

Put Ink to Paper

Add a Traditional Element to Today's Techie Marketing Strategy

by Nicole Vullo

WHETHER IT IS A CONVERSATION WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY OR YOUR COWORKERS, it seems everyone these days is talking about all things robots. With all due respect, it is a valid topic. Ever since ChatGPT started to make its presence known toward the end of 2022, the terms “AI” and “automation” have quickly become hot buzzwords. On a lighter note, I can recall a team lunch in our office that started out discussing ChatGPT but quickly segued into a conversation of “what was the name of the Jetson’s maid?” I will save you the Google search: her name was Rosey.

My point is that in 2023, all these futuristic elements that we expected to happen at some point in the new millennium are becoming mainstream. And while they are great tools to have in your repertoire, are they truly the “end all, be all?” I may be in the minority of marketers when I say this, but I would have to say no.

Start with the Human Connection

In the funeral and cemetery profession, especially, we still need to have a human connection to how we do business. After all, our clients are people. People who sadly are experiencing one of the worst moments of their lives. It is our duty to use skills like empathy and compassion to treat them with the utmost care.

To help with serving our client families, I want to talk a bit more about something I feel should be part of your strategic marketing plan. This is something that appears to become a bit of a lost art—the handwritten note.

Back in January, our team had our annual kick-off meeting where we recapped the previous year and discussed our plans going forward. One of our new initiatives was monthly trainings to further develop our skills. While I was excited to continue to build my knowledge base on the funeral and cemetery profession, there was one training course that had me a little apprehensive.

We were going to have a two-day etiquette workshop complete with a three-course meal. As an Italian who talks non-stop with her hands, you can see why I was apprehensive about having a meal. It's always a good move to keep the glassware away from my space once the hands start flying!

Nerves aside, I was ready for our etiquette workshop; and believe me when I say that it was the best class I have taken since my marketing courses at St. John's University. In these two sessions, we learned so much about how to properly conduct ourselves in all types of business

settings but also about making human connections. This one module in particular had me paying the most attention due to the nature of our profession.

Making a human connection has become a lost art. Let's face facts, we are all consumed by our cell phones that they at times are an additional body part. I believe funeral homes and cemetery businesses that place an importance on the human connection, and on their employees' interpersonal skills, will become more valuable and earn the trust and loyalty of their client families.

It was in the Human Connection module that we began to discuss the importance of handwritten notes and how they still need to be very much a part of your business practice. Recently, I had ordered some home décor from a small business boutique. While I was excited to have my order delivered, what made me more grateful was the handwritten note



Thank You!

included in the box. Upon opening the envelope, I came across a perfectly branded piece of stationery with a simple message: "Thank you, Nicole, for your order. We appreciate your business and are thankful for you." It was this gesture that made me know that there was indeed a human behind my

purchase and not some automated program. Little things like that will absolutely lead me to make more purchases from this vendor.

It Starts with Pen and Paper

When I think of how a handwritten note can correlate to funeral service, my brain

immediately goes to aftercare and the new ways that consumers are viewing grief and death. In our 2023 Funeral and Cemetery Consumer Behavior Study, we asked the following question: What can the funeral and/or cemetery profession do to deliver a better experience?

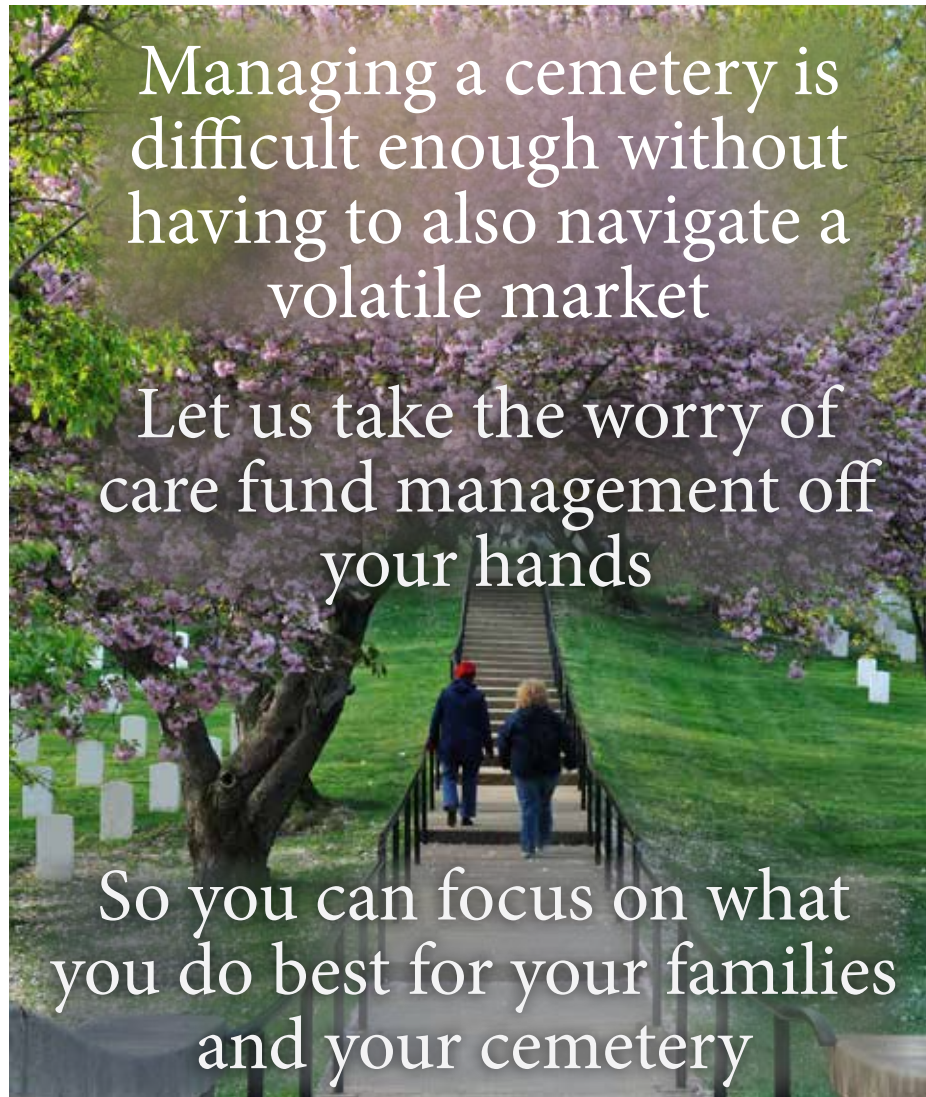
Among the responses, two of the top 10 answers was compassionate service and comprehensive support. Consumers are seeking funeral professionals to be empathetic and understanding. They are also seeking those who can provide quality customer service and additional support, such as grief counseling. Their goal is to have the profession create a compassionate and supportive environment throughout the entire process.

When I read through our data and saw that more consumers today are now wanting grief counseling and support even after the services are over, it resonated with me that aftercare is even more important now than ever before. What are we as funeral and cemetery professionals doing for our client families after they leave our doors? Are we checking in with them? Did we thank them for choosing our business as their care provider? While I know that we are all busy and our workloads are hectic, instances like this are when that small handwritten note can make a large impact on our client families.

A handwritten note with words of thoughtfulness and gratitude will be remembered long after the note is tossed, or for us emotional types, placed in a memory box to reference when you need a smile or a pick-me-up. Regardless of your level in our profession, I encourage and challenge you to get out your stationery and pen and write a note of thanks to your client families.

From a leadership standpoint, they demonstrate humanity and appreciation in the simplest forms that can exceed generational gaps and cultural differences. More importantly, a handwritten note of appreciation can change the course of someone's day, week, or even life.

When you think about it, our clients are grieving. An unexpected note to check in on them and to wish them well can make such an impact. These simple but powerful acts separate you from your competitors; and to the recipient, these notes become treasured mementos tucked away with lasting impact.



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From a marketing standpoint, handwritten notes demonstrate your core values of showing that you care for your clients, and they showcase your funeral business as a leader within your community.



From a marketing standpoint, they demonstrate your core values of showing that you care for your clients and they showcase your funeral business as a leader within your community. Plus, it is a great time to put on your design hats and create a perfectly branded piece of collateral that features your logo and brand colors. You can lose yourself for hours in all the designed stationery templates on programs like Canva and Vista Print.

An Uncommon Tradition

In 2023, the handwritten note is a rare find. When we receive a letter or card in the mail, we know that it has importance tied to it. The assumption is that whoever sent this note took the time (and care) to put what they have to say in writing. A handwritten note can serve as a powerful reminder of the interaction that prompted

the thank-you in the first place. It maintains the personal connection in what we do for our client families—serving with compassion, care, and empathy.

In a world of robots ... be human. 📧

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