

# Cremation, & Virtual

---


*The cemetery of the future must offer Good, Better, and Best options for the preservation of cremated remains, above ground and below ground. Give people options.*

---

# Memorials Visits

by Daniel M. Isard, MSFS

## A Glimpse at the Cemetery of the Future



**AM OLD ENOUGH TO REMEMBER** the very first episodes of The Jetsons. This futuristic primetime cartoon showed us the world of tomorrow. While so many of the concepts still have not come to be, many have! But The Jetsons never had a cartoon character die, so we never got to see how George or Jane would have been interred in the future. With all due respect to Hanna-Barbera Productions, here is my best guess at the cemetery of the future.

Why is this concept even print worthy for this magazine? Well, you have a major investment in this business for which you have stewardship. Your stewardship will last until you retire and pass that responsibility on (in a nonprofit) or until you sell it (in the case of a management agreement or a for-profit).

In most cases, you have a business with inventory that is measured in years and maybe lifetimes. An acre could bury about 1,200 bodies; but as the cremation rate increases, that same space could provide ground interment for about 40,000 cremated remains. Since only about 20% to 40% of cremated bodies are formally interred into a cemetery, that means that one acre could require a time equal to about 100,000 to 200,000 deaths in your service area! The period of active selling and interring is going to expand beyond anyone's comprehension.

Generally, a master plan should have a developed area that represents about five years of consumption. Due to changing trends in cremation, what used to be five years of inventory can now be 10 to 20 years of inventory. The cemetery of 100 years ago did not have any special offerings for cremation choosing consumers because they did not even make up 1% of all deaths. Now with most consumers choosing cremation, the cemetery of the future must be a cremation-focused offering.

### Change in Business Plan

Two generations ago, funeral homes and cemeteries fought as to who sold the vault and marker. Today that fight continues, but it is fought far less often. The irony to cemetery management is that you must look further ahead than funeral home management. You must make decisions on quantity and diversity of inventory, not just opening and closing graves. So, the further we can investigate the future, the better.

As I investigate the future, there are three dynamics that must be built into your future business plans. Allow me to address each one at a time.

### Future Cast 1. Cremation.

Not much of a guess, huh? I agree. But for the cemetery, that cremation issue must be addressed in a much more affirmative marketing effort. Right now, with burial consumers, your competition is your other neighboring cemeteries. At worse, you must fight to serve veterans, contrasting the free grave at a veteran cemetery.

When marketing to cremation families, you have several battle fronts. First is the time to make an interment decision. With burial, at-need consumers must make this decision within a few days. Cremation consumers have an unlimited timeframe to choose an interment decision. You must market not only to pre-need cremation consumers but the at-need cremation consumer and address the perils of the delayed decision.

The cremation consumer is different in another obvious way. As I stated previously, only about 20% to 40% of consumers inter (inurn) cremated remains. The rest do not need a cemetery for interment or

stewardship of the cremated remains. The romantic idea of scattering as opposed to the permanence of a niche is something we do not challenge. The idea of the sun setting cliff, idyllic calm ocean or lake, the favorite campground, or (dare I even mention it) being scattered at the site of the favorite sports team's field, is tough to argue with.

For religious cemeteries, there are rules and traditions for a proper burial that dictate behavior. But for those who are non-sectarian or spiritual rather than religious, they have options. Any watcher of Storage Wars knows how many cremated remains are found in abandoned storage

lockers because many people just do not want to face the reality that a decision has to be made.

For many years, we did family follow-up surveys for clients. If the family chose cremation, we asked a follow-up question only of those families. The question was, "What have you decided to do with the cremated remains of your loved one?" Almost 90% had not made the decision of what to do within six weeks after the funeral! We then followed up with options and found about 20% intended to place those cremated remains within a cemetery, about 50% intended to scatter at some future event, and the remainder had no idea.

The cemetery of the future must offer Good, Better, and Best options for the preservation of cremated remains, above ground and below ground. Give people options. Glass front niches tend to sell for 3 to 4 times what closed niches sell for because they have a personalization factor that illuminates the life inurned, not just shutting it in.

The cemetery of the future has to offer options including multiple inurnments in ground, maybe 4 or 5 or more deep. Yes, that is a price thing, but the chance to amend your business plan so that the opening/closing fee becomes a bigger part of your income is in play here. Imagine if a tube uses 1 sq. ft. of ground. If you can put 2 urns in that tube, you charge \$X. Maybe a tube that is 3 or 4 deep is \$1.5 X. But each time the tube needs to be opened and closed, that is a source of profitable income. We need to be thinking creatively.

### Future Cast 2. Memorial Preservation.

Cemeteries are complex businesses. To the anthropologist, they are stewards of the dead body. To the sociologist, they are places that help people preserve life stories. I do not think we do a good enough job helping families understand this facet of our purpose.

For those scattering, why not have a beautiful scattering area in your property? Along with the scattering fee, you can offer a memorialization via a growing artwork. I helped design a cremation-focused cemetery in a foreign country. The idea was the cremated remains would be turned into gemstones and those gemstones could be put into a mural. We offered two murals to start. The mural could be photographed,

Caring for every need, every day.



**NMS** NATIONAL MORTUARY SHIPPING & CREMATION

800-321-0185

We Are Available to Take Your Call 24/7

### Experts In:

Domestic & International Shipping • Cremation  
Flight Booking • Embalming • Livery • Airline Transfers • Graveside Services  
Airline & Shipping Requirements • Consulate Paperwork & Translation

### Download Our Free App



Download for iPhone



Download for Android

Our app makes it easier than ever to give new death calls, setup pre-arranged shipping and cremation calls, request price quotes, and more.

[natlmortuaryshipping.com](http://natlmortuaryshipping.com)

and the growing developing image sent to each family whose loved one's gemstone is encased within that mural. There was a virtual inscription of each name that was part of this mural. Was this expensive? Yes! But in the Good, Better and Best of marketing, this represented an offering within the Best category.

We need to bring properties to life. We need to do that by bringing the living onsite after their loved one's death. We should offer monthly events to encourage people to come and visit the property and the interment/inurnment or memorial site.

Programs that can feature music, speakers, religious services, veteran's events, national holidays, aftercare and outreach, and other events should be planned. These events can be the keystone of your website, showing pictures and videos. Interviews and testimonials of survivors can be added to your website. Your website must show how you are different. Capture programs that you have done and announce those publicly on your website and social media.

### Future Cast 3. The Virtual Cemetery.


Imagine you want to visit the grave of a loved one. You must do it during daylight hours. The consumer must get dressed in the proper clothing for the outdoor visit. The consumer then must drive. They arrive onsite and must walk to the grave, niche, or crypt area, which

**You cannot keep people alive, but you can assist the family in keeping their memory alive longer.**

may be on uneven land. The weather must cooperate as well. All that assumes you reside in the same area as the cemetery. How often do people relocate after their partners' die or kids move out of the area?

Imagine if you build a virtual cemetery. People can visit 24 hours a day, regardless of weather. Imagine if you capture the obituary, maybe photos from the family of the deceased, have music playing in the background. Now, in addition to having a place for the interment or memorial capture onsite, you offer this as part of the package. Imagine how powerful your offering would be for families regardless of their choice of burial or cremation.

The English artist, Banksy, is quoted as having said, *"They say you die twice. One time when you stop breathing and a second time, a bit later, when somebody says your name for the last time."* You cannot keep people alive, but you can assist the family in keeping their memory alive longer.

Let each member cemetery commit to helping families make good decisions. 

**Dan Isard** is founder of The Foresight Companies, which has served thousands of funeral homes nationwide for four decades. Articles in this series can be found on the Insights section of theforesightcompanies.com. Contact Dan at 602-274-6464 or [disard@theforesightcompanies.com](mailto:disard@theforesightcompanies.com).

# ENGRAVE ENDURING MEMORIES

WITH THE PERFECT PAIR



Create Personalized Memorials with AP Lazer Machines and SuperNova Granite



24/7-365 Tech Support



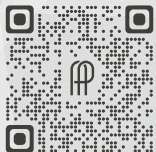
Removable Base for Large Objects



High Detailed Engraving



Complete Business Solutions



Learn how to provide families the ultimate tributes to their loved ones!

Visit us at [aplazer.com](http://aplazer.com) or call 800-585-8617.



Mention **APLAZERFUNERAL** to Receive **10% off** Your AP Lazer Machine **AND** SuperNova Granite for **3 Full Years**

