or very important. Let us conclude that compliance with cemetery requirements is the primary driver of vault sales, families have shown in this study to be equally concerned with protection of the remains of their loved ones.

2/3 of burial families are concerned about protection



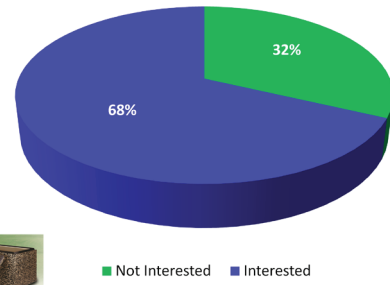
Q. Thinking about the purpose of the burial vault, please rate the importance of each of the following.

► **A majority of families would choose to personalize the burial vault if provided that option**

Survey participants were shown a photo of a burial vault with a simple appliqué of a golfer and the deceased's name and years of birth and death. Asked if they would

have interest in personalizing the burial vault with words and symbols of what their loved one had a passion for (such as shown in the photo), sixty-eight percent said yes. Many of the remaining thirty-two percent wrote that they needed additional information before deciding, particularly regarding cost. There were no costs provided throughout the survey and this is one example where participants may have assumed there would be additional costs associated with personalization. However, many vaults can be personalized without additional cost to the family and it is conceivable that if this information was shared with the study participants, the interest in personalization may have been even higher.

Majority of those choosing a burial vault are interested in personalization



Q. Please indicate your level of interest in personalizing the burial vault with words and symbols of what your loved one had a passion for (such as in the photo above) for display at the graveside service.

How can Funeral Professionals apply lessons learned from this study on burial families?

This study validates that education makes a significant difference in the choices that families make when it comes to burial vaults. They make better product choices – even with assumptions that those better choices will cost them more. They are concerned about protection, not just cemetery compliance. And they are very interested in personalization of the burial vault.

Do your percentages of burial vault sales versus grave box sales reflect the percentages in this study? What about your percentages of personalized vault carapaces that can bring so much meaning to family and friends?

Are you utilizing the various educational tools that your burial vault vendor has to help you communicate and educate your families? Videos are particularly powerful, again as demonstrated in this study, as most are comfortable and willing to watch a video and it can educate the entire family at the same time. Videos can also be shown in various environments where you might be engaging with a family... selection rooms, arrangement conference rooms, on PCs or tablets used by pre-need counselors, or on your website.

Do a quick evaluation of the way you and/or your staff educate families about burial vaults and see if a few simple tweaks make an impact on your families, on their decisions, and yes, on your sales. **FBA**