

THE FUTURE OF PRENEED SALES

by Bill Williams

Almost every successful funeral home today offers preneed to their communities. That reason alone makes it an absolute necessity to include preneed in your list of services. If you don't, your competitors have a strong advantage over you.

But what you may overlook is how you are offering your preneed services to consumers.

Selling preneed services online is an emerging trend that will only continue to increase over the next five years and give you a significant competitive advantage. Read on to find out why.

Consumers crave convenience. Think about it from this perspective. For consumers, online shopping has taken over the retail industry and it will only continue to grow. According to the U.S. Department of Commerce, e-commerce sales were up more than 16 percent in the first quarter of 2018 from the first quarter of 2017. And it's no wonder why - buying products online is simply more convenient.

The same consumers are beginning to expect this level of convenience in every shopping experience, and that includes preparing for the death of a loved one. Whether consumers prefer to make these tough decisions in person with a trusted professional or in private from the comfort of their own home, you are giving them the choice to conduct either or both - a choice that can help place you ahead of your competition.

Millennials are quickly becoming the top consumer. Millennials are taking over the marketplace in every industry, and deathcare is no exception. More and more, millennials are the ones purchasing preneed for their older relatives, so you must make sure to market directly to them. That means meeting them where they are - online.

Because of their digital natures, this new generation of consumers have different expectations on how they receive and review the information you put in front of them. They

expect simplicity, speed and transparency when it comes to preneed planning...and you should be prepared to deliver it to them. Selling your services online is a productive first step.

We have the technology - and it's time to start using it.

In today's world, the best approach to increase preneed sales is to incorporate technology. And beyond just the sale itself, a digital platform can enhance your client service as well. With the right technology, your firm and your client can easily monitor the complete life of their preneed contract any time of the day, which goes back to my point about convenience. No matter the time of day or the day of the week, your consumer can check on their preneed contract and see their outstanding balance and even make a payment online. Simplicity and transparency will go a long way for people who seek excellent service during a time of discomfort.

But always keep safety in mind. When offering preneed services online you may be worried about digital security. That's a valid concern, because cyberattacks have become commonplace and your consumer's private information is constantly vulnerable.

But you can protect yourself while still reaping the benefits of selling online. From compliance measures for credit or debit card payments, to conducting all digital communications through a secured system, there are many approaches to safeguarding you and your clients' sensitive information.

It's time to invest in the future of deathcare. As you're fully aware, families opt for advance funeral planning, so they aren't forced to make tough decisions during a difficult time and can simply focus on celebrating the life of their loved one. While a personal touch from your company during this process is a timeless service that will never lose its value, adding an online feature to your sales platform will help transition your business to the future. Because in five years from now, it may be one of your strongest revenue streams that helps keep your business out in front. **FBA**



Bill Williams is president and CEO of Funeral Services Inc. and serves on the FSI Board of Directors as vice chairman. He joined FSI in 2001 as vice president. He was named president in 2003. Under his leadership, FSI has expanded to offer services in more than two dozen states across the country. Mr. Williams has experience in every aspect of the funeral service profession, including ownership and management of funeral homes and cemeteries. He began his career in the deathcare industry when he became a licensed funeral director in 1980. He is a graduate of Gupton-Jones College of Mortuary Science in Atlanta, Georgia.