

The background of the entire cover is a close-up, high-contrast photograph of bright orange and yellow flames, likely from a crematorium, creating a dramatic and thematic visual for the publication.

SouthernTM

◆ FUNERAL DIRECTOR ◆

Family Owned and Published Since 1919

MAGAZINE

July 2025

www.sfdmagazine.com

CREMATION & CANA PRE CONVENTION

IN THIS ISSUE...

- CANA 107th Annual Cremation Innovation Convention Program
- The Importance of a Proper Merchandising Plan for Cremation
by Paul Graham
- Growing Preneed Sales in a Market Shifting Toward Cremation
by Jack Hirsch
- Increasing Cremation Revenue with Non-Traditional Solutions
by Darren Crouch
- Ashes in the Living Room? A Surprising Revelation in Death Care
by Larry Stuart Jr.
- The Experience Advantage by Tyler Anderson

GROWING PRENEED SALES



Although today's consumers have more choices than ever when it comes to end-of-life planning, cremation is increasingly growing in popularity. Its flexibility, lower cost and alignment with personalized and environmentally conscious values have driven interest among preneed clients and families.

A 2023 National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA) report estimates that the U.S. cremation rate will increase to 81.4% by 2045. This dramatic shift creates opportunities and challenges for deathcare professionals focused on staying competitive. Whereas traditional burial once formed the cornerstone of preneed planning, clients and loved ones are now seeking cremation as a simple, sustainable, and accessible option, prompting funeral providers to reassess how they present and package their services.

Embracing cremation not just as a method of disposition but as a valuable approach to meaningful memorialization will enhance value, strengthen client relationships, and grow your preneed business in a shifting market.

EDUCATING FAMILIES ON MEMORIALIZATION OPTIONS SPECIFIC TO CREMATION

One of the most effective strategies for increasing preneed cremation contracts is simply educating consumers. There is a wide range of memorialization options available for clients and families considering cremation, but many are not fully aware of these choices or how they can meaningfully integrate them into their end-of-life plan. Many people equate cremation with limited ceremony or remembrance, believing it removes the possibility of having a place to visit, a ritual to honor, or a legacy to preserve. This unfamiliarity offers professionals the opportunity to reframe the narrative by

helping families understand that cremation is not restrictive, but rather a versatile foundation to celebrate a life.

Options for remembrance that families may not be aware of include permanent placements with tangible memorials like benches, granite markers, columbarium niches and tribute trees. Additionally, keepsakes such as cremation jewelry, fingerprint charms or blown glass containing ashes can become a meaningful part of the preneed planning process. When presented thoughtfully with empathy and expertise, these deeply personal forms of memorialization speak to individual values and lifestyles and present clear upsell opportunities when packaged as part of a comprehensive preneed plan.

LEVERAGING ONLINE PRENEED PLANNING TOOLS

Families often begin their end-of-life planning journey with online research, seeking clarity, options and reassurance before meeting with a deathcare professional in person. An informative, interactive, and user-friendly online platform allows families to browse urn selections, ceremony types, and memorialization services at their own pace. This self-guided exploration can be the first step toward a more committed planning discussion, making the quality of the online platform critically important.

Effective digital tools offer more than a simple contact form; they provide detailed service descriptions, visual aids and transparent pricing structures that help build trust and support informed decision-making. Further, systems integrated with CRM software can track client interactions and schedule follow-ups, allowing funeral homes to create a seamless and responsive experience from interest to purchase.



IN A MARKET SHIFTING TOWARD CREMATION

by Jack Hirsch

Data from the 2022 Funeral and Cemetery Consumer Behavior Study indicates that 33% of consumers will pay a premium for the convenience that technology provides. Investing in a robust online platform with mobile-friendly capability is a smart move that will extend a firm's reach to new demographics, offer more accessible services and create a smoother, more engaging experience for families planning ahead.

CREATING PERSONALIZED OR GREEN SERVICE PACKAGES

Interest in unique and sustainable end-of-life options is growing, and forward-thinking firms are responding by offering cremation packages that incorporate personalized touches and eco-friendly elements. Tailored packages designed to reduce environmental impact may involve biodegradable urns, tree-planting memorials or services that minimize carbon footprints. Offering such choices demonstrates a commitment to sustainability, appealing to environmentally conscious consumers.

Personalization also plays a key role in driving value. Creating a ceremony that reflects an individual's culture, hobbies or beliefs helps transform a cremation package from a commodity into an experience. A provider's willingness to be open, flexible, and creative during the preneed planning process builds authenticity and trust. Whether that means offering a livestreaming service for distant relatives, incorporating personal music selections, or hosting a memorial at a favorite outdoor location, the adaptability of cremation allows funeral homes to cater to a wide range of preferences. These and other options can be part of a tiered preneed offer-

ing, with basic, enhanced or premium experiences based on their budget and vision.

ELEVATING CREMATION WITH MEANING AND FLEXIBILITY

The public often misunderstands cremation as having inherent limitations. Deathcare providers can strengthen their preneed sales by shifting the narrative from minimalism to meaningful choice. Providers can meet client expectations with compassion and creativity by educating families on the wide range of memorialization options, embracing digital planning tools and developing personalized or green service packages.

These strategies enhance the value of cremation services and build trust and long-term relationships with families. Firms that remain responsive to shifting preferences and open to innovation will be well-positioned to grow their business while offering customized, emotionally rich memorial experiences.



Jack Hirsch serves as President of FSI as of January 2025. Previously, he served as senior vice president of the Funeral & Cemetery Trust Division at Argent Trust, FSI's parent company. With more than 20 years of financial experience, Hirsch specializes in regulatory reporting, trust services, asset management, and tailored solutions for endowments and foundations.

As FSI's president, he is focused on continuous improvement and helping operators reach families in meaningful, convenient ways by streamlining services and leveraging the strengths of FSI and Argent Trust.