



Pre-Plan Your Marketing Needs With Direct Mail

As a funeral director, you face a unique advertising obstacle. Your services are rarely in the forefront of people's minds, but it is ultimately needed by everyone. Even with the success of HBO's hit series "Six Feet Under," which centers around the Fisher and Sons Funeral Home, the subject is still not very popular among the general public. Your community needs to be aware of your special services and getting your message into their homes should be a top priority. This is where marketing comes in and direct mail marketing is a great place to start. Isn't that what the Fisher boys would do?!

We know that pre-planning a funeral makes sense and offers peace of mind, yet the majority of people are reluctant to talk about it. To promote your business properly, you must develop a marketing and advertising strategy flexible enough to promote the benefits of pre-planning and at the same time promote your business. One way to achieve this is through the different avenues of targeted direct mail advertising.

Getting Started

There are many different ways to utilize a direct mail campaign. Direct mail devices can illustrate the simplicity and personalization of the services you provide. Your campaign can share the benefits of how your crematory services are a current and valuable option. It can also be an efficient way to promote your company name and help you find new clients.

Steve Zuckerman, president of Clipper Magazine notes, "From the

outset of your marketing campaign, you must make sure you keep your message clear and concise. No one wants to read anything complicated if they don't have to. Think of an appealing way to bundle your professional services together so they can be read quickly without losing any of their meaning. You can certainly create direct mail devices that promote your business and services at full price, yet you can also make them an offer they can't refuse. Be sure to include all of your telephone, email and website contact information to give potential clients a number of different ways to contact you about your great services."

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Zuckerman, adds, "Branding your business through repeated and consistent direct mail strategies will make people think of you first in their time of need. People are more likely to do business with a company that can offer them a fair deal, even though it is still important to advertise your name, services and special benefits. All too often, funeral home directors and operators do not take full advantage of advertising their pre-need promotional offers. Whether you are providing discounts

for pre-planning, a free initial consultation or special rates on vaults, monuments or burial caskets, you need to make sure people know not just who you are but what you offer. Regardless of how generous your promotions are, they will not help your business if the public is unaware of them."

It's best to hire a professional graphic designer or a marketing agency to design your direct mail campaigns rather than to create something that may look unprofessional. After you have a great looking direct mail piece, pass the proof around to your partners and employees. Ask them for their input. Like the Fisher's, you probably have employees like Rico who are more like partners. This is a great opportunity to make sure your direct mail device conveys the message that you want to get across. You should also show it to some of your business associates. They will gladly offer valuable advice and insight about your message and design.

Safety in Numbers or the Power of One?

If you are going the solo direct mail route, it is a good idea to send

colorful postcards whenever possible. The postage is less expensive than standard mail and unlike envelopes; they don't have to be opened for the potential client to immediately see your offer. Use a high quality paper stock for your postcards, because they are more durable and they are more appealing to the recipient. For solo direct mail, you will need to write the copy, create the artwork, determine your targeted markets, and hire a local direct mail house to facilitate the mailing. As you investigate the pricing of a solo direct mail campaign, you may discover the financial benefits of nationally respected direct mail resources like Clipper Magazine, Val Pak, Money Mailer and others. For example, Clipper Magazine is respected as a unique premier quality full color glossy direct mail magazine. The others are usually in an envelope format, with a myriad of advertisers who market themselves together. The cost of cooperative and magazine format direct mail is usually only three to four cents per home as opposed to solo direct mail campaigns which usually cost between fifty cents to one dollar per home. When you add up the costs of artwork, printing, mailing labels and postage, it is a greater advantage to use cooperative direct mail or a combination of both. Direct mail program resources like Clipper Magazine offer complimentary marketing consultations, artwork, the use of professional photographs, mailing lists, printing and postage all in one simple package.

Direct mail magazines feature beautiful, professionally designed advertisements cover to cover. They draw the consumer in, make the sale and spur the desired action. And they're made all the more effective by a distinctive, easy-to-use magazine format. "Because it's a magazine, Clipper Magazine is treated like one," says Steve Zuckerman of Clipper Magazine.

"Consumers return to it and read it repeatedly. In fact, its shelf life lasts six to eight weeks in the home." The magazine format and direct-mail delivery mechanism give your message the impact of a solo mailer. And do it for pennies per household. That gives your message repeat exposure and more time to generate responses.

Cooperative direct mail sources vary in quality and quantity. Direct mail magazines like Clipper, more comprehensively blanket the area surrounding your business with 50,000 homes per mailing. You can specifically target part of the community or all of it. Most cooperative envelope marketers mail to a smaller number of homes per area, where you can target 10,000 or more homes per mailing area surrounding your business. It is always best to sign annual agreements, rather than to just try it once or twice. With the type of unique services offered at funeral homes, you need to stay top of mind at all times, for when the family's needs are required. With cooperative and magazine direct mail, you can easily afford to hit local area residents at least six times per year.

Nancy Gilronan of Clipper magazine in Mahwah, NJ adds, "I successfully worked in the mortuary business for the past 7 years. My husband and daughter still actively work in the mortuary and cemetery businesses here in New Jersey. I must share that advertising is an absolute necessity in the mortuary business, just as it is for any business today. You just need to select the right type of advertising. We need to take the responsibility of educating the local community of the distinct differences in our pre-need versus our at need services."

Gilronan continues, "Most mortuaries do very little advertising, yet you really should make the

investment. I believe in the direct mail magazine format as the perfect marketing resource for mortuaries. Yes, there are many options from TV and radio to newspapers, magazines and direct mail. Like any advertising, your direct mail advertising needs to share the emotional benefits of pre-need versus at need, more so than the financial advantages."

Magazine format direct mail advertising offers you a number of important benefits that cannot be achieved through other advertising methods. In particular, cooperative and magazine direct mail allows you to target specific demographics within your community, effectively publicize special promotions, track your advertising results through the use of certificates and to ensure results within each mailing. With a direct-mail magazine, they sift through and identify the prime households in your area. They do the research and match your preferred demographics. As the publication expands its coverage areas, they use the same constantly updated data to find more of the customers you want most.

If life reflected television, each episode of your business day would start with an untimely passing and end with a funeral with a nice story packaged in between. But since your name probably isn't Nate or David Fisher, your business requires more than a screenplay, it requires effective marketing. And, unless you're in an Emmy-winning TV series, every dollar counts and getting the most of your marketing dollars can begin with cooperative direct mail.

For a complimentary direct mail advertising consultation or more information about Clipper Magazine resources near you, call 888-569-5100 or visit their website at www.ClipperMagazine.com.