

BUILD YOUR BRAND

Key elements for creating a successful brand for your business, one that remains true to your core values and purpose.

By Nicole Vullo

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For more than two decades, social media has given many people the ability to market themselves to the world. What started as platforms only for celebrities and athletes quickly morphed into a way for businesses, regardless of size or industry, and your average joes to have their voices or their “brand” heard in an expanded capacity.

2020 was the year, more than any other, that thrust social media and digital technology to the forefront and integrated it into almost every aspect of our daily lives. Phrases like “You’re muted” and “I’m going to share my screen; can everyone see it?” have become commonplace.

For me, the increase in usage of and reliance on social media is both a blessing and a curse. While it is a fantastic extension and vehicle for our brands and ideas, it comes with great responsibility for us as users and for consumers as our audience. I will expand further on these later.

Before we dive into the key elements in building a successful brand, I want to introduce myself to readers and share how sheer fate brought me to this profession. My passion has always revolved around people, so I knew my career path would have that aspect tied into it. My first experience with funeral service began in 2013 when I received an opportunity to work as an office assistant at a local funeral home in my hometown of New York City.

Although my tenure there was brief, as I accepted a position in the corporate marketing world, the amazing people skills I learned in the funeral home are talents I will forever carry with me and skills that simply cannot be taught in an office cubicle. The sheer fate moment for me happened at the end of 2019 when I relocated to Arizona and was offered the opportunity to be part of the Foresight team.

Now let’s jump back to the building blocks of a successful brand. I start with the one element that’s my personal favorite, **BRANDING**. You can’t have a brand without proper branding. One of the main components of branding is to establish and maintain consistency. Brand consistency builds confidence in your brand. It solidifies who you are and what you do for your audience. You can easily achieve brand consistency with guidelines such as your color scheme (check out pantone.com for all your color scheme dreams), a well-designed logo, a business tagline and appropriate imagery. And once you have these guidelines, you must stick to them!

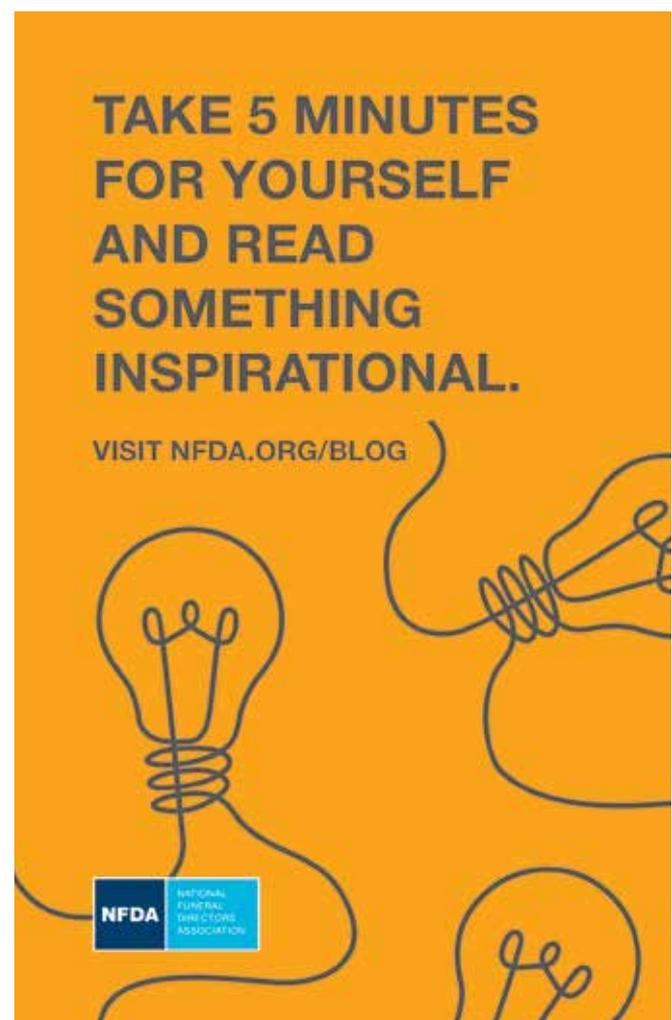
When defining your brand, my advice is to do what works for you and your business. Yes, it’s fine to be mindful of your competitors, but please do not let

that dictate and define what you do. You have your voice and your narrative, and it’s best to stick to it.

Once you have your brand established, the next step in a successful brand build is **SOCIAL MEDIA**. When done right, social media is a successful extension of your brand, and here is where your voice can shine through. Social media is the main method for engaging with your audience. It’s important to be active on social media, but you must also be your most authentic self. Social media platforms give you the ability to tell your story on a large scale.

As I mentioned at the start, there has been a great evolution of social media, and sadly, sometimes not for the best. The unfortunate elements we must bypass include bot accounts, spam and overly endorsed/sponsored content. But when we get past these slight roadblocks, social media morphs into a fantastic resource.

It’s hard to believe that a millennial like me would ever dare use the phrase “back in my day” and expect to be taken seriously, but I will need to use it for this article (just know that I am smirking at myself as I type it).



Back in my day, I started to use social media platforms like Facebook when it was in its original model. Facebook was described to me as “college kids’ version of LinkedIn” – a great way to connect with your classmates and promote yourself. So, as I was about to start my first semester at St. John’s University, I created my Facebook account.

I can remember like it was yesterday sitting in my Marketing 101 course, and my professor asked, “Who here has a Facebook account?” As the whole class raised our hands, the lecture theme for the day was, “What is social media and how will it change our world?” It was in that very class that we were taught that Facebook and other social media platforms will have a huge impact on how we live and how we do business. The number of new jobs focused on social media will be astonishing. Well, professor Morris, if you are reading this, let me just say this – you were right!

When using social media for your business, it’s important to remember that your online persona should be a carbon copy of your in-person demeanor. This means that you should talk on social media just as you would talk to client families. After all, there’s always the possibility that a client has seen you on social media first and does business with you second.

It is also crucial that you know your audience and know the times. The worst thing you can do is post something inappropriate because you didn’t “read

the room.” A good rule of thumb to follow: Sometimes less is more. There is something to say about simplicity and subtlety that can deliver an impactful message. All you need for a perfect social media post is your message and supporting graphics or visuals that emphasize what you are saying.

Social media for your business must be a healthy mix of both business promotion and thought-provoking content that will encourage your audience to engage and converse with you. The last thing you want is to be a business that is always trying to sell something. You want to show you care about your audience and want to help them. Trust me when I say that using your platform to promote your goodwill and dedication to this profession will never be viewed as “off brand.”

I have used Facebook as one of my main examples of social media, but it is important to mention all the tools out there to use when promoting your business. I recommend that you actively include Twitter and LinkedIn in your social media tool kit. Most social media platforms by now have similar features and functionality, so posting the same content across all three does not take a lot of extra effort. Plus, it’s beneficial to cross-post so you’ve covered all your bases and maximized your reach.

One of the blessings of social media is that there are so many new tools to each platform. They are always evolving and there is always a new feature to learn. By far one of my favorite features is analytics. I cannot begin to tell you the excitement I get when reviewing our social media analytics at the end of each month. I encourage you all to dedicate time to review your analytics, which can tell you exactly what is working for your business and what is not. From there, you now know what adjustments need to be made for future posts and content creation.

Based on the results of Foresight’s Funeral and Cemetery Consumer Behavior Study, we know that yesterday’s emerging trends will be permanent fixtures in the future of the funeral and cemetery business. This is especially true when talking about the use of technology, video gatherings and online arrangements. The same belief holds for the impact social media has on your business. It was here long before the pandemic, and it is crystal clear it’s not going anywhere. It will only continue to evolve.

The third and final element to factor into your brand build is your **WEBSITE**.



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It is vital that your business has a functioning website full of fresh and impactful content. This allows your audience to further read about your firm and learn exactly who you are. Let's face it, after a client sees you on social media, their next trip on the journey to you is via your website. A great website is extremely easy to navigate and is updated regularly. For example, your contact information needs to be easily spotted as it is usually the first thing a client will be looking for. As you design your website, your brand guidelines will come back into play as well. Here is where your color scheme, taglines and logos will shine.

When crafting and updating your website, one thing you must now add is pricing. The pandemic and the results of Foresight's consumer study have taught us that 75% of consumers want access to pricing online. Even more important to know is that 52% of those consumers will only do business with you if your pricing is provided online.

I understand that funeral service pricing is a complex concept, but it must be a priority to make it easier for consumers to locate and understand the pricing on your website. If your pricing is clearly stated

on your website, just imagine how smooth your first conversation with a client could be.

When discussing your website and overall brand, two things are key: communication and transparency. Communication skills are crucial in basically every industry but particularly in ours. We are dealing with families that are extremely vulnerable and often not in the right frame of mind. When marketing ourselves and our business, it is our duty to communicate all the necessary information to families clearly, completely and honestly. We need to be a "guiding light" from the moment we are first seen to the last moment when they leave our care. If we communicate clearly, the trust a consumer holds in our brand will be stronger than ever.

It's my hope that the impact of social media and brand building does not intimidate you. It should be an opportunity and a catalyst for you to transform your business into a new and modern space. Social media is a great platform to use to expand your reach and visibility. My only parting advice is that no matter how you use social media for your business, please remain true to you, your core values and your purpose. ☰

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