

Cremation Arrangement Websites: The Ultimate Guide

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About Robin Heppell

Robin Heppell – Funeral Industry Marketing and Strategy

What gives Robin Heppell such deep understanding of the funeral industry and how to successfully market cremation to consumers? As a CFSP funeral director and certified celebrant that has arranged over 2,000 at-needs. As a pre-need agent, he sold over 1,500 pre-needs – ranking as the #1 Sales Representative for NSMs (now SIFH's) Monumental Life Plan one of his years there. At the same time, he developed marketing tactics that rapidly grew market share for the funeral home he was working at as the cremation rate soared from 64% to 92%.

Under the umbrella of Heppell Media Group, Hepp's multiple initiatives and brands, including Funeral Futurist Consulting, Funeral Boardroom, and Funeral Gurus, have helped hundreds of funeral homes and cremation businesses rapidly grow market share. His educational program initiatives have earned him wide-spread notoriety among industry associations and funeral professionals. Hepp has presented at over 40 National and State deathcare conventions on topics regarding infusing funeral marketing with modern technology. Hepp's Funeral Marketing Rock Stars conferences have attracted more attendees per event than any other industry vendor conferences. Robin Heppell is also a Google AdWords Certified Partner, having completed the many hours of coursework and passed the test necessary to attain certification.

It is this collection of experiences and skills that have equipped him to provide a degree of marketing expertise unmatched by any other marketer in the funeral care industry.

Cremation Arrangement Websites: The Ultimate Guide

Opportunity

Among the challenges confronting funeral homes today is how to win the business of cost-conscious cremation shoppers in a profitable way, and deny that revenue to competitors.

The nation's shift towards online shopping and e-commerce has not skipped the funeral industry. If you doubt that large numbers of families would even consider arranging something so important online, Batesville's 2008 finding will come as a shock: 62% of families that had previously been through cremation arrangements agreed with the statement "making arrangements does not require the help of a funeral director."

A decade later, consider that reality in the following context. The economic situation of many families means they cannot afford \$3000 funerals. In 2016, 34% of people had \$0 in a savings account, while 69% had less than \$1000 (GoBankingRates). So while families still want to "do right" by their deceased loved ones, it is easy to see why growing numbers are willing to sacrifice the trappings to obtain lower costs.

The question is, which funeral home owners will more quickly adjust to the market reality that changing consumer desires have sliced the "funeral industry pie?" The growing number of funeral home owners starting cremation businesses proves they are increasingly trying to get a big bite from each slice rather than compete over just the (shrinking) traditional funeral home slice?

In order to stay competitive, funeral home operators should consider launching a low cost cremation business, anchored by a cremation arrangement website. Leveraging these websites greatly reduces overhead costs. Also, to the surprise of all, cremation arrangement websites almost always achieve a slightly higher sales averages than in-person arrangements achieve.

Whether you want to expand overall market share with a low cost cremation brand and website, or ensure your current cremation arrangement website is achieving maximum brand appeal and profits, Funeral Results Marketing (FRM) has the tools and experience to aid you.

This in-depth guide provides a wealth of information to help you prepare, position and project yourself into the growing online cremation market space. It identifies twelve factors that must be considered in detail. These will help you establish a strong foundation to maximize your capacity for success.

Corporate Structure

If you are already operating a funeral business, you can either create the cremation arrangement website as a new and separate entity or, if permissible in your jurisdiction, to include it under the umbrella of your existing corporate structure. The legal and accounting expenses associated with needing a new set of books and having to file another set of taxes are possible drawbacks.

From a marketing perspective, creating a new corporation is beneficial because both companies will be able to have their own dedicated AdWords account, which means you can essentially double your marketing, reach by having two sets of ads in rotation and bidding on keywords for both companies.

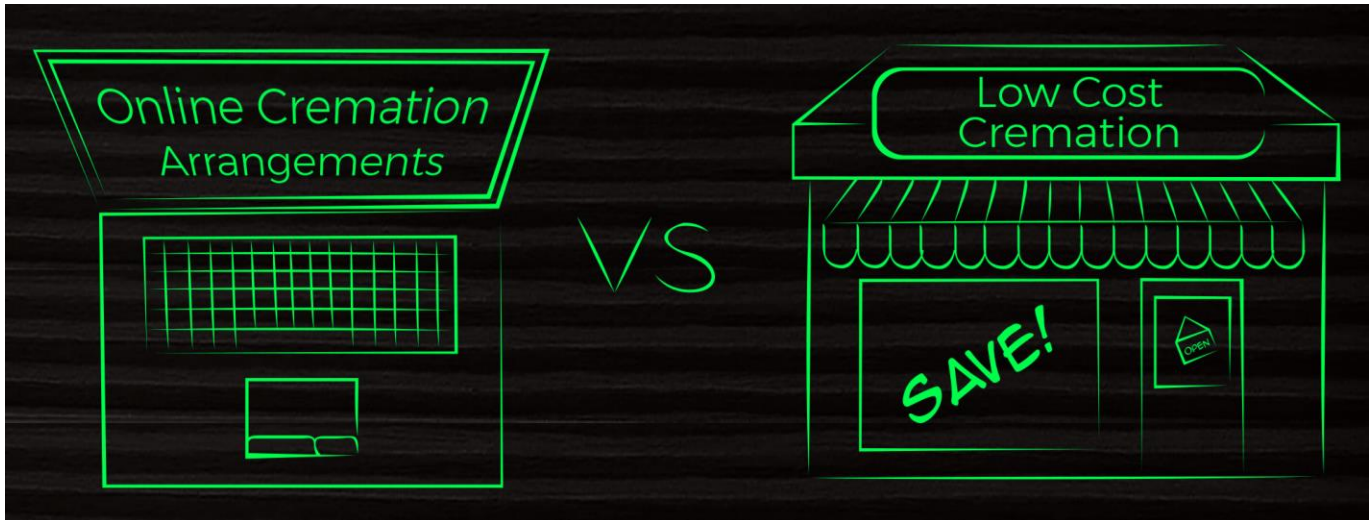
License Structure

If you are already operating a funeral home, you might be able to include the new site under your existing license as a “provider of choice”, or obtain a “minimal provider” license. In other jurisdictions, a separate new license will be required. As part of your FRM Strategic Planning session, we can advise you how best to proceed according to your local legislation.

Virtual or Physical Operation

Depending in part on whether you already oversee an existing funeral home, your cremation arrangement site could be configured as a physical presence (storefront or full-service), or just as a virtual, online presence. These are some points to consider in deciding which is best.

Even if you already have an existing storefront operation, you can greatly reduce startup costs and risks by operating the cremation website only as a virtual entity. FRM can configure your new website so that it will be effortless for customers to access your services in the manner they prefer.



Online clients can still be invited to visit your existing physical location to pick up cremated remains and documentation. Although your full-service funeral home clients should have the benefit of a more personalized level of treatment, we can advise you on how streamline the time that you spend interacting with your online clients so that, even though they are paying less, they will also receive an appropriate amount of personal attention.

Having a bricks and mortar location associated with the new site increases perceived authenticity and trust, but it also adds to the pressure to meet a certain earnings threshold each month to cover expenses and remain profitable. Rather than eroding your bottom line with staffing and overhead expenses associated with leasing a separate facility, it might make more sense to rebrand a smaller, existing location's identity to encompass the new cremation website.

If you are already operating a physical location, but finding that the bulk of your client interaction is by phone and/or email, you could consider transitioning to a virtual operation. The advantage here is that you'll have time to focus on setting up your virtual operation while letting the lease and other arrangements wind down on the physical location. Although we have not seen this happen much yet, it's a scenario that may soon become increasingly viable as the service model continues to shift.

Website Launch

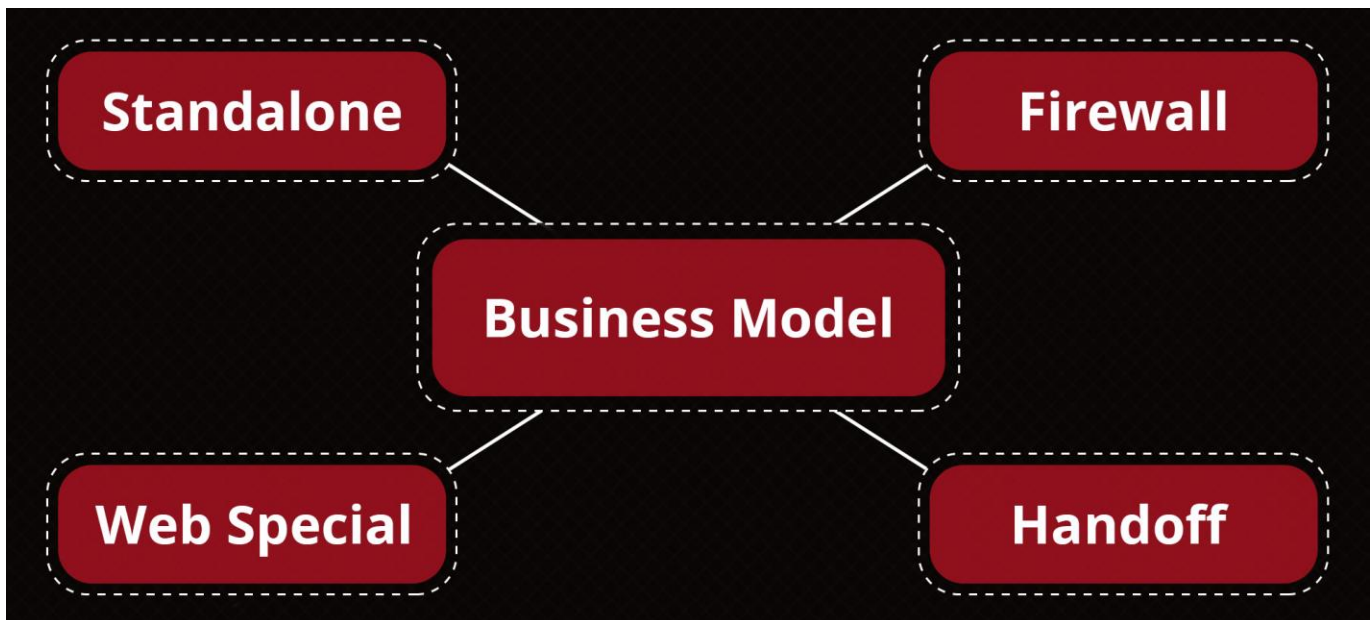
Depending on your situation, there are two possible ways to approach the website launch:

1. The Grand Launch is best when the entire website is ready to go, with every element in place and ready to be accessed by consumers.

2. The Two-Step Launch is advisable if you are in a hurry to establish your online presence, either to get in early on the market or to compete against similar services already in place. First, a mini-site is assembled to provide basic information, in particular an easy-to-understand price comparison graphic. The mini-site can still be connected to Google Ads to drive traffic and gather info about opt-ins. The full site will be rolled out only when all information and elements are in place.

Overall Business Model

Like so many of the decisions that need to be made at the outset, the business model structure of the new cremation arrangement website will depend in part on whether it will operate alongside an existing funeral home, or will operate as the sole focus of the business. There are four configuration options:



Standalone: In situations where no full-service funeral home already exists, the cremation website alone will comprise the whole operation. It might include one or two burial options in addition to the online cremation arrangement options.

Firewall: Where a funeral home already exists, the new cremation site and business and the existing home will each have their own registrations, licenses, and dedicated staff, functioning as two separate concerns with a firewall between them.

Web Special: To avoid losing cremation calls to lower-cost competition, an existing full-service provider funnels business arising through phone calls or Google Ads to a similarly-branded

cremation arrangement website. Although the operating name might be slightly different, this separate site will be clearly associated with the existing operation in most ways.

Handoff: The cremation arrangement website with a separate identity, but not the exact same branding, with the existing operation. For example, Heppell Funeral Home is the principal business, and Cremation BC is the “handoff” site that low-cost-seeking clients can be referred to. In order to foster continuity and trust with the handoff structure, it’s important to be completely transparent about the fact that both entities are overseen by the same company.

Staffing

In order to control costs, it probably makes more sense to designate an existing employee or two to oversee the new cremation business, and to shuffle other staff members around in order to handle transfers, and to permit other economies of scale wherever feasible.

Service Offerings

In our experience, a selection of just three different cremation packages is often the most effective, enabling customers to easily grasp how prices for similar packages compare between your full-service funeral home website and your cremation arrangement site. However, deciding on the optimal amount and combination of services to offer can be tricky. During your FRM strategy session we can advise you as to the best configuration based on your specific circumstances and existing sales trends.

Accepting Pre-Need Customers

Before you decide whether to or enable pre-need arrangements to be purchased on your website, it’s important to carefully research and comply with any local regulations surrounding the transfer and holding of payments. For example, in many jurisdictions, any PayPal funds you receive will be subject to the same rules as those received directly into your business account. FRM can help you decipher the local rules and regulations to see if accepting pre-need business would be a viable and worthwhile option.

Memberships & Societies

The marketing tactic of branding a funeral home business as a “society” and offering memberships to prospective clients used to be a more consistently reliable way of securing future business, but with so many low-cost options becoming available, it is no longer quite as

effective. However, memberships associated with future service discounts and offered to new or existing clients can still be an effective tool for collecting contact information and stockpiling a source of future business.

Potential Market Size and Service Area

Whether there are already existing low-cost options in your area, or yours will be first to market, it's helpful to get a realistic sense of how many cremation calls might be up for grabs within your intended service reach. As part of your FRM strategy session, we look closely at Google Maps data and zoom in on the optimal service area for your business, taking other factors such as the location(s) of your competitor(s) into account.

This simple formula is an accurate tool for estimating the number of available cremations there are to compete for in the given area that you are servicing.

$$\mathbf{MP \times DR \times CR = AMO}$$

MP: Market Population

DR: Death Rate

CR: Cremation Rate

AMO: Annual Market Opportunity

Population within potential area (e.g. 25, 35 or 50 miles) X

Death rate within that radius X

Current cremation rate within that radius.

When determining service area, location may not be as much of a concern for online arrangements as it has been for traditional. Positioning yourself as the first provider to market offering online arrangements can be a great advantage, but even if competition already exists, you can still dominate just by doing things better. The value of marketing to areas farther out is debatable, unless there is a major center that is clearly underserved. It might be best to focus on your backyard first, and not market to areas farther out, unless calls come to you.

Strategic Naming

Never underestimate the importance of coming up with the perfect name for your online cremation business, a name that will inspire confidence and trust in your prospective clients.

The most highly effective names contain two components: The first part should be something distinctive to your area; perhaps a geographical reference or other locally-recognizable name which might already be associated with local businesses or public organizations. Ideally, it will comfortably encompass the general area in which you offer your services, but should not be so far-reaching or vague that people might not recognize it. It should be easy to pronounce and spell, and should elicit a sense of connection and familiarity.

The second element should clearly describe what you do, i.e. Cremation, Cremation Services, Cremation Center or Crematory.

A word about domains: There are many websites where you can check the availability of domain names being considered, and ensure that they are not likely to be confused with other claimed domains. While the .com extension is the most widely-used worldwide, in Canada the .ca extension is also widely recognized and acceptable. Less desirable domain extensions (because they don't convey a sufficiently legitimate impression), would include .net, .biz, .us and .me.

Measuring Success

As with any solid business plan, it's important to determine exactly how many calls need to be secured in order to become profitable. A starting goal might be to aim for serving 10 calls a month by the end of the first year, in order to break through the benchmark of 100 calls per year.

To maximize the benefits of your scheduled strategy session with FRM, take plenty of time in advance to consider all of these factors with respect to your own scenario. This will ensure that you get the full benefit of our extensive knowledge and experience in this highly-specialized market to help you address the factors that are so crucial in ensuring your cremation arrangement website will have a solid base to launch from. In addition, we'll take you through a competitive market analysis to give you a clear snapshot of how your new business will be positioned in the existing market.

Next, the fun part of the process can really begin, as we dive into the nuts and bolts of planning out specific details for developing your cremation arrangement website.

Online Presence and Identity / Social Media Positioning

This consists of managing your identity or brand, logo, domain name and website design, as well as social media icons and account. The importance of having strong social media visibility that stays consistent across all outlets cannot be understated.

A word about website images: To establish credibility and elicit trust, we advise all of our clients to always display images of real people who are actually involved in the business, as opposed to generic images. No matter how slick stock photos might look, they can never convey the same kind of authenticity as pictures of actual management and/or employee members.

Website Elements

E-Commerce Section: This section, the meat-and-potatoes of your site, consists of completely customizable components you can choose from. All FRM websites include at least some of the following:

Service Offerings: We suggest no more than three options, as people are more likely to revert to the minimum when faced with too many. You can add one or two burial options here if desired. The arrangement options you will choose to offer can be configured as a scrolling page (ideal for packages) or using a multi-step format (more similar to an in-person interaction).

Merchandise: It's usually best to choose your six most popular and/or profitable urns to display, as well as one scattering tube. (To make it easier for site visitors to see and compare all of the options, merchandise information in the form of a chart or spreadsheet can also be uploaded into this section, created from providers, from accounting management software or any other source.

Additional Services: Here you will offer your death certificates (we can supply a tool to make it easy for shoppers to calculate cost by area and quantity).

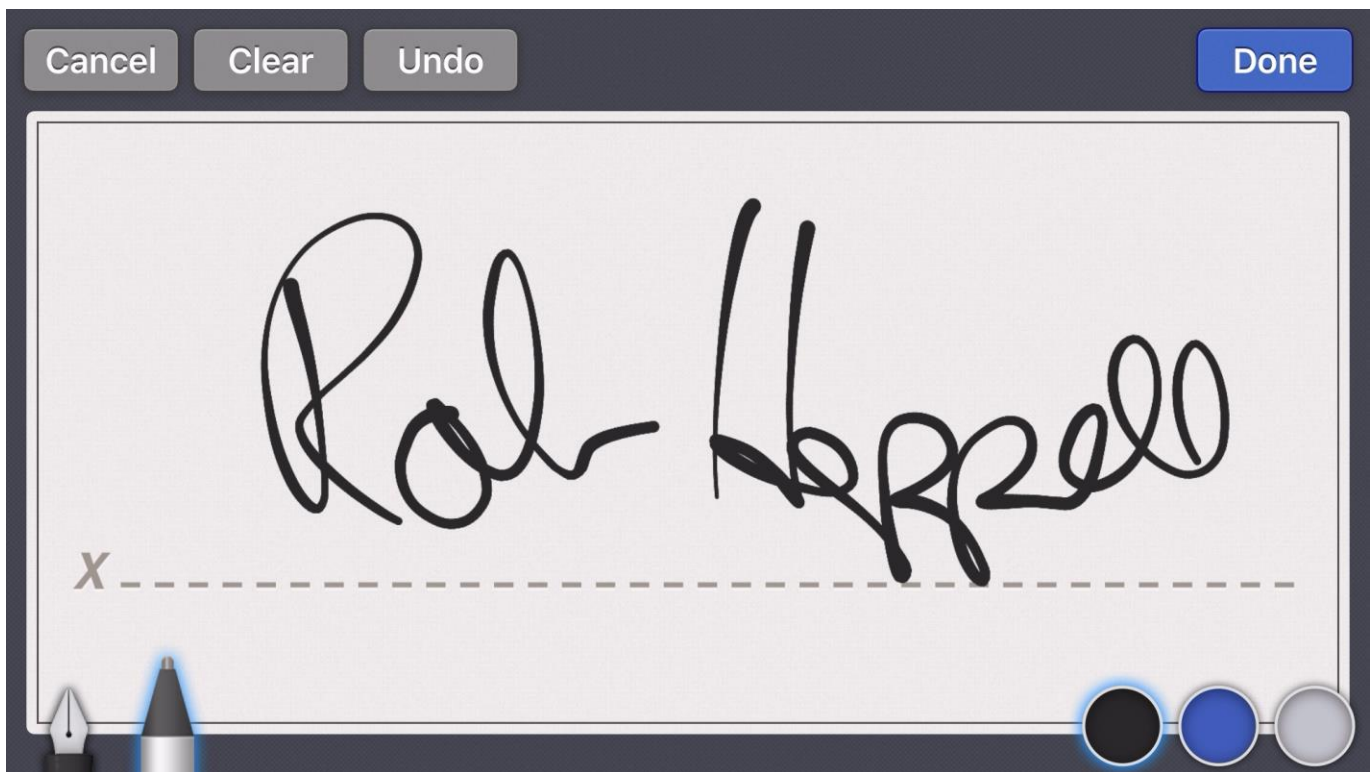
Online Store: A la carte urns, jewelry, fingerprint jewelry, etc. This area will house your payment center, which will also be configured to accept cash advances for pending arrangements.

Options and Upgrades: These could include services such as cremation witnessing and pacemaker removal. Some funeral homes also levy an extra fee for deceased who are in excess of a certain weight, but unless the financial gains will definitely be worth it, this can easily

backfire and be perceived as insensitivity. Some homes turn this to their advantage by clearly stating that they DON'T charge extra for heavier deceased.

Obituaries and Condolences: Even if your main funeral home website already has one, we highly recommend the inclusion of a complimentary obituary/condolence section on your cremation arrangement website. Not only will this feature increase authenticity and trust by providing social proof of your business, but because it essentially also functions as content that is continuously being added to, it has the added benefit of being able to drive search traffic to your site. So we strongly advise that this service be offered free of charge, although it could be presented as a \$50 value that is offered for free.

Electronic Document Signing: Currently Adobe Sign and SignNow are the most popular options for enabling secure online signatures, but the technology and offerings are constantly changing and improving, and should continue to become more affordable. We can integrate document signing capability on your site from a different provider if there's another one you are already working with.



(Signature using Sign Now on mobile device)

Widgets: As part of your package, FRM has a large selection of Widgets you can select and customize for your site, including scrolling testimonials, FAQs, local weather and more. In

addition to helping with marketing and providing useful information to site visitors, they can also make the website more visually engaging.

Marketing Assets: Enhance the marketing potential of your site by providing useful and relevant information and resources to assist and gain the trust of your customers. With a FRM cremation arrangement website, you have the choice of including any of these useful resources for clients and site visitors to read, view and/or download:

- Cremation Planning Resource Kit
- 10 FAQs & QSAs (questions they should ask)
- Glossary of Terms, Checklists, Guides & Templates
- 4 SEO-boosting screen capture marketing videos about funeral or cremation terms can be placed on the website and/or on YouTube

Your FRM website can provide stock content for death notice and pre-planning information, as well as access to a library of resources with titles like "Ask the Cremation Experts", "Cremation FAQs" etc. Provide us with the PDF or Word document format of your Cremation Authorization Form so that we can also add it to your site. If you don't have much in the way of existing resources, we can ask you for the relevant information needed and create them for you.

Website Review and Training: Once we've laid the initial groundwork for creating your site, you'll be provided with complete access, and be able to see it at the various stages as it is being created. All FRM websites include a training dashboard and videos which clearly explain the steps for you and your staff to load obits, change prices, and make other modifications that will help you control, and get the most out of, your website.

Website Launch: Generally, within (2 to 4 months), your new cremation arrangement website will be ready to launch, and once that happens there will be visitors to the site, arrangements being made, and money coming in.

From beginning to end of the entire process, Funeral Results Marketing will be on hand to help you make decisions and configure each of these important individual elements. But the creation of your website is only the beginning. After launch, we constantly monitor the results of our existing clients' websites and gather data and feedback, to help us identify which strategies, designs and other details are achieving the best results. Whenever we become aware of an opportunity for improvement, we let you know, and if desired we can make changes to your site to integrate the improved concepts. Our highly specialized knowledge and proven website configurations will provide you with innovations and advantages that are constantly being optimized, to give you a dramatic edge. This is another benefit of an FRM website that a general web designer simply cannot provide.

Summarizing all of the considerable advantages and benefits, FRM sites:

- Are not proprietary, you retain full ownership and control
- Built to be SEO-friendly from the ground up
- Include your choice of highly customizable arrangement processes in either a Bundle or Multi-Step format
- Are configured with a bulletproof “get paid first” arrangement process
- Can be designed to accommodate both pre-need and at-need options in accordance with our recommendations and your preference
- Include an attractive online obituary/condolence section
- Display beautifully on any device or interface, with full mobile responsiveness.

Getting the Most Value for Your Website Investment

We highly recommend implementing these all-important strategies in order to maximize the effectiveness and reach of your cremation website. Although they are relatively simple, they will greatly increase the odds that your new site will produce robust results beyond your most ambitious expectations.

Harness the power of Google AdWords campaigns.



Simple Low Cost Cremation - Cremation Plans from \$1295
 Ad www.pacificcoastcremation.com/LowCost (250) 483-2559
 Pacific Coast Cremation: Arrange Online (Save \$50) or at Our Office or Your Home
 Services: Simple Cremation, Celebrations of Life, Memorial Services, Graveside Services
 2780 Veterans Memorial Parkway, Victoria, BC

Simple Cremation \$1,295.00 Simple cremation offering	Celebration of Life \$2,140.00 At venue of your choice	Cemetery Gathering w/ Urn \$1,625.00 Graveside after cremation
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We’ve seen the proof time and again: Google AdWords are by far the most effective, and cost-effective, strategy you can possibly employ to drive business to your cremation arrangement website and services. We hear constantly from many of our clients that these little ads literally run their business for them. In fact, one client conducted a survey and found that 70% of the families they had served had been attracted through a Google Ad. (Wow!) We can advise you on

the specific formats for these ads that have been shown to generate the most dramatic responses.

Make sure your offerings are easily accessible, everywhere.

Although even ten years ago it might have seemed unthinkable, the internet and the fast pace of life today have created a climate where families will often begin their decision-making process by browsing options on their mobile phones *while seated at their loved one's bedside* in a hospital or hospice. By choosing FRM to design your website, you'll have the peace of mind of knowing that it will be fully responsive, easy to navigate, providing a frustration-free experience for mobile shoppers.

Include a pricing matrix on your website.

Another FRM website element which has garnered excellent results for our existing clients is the inclusion of a pricing and comparison chart, bar graph or matrix. It is by far the most convenient way for visitors to your site to quickly identify the value to be gained with your various services, and will often even incentivize them to make a value-based decision on the spot. Results are most dramatic in combination with a Google Ad that linking directly to the page containing the matrix.

Secure payment first.

With respect to receiving funds for services, the online arrangement process should NOT mimic the flow of a traditional funeral home arrangement process. All FRM websites will steer purchasers to move through the decisions and steps in a logical order, with payment occurring early in the process, as follows:

1. Select desired services and merchandise and remit payment via credit card or PayPal.
2. Provide vital statistics about the deceased.
3. Complete cremation authorization and any other required forms.



The worst-case scenario is that you might need to follow up personally with the client to complete a form or for more information or, but we believe this is far preferable than having to follow up with them to secure your money.

Send follow-up emails to boost sales.

Unlike traditional arrangements where families might make several visits to a home to finalize arrangements, the very nature of online arrangements translates to fewer opportunities to present optional, and often lucrative, additional service and/or merchandise offerings.

Sending your clients tactfully-worded emails at just the right time, presented as a natural and unobtrusive part of your regular personalized service, can be a highly effective way to engage their interest in these available extras. FRM can help you identify the correct tone and ideal

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Subject: Cremation is complete

I wanted to let you know that the cremation of [deceased name] is now complete. The urn can be picked up from our facility tomorrow or if you have provided us with other instructions they will be carried out within the next 24 hours.

If you have not selected and earn yet and are still wishing to do so, you still have time - please visit our online store for a number of selections of urns, keepsakes and cremation jewelry.

Here is a link to our online store: [LINK]

If you are planning a celebration of life, we have some resources available for you.

Visit this page to download our celebration of life worksheet and if you wish you can contact us and talk to one of our event planners about how to make The celebration of life service as meaningful as possible. There's no obligation or fee for this service.
[LINK]

Sincerely,

Your cremation provider
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suggested timing for these sales-boosting communications.

Don't overwhelm with too many options

As stated earlier, we believe that the optimal number of arrangement options to offer is three. For example:

1. "Just Cremation" (good)
2. "Simple Cremation" (better)
3. "Signature Cremation" (best)

Choose your package

	Just Cremation	Simple Cremation	Signature Cremation
	\$1495	\$2595	\$3695
Removal from Place of Death & Transfer into Our Care	✓	✓	✓
Custodial Care in our Climate Controlled Holding Facility (additional days \$60/day)	1 day	3 days	5 days
Preparing, Securing, Filing & Obtaining Necessary Documents	✓	✓	✓

More than four options can become confusing, and it's been proven that when a prospective client is overwhelmed with too many choices, they will usually end up deciding on the option for the lowest cost. This "keep it simple" rule should be observed on your website as well as in print advertising pieces such as brochures, postcards, membership literature etc. which leads into the next tip ...

Educate and build trust, whenever and wherever prospects can be reached.

Print advertising can be an economical yet powerful way to put your services in front of market segments that might otherwise not realize they exist.

Consider Valpak coupons (if offering prepaid preneed plans): These little booklets of coupons can provide a low-cost vehicle for getting the word about your low-cost cremation services into residential homes. Some people just toss them, but many value-conscious shoppers tend to go through them and make careful note of any deals for services they might need. The coupon should direct them to a dedicated page on your site that makes it easy for them to get all the details and claim their discount.

Leverage the opportunities available through hospices, hospitals and clergy.

In 2011, 44.6% of all deaths in the US, comprising 1.16 million calls, were under hospice care. With an [average hospice stay of 71.3 days](#), caregivers have ample time to build relationships with families and their terminally ill relatives, and are frequently asked to recommend funeral and cremation arrangement providers. Similarly, hospital staff and clergy members are also trusted sources of advice for families in need.

Make sure you are positioned to take advantage of these opportunities by creating a simple brochure with a clean layout and easy to understand information about your offerings that can be provided on request.

Maximize the Power of Your Cremation Arrangement Website

By booking a Strategic Planning Session with FRM, and entrusting our team to oversee and execute the numerous details associated with starting your online cremation website, you've already taken major strides to stack the odds of success overwhelmingly in your favor. But our services don't stop there. After your site launches, we will be in constant contact to monitor your results and make suggestions for ongoing improvements to ensure you are getting great results.

In addition to developing and hosting your website and managing your Google AdWords campaigns, you can also take advantage of our comprehensive consulting and analysis services by becoming a member of our War Room Report & Analysis and Funeral Boardroom programs.

We're so confident in our ability to help you regain a firm footing in the business you love that we offer a 100% money-back guarantee. Call [888-337-3698](tel:888-337-3698), or click here to provide us with your contact info, and book your FRM Strategic Planning Session today.