

The push toward an increase of preneed sales is a good thing. This can provide the opportunity to sell traditional funeral products and services – thus reducing the cremation rate. However, I believe no one will produce enough preneed sales to offset their rise in cremations. The generations becoming responsible for the care of their deceased family members are different than the generations before. Many will pose the question: Why pay for an expense today, when it is easier to use a credit card at the time of need?

No longer is the term “disposition” as relevant as the word “disposal.” As distasteful as it sounds, cremations, like paper plates, allow for a quick, inexpensive solution of disposal. The current cultural acceptance and trends have moved away from traditional religious practices. One must realize the selection of cremation as a means of disposal is not always a financial decision. Often the cremated remains are never picked up and sit on shelves in funeral homes for years.

The daily reading of the obituary column where statements like “private services will be held at a later date” suggest a cremation service. I agree the intention of aftercare is good and provides preneed sales leads. However, if the participants can’t find the need for any type of service, one must question the usefulness of aftercare. Here again we see the cultural changes reducing the need for aftercare.

Talk among the industry typically includes comments about “how slow the death-care industry is to change.” Slow or not, the change is happening. Buggy whips became cruise control and the Pony Express became email. The challenge of the death-care provider is to recognize the changing trends and adapt to the change. Businesses not accepting and adopting change will experience failure.

The intent of this writing is not meant to be a negative assessment of the industry. It is meant to simply share my thoughts based on my per-

sonal conversations and experiences in the industry. If after reading this one feels uncomfortable, then I feel I have provided some good insight into the future of the industry. I would hope death-care professionals can take my thoughts and use them to evaluate their own internal operations, recognize where change is needed and implement plans to help secure their future.

In conclusion, where do I see the industry next year? Cultural trends will continue to mandate change in the death-care industry. Professionals not changing in a sufficient manner to meet the demands of the client will suffer the consequences. I do not expect to see significant changes as history indicates transitions in the industry just do not happen quickly. Just as families have a choice, so do death-care professionals: accept and adapt to change or not, both have consequences. I hope the industry is successful with navigating the changing society in which we live. My success depends on it as well.



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additional volume from their competitors. The key component to earning higher margins is educating the consumer.

Today’s consumer has instant access to information at their fingertips and is accustomed to using the internet to comparison shop or learn more about a product. Given this fact, doesn’t it make sense that consumers would be eager to receive information on funeral products they know very little about? It is critical that funeral providers and suppliers utilize websites, social media and other online platforms to distribute information that consumers so desperately need and want.

One example is the burial vault, one of the least understood products offered to consumers. In a 2013 independent research study conducted by Product Acceptance & Research,

78% of burial families did not know the difference between a burial vault and a grave box. However, after viewing a two-minute video explaining the basic construction, protective properties and personalization options of a burial vault, only 17% said they would choose a grave box – and yet industry averages are closer to 50%. The need for information, and the positive result of comprehensive education, couldn’t be clearer.

It is the funeral industry’s responsibility to provide consumers with information to make informed decisions about the products and services they are buying. Be consistent in the information you provide and do not filter it based upon what you perceive the consumer can afford or desires to buy. Explain the product choices, and you just might be surprised what your customer selects.

We are beyond the point of thinking that cremation will somehow slow down or in-ground burial will magically reverse its downward trend. A byproduct of cremation growth will be further consolidation of funeral providers and funeral suppliers. The funeral providers and suppliers who are successful at earning a higher margin on their traditional business will survive and be in position to acquire