

How to Reinvent, Retrain, and Refocus Your Cemetery Pre-need Sales Program in Response to COVID-19

By the ICCFA Disaster Management Committee

The following is based on information available as of April 1, 2020.

Our nations COVID-19 crisis and its significant effect on the economy is forcing traditional cemetery pre-need sales programs to reinvent, retrain, and refocus.

Reinvent your messaging - “Checking in” and “Providing a community service”

When it comes to the traditional cemetery pre-need sales program the message has not changed in years. It has always lead with the question “do you have your arrangements made?” and finished with “I am going to be in your area this Wednesday, what time should I stop by to visit and provide you your free family planning organizer?” At no time in history was this “cold call” thought to be insensitive or an outrageous ask of the prospective customer. Well today, that has all changed. For one, the leading question is a bit insensitive right now. And two, nobody is stopping by anyone’s home to drop by an FPO unless they want to be met with either a disinfectant pepper spraying or the business

end of a weapon. So, consider reinventing the messaging. People have been home for weeks; watching the news, microwaving leftovers, hoarding toilet paper, and talking with their families. There has never been a better time in our history to have the conversation about the inevitable. Rewrite your prospecting script to be more informational about your cemetery and what you're doing to support the community and help slow the spread of COVID-19. Once you have established yourself in a supportive role you can then offer an FPO as part of a community outreach program.

Retrain your presentation - Digital presentations

We all know cemeteries are not the most technologically advanced businesses out there. That is not to say that there isn’t a significant amount of technology available to us. However, most cemetery businesses have never taken advantage of these advancements. Well, now is the time to bring Internet to the Flintstones. Consider your vendor partners with digital arrangement platforms, cemetery mapping software, and web based memorial design

portals. You can also implement web-based document services for digital signatures on contracts, interment authorizations, bank draft and credit card authorizations. Programs like Zoom, Skype and Microsoft Teams allow counselors and families to interact face-to-face. These are all tools that once implemented can be used even after normal business practices resume.

Refocus your efforts – Aftercare, Seminars, Paid-in-full merchandise, Advertising

Think of all those families that counselors “didn’t have the time” to follow-up with after the service. There is a captive audience out there that is probably not even aware they can still visit the cemetery during this time. Using some of the aforementioned technology-based tools, counselors can engage families in aftercare appointments and provide information, documents, and tools electronically. Instead of the traditional lunch and learn, consider quarantine seminars using the digital platforms to gather groups and present using screen share technology. These same tools can be used to design and get instant proof approval on paid in full memorials. Every memorial designed, ordered, and set is revenue for the business. This is also another touch point with families that could result in upgrade opportunities, additional heritage sales and even referrals. Finally, look at your current marketing and advertising. Now more than ever people are shopping online and staying connected through social media. If you are not already, consider updating your web presence and deploying social media marketing that supports your prospecting messaging. 