



Preneed

By Patti Martin Bartsche

Preneed Touch Points

As a funeral professional, you understand the importance of a strong preneed program. But how can you make sure your preneed efforts are as good as they can be and your staff is working in the most thorough and efficient manner?

Our preneed partners are here to help, offering insights on your most common preneed problems.

Q “How important is preneed marketing in the digital age?”

A Tyler Hornibrook, vice president of marketing, Precoa



It's no secret that digital technology has taken a front seat in marketing. Businesses large and small, old and new, rely on digital marketing and the ability it provides to target, test, measure and optimize every message to every audience subset – to reach and influence consumers throughout every stage of the marketing funnel.

Because consumers today are so connected to their mobile phones and computers, digital marketing strategies can be used to reach them wherever they are, whenever marketers want, in a dizzying variety of ways. We've all been targeted by display advertising, social media advertising, email marketing, content marketing campaigns, survey capture forms, text messaging and more.

The funeral business is no different. But while the way you go about marketing your funeral home has probably changed dramatically over the past five or 10 years, your No. 1 marketing priority hasn't changed from the days before digital: it's still connecting and engaging with families.

Do you know how to best reach your target audience?

Today, baby boomers are the core target audience for funeral home marketing. Research shows that, like their younger millennial counterparts, they are active consumers of digital media. An overwhelming 82 percent of boomers use social media – mostly Facebook – while 95 percent use search engines and email (SOURCE: DMN3, 2018).

Although they're not nearly as reliant on social media and digital platforms as millennials, a significant portion of leading-edge boomers (those born between 1946 and 1955) use Facebook 11-plus hours per week (DMN3). And like younger consumers, they regularly visit and research information on company websites after being exposed to business messages on social media sites.

So it's reasonable to conclude that no funeral home marketing plan is complete without strategies that target baby boomers online.

Yet, results measurement can be misleading.

With the advent of social media came the ability to measure what's known as “engagement.” Suddenly, counting impressions gave way to counting “likes,” “shares,” “comments” and “reposts.” These engagement measures are what we call “vanity metrics” because they make marketers feel good and because they look good on paper. Vanity metrics have been adopted as a proxy for evaluating a marketing campaign's impact.

But more recently, the marketing world has grown skeptical of the value of vanity metrics. An article published in the Harvard Business Review explains why social media marketing by itself is not effective unless it's part of a comprehensive, multi-channel campaign. The article pointed to recent research that showed 80 percent of U.S. companies are unable to quantify the value of their social media efforts. Further, the research found that 87 percent of chief marketing officers at Fortune 500 companies acknowledged that they are unable to document whether social media creates new customers.

Harvard Business Review's researchers found that vanity metrics don't work the way many marketers think they do. In contrast to conventional wisdom, the simple action of liking a brand is not the same as

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endorsing it in the traditional sense, because people tend to click on “like” indiscriminately; therefore a like is not indicative of an individual’s behavior or intent to purchase from that brand. Liking a brand isn’t even predictive of a person’s future exposure to it: Because of Facebook’s complicated algorithm, there’s no guarantee that a follower will ever see a brand’s posts in their newsfeed, or that a follower’s friends will be aware of their endorsement of that brand. Therefore, likes alone do not conclusively influence behavior and purchase intent among friends.

Integration makes social media more effective

Preneed has a long purchase cycle, one in which the audience’s interest must be nurtured. Within that span, we have the opportunity,

and obligation, to be respectful of prospects’ time and attention, so we have to be highly intentional about every marketing interaction.

Social media is just one of many touch points to be used throughout the preneed marketing pipeline. Utilizing traditional marketing demographic data can help a preneed marketer build and refine their target digital audience and can also enable them to create personas – highly refined consumer descriptions that enable businesses to understand and categorize the motivations behind different target audience segments. Tying it all together into a multichannel marketing strategy, with informative content, advertising, and customized messaging that explains the value of preneed and why it matters, is the key. You must strike a careful balance between design, testing, tracking and

follow-up at every touch point.

Conclusions

It takes a tremendous amount of resources to be truly effective. You need preneed experts who are available on-demand to nurture prospects, follow-up with inquiries, respond to chat requests, and reply to emails with information tailored to each particular lead source. When the need for preneed planning or funeral services arises, families will make their first call to the provider who has invested in building a relationship with them. Most funeral homes can’t do it all alone; that’s why partnering with a multichannel preneed marketing expert is crucial. Using fewer in-house resources, you will be able to serve and provide a path to healing for more families in your community. •