



What's with the Dirty Carpet and Stale Donuts?

**Three Things You Can Do Right Now
to Future Proof Your Business**

by The Foresight Companies and SoCal Approach



ACCORDING TO A RECENT ARTICLE published by the University of Kansas School of Education & Human Sciences¹, the U.S. education system “has been struggling to keep up with other countries in terms of educational performance ... The consequences of this educational gap are far-reaching ... The USA is now the worst-educated workforce in the industrialized world.”

Based on the results of our **2024 Funeral & Cemetery Consumer Behavior (FCCB)** study, the U.S. funeral and cemetery profession may just be in a similar position when it comes to educating consumers about both its products and services ... and itself.

And that’s not all. Other data from recent FCCB studies highlight another key challenge facing the funeral and cemetery industry: an impending avalanche of customers who live their lives online and will expect to be able to do the same when arranging for funeral and cemetery-related products and services.

For an industry that is, by its own admission, not always on the forefront of change, improving consumer education and building a better online business environment will not be easy.

But wait, there’s good news: working to solve one of the challenges may also help address the other.

The FCCB study, published by The Foresight Companies and conducted by SoCal Approach Research and Marketing, is the profession’s most comprehensive examination of consumer attitudes. It has been conducted annually since 2020 and focuses on consumer attitudes and experiences with both the funeral and cemetery industries.

In 2023 and 2024, the study was expanded to include industry professionals, providing a fascinating and invaluable look at how consumers view the profession in comparison to how things look from the inside.

Based on the most recent results, and to paraphrase a popular sound bite, “Houston, we have some problems.”

You Think They Know, But They Don’t Know

As noted in the introduction of the FCCB study, the first thing consumers told us was that too many of them just don’t know enough about their options. In both the 2023 and 2024 studies, four-out-of-ten consumers agree with the statement: “I don’t know enough about funeral and cemetery products and services to make informed decisions.” That figure grows to over 50% if we consider only those consumers who have not had any past experience with the industry.

While this shouldn’t come as a surprise, it should raise some eyebrows. For example, the average consumer buys a new car every seven years. Think about the last time you bought a new car. How much has changed? Are you familiar with all the newest safety technology? Can you locate all the diagnostic information on what used to be the dashboard? Can you connect your phone?

Think about products and purchase processes that are both infrequent and have many decision points. Buying a car and buying a home are processes where consumers don’t want to make a mistake.

65%

of customers say they lacked proper education about cremation, burial, and memorialization options.

- 2024 FCCBS

Now, add in the fact that ours is a very final decision. Buy the wrong cell phone, and it's an expensive mistake, but it's fixable. Buy the wrong casket? That's more problematic. It's understandable why so many consumers feel uninformed. For many, the first time they're having the discussion is when they find themselves making an at-need decision.

Even After the Process, Customers Feel Under-Educated

Even those who have recently purchased or arranged for services wish they had been educated better. In fact, two-thirds of the profession's customers say they lacked proper education about things like cremation options, burial options, and memorialization alternatives. And while there is some variation across products/services, the profession may be assuming consumers already know more than they do.

Consider caskets, probably the most well-known product in the industry: only 53% of customers, barely half, say they received education about casket options. It's been widely reported that cremation rates continue to skyrocket, however only 29% of consumers received what they consider appropriate education about memorialization options for cremated remains.

"On the one hand, call volume is down across the board, but here we are missing opportunities to drive revenue," said Chris Cruger, CEO of The Foresight Companies. "We know cremation customers want to memorialize, but we're not educating them on their option. We're leaving money on the table—money consumers are telling us they are willing to spend if only they were aware of their options."



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– Chris Cruger
CEO, The Foresight Companies

Are You Prepared to Ride the Technology Wave?

Online demands and expectations of the profession are going to explode in the near future. While only about one-third of recent customers (35%) went online to research and conduct their business, 70% of future customers plan to do so. And that's just the beginning.

When asked which websites they plan to visit to educate themselves on their options, roughly 7-in-10 consumers essentially give two answers: (1) Google and (2) the websites of the funeral homes and cemeteries they are considering. No other online destinations are even close with the Better Business Bureau a distant third at 22%.

These future customers want to be able to DO a lot more than just browse products and prices. Yes, access to clear pricing is critical, as almost 90% of customers want that. But between 70% and 80% also expect to be able to do much more, such as pay online, complete their paperwork online, and make their arrangements

fully online. These expectations will require the profession to set its sights well beyond simply meeting FTC requirements related to the information being offered online.

Current customers aren't exactly brimming with confidence in the profession's ability to deliver when it comes to digital tech. Ratings of both the profession and its professionals for delivering-on and explaining technology are among the lowest of 11 attributes consumers are asked about.

"The profession responded during COVID by streaming funerals, but the next technology step will be much more challenging," said Foresight's marketing manager, Nicole Vullo. "Consumers expect a simple-to-navigate user experience and clear pricing to make research easy. Right now, many of our locations struggle to present themselves well in the digital universe"

Ensuring the landscaping is well executed, the location is painted, the interior is clean with comfortable chairs and fresh coffee are all priorities for your physical location, but what about the digital equivalent of your business—your website? Is it well maintained? Everything easy to find? No broken links? All the information a browsing customer could want and presented in an easy-to-consume format? For too many locations, they're still presenting the equivalent of dirty carpet and stale donuts.

What Does the Profession Have to Say?

Based on what recent and future customers have to say, the profession clearly faces an imperative to improve how it deals with John Q. Public. A much more expansive vision of an online experience is an imperative, coupled with the need to do a much better job in helping customers understand what is available to them in their time of need. Unfortunately, some of the answers obtained from its professionals should give the industry pause.

We asked industry insiders to share their single biggest concern about the future of the profession, then used AI to aggregate the open responses into different categories. Twenty-one percent identified "Not Adapting to Consumer Change" as their biggest concern.

One professional commented about the industry's "*unwillingness to engage the consumer, find out what they desire and make the necessary changes requested.*" This comment was representative of the idea that, despite consumer preferences changing, the prevailing attitude remains that we will "do it the way we've always done it."

The professionals we spoke with were spot-on in one key area. They are concerned with our ability to provide consumers with

71%

of consumers plan to research their funeral or cemetery purchase online.

– 2024 FCCBS



“By educating consumers on their options, we’re not only driving revenue, but we are easing the burden of a family member who wants to do right by their loved one.”

—Mike Cooperman, chief marketing officer,
SoCal Approach

technology-based products and services, with only 44% confident we can do so.

In this area, consumers agree—it’s one of their biggest concerns as well. In a world where commerce is increasingly done online, resistance to change in this area seems akin to screaming into the wind.

1. Admitting you have a problem is the first step in fixing it.

Is *your* staff doing a good job of educating the customer on their options? On the whole, consumers are telling us they need more education, but maybe your location is doing a fantastic job.

So how do you know? Organizations that are delivering world-class customer service are asking their customers for feedback. They’re not afraid to hold the mirror up to their own business and identify the flaws.

“You’ll never know you have a problem if you don’t ask,” said George Owens, president of SoCal Approach Research and Marketing. “Many of the locations we work with didn’t recognize the opportunities that were right in front of them. Increased education of the consumer will lead to increased revenue.”

2. More Training, More Listening, More Selling.

Listening to the voice of the customer has added benefits beyond ensuring families receive great service. If you’re asking the right questions, consumers are actively telling you how to increase their per-transaction spend AND improve their experience.

Even in an at-need situation where time may be of the essence, appropriate and timely follow-up may help identify consumer needs that, at the time, simply weren’t top priority.

For example, “More than 50% of consumers who have cremated remains want to memorialize, they simply aren’t clear what their options are,” according to Mike Cooperman, chief marketing officer for SoCal


Approach. “By educating consumers on their options, we’re not only driving revenue, but we are easing the burden of a family member who wants to do right by their loved one.”

3. Ensure Your Digital House is in Order.

Our friend and colleague, Doug Gober, was sharing insights from the FCCB survey with a large audience last year. When the topic turned to technology, and more specifically, websites, one funeral director got animated. “My customers don’t care about websites,” he proclaimed.

That may be true ... right now. But we know the “future” consumer. And when we say that we are talking about younger Boomers and older Gen Xers, and they are digitally savvy. And they expect to find everything they’re looking for online.

But don’t think consumers are simply looking for pricing, which they absolutely are. They are ALSO looking for information to educate themselves, and reviews to understand what other consumers have experienced.

If your website and your Google Reviews aren’t in order, you’ve got a mess on your hands. The good news is, in this case, one hand washes the other. A website complete with transparent pricing information as well as simple-to-access, easy-to-consume educational information, will help consumers understand their options, ask the right questions, and understand the value they’re receiving for the service you’re delivering. 

The Foresight Companies, one of the largest consulting firms serving the funeral and cemetery business, is dedicated to leveraging its expertise in operations, finance, mergers and acquisitions and other key areas necessary to drive success in the space.

SoCal Approach Marketing and Consulting Group was founded to measure, identify and execute insights-driven marketing solutions that businesses can use to better understand and reach their target audiences.