

Cooperative Funeral Fund Inc.

Marketing in Your Comfort Zone

as seen in:

November 2018
ICCFA MAGAZINE
CEMETERY CREMATION FUNERAL

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The following article was first published in the November 2018 issue of ICCFA magazine, and is reprinted with permission.

by Wendy Harris

ICCFA Magazine spotlight



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► **Cooperative Funeral Fund Inc. (CFF)**, Madison, Connecticut, specializes in the management of pre-need and perpetual care fund accounts. CFF has provided a program for the death-care industry to facilitate the creation, investment, tax compliance and payout of funeral trusts since 1989.

www.CooperativeFuneralFund.com

MARKETING

You must market your business, and you must keep up with the times. If just thinking about this makes your head hurt, here are some tips for how to get started. Start small and build your confidence as well as your business—but start.

Finding ways to market that are in your comfort zone

Marketing is an essential part of any business. Getting your message out to your potential clients, highlighting your specific product or service to generate more business, sounds like a logical thing to do, but many business owners hesitate when it comes to marketing.

Why? They don't know where to start, they perceive the costs (in time and/or money) as daunting and they worry about somehow putting the wrong message out there.

But marketing your business doesn't have to be difficult, expensive or uncomfortable. To get started, you need to find a task that's in your comfort zone in order to gain confidence and momentum.

Once you find a marketing strategy that works for you and your business, you will find marketing rewarding, because you will be communicating with your market and finding interested clients. This sort of positive feedback will encourage you to do more.

That said, it can take time and experimentation to find the marketing channel best suited to you and your business. Some of us are more technically oriented, some are more creative, some are more extroverted.

We all have different personality types and comfort levels. Again, the trick is to find a marketing task that plays to your strengths and lands squarely in your comfort zone.

Overcoming barriers

How does the term "marketing" make you feel?" Overwhelmed? Overcome by a feeling of general malaise?

How about marketing jargon such as "ROI," "touch points" or "actionable insights?" What about "snackable

content?" (Huge eye roll here.) Okay, one more: "SoLoMo." This stands for "social-local-mobile." No, thanks. Even to me, these terms seem irritating and unnecessary.

Industry jargon can sound annoying and be disruptive to communication, and is often intended to be intimidating. Let's wipe away the jargon, along with the negative reactions it can evoke.

In our busy day-to-day lives, we are running our businesses and taking care of our families. There are not enough hours in the day to get it all done. Focusing on what needs to be done today can take all our bandwidth.

The thought of doing additional work such as marketing our business with the goal of increasing sales and future market share can easily overwhelm or intimidate anyone. And as technology advances, it seems that there is even more we need to know and incorporate into our marketing.

The good news is that technology has also made it easier and more instantaneous to reach out to your prospective clients. It is often less expensive than previous marketing methods, sometimes even free—but time-consuming.

Consider picking one action item that falls in your comfort zone as a way to get started. To get you thinking about what that item might be, I'm going to review some marketing basics to keep in mind regardless of how you decided to go about it. Then, I'll provide an overview of a number of different preneed marketing options—one for every personality and wallet.

Your goal is to get comfortable with one and implement it. You want to avoid getting overwhelmed by trying too many new things at once.

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Industry jargon may get in the way of people’s understanding of what you have to offer. Use the language of the consumer, not that of the industry. Instead of referring to “direct cremation,” try to use terminology that your clients will understand and use themselves, such as “simple cremation.”

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Marketing basics

Adjust your mindset. The first step in marketing should be to define the pain point of your buyers and how you can solve their problem. Show them how. They may not even know that there is a looming problem. (How many people think about death and the decisions it will require unless they have to?). It is your job to inform and guide them.

How many families have you seen who did not have a plan for their loved one? How many families have you seen cease communication after the death of a loved one? It’s sad. You can help.

The death-care profession solves problems. You are here to address the pains and problems of both the living and the deceased. Yet you hesitate to talk about this because it is deemed “selling.”

If this sounds like you, the first thing to focus on is your mindset. Refocus your lens: *You are helping others.*

When you share information about what you do and how it benefits the living, you are providing needed information and helping others. People probably don’t know about all the memorialization options available when choosing cremation, for example.

If you are already focused on marketing efforts, that’s terrific! If not, the first step is to really understand that there is a need for you and what you do. You are solving a problem. You are providing a service by sharing what you know with others. You are helping people.

Avoid jargon. This is a simple one. Just as marketing jargon can muddle things rather than convey useful information about coming up with actionable lead-generation efforts, so may industry jargon get in the way of people’s understanding of what you have to offer.

Use the language of the consumer, not that of the industry. Instead of referring to “direct cremation,” try to use terminology that your clients will understand and use themselves, such as “simple cremation.”

Thinking in terms of clients’ standard

language usage, such as “affordable cremations,” will also help you when you are coming up with key words for web page optimization or paid online advertising. More on those later.

“Let’s talk about you.” (Not you—your potential clients.) This is going to sound basic, and it is, yet people often fail to do it. People like to talk about themselves. They will scan literature or an ad and think “What’s in it for me? Why do I care about this?”

What this means is that in your marketing, you should replace “we” and “us” statements with “you” statements. Point to what is in it for them. Point out the benefits to them; give them the “goods.”

For example, take this typical marketing point from long-established firms: “We’ve been in business for over 100 years.” So, what is the benefit to the consumer? Try to be clever and memorable: “We probably know your grandmother’s favorite flower.”

Tell your story. Stories resonate with people. They are entertaining and real, not “salesy.” We all relate to and are interested in hearing what the marketing and sales department refers to as “case studies.”

Get comfortable telling your stories. Be yourself. No one is comfortable using someone else’s script as to what they should say and how they should sell. This includes your sales managers, who need to use their own voice

People know when you are being genuine. The same holds true with all your marketing literature. What is the history of the company? Its people? What are their interests? What do they like about what they do? What makes them different? How are they involved in the community?

Prepare for public speaking. If when you think about public speaking a vision of a desperately uncomfortable salesman with beads of perspiration on his forehead is what comes to mind, all is not lost. If you are introverted or fearful of making public presentations, you can have someone else represent your business. After all, you don’t work in a vacuum.

Or, you can improve your ability to do this by joining a Toastmasters group. This supportive group is also a great community networking tool. It enables you to practice public speaking, starting with small, intimate venues, building your confidence until it becomes less intimidating and maybe even enjoyable.

Use pictures. Another basic point that must be emphasized: People prefer pictures over text. This is not because we are innately lazy, though that may be part of it for some people. We are inundated with information, making it difficult to focus on anything. In addition to the information overload we all face, people naturally transfer more data and retain it better through images than text. It’s natural.

Use this to your advantage whenever possible. There are lots of online sites now that offer copyright-free images you can use in your marketing pieces, including brochures, presentations or online advertisements. Make sure they are relatable to the viewer.

Some free image website places to get you started: *unsplash.com*, *pexels.com*, *gratisography.com*, *pixabay.com* and *lifeofpik.com*.

Offer people an incentive. When marketing to people, whether through your website, via a direct mail piece or through a tabletop display, offering information is not enough. Also offer something such as a raffle prize, free memorial cards or a keepsake. What would you pay per lead to find someone who can benefit from what you have to offer?

Target specific types of people. Share your knowledge with the people who would benefit the most. For example, share information about veterans’ benefits during the Veterans Day holiday, at veterans’ events and at VFW halls

Or how about the “sandwich” generation? These people who are providing care for elderly parents while also raising children appreciate the benefits of preplanning.

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Start a social page—Facebook, specifically, is where the 55+ crowd is hanging out. It doesn't hurt to also interact with younger people, the ones who will help make arrangements for older family members. Look for them on Instagram.

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A marketing menu

Community outreach. If you're not comfortable with putting yourself out there at networking functions, either find someone on your staff who is or come prepared with something valuable to hand out and/or display.

Bring literature on the benefits of preplanning that uses imagery people can relate to. Make sure any posters or brochures include photos and stories, as well as an offer for something of value.

Hospice workers are often receptive to information. Senior fairs can provide a great opportunity for information-sharing.

Direct mail. This is a well-received marketing channel. Since online marketing has exploded, gone are the days of people receiving excessive junk mail. People enjoy getting mail.

There are many affordable companies that will design and send out postcards. You can send out letters yourself.

Another more affordable option is called EDDM—everyday direct mail. This can be a do-it-yourself alternative that costs less than first-class postage—currently less than 18 cents per piece.

This type of direct-mail campaign is done directly through your local post office and allows for partitioning off areas of town based on postal route. You bundle the mail and bring it to the post office, and in exchange you get a lower postal cost.

Learn more about EDDM at <https://www.usps.com/business/every-door-direct-mail.htm>.

Website. It's OK if you don't have one yet—many businesses still don't. But you absolutely need to get one ASAP, even if it's just a simple page with contact information to start with.

A large majority of customers shop online even for local products and services. How will they find you if you're not online?

For now, you can use your Facebook page or SquareSpace, Wix or GoDaddy website builders if you cannot afford a web designer.

If you don't have time to put together

your site, hire someone from *fiverr.com*.

Regardless of who designs your page, remember to include the key words potential clients would use to find you.

Social media. Start a social page—Facebook, specifically, is where the 55+ crowd is hanging out. It doesn't hurt to also interact with younger people, the ones who will help make arrangements for older family members. Look for them on Instagram.

This is especially important if you don't have a website. Facebook is an essential way for people to find your business when they search online—and they will, I assure you.

Online paid advertising. Facebook has quickly become a go-to source of advertising campaigns. It allows for incredible targeting by age and location. Admittedly, I don't go on the platform much, mostly because I end up buying things perfectly targeted to me!

Keep in mind that video ads work better than text ads, but be sure to include a transcript of the text for videos. Keywords are important here. You want to compete on keywords that are accurate and less expensive. This is one place where using marketing language will help.

A helpful resource is <https://moz.com/explorer> or Google AdWords. These are often referred to as “long tail keywords,” based on a term coined by the best-selling marketing book author Seth Godin.

Reviews and testimonials. These are important. Ensure that your reviews are good and that you follow up with and rectify any outstanding issues.

Ask for testimonials. If this makes you uncomfortable, use a free tool such as *surveymonkey* to ask for testimonials via email—and be sure to ask if it is OK to share their comments online. Then do so on your Facebook page and website and anywhere else suitable. Use your best one on your brochure—something everyone would identify with is ideal.

Networking. Call and arrange to drop off your business cards and/or meet with

elder-care attorneys or people at senior centers and hospice facilities. They are eager for your information, and it helps them to do their jobs better.

Being able to refer a client to a trustworthy and helpful professional is a great thing, and you have information about issues seniors would like to know more about.

Two more tips

Experiment. Try something that feels comfortable to you. I have talked with folks who found direct mail to be too aggressive.

Inevitably, a mailer would be sent to someone who was ill or deceased, resulting in an irate call to “take them off the list.”

Some funeral home or cemetery managers feel “any offence is too much for us.”

Others, some of whom had no luck with direct mail, have told me how successful they were with TV.

You need to be comfortable with what you do, but you will find that the more successful marketing projects you implement, the more comfortable you will become. You will be building your own marketing “case studies.”

Be your buyer. Step into their shoes. Feel how they feel. Feel the weight of their problems and struggles. This makes it much easier to find text and images that they, not you, can relate to, and improves communication between you and your potential clients.

Conclusion

Remember, marketing is just a way of contacting your future clients. You can be there physically, or not. You can spend money or time to get it done. You can have someone else do it. You can start small and, as you build your confidence (or at least tolerance), you can do more.

Start small and let your efforts gather momentum as you get more comfortable with marketing and building your business. Try picking a marketing task you'll feel the most comfortable doing, something that feels right. Be yourself—people like you! □