



# Reach Your Customers

BY NICOLE VULLO

# And Thrive

## To strengthen your business and be prepared for changing times, you must accept and embrace innovation.

They say hindsight is 20/20, and while no one could have predicted the long-lasting impact the pandemic would have on our businesses, the truth is that most of these “new” marketing trends across the funeral and cemetery professions are actually not that new.

Social media has been around. Google Ads were available as an advertising platform. Branding was always crucial, and having a functioning website was the norm.

It's just that, at the time, they were things we'd get around to implementing “eventually.” They were considered “nice to haves.” Now, when it's vital to connect with client families in every way possible, these “new” trends have now become “need to haves.”

I don't want to bear bad news or be alarmist, but if you don't have these elements as part of your business, we may as well say our goodbyes. Now, I know readers may be thinking, “This will never happen to me. My business is solid.” Unfortunately, if it happened to Blockbuster, Polaroid, Kodak, Borders, Tower Records and General Motors, it could happen to you.

Since branding is a passion of mine, a Collective Campus article focusing on brands and innovation caught my eye recently. One data point surprised me: “88% of the Fortune 500 firms that existed in 1955 are

gone.” As I read, I tried to imagine what had happened to cause this.

The answer was simple: failure to innovate and future-proof their business models. Most fail to innovate not due to lack of motivation but because they're late in realizing the opportunities, and sometimes dangers, since they are dedicated to simply maintaining their business.

While some companies failed to survive because they did not innovate, a handful – DoorDash, Apple, Southwest Airlines – are thriving because they've embraced it. Successful companies have in common a vision and a resolution to make changes to evolve and thrive. They've embraced innovation, resulting in success for their business. They keep changing and adapting to meet the demands of a rapidly changing world.

What I'm trying to make clear is that you must innovate to keep your business active and growing. For the past three years, our Funeral and Cemetery Consumer Behavior studies have shown us that consumers are embracing completely new ways of doing things and have no intention of going back to the old ways. They are evolving, and so must we.

Innovation doesn't have to be complex or intimidating. Here are four ideas to help you innovate your business to meet the new funeral and cemetery consumers.

## **REVAMP YOUR MARKETING STRATEGY**

Since 2020, pretty much every type of business has had to find new ways to market to consumers. Funeral home and cemetery owners and operators must do the same. This is where you can try something new that you may not have thought to do before.

I would suggest allocating part of your marketing budget to Google Ads, a digital platform that allows you to bid on keywords specific to your business (“funeral home near me,” “funeral planning”). It also provides display ads on your business/service offerings, along with product listings. These specific ads can be placed in the results pages of search engines and on such non-search platforms as other websites, mobile apps and videos.

The best part is you can totally customize your budget to best fit your business. At a time in which everyone relies on the digital world for literally everything, if you are not on Google Ads, you are missing out.

## **BUILD A WEBSITE, MAKE IT EASY TO FIND**

Having a functioning website allows for current and prospective client families to learn about your business and how you can help them during their time of need. A winning website is one that is easy to navigate and updated regularly. Think of the things your clients need quickly. Contact information must be visible in the website's top navigation.

To make your site easy to find, it's important to use content-rich keywords in your messaging. Think of words a consumer would be searching for and make sure to properly incorporate them on your website. Having the right content will also help your organic search, as you want to have healthy mix of organic search in addition to paid search.

Another reason to have a functioning, easy website is for your Google Ads campaigns, all of which will link to your website. If it is not updated or functioning properly, Google can penalize you and drop your rankings.

The final thing to consider is listing prices. Consumers today demand both convenience and transparency; our survey revealed that 75% of consumers want access to pricing online, and 65% expect to view products online as well. Thus, it's important to make this information easily available. If you do not, you run the risk of client families choosing to go elsewhere.

## **SELL THROUGH VIDEO CONTENT**

One marketing element that has taken over all business verticals is the use of video. Let's face it, we're all

busy and sometimes do not have the time to sit and read through brochures and paperwork. With data showing that the average person spent 100 minutes a day watching videos in 2021, it's obvious that this is how you need to be reaching your audience. In fact, consumers are more likely to buy a product if they have watched a video about it. Some great video ideas include an overview of your business, client testimonials and a tour of the property.

Just like with your Google Ads budget, your video marketing spend does not have to break the bank. There are various advertising agencies and videographers that can create video for you based on your specific budget.

Consumers do not need a showy or highly produced movie; leave that to Scorsese and Tarantino. What consumers do want is transparency and authenticity. A good rule of thumb to follow is that sometimes less is more. Know your audience and know your times. Often, minimalism and subtlety will do you more favors in the long run.

## **INCREASE YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE**

Now more than ever, social media plays a huge role in your business' success as it is one of the main venues by which consumers learn about your business. Since transparency is something deeply valued by most consumers, you must take that into consideration when promoting your business on social media. Your digital persona should match your physical character. This means that how you present yourself online needs to appear as if a client family was sitting next to you.

The social media approach for your business should have a combination of business promotion and thought leadership that will lead your audience to reach out. Trust me when I tell you that using your platform to display your goodwill and dedication to this profession will never be taboo.

To stay ahead of changing times and strengthen your business, your firm must accept and embrace innovation. To do this, listen and be flexible with the needs of the families you serve. Your success will be measured in how you are able to adjust your business model to fit into the customer-centric mindset.

If you don't embrace innovation, sadly, you are missing a huge opportunity. If you don't have time or the resources, ask for help. It's not easy, but there are a range of agencies and suppliers that can help by serving as an extension of your business. Implementing innovation into your business will be significant to both your short-term and long-term success. ☐

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