



# The Renewed Focus on Pre-Need: Giving Consumers What They Want

## Foresight Focus



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↑ **30%**

increase in importance of end-of-life planning vs 2020

**80%**

interest in end-of-life planning if consumer experienced a death



“Our pre-need funeral was up about 22% ... we continue to see increased pre-need sales activity.”

**Brad Green**  
CEO, Park Lawn Corporation

While Covid-19 has had massive effects on how consumer perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors have changed at an accelerated pace all across the board, consumer demand for pre-planning is an area that has taken front and center for the funeral and cemetery professional.

While the last two years have been taxing across the globe, hitting the psyche of consumers everywhere and in almost every industry, the pandemic has taken a particular toll on funeral and cemetery last responders who have borne the brunt of helping families affected by the virus. Because there is a heightened awareness over one’s own mortality given Covid deaths, there has been a marked change in the attitudes of consumers regarding the value and importance of having pre-arrangements in place. As we discussed in the results of the *2021 Foresight Companies Consumer Behavior Study (FCCBS)* released this summer, 75% of the study’s respondents reported that making advanced arrangements for their end-of-life plans is important, an increase of 30% versus the 2020 FCCBS results. For those respondents who experienced the death of a loved one, consumer interest in pre-need increases to 80%. This presents a significant opportunity to serve client families as securing cemetery property and funeral services in advance of need are more actively being sought-after than ever before.

The marketplace validates these consumer research findings. The major consolidators all show strong pre-need sales growth, with SCI, the industry’s largest public consolidator, having announced that pre-need funeral sales grew 57% while cemetery pre-need sales increased 36% as they closed Q2. During an earnings call in May with Toronto-based Park Lawn Corporation, CEO Brad Green commented “our pre-need funeral was up about 22%” and that “we continue to see increased pre-need sales activity.”

Funeral home and cemetery operators can maximize the current increase in demand for pre-need services by addressing three core elements of their business.

## RECOGNIZE YOUR “WHY” AND PASSION IN PRE-PLANNING

Consumers are voicing their heightened desire to pre-plan and make pre-arrangements. However, as an operator, you have to determine why you should be more active in selling pre-need or else you are just blindly doing something just because everyone else is doing it. At a high level, the reason why you do what you do is to serve families in their time of need. Serving families or helping families heal should continue to be your “why” reason when it comes to serving them in pre-planning, and this needs to continue to be your passion—otherwise, executing your pre-need sales program will feel like an empty proposition.

Having and identifying the “why” you sell pre-arrangements to your families makes that connection and provides purpose to your pre-need sales program. Furthermore, the conviction you internally have then inherently drives the purpose towards and through your sales team, whether they are internal or external. Making this purpose the focal point will then help make emotional connections with the families that make the decisions to purchase pre-need

funeral arrangements or pre-need interment rights. As operational leaders, we need to evoke the emotions of our employees or associates which will in turn evoke the emotions of the clients or customers to buy what we have to offer them—which is all underlined by our purpose to serve them even before the need is imminent.

One of the main ways you can passionately serve your families in pre-need is by being a trusted counselor and transparently educating consumers about pre-planning and pre-need sales. Provide open communication of flexible product offerings and transparent pricing are customer-centric ways that consumers state how they want to be treated. The pre-need customer has clearly demanded that he/she wants transparency (data from FCCBS shows among all customers and all service types, at-need or pre-need):

**74%**

of customers indicate they want access to information that can be viewed online and furthermore,

**65%**

want to be able to research products online,

**48%**

of all consumers say they would do it all (pre-plan) online, if given the opportunity to do so.

This tells us that those operators whose salesforces, driven by purpose to serve, that embrace the reality of a consumer that expects clear, concise communication and that encourage online research by providing online pricing and building a flexible sales process in a customer-centric manner will have an easier way towards completing the pre-need sale and are poised for growth.



## INVEST IN YOUR SALESPEOPLE

Does your team recognize that consumers are evaluating their own mortality at levels far higher than ever before? Can they translate these feelings into effective sales presentations and present offerings that compel families to purchase? Do they have the tools they need to be successful?

What this means for operators of all sizes is that there is an opportunity that exists right now to capitalize on this renewed focus. The winners will be those that message the opportunity for consumers to take control, something that the pandemic has taken from many of them in a number of ways. The FCCBS showed almost a third of all consumers experienced the loss of a loved one or someone they knew because of the pandemic and another study published by Axios-Ipsos showed 1-in-3 Americans know someone who died of COVID-19.

The mere proximity to loss, many of which likely occurred without pre-need plans in place, builds a foundation where an entire potential segment of the market is primed to protect themselves and their loved ones from the cost and potential emotional overspending that comes when pre-planning does not occur. There is a clear willingness on the part of those consumers that do not have pre-need arrangements in-place to consider purchasing now. This re-awakening as to the value of taking control over end-of-life planning, including lessening the burden on those

left behind, is of great significance to those managing funeral or cemetery pre-need salesforces. Consumer sentiment (some as a result of the pandemic) has brought the importance of having pre-arrangements in place to the forefront, more than ever before.

Investing in your salespeople begins with obtaining their buy-in to your purpose and “why” proposition. If your sales team is external as provided by an insurance or trust provider, this vision must be clearly communicated and continually followed up on by you. If your sales team is internal, this should be qualified for in your interviewing, hiring, and training process. Regardless, implementing successful pre-need sales programs requires strategy and a well-thought-out plan to achieve your objectives. After all, a goal without a plan is merely just a dream. Therefore, your plan should effectively help you achieve your purpose to serve more families, grow market share, and grow future volume.

However, please remember that salespeople are driven to make money—but this does not mean that this drive is mutually exclusive of your own goals and objectives. Do not be afraid to garner feedback and accept ideas from your sales team that could improve your plan implementation.

## RE-EVALUATE YOUR MARKETING

Over the last 18-months, general consumers were forced to make new decisions based on the availability, or lack thereof, of their preferred brands. In fact, 28% of consumers made permanent changes to their brand preferences. As a result, marketers around the world are having to rethink their approach to secure existing consumers or win back former customers.

Marketing-savvy funeral home and cemetery operators who are talking about pre-planning, and repositioning the role of the funeral director or sales counselor to that of a “last responder,” will gain a significant edge over their competition. Coupling this message with an experience that looks and feels consultative and educational on their terms, should make these customers eager to get their plans completed, and tell their friends and family about their experience.

The 2022 Pre-Need Toolkit According to The Foresight Companies includes:

### Understanding and Focusing on the Opportunity



Understand there is a renewed interest and value in having pre-arrangements in place on the part of consumers.



Focus on the changing face of pre-need sales for today’s consumers in terms of how they shop, the information they desire, and the experience they demand. Be consultative, open, and transparent.



Prepare your organization – ensure they understand you need a seamless sales and arrangements experience, a seamless technology experience, and a focus on flexibility.



Drive your organization towards a customer-centric mindset.



Evaluate your product and service offerings, your messaging, your digital presence, and your lead generation activities to understand how they are being received by consumers.

Finally, be diligent of measuring how effective your marketing plan is—are you receiving more inquiries, more leads, increased sales, etc. Like goals and action plans, your marketing plan should be measurable so that you know how well you are doing in your market penetration and its efficacy and remember, don’t be afraid to ask for help.

## Concluding Thoughts

The bottom line is there are more customers interested in learning about pre-need, and more customers primed to purchase than ever before. The question becomes, will they buy funeral and/or cemetery arrangements from you or your competition? The study data indicates that consumers are primed and wanting to make pre-arrangements. Consumers have spoken, and you can build a competitive advantage by taking hold of the opportunity to reach these consumers.

Through implementation of the research contained in this white paper, the answer is simple... they will choose the one who fulfills their needs. It's time to take hold of the opportunities that lie ahead to reach these consumers. If you have further questions about consumer behavioral changes or need assistance with any piece of or with all stages of improving your pre-need sales program, or you are not sure how to begin, we can help!

Reach out to The Foresight Companies to learn more.



marketing & consulting group

## About The Foresight Companies

Our mission is to provide solution-based services that guide clients through the process of strategic change. We are passionate about the funeral and cemetery profession. Our singular focus is our client's success. We understand the business of doing business. We provide business solutions for businesses of all sizes and maintain confidentiality, credibility, and trust of our clients. Our track record demonstrates that we convert business analytics into business success. We advise our clients with both insight and foresight on strategies to improve their profitability, grow their business and ensure a brighter future.

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