

# The Southerner

NEWSLETTER OF THE SOUTHERN CEMETERY CREMATION & FUNERAL ASSOCIATION | SPRING 2021



Miles Tolen Penn  
SCCFA President

## Presidents Message

A message from Miles,

The past year has been a challenging one for everyone, it has been even more challenging to serve families in the death care industry with the same care and compassion that you could show pre- pandemic. As vaccinations become more available the hope is that we will be moving towards a "New Normal" in our society. I am proud to be serving families during these different times, and I have been impressed with how cemeterians and funeral directors alike have adapted to the ever changing mandates with the pandemic. The SCCFA remains a valuable resource ready to assist members throughout our association.

With some events are deciding to stay virtual and others slowly starting to schedule in person conventions, I feel fortunate that the Southern is going to hold our annual convention in Hilton Head, SC starting June 20 th . Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina are joining the SCCFA this year in hosting. The Convention will be held at the Westin Hilton Head Resort, a great place for a convention as well as a family vacation. We are looking forward to a strong turnout with our registrants and with our vendors. We will kick off the convention with a low country boil looking over the beach, and after some days of great speakers and networking we will wrap up the convention on Tuesday night with live music and the closing reception and banquet. For more information about the SCCFA convention and schedule visit the Southern's website [www.sccfa.info](http://www.sccfa.info). We look forward to seeing everyone at the convention in June.

*Life's short - be Southern*

[WWW.SCCFA.INFO](http://WWW.SCCFA.INFO)





Argent  
FINANCIAL GROUP, INC.

# TRUST EXPERIENCE



Argent is the provider of choice for funeral and cemetery trust and investment management services.

## Argent's Funeral & Cemetery Trust Services:

- Pre-need Trusts
- Perpetual Care Trusts
- Merchandise Trusts
- Pre-construction Trusts
- Investment Management
- Customized Services



**Mark Milton**  
Institutional Services Manager  
(504) 291-8810  
mmilton@argentfinancial.com



**Jim Breaux**  
National Sales Executive  
(504) 291-8840  
jbreaux@argenttrust.com



**Debbie Holmes**  
Trust Officer  
(318) 251-5856  
dholmes@argenttrust.com

[ArgentTrust.com](http://ArgentTrust.com)

3102 West End Avenue, Suite 775  
Nashville, TN 37203

201 St. Charles Ave., Suite 2420  
New Orleans, LA 70170

500 East Reynolds Drive  
Ruston, LA 71270

2602 Iron Gate Drive, Suite 202  
Wilmington, NC 28412





# Adapt or Die

By: **Spencer Hines** – NorthStar Memorial Group

Cutting edge. Technologically advanced. Innovative. These are words that probably wouldn't make the top of your list if asked to describe the funeral profession. Yet, to be successful in today's world, we must adapt our way of thinking and evolve our business practices to meet the changing behaviors and needs of the families we serve.

Thanks to the internet and [statista.com](https://www.statista.com), I can tell you that last year there were 4.6 billion people using the Internet. That's more than half of the world's population. Today in the United States alone, more than 90% of the total population is online – and growing by the millions every year. Add to that the number of active mobile internet users – 246 million people – and it's obvious the direction our industry must head to be successful.

If you think this doesn't apply to our industry because our consumers are older, think again. An overwhelming majority of adults from the Greatest Generation, the Silent Generation and Baby Boomers are actively engaged online and steadily growing. They're active on social media, they purchase goods and services online, and they do their research online before buying. They are fully indoctrinated into the digital world and prefer to interact here.

What does this mean for us? It's simple really. We must go with them. We need to be where they are and provide them with the information they seek. If there is a silver lining to 2020 and COVID-19, it's that many in our industry were forced into the digital space to find new ways to conduct business. Online webinars took the place of in-person seminars held at local restaurants. Facebook Live played a vital role for team members to meet with families. Funeral homes relied on digital platforms like Zoom to host memorial services and celebrations of life. It wasn't easy, or ideal in many situations. But we learned ways to be effective and to show compassion and care when holding a hand wasn't possible.

Now it's time to take what we learned in 2020 and put concrete, well-thought-out plans in place that incorporate digital into every conversation. Nothing should ever replace in-person opportunities to meet with families, nor could it. What I'm suggesting is finding where in your business it makes sense to bring in digital. For several years now, it's been a key piece to every marketing plan we execute at NorthStar. We have seen the value behind this cost-effective and critical channel and the role it can play for bringing in new families and maintaining relationships with families we have served over the years.

I think one of the most important lessons we can learn from this is that we should never shy away from change and embrace the possibilities of new ideas and new opportunities. While our role in society hasn't changed over the years, our families have. And to continue to serve them to the best of our ability, we must think of ourselves as cutting edge, technologically advanced and innovative.

# The Case for Paid Search: Understanding the Value of Search Engine Marketing

By Welton Hong - Founder of Ring Ring Marketing ®



Many people see search engine marketing (SEM) as the “lesser” sibling of search engine optimization. The reality is the two are equally important to your cemetery marketing campaigns.

Before moving on to the stats and facts that prove the value of paid search, let's first ensure everyone understands what these two strategies are and why some people unfairly look down their noses at SEM.

Search engine optimization (SEO) refers to your business website appearing organically in the search engines. That means you don't pay specifically for the link that shows up on Google. Instead, you concentrate on writing great on-page content, developing backlinks and citations, and engaging in strong keyword research.

The goal is to “persuade” Google your page is a top resource about a certain topic. That way the search engine offers your link when someone searches with related keywords.

Search engine marketing (SEM) refers to paid ads that help ensure your website appears in search engine results pages (SERPs). The basic idea is that you set some parameters for your target audience and what keywords you're interested in showing up for. You also set a budget and then ad-bidding software places bids for you. Win the bid, and you show up in search results for a specific query.

One of the reasons people look askance at SEM is that they believe the entire purpose of a search is for Google or other engines to do the legwork to deliver best results to users. If advertisers are paying into that mix, won't that dilute the value of search results and ranking?

Actually, it doesn't. Check out these seven stats and facts for a better understanding of how paid search provides value to users and businesses such as your cemetery.

## 1. Paid ads drive higher conversion rates.

Someone clicking on a paid search link is more likely to convert than someone who clicks on an organic link. In some cases, the difference can be a 50% greater chance of conversion from paid traffic. A potential reason for this fact is paid ads might be even more targeted to the person than organic search results. If you search “preplanning” on Google, the organic results are ranked by relevance to your search and potentially your geo location. But the paid results can take into account other demographics and behavioral metrics, such as whether or not you've visited certain cemetery websites or your income level.

Because the ad links might be more targeted, there's a better chance they attract someone who is seriously considering making a purchase or contacting a cemetery for more information.

## 2. Most marketers stand behind PPC.

PPC is pay-per-click advertising. Search ads are typically PPC, and close to 80% of online marketers believe this type of advertising has a huge benefit for their businesses. Those benefits are experienced by organizations of every size and type. About 65% of all small and midsize businesses (SMBs) keep a PPC ad campaign running most of the time.

## 3. Businesses are likely to neglect their ads.

If you have given PPC a go without good results, you might not be keeping close



### **3. Businesses are likely to neglect their ads.**

If you have given PPC a go without good results, you might not be keeping close enough tabs on your campaigns. More than 70% of all businesses that engage in online advertising ignore their campaigns for a month or more.

Paid search can be lucrative, but it doesn't always produce results without some work from you, your employees, or someone managing the campaigns on your behalf.

### **4. Not everyone hates ads.**

Another reason people give SEM the side eye is that they perceive it to be annoying to consumers. They buy into the fact that ads alienate potential clientele, perhaps ensuring that people won't click on your organic links, either.

This might be true if you're running spammy display ads and banner campaigns that interfere with someone's ability to interact with websites.

But paid search isn't typically considered annoying. Many people don't even notice the difference between organic and paid search results, and those who do can easily decide to click organic links without any inconvenience if they don't want to interact with ads.

It's also important to realize that many consumers don't hate all ads. They're willing to see and engage with ads that are relevant to them. Globally, only approximately a quarter of internet users run ad blockers, so it's not a big concern.

### **5. People click on the most relevant ads.**

However, it is best practice to keep your ads and campaigns as relevant as possible. Relevant ads are least likely to alienate consumers. Relevant ads are also most likely to garner clicks and result in conversions. When asked why they click ads on SERPs, a third said they do so most often when the ad appears to directly answer their query.

### **6. Google ads can drive huge returns.**

Google ads can be powerful. Outside of paid search, Google's ad network covers nearly 90% of the internet. Google is also a member of the Acceptable Ads program, which can help reduce the impact of ad blockers on your content — especially when it comes to paid search.

Pair all that with the fact that every \$1.60 spent on Google ads generates an average return of \$8 and you can see how SEM might be a winner. That's a 400% ROI!

### **7. Paid ads generate more clicks than organic search.**

One reason SEM return on investment is so high might be because paid ads get more clicks than organic search by a big margin. Approximately 65% of people who are searching with commercial intent click an ad over an organic link.

Commercial intent means the keywords a person uses indicate a high likelihood he or she is planning to make a purchase or take action soon. In the case of cemeteries, keywords with commercial intent might include "cost of cemetery plots" or "local cemetery service."

While not everyone who enters those queries will make a purchase, most people searching for those things are at least interested in doing so at some point.

The takeaway here is this: Organic search isn't the only way cemeteries can reach potential clientele online. And if SEO is the only game you're playing when it comes to online marketing, you're leaving a lot on the table.

*Welton is a leading expert in helping funeral homes and cemeteries convert leads from online directly to the phone line. He's the author of the book **Making Your Phone Ring with Internet Marketing for Funeral Homes** and a regular contributor to **American Funeral Director magazine** and several other publications.*

*Welton has a graduate degree in **Electrical Engineering** from the **University of Colorado at Boulder**. Prior to starting **Ring Ring Marketing**, he was a senior **technologist** at **R&D facilities** for **Intel**, **Sun Microsystems**, and **Oracle**. He regularly speaks at **conferences and other events** for people in the **death care industry**.*

*Welton Hong, founder of **Ring Ring Marketing**®*

# Creating & Leading A Climate of Change

By: John Michael Higgs - Cave Hill Cemetery

Managers often see change as an insurmountable task that involves too much work and far too much time for them even consider approaching. However, change is the only constant in organizations today, as economic shifts and a global pandemic have altered the pathway for many.

But, if approached in the right manner, the implementation of a new process or ideology can be done in such a way that it brings about the best in an entire team, causing them to conduct an introspection of themselves and their ability to be successful parts of the organizational whole.

John P. Kotter, a Harvard Business School professor, has developed a basic approach to bring about change in an organization in his book, *Leading Change*. In total, he proposes eight steps to bring the onset of change that may seem simple at a quick glimpse, but requires constant focus and attention.

## Kotter's Steps to Creating Change:

- Establish a sense of urgency
  - Examine the market and competitive realities
  - Identify and discuss major opportunities and potential crises
- Create a guiding coalition
  - Put together a group with enough power to lead the change as a team
  - Establish a team mindset
- Develop a vision and strategy
  - Create a vision to develop the change effort
  - Develop strategies for achieving the vision with short and long-term wins
- Communicate the change vision
  - Use every vehicle possible to constantly communicate the new vision and strategies
  - Make sure that the guiding coalition models the desired behavior of the whole team
- Empower broad-based action
  - Get rid of obstacles
  - Change systems or structures that undermine the change vision
  - Encourage risk taking and non-traditional ideas, activities, and actions
- Generate short-term wins
  - Plan for visible improvements in performance
  - Create wins for the entire team
  - Recognize and reward those that make change a reality
- Consolidate gains & Produce more change
  - Use increased credibility to change systems, structures, and policies that do not fit together



- Don't transform the vision
- Hire, promote, and develop people that can implement the vision
- Reinvigorate the process with new projects, themes, and change agents

- Anchor new approaches in the culture
  - Create better performances through customer- and productivity-oriented behavior, more and better leadership, and more effective management practice
  - Articulate the connections between new behaviors and organizational success
  - Develop a way forward to ensure leadership development and succession

Kotter's 8-Steps to Create Change create an opportunity to make change a reality in the workplace. The mindset of change and adaptation to a team-based approach can make a radical difference in the long-term success of any business. However, one cannot discount that this is an ever-evolving process that requires a paradigm shift for everyone to move forward. As change is created and manifested in the culture, two things are sure to happen- a reduction in complacency and the creation of a learning organization, both of which further build upon the likelihood of success.

\*Adapted from Masters thesis by John Michael Higgs for Indiana Wesleyan University Master of Science in Management program. 2005.



# Using Video to Tell Your Story

Sam James – James Funeral Home & Northlake Memorial Gardens, NC



With both our funeral home and cemetery, I have always been a big proponent of using video to showcase what we offer and who we are.

Video not only shows your facility, your cemetery or your service—it also conveys your passion in the way a traditional ad cannot. There are a few tips that you want to remember as you use video.

First, video can hurt you as much as it helps you if not done well. Hire a professional videographer to make sure it is done right. Have your staff dressed and ready to be filmed. I saw a video recently of a funeral home where no employee was wearing a jacket and even worse- they had short-sleeved dress shirts. Awful. You must always choose your words carefully.

Second, keep that video short-- under two minutes is ideal. You can make multiple ones and rotate them. It is great to make new videos every couple of years to capture what is new. If we showed a video of our funeral home from 2010, the rolling stock would look very old and outdated compared to what we currently offer.

Third, boost them! Once you have a video, use social media to promote the video. You can target your market very easily and it is a great way to engage your community. You can narrow down to what age or zip code sees the video. Facebook loves video and it shows up very well on that platform.

Lastly, put that video on the homepage of your site. Let it be how you introduce your funeral home or cemetery to the community. Be passionate and kind. Tell your community why they can trust you!

To see the full video for James Funeral Home, go to [jamesfuneralhomeLKN.com](http://jamesfuneralhomeLKN.com) (It is on the home screen.)

To see the full video for Northlake Memorial Gardens, go to [northlakememorial.com](http://northlakememorial.com)

# Work Orders: A Drag on Resources, or a Customer Satisfaction Opportunity?

By: Linda Jankowski – [webCemeteries.com](http://webCemeteries.com)

Anyone who has worked any length of time in the cemetery profession - whether in a summer internship or in a lifelong career knows how much of a hassle a work order can be. And that hassle usually starts with a phone call or visit from a customer or visitor who is upset or angry. Once things are off to a great start like that, it is all downhill from there, right? Not always and it does not have to be.

Cathy Williams at Michigan Memorial Park in Flat Rock, Michigan has dealt with her share of complaints and requests. She handled a work order from a concerned couple regarding a headstone that needed to be raised and levelled due to it sinking into the soft ground. After the situation was rectified as quickly as she could manage, Cathy invited the couple out to survey the finished work. When she saw that they were satisfied, she asked if their arrangements had been made and offered to tour the cemetery with them. The couple was lukewarm but after seeing how Cathy and the cemetery handled their request, they were so impressed that they purchased a private estate to the tune of \$60k. How is that for a nice payoff?

Work orders come in all shapes and sizes, and from all manner of causes: patches of grass killed in the summer heat, a marker damaged by a close encounter with a lawnmower, a tree split in half by wind, or a headstone tilting because heavy rains have caused the ground to shift. Regardless of the issue, something must be done to resolve the problem, which leads to the headache of work orders.

Why are they such a headache, though? And is there a better way to handle them? Perhaps, a streamlined process? A way for the cemetery to gain opportunities and improve customer relations?

Maybe even generate sales? Yes, there is. Before we get to that, let's look at the two main reasons that work orders are such a challenge.

The first is that work orders are predominantly paper driven, even in large cemeteries that have gone digital with most of their other processes. Work orders are typically generated in the following manner:

- A customer or visitor notices something wrong out on the property, such as a broken headstone.
- They visit or call the office with a concern or complaint.
- The concern or complaint gets written down on a piece of paper (work order form).
- The work order is copied and added to a binder.
- The work order is handed off to a groundskeeper or to the superintendent.
- An investigation unfolds to determine the nature and cause of the problem.
  - How did the headstone break?
    - Was it struck by a lawnmower? If so, was it one of ours or was it an outside party? Who will pay for the damages?
    - Was it vandalism? If so, a police report needs to be filed and measures taken to insure no other property is damaged.
    - Was it struck by lightning? If so, this is an act of God and the cemetery may not be liable for any damages.
    - Were there guarantees made by the cemetery?
    - Something else?
- The work order eventually ends up back on the manager's desk with recommendations or suggested resolution.

This process can take weeks and sometimes months to resolve itself as the work order gets passed from



person to person in the cemetery. And while this is going on, the customer who originally voiced the complaint is watching and, from their perspective, sees that nothing is happening. This only makes a concerned or annoyed customer even angrier, which just increases the stress put on cemetery staff when they must contend with work orders.

This leads to the second reason why work orders are a drag - attitude. Work orders are a daily part of cemetery life, but they are a disruptive one. Sales staff must stop doing their jobs to address a concern brought to their attention. Work orders are second to burials where Groundskeepers have to schedule work orders to fit between their routine day-to-day work in order to investigate and mitigate the associated problem. Managers must shift their focus away from more important tasks in order to resolve these issues to everyone's satisfaction. No one enjoys doing it, no one wants to do it which leads to dragging feet to get the issue addressed.

There is a solution to this problem. Work orders will never go away, but they can be automated through a management system. Imagine generating a work order and it is assigned and tracked from beginning to end, automatically notifying staff and customers appropriately throughout the process! Cemeteries that have brought their sales and inventory management online are already aware of the time-saving advantages afforded to staff who can instantly look up customer information and sales data. Those same advantages can be brought over to work orders, as well.

Once an issue is brought to the cemetery's attention, staff can enter that information into the system, management can select who will be assigned to it, and that person can be notified immediately. Management can track the progress of the work order, which increases accountability, motivation and faster resolution. This results in work orders being processed faster, avoids loss of paper and provides greater satisfaction for customers and employees alike. Best of all, the customer can be notified of status updates through the system as work is progressing. When customers are happy, they tend to buy more and refer you to others. Ask Cathy Williams.

Work orders may be here to stay, but the way that you manage them does not have to be. Cathy's \$60,000 sale isn't going to be how every satisfactory work order pans out - but the combination of proper process and automation, along with an upbeat attitude from all cemetery staff will ensure that work orders are less of a drag for everyone. A motivated staff who quickly and effectively addresses the concerns and complaints of customers is sure to generate positive buzz in the community, direct sales and word-of-mouth referrals.

*By Linda Jankowski, Director of Business Development for webCemeteries.com. Linda has a technology background but was drawn to the cemetery profession in the early 2000s. Linda has functioned as the Owner and Principal Consultant of Jankowski Consulting Group focused on performance management in cemeteries and funeral homes across the US; Regional Director for Midwest Memorial Group overseeing 29 cemeteries in the Detroit, Michigan market and Marketing and Sales Director for Mt. Elliott Cemetery Group overseeing 5 cemeteries in the same market. She is a member of the ICCFA Sales & Marketing Committee (Dead Talks) and served as program co-chair of the Wide World of Sales in 2010. Linda served on the ICCFA Board of Directors in 2007. Today, Linda enjoys blending her technology background and cemetery experience to provide a bit of real world understanding to software sales. "I enjoy being part of an industry solution that provides a meaningful experience to the consumer and closes the gap on a software solution that checks every single box. Without my cemetery experience, I would have never known the difference".*





ANNUAL CONVENTION & EXHIBITS WESTIN HILTON HEAD RESORT, SC

Attendee and Family Registration Form

Attendee Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Spouse/Guest: \_\_\_\_\_

Company: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Are you a current member of the?  SCCFA  GCA  NCCA  SCCA (Check all that apply)

- \$499. Full Registration – Association Member
- \$599. Full Registration – Non- Association Member
- \$349. Spouse/Guest Full Registration Association Member  \$399 Spouse/Guest Full Reg Non-Member
- \$195. One Day Pass  Monday or  Tuesday from 9AM – 4PM (does not include closing banquet)

*Full Registrations above include entry into Exhibit Hall, all sessions, kickoff reception and low country boil, closing reception and banquet*

- \$100. Additional Kickoff Reception and Low Country Boil (1 is included in Full Registrations above)
- \$150. Additional Closing Reception and Banquet Ticket - 13 yr old - Adult (1 is included in Full Registrations above)
- \$ 40. Additional Closing Banquet Ticket - 5 – 12 yrs old
- \$ 0 Additional Closing Banquet Ticket - 0 – 4 yrs old

Please list Children and ages:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\$125. Golf Tournament (indicate how many) – Names \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Once completed, please email this form to [sccfa.office@gmail.com](mailto:sccfa.office@gmail.com) We will confirm your registration and email you back an invoice that you can submit for payment, either by check or you will be able to pay online with a credit card.

**CANCELLATION POLICY:** Cancellations must be received in writing, either mailed to SCCFA, PO Box 681053, Marietta, GA 30068 or emailed to [SCCFA.OFFICE@gmail.com](mailto:SCCFA.OFFICE@gmail.com). They must be postmarked no later than May 20, 2021 and are subject to a \$100 cancellation fee. No shows will not receive a refund.

Please return this completed form with your payment to SCCFA – PO Box 681053 – Marietta, GA 30068 or Email your completed form to [sccfa.office@gmail.com](mailto:sccfa.office@gmail.com) and we will email you an invoice for payment.

**Have questions or need additional information**

**Please contact Susan Mena at 770-490-6810 or by email [sccfa.office@gmail.com](mailto:sccfa.office@gmail.com)**

Don't forget to make your hotel reservation, visit [www.sccfa.info](http://www.sccfa.info) for an online link and hotel information



ANNUAL CONVENTION & EXHIBITS



# R&R

## *At The Beach*

### *Resilience & Reinvention*

PLEASE JOIN US

**JUNE 20-22, 2021**

WESTIN HILTON HEAD RESORT, SC

**HOSTED BY:**

SCCFA – THE SOUTHERN  
GEORGIA CEMETERY ASSOCIATION  
NORTH CAROLINA CEMETERY ASSOCIATION  
SOUTH CAROLINA CEMETERY ASSOCIATION

**MORE DETAILS WILL BE AVAILABLE ON OUR WEBSITE**



[WWW.SCCFA.INFO](http://WWW.SCCFA.INFO)



CONTACT: SUSAN MENA | 770-490-6810 | [SCCFA.OFFICE@GMAIL.COM](mailto:SCCFA.OFFICE@GMAIL.COM)

# Still working like this?



Family. Service. Simple.

webCemeteries.com • 800-653-7049