

by Dale Filhaber

ICCFA Magazine author spotlight



dale@dataman
group.com
561.451.9302
1.800.771.3282

► Filhaber is president of Dataman Group Direct, Boca Raton, Florida. Filhaber has served as a member of the Florida Direct Marketing Association Board of Directors for

the past 26 years, and is a past president of the Florida Direct Marketing Association.

► In addition to being published in local press and DM industry trade journals, she is a frequent lecturer on direct marketing, having spoken to the national Direct Marketing Association as well as several Florida chapters, The Public Relations Society of America, the Small Business Administration, the Water Quality Association and local colleges.

► She is the author of several blogs, including Ask DataDale and Pure Water Profits. She publishes articles in many industry periodicals, with recent contributions in Water Technology and Southern Funeral Director's magazine.

► Filhaber has received many industry awards, including the Golden Mouse Award for Direct Marketing from Women in Ecommerce, an Up & Comers Award in Entrepreneurship from Price Waterhouse and the South Florida Business Journal and a Direct Marketing Association Golden Arrow.

► **Dataman Group Direct**, founded in 1981, provides results-driven direct mail and telemarketing lists to hundreds of clients across the country.

www.datamangroup.com

Editor's note

Preneed Sales Success, an ICCFA Magazine column by various authors, focuses on building success in sales, particularly the preneed sale of cemetery, cremation and funeral products and services. Submission inquiries are welcome. For details, contact ICCFA Magazine Managing Editor Susan Loving, sloving@iccfa.com.

PRENEED SALES SUCCESS

Planning your sales and marketing involves figuring out not only how to advertise and market online but also the best ways to generate both preneed and at-need sales.

Generating leads for preneed vs at-need sales

Every business relies on the process of marketing, lead generation and sales. Sure, there are different nuances on this theme, depending on the product or service and the price point of that product or service, but the core principles hold true, regardless of the industry.

The death-care profession is selling a product and/or a service. The end result of marketing and advertising efforts is the generation of leads so a salesperson can meet the prospect face-to-face to close the sale.

Many owners and managers of cemeteries and funeral homes are savvy marketers. They can tell you how many leads they need per month for each counselor; they can tell you their cost per appointment; they know how many preneed contracts they have versus how many calls they got for at-need services.

But many others are pretty much mystified by today's marketing landscape. Many of these are family-owned and -operated establishments that have operated a certain way for many years and are losing market share to operations using more sophisticated marketing techniques to drive lead generation.

Even when death-care establishment owners or operators want to upgrade marketing outreach, I think there is a real disconnect between knowing what they want to do and understanding how to do it.

As we move into 2017, owners and sales managers need to focus their marketing approach on their two core products: preneed and at-need arrangements.

In terms of marketing, generating preneed sales requires a focus on outreach (you need to find people to sell to). Improving at-need sales requires a focus on search (making it easy for people to find you).

First things first

Owners and sales managers need to understand that marketing dollars need to be budgeted across a 12-month period. The rule

of thumb is 5-10 percent of sales, depending on the organization's goal. The dollars need to be allocated between branding and visibility, direct marketing outreach and lead generation.

A well established, high-name-recognition cemetery or funeral home may need to spend less on branding and more on direct outreach; a newer establishment may need to spend a higher percentage of its marketing budget on branding and awareness.

At-need: The simple visibility test

How does a cemetery or funeral home know if it has visibility in its market? A simple Google search will tell the story in one minute. Since most cemeteries and funeral chapels are local, typing in your company's name and seeing what pops up is the easiest way to see if consumers can find you online.

If you don't see your own cemetery/funeral home listed, chances are that no one else can see you, either. If you do not see your company listed, get nervous, get serious and find a resource that will help you get visible ASAP.

If your cemetery or funeral home is way down on Google's list, you also need to be concerned, because consumers tend to click on the listings closer to the top.

If you are near the top of the list, great, because now you can concentrate on lead generation, since so much of the process focuses on driving consumers to your website and phone number.

Local search

There are many resources in the marketplace, companies that work with cemeteries and funeral homes to position them online for both local search and pay-per-click advertising.

Part of local search is driving free traffic to your website. It is paramount that your cemetery or funeral home is properly listed

on Google Local Plus and the mapping sections of Google and Bing.

You want to make sure that a consumer using a mobile phone can find you, see your location and simply click to connect to your phone number. This is vital. In the world of at-need service, when a death occurs, consumers are not going to spend time looking around.

They will reach for their cell phones and start clicking on the top listings they see. They need convenience, they need efficiency and you need to ensure that your name will be front and center.

Other components of local search include submissions and registrations on other local resource websites, including the internet Yellow Pages. Again, when it comes to at-need business, you need to be found at the top of the list, you need to be found quickly and the system has to be in place for a quick click to call.

Pay per click

This is where you pay to have your cemetery or funeral home listed in prime internet real estate so that consumers will be able to find your listing near the top of the page. If you cannot get to the top of the page with free organic local search efforts, then you need to bite the bullet and pay for it.

Again, the at-need consumer is not going to start scrolling around looking for your listing. Visibility is key.

Most firms work with an outside company to set up their Google Ad Words account, create the actual campaign ads and put together an appropriate keyword list. It's vital to select the right keywords that consumers typically click on when they search for a cemetery or funeral home, and at the same time strategically budget the keywords to maximize results.

There are companies that will set this up for you and then turn it over to you to manage your campaign. Other companies provide monthly reporting and maintenance options. Either way, cemeteries and funeral homes need to allocate dollars to this part of their marketing budget.

Facebook

Many cemeteries and funeral homes are using Facebook advertising to help them get in front of prospects in their local area. One option is to upload your customer list and ask Facebook to find "look-alikes."

Facebook ads can help with visibility and

branding, since a company can pay to have its ad appear on their prospect's Facebook newsfeed.

New in the marketplace: uploading/matching a direct mail list to Facebook to create a blended campaign. Marketers can time their Facebook ads so they will start to appear just before their printed piece arrives in mailboxes.

Since response increases with the number of impressions a prospect experiences, adding another channel to the marketing mix is a real plus.

Lead generation for preneed sales

Direct mail is still the #1 driver of lead generation in the death-care business, whether it is used to invite prospects to a lunch seminar or offer a home-delivered premium that culminates in an in-home presentation.

Cemetery owners should not fool themselves into thinking they can do one direct mailer and people will be walking in the door. Direct mail is not an event, but a well-planned series of touches that affirms brand, serves as a reminder and becomes part of the conversation regarding preneed planning. It is an essential part of your preneed marketing tool box.

Direct mail does not sell preneed. It sets up the opportunity for your salespeople to sell preneed.

It is a lead generation tool.

Many death-care marketers have explored EDDM (every door direct mail). Some have done well; others not so much. Most marketers have found that for preneed sales, it's far more efficient and cost-effective to target the best-performing market segments:

- Households with an older adult
- Planners
- Selected seniors
- Birthday lists
- Veterans
- Individuals whose parents had preneed plans

Marketers need to keep in mind the importance of matching the creative piece and the offer to the market segment for best response. The message to a 60-year-old about his or her parent is substantially different from the message that will resonate with a veteran.

But you have to test. One of the primary strengths of direct mail is our ability to measure its efficiency. So keep in mind the four principles of direct mail testing:

1. Run a test. 2. Analyze the results.

3. Tweak based on findings. 4. Repeat.

Test only one element at a time. This is the best way to know for sure if your mail piece is working.

Funeral home and cemetery managers also need to look at their own databases. This can be a tremendous source of great information which can be used to clone or develop new prospect lists. These lists can be kept current through NCOA (National Change of Address) and data-appending processes.

It's also a great idea to contact families on your customer list. Since these are your actual customers, it's OK to call them on the phone. Using the personal touch, you can update data and obtain new next-of-kin and family information.

Remember, individuals who had a positive experience with a family member's preneed arrangements are great leads, open to making their own prearrangements.

Telemarketing is still a viable lead-generation tool for some companies. Even though Do Not Call laws have made the search for good quality telephone numbers much more challenging, telemarketing can still bring home good leads.

Sure, things were great in the "olden days," when you could call 10 homes, speak to two people and make one appointment for a home visit, giving a salesperson the opportunity to close the sale. Today, only 10 percent of consumers are available to call, and the best phone numbers have been taken off the market.

However, for funeral homes and cemeteries in rural markets with spotty cell phone coverage, or in areas with a large Hispanic population, telemarketing is still a great, low-cost outreach tool for generating leads and setting up appointments.

The last word

People buy from people. No one is going to plunk down \$10,000 on a mausoleum space because they got a brochure in the mail. The goal of a lead generation program is to set the stage for the personal appointment. That's what will close the sale.

Final comment: Cemetery and funeral home owners and sales managers need to understand that they must have a working marketing plan that the entire sales team buys into. It takes a team effort to create and embark on an ongoing marketing program that takes into consideration both at-need's "need to be found" and preneed's "need to find." □