

Is Our Profession Having a Full-Blown Customer Service Crisis?

The Funeral and Cemetery Consumer Behavior Study (FCCBS) uncovered an alarming and persistent issue between consumers and our Profession. The funeral and cemetery profession is facing a growing disconnect between what today's families expect and what many providers are delivering. This white paper explores whether that gap signals a full-blown customer service crisis—and what businesses must do to regain trust, relevance, and long-term loyalty.



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INTRODUCTION

We recently released the results of the sixth installment of the annual Funeral and Cemetery Consumer Behavior Study (FCCBS), our study of the behaviors, attitudes, and expectations of both consumers and funeral service professionals regarding the funeral and cemetery profession. The 2025 results include many important findings, including the Profession's continued struggle to adapt to an increasingly online customer and the customer's continued struggle to understand their options and make informed decisions. Neither of these findings is new, and we have highlighted their importance for the past several years of the study.

There IS something that has caught our attention this year, a potentially alarming set of findings that, when taken individually, seem relatively minor, but when grouped together, signal a significant challenge for our profession. Specifically, there are a multitude of distressing signs that we may be having a customer service crisis. Consider the following...

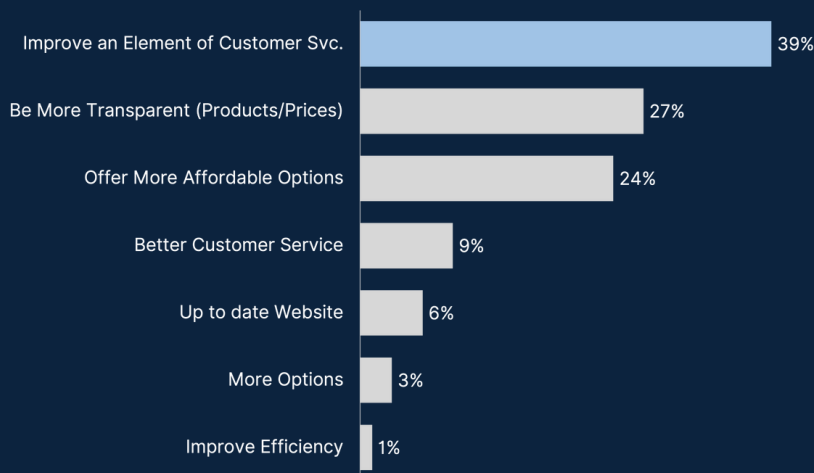
CONSUMER COMMENTS POINT TO IT

We asked consumers to tell us, in their own words, what the Profession could do to improve their experience. Some suggestions are obvious, such as the two most common answers, one focusing on the

need for more transparency with product and pricing information and the other focusing on more affordable options. One could easily dismiss everything else from this chart as trivial given the gap between the top two findings and the rest.

However, when we use machine learning algorithms to aggregate these customer comments into categories, these answers form a critical throughline that points out the need for better customer service overall. Furthermore, by grouping all the individual answers into one "Improve an Element of Customer Service", that suddenly becomes the most common suggestion, with four-in-ten customers citing the need for our profession to be better.

FIGURE 1: CONSUMER FEEDBACK



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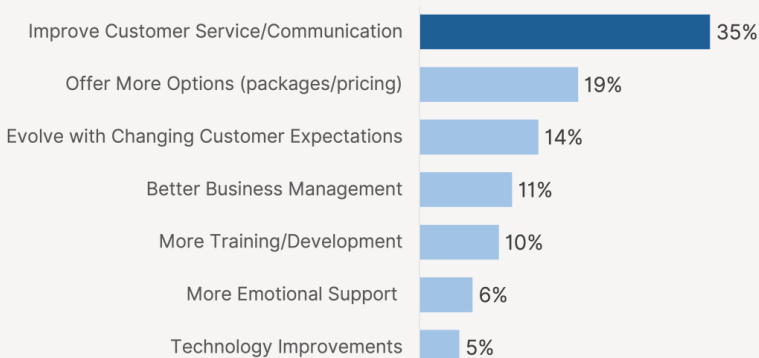
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INDUSTRY INSIDERS RECOGNIZE IT

We also asked the profession insiders to rate their own profession across ten attributes. Most respond with high ratings across the board. But some do not and give a lower rating to the profession. We followed up with this group and asked them why they gave lower ratings, and what specifically do they believe the profession needs to do better.

Their responses were clear and needed no additional digging. Improve Customer Service was overwhelmingly the most common answer with over one-third of insiders pointing to it.

FIGURE 2: INDUSTRY INSIDERS' FEEDBACK



LACK OF EDUCATION IS REINFORCING IT

Consumers continue to report that the profession is not giving them enough education about their options and that, as a result, they don't believe they know enough to make an informed decision.

Can this be true? Can a profession that prides itself on providing compassionate and qualified care to families at a time of deep need really be facing a crisis of customer service? Data from the FCCBS study suggests that the answer is "yes".

In addition to that data, the recent experiences of one of our own insiders who was helping with a friend's arrangements speak to this very challenge.

A CASE STUDY: ONE INSIDER'S RECENT EXPERIENCE

Let us introduce you to "Amy". Amy's best friend Linda would have turned 45 years old on June 24, 2025. Unfortunately, Linda lost her battle with cancer and died before reaching that milestone. Although deeply saddened by the loss of her friend, Amy's grief was tempered by the fact that because she worked as a supplier to the Profession, she would be able to provide much-needed assistance to Linda's mother in making necessary arrangements.

Amy's help would be especially important since Linda did not have pre-arrangements in place, and Linda's mother had never been involved in making funeral arrangements. To complicate matters, Linda's mother lived almost 2,000 miles away. The only guidance Amy had given was "something Catholic", thus Linda's mother was faced with several choices that she knew little about, other than these decisions had to be made quickly.

As they made their way through the process, Amy and Linda's mother experienced multiple instances of poor customer service – lack of communication, lack of information on next steps, and a considerable amount of waiting with no explanation. One event came dangerously close to outright fraud – along the lines of "just sign this contract and we'll fill in the details later."

In the end, Linda's arrangements were completed successfully. She was cremated, a beautiful funeral mass was held for her, her ashes were placed in an elegant urn, and she was memorialized in mailbox niche at a beautiful Catholic cemetery. But there were plenty of customer service "speed bumps" along the way, some of which you'll read in more detail below.

If we look back through the past five-years of FCCBS results, there are several warning signs that align with Amy's recent experience that the Profession hasn't made much progress when it comes to dealing with our customers.

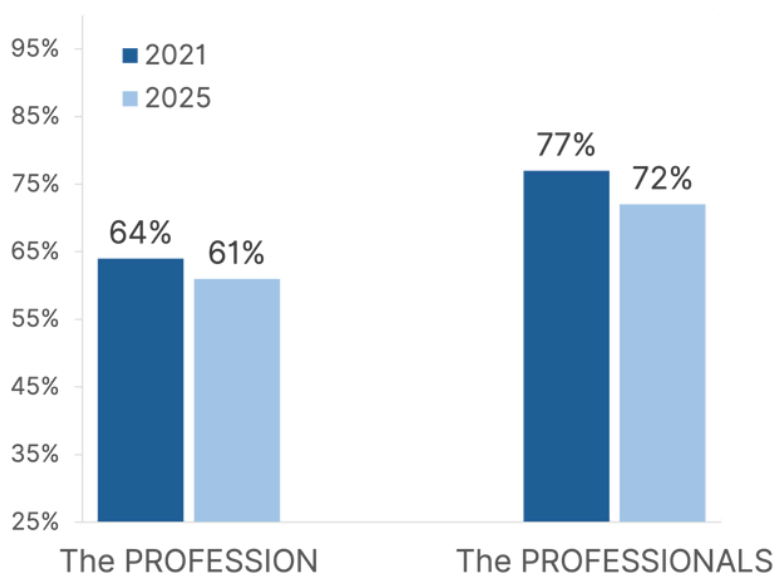


RATINGS OF THE PROFESSION AND ITS PROFESSIONALS HAVE NOT IMPROVED

Each year, the FCCBS Study solicits customer ratings of the Profession and its People across a number of characteristics, including things like Professionalism, Honesty, Ability to Meet a Budget, and Going Above and Beyond.

If we calculate the average rating across all those characteristics, then track that average rating over the past five years, we see that BOTH the ratings of the Profession AND the ratings of the Professionals are lower today than they were five-years ago. Although the decline may appear small, the goal for any industry is to get better over time, not worse.

FIGURE 3: AVERAGE CONSUMER RATING

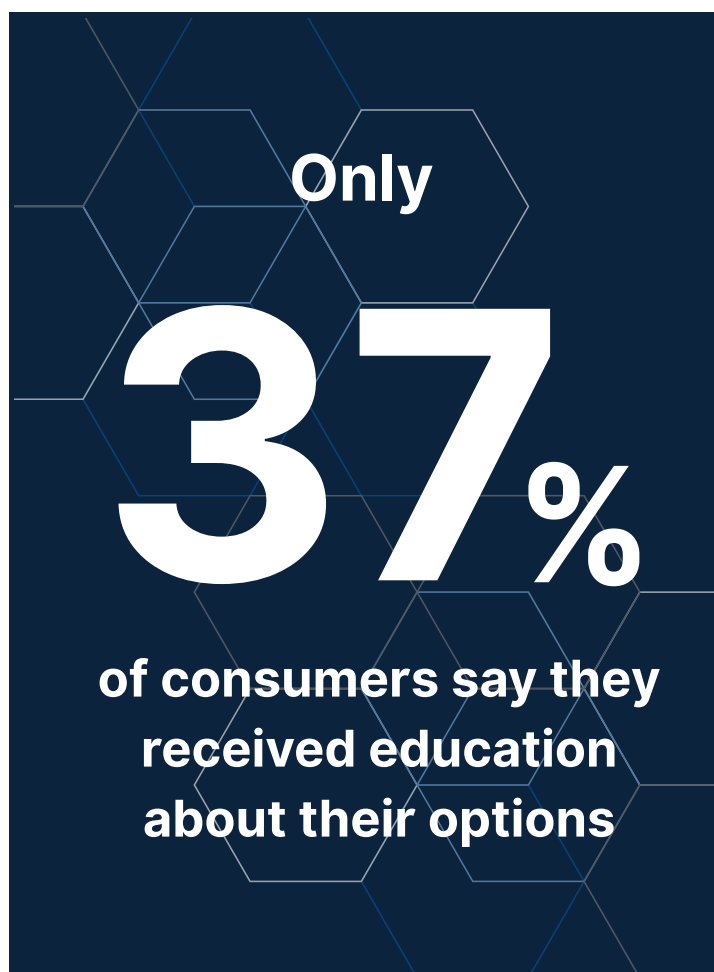


And that's not all. Of the ten specific attribute ratings that we can track over those same five years, nine are lower today than they were in 2021.

Unfortunately, the data from the FCCBS Study, whether it be the trends highlighted in the previous paragraph OR other key issues facing the Profession, are all consistent with the frustrations Amy personally experienced as she tried to guide Linda's mother through the process of making arrangements for her recently deceased daughter.

CUSTOMERS DON'T FEEL EDUCATED

The results of FCCBS have consistently shown that customers aren't getting the education they need, and that those inside the Profession are generally unaware of this problem. The gap between what consumers know and what we THINK they know is profound.



Take Linda's mother, who had never made funeral arrangements before. Linda did not have pre-arrangements in place, nor did she leave much in the way of her preferences before she died. As a result, Linda's mother was dependent on others to help her understand what options she had, how much they would cost, how long they would take, etc.

Just as the data from FCCBS suggests, the Profession was not as helpful as it could have been.



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After the body was cremated, Linda's mother had to make more choices:

- There were a lot of blocking and tackling questions like:
 - How quickly will the ashes be ready?
 - What kind of urn or container will they be in?
 - What are my choices for an urn in which to either bury or memorialize Linda's ashes.
 - Where at a cemetery can I place Linda's ashes for permanent memorialization? Again, neither the direct cremation provider nor the cemetery counselor was particularly available or helpful.
- The cremation provider did not show Linda's mother the rather plain "standard" urn they would use. She only learned about that from the cemetery counselor while discussing memorialization options. She was, unfortunately, very upset to find out that her daughter's ashes would have been delivered in such a plain plastic container had she not found out ahead of time.

- Even after Linda's mother settled on a mailbox niche at a local Catholic cemetery, the profession failed to help her understand some of the consequences of her actions. For example, nobody told her that she needed to provide the final urn to the cremation provider well in advance of the memorial ceremony for the ashes to be transferred. Linda's mother quite naturally assumed that transferring a small set of ashes from one urn to another could be done quickly and easily. Luckily, Amy was able to help Linda's mother avoid what could have been a stressful situation if Linda's mother had waited.

Without appropriate guidance and education, you can understand why consumers feel overwhelmed.

As it turns out, it was Amy and Linda's hospice nurse that provided the clearest and most helpful guidance to Linda's mother.

FIGURE 4: THE GAP BETWEEN CONSUMER AND PROFESSIONAL OPINION REGARDING EDUCATION

	Professionals Say They Offered It	Consumers Say They Received It	Gap
Education about Pre-planned Arrangements	88%	31%	57%
Education about Options for Cremated Remains	79%	32%	47%
Providing the Latest Technology	71%	25%	47%
Education about Different Urn Options	83%	36%	47%
Education about Keepsake and Memorial Products	79%	36%	43%
Providing Catering Services	52%	15%	37%
Education about Different Burial Options	77%	43%	33%
Providing a Venue for a Memorial Service	83%	52%	31%
Education about Different Casket Options	78%	51%	26%
Education about Different Cremation Options	52%	26%	26%
Providing Full-service Concierge Service	52%	37%	15%
Education about Cremation Scattering Services	35%	20%	15%



THERE IS A LACK OF TRANSPARENCY AROUND COST

The lack of transparency, especially around pricing, is another consistent theme in the FCCBS data over the past several years. Consumers have become accustomed to easy online access to information about pricing in most, if not all other industries and now expect the same from the funeral and cemetery profession. FCCBS results show that, so far, the profession is not delivering on that expectation.

Amy's recent experience included multiple instances that demonstrate what the data indicates.

For instance, when discussing the memorial niche options with the cemetery counselor, Amy and Linda's mother asked about pricing. Instead of having pricing information conveniently at hand, either in paper form or perhaps on a tablet, the counsellor made them wait while he returned to his office to get pricing information.

FIGURE 5: AVERAGE CONSUMER RATING



Amy described this wait as taking "way too long" and estimated their wait time at 15 minutes – akin to having a car salesman "check with their manager" about the price. She ended up filling this wait time by helping Linda's mother look at various urn options that were haphazardly scattered around the premises.

As a result, Amy described the experience as having a "used car dealership" atmosphere.

CUSTOMERS OFTEN DISTRUST THE PROFESSION AND ITS PEOPLE

Another concerning trend from FCCBS shows the for ratings for the Honesty of both the profession and its people have declined more than any other over the past five years. This decline was certainly reflected in Amy's experience.

As their meeting with the cemetery counselor wound down, Linda's mother made some tentatively final decisions on both the urn and niche for Linda's ashes.



At this point, she told the counselor that she wanted to take all the information with her so she could discuss it with her husband before finalizing everything. The cemetery counselor said he understood but also asked Linda's mother to sign a blank sales contract before she left, with the promise that he would then fill in her final selections.

The counselor may have had the best of intentions with this request, or he may have been hoping to take advantage of Linda's mother. Regardless, his actions created an undercurrent of doubt and mistrust in the minds of Amy and Linda's mother. It also contributed to the "used car dealership" atmosphere that Amy described previously. And while we recognize this is only one instance in the experience of one customer, it is consistent with what the data is telling us.

Does this mean that all cemetery and funeral counselors are dishonest? Of course not. After all, the ratings for Honesty remain relatively strong for funeral and cemetery professionals. The fact remains that consumer opinion of the honesty and trustworthiness of the profession and its people is headed in the wrong direction, and there's a reason for this decline.



HOW DO WE FIX THIS CUSTOMER SERVICE CRISIS?

It's tempting to view Amy's story as an unfortunate and unflattering, but ultimately atypical, experience with our profession. After all, this year's FCCBS results showed that our profession tends to be rated better than many other industries.

As tempting as that may be, it's probably a mistake given that this year's FCCBS results also show a disturbing lack of progress on multiple measures of the customer experience, not to mention some cases in which the profession has gotten worse over time:

- Customer ratings of the profession overall are lower today than they were in 2021.
- Customer ratings of the professionals are lower today than they were in 2021.
- Customers continue to feel that the profession does not provide enough transparency into the products and services it offers.
- The customer is not getting the education they need about their options.

So, what CAN we do to make the consumers experience better? The good news is, there are some simple things you can do today to enhance the customer experience.

Here are some best practices we've picked up from observing the locations that consistently get it right with their customers:

REALIZE CUSTOMERS NEED BASIC EDUCATION

Whether we're talking about the most basic services we provide or the latest and greatest products, stop assuming customers know what you're talking about. Most families simply don't know what they don't know.

And just when you think you've told them what they need to know, tell them again. If you think a single

conversation and one email will do the trick, you're wrong. Think about how much money big companies spend on integrated marketing campaigns that combine paid (advertising), owned (your website), and earned (public relations) media. They do it because they know they must hit consumers with different the same message in several different ways over an extended period to get the desired effect.

MEASURE YOUR CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Many locations would rather bury their head in the sand than recognize their own opportunities to improve. Locations that

deliver a world-class customer experience WANT to know what's working and where they can improve their processes.

Delivering outstanding customer service isn't just magnanimous. It's financially prudent. An effective customer experience leads to increased loyalty and a higher per-transaction value. If you're not doing it for them, do it for yourself! The annual cost of a simple customer feedback program can be paid for with a single additional pre-need sale.



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QUIT BEING AFRAID OF TRANSPARENCY

The fear our profession has at putting pricing online is understandable, but regrettable. If you think customers aren't ALREADY shopping you, think again. FCCBS tells us that customers are visiting multiple websites, review sites, and physical locations before they make their decision. And the younger the customer, the more likely they are to shop online.

While many locations are concerned that putting easy-to-understand pricing online will lead to a race to the bottom, a vast majority of customers simply want the confidence that they're not being taken advantage of.

And for those of you who say, "We have our GPL online", you're adhering to the letter of the law, but not the spirit. Look to other industries with complex pricing models that have done a much better job of making their online pricing consumable and understandable.

LEARN MORE

ABOUT FORESIGHT

At **The Foresight Companies**, we are passionate about the funeral and cemetery profession. As funeral home and cemetery consultants, we have one singular focus: our client's success. Our mission is to deliver exceptional solutions for the funeral and cemetery profession. We strive to exceed expectations, build meaningful relationships, and create value for every client we serve.

Our formula includes the knowledge gained from our Partners who have over 100 years of combined experience. We have the insight and experience to make a difference for you.

Chris Cruger, CEO, The Foresight Companies www.theforesightcompanies.com

ABOUT FORTITUDE

Fortitude Research and Marketing is dedicated to supporting the Profession with data-driven solutions that create measurable results. From a team steeped in both funeral and cemetery service and understanding the voice of the customer, our Customer Experience Platform (**CXP**) and Cremation Qualified Leads (**CQL**) programs are built to measure consumer feedback and drive pre-need revenue. Fortitude partners with The Foresight Companies each year to publish the Funeral and Cemetery Consumer Behavior Study (**FCCBS**), tracking and forecasting attitudes, opinions, and behaviors about the funeral and cemetery profession.

George Owens, President, Fortitude Research and Marketing www.fortitudeinsights.com

LEVERAGE OUR COLLECTIVE POWER

It only takes one negative story to turn into a black eye for our entire profession. We all know that it may be one bad apple, but as the proverb goes, it spoils the whole bunch. As a profession, we need to be better about telling our story – within our individual communities as well as nationwide. We are a profession of people who help families during dark times.

When faced with such challenges, other industries have collectively stepped up. From "Got Milk" to "Pork, The Other White Meat" and "Beef, It's What's For Dinner", state and national associations have used media to control the narrative and tell their story. The "Got Milk" campaign led to a significant surge in milk consumption at a time where beverages like soda had "eroded milk's place in consumer diets."

Perhaps the time is right for our Profession to take a collective and major step toward promoting ourselves to the consumers who will use us in the future.



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