

American Cemetery  
Marketing and event planning

## **Marketing Your Cemetery the New Old Fashion Way** **By Daniel M. Isard**

In the old days, you know back when Robert Young knew best and Dennis was a real menace, there were simple ways to market cemetery space. You wrote letters to people actually went out and knocked on doors and made phone calls to people at home. Now, a half century later, you can't call people without the Federal Trade Commission calling you, dogs keep door knockers at bay and nobody in their right mind sends letters anymore.

Back in "the day" you sold grave spaces but today you offer interment rights for sale; above the ground, below ground, doubles, triples, for urns or groups of cremated remains. Back then the rare cemetery employee was accused of stealing jewelry and today almost every progressive cemetery business is selling jewelry. We have turned the whole world of what we do upside down.

The only thing that is consistent between the *old school* and *nu skool* is that there are certain days of the year that as a group, the community will come to the cemetery to honor those since passed. Therefore, for marketing purposes, that is where I think we should start.

### 1. Create The List of Invitees.

In the days of Ward and June a *portal* was a window on a ship. The current days of Twitter know that a portal is a common community. Think if you will how many people in your community can be aligned with the common connection of the community of memories from your cemetery. Any one person buried in your facility might be related by kinship to 10 or 20 people in your region but they might be the neighbor or friends to a hundred. The reality is that your cemetery is a portal; you might not be embracing that opportunity.

Before beginning any event, you need to be prepared to capture that data of community so that you can be the center of so many people before this event. This is a case where the size of the town is not an advantage or disadvantage. In small towns, funerals are bigger because so many people within the town knew the deceased or their family. In larger cities the same dynamic exists, it is just that we don't embrace it. One person may be involved with hundreds of people directly and indirectly through church, school, organizations and work. The lack of the sense of community tells people that

it is not as important to attend a funeral. The same dynamics exist when planning an event.

So, now we need to build the list. Keeping your contact information up to date is important for this. Also, use your web site to get families to want to stay in touch with you.

In the 1970s we had large published books called “By Streets Directory”. These massive books showed who lived where on each block of your city. These books were bigger than the back seat of a Dodge Fury! They were easy marketing tools for soliciting. Today, we have something called “Google”. Plug an address into any subscription data base and see who lives where! No paper cuts and much quicker and practically updated daily, but you just don’t get that pain in the lower back trying to put this in the back seat of your car.

## 2. Pick the Right Event

Planning an event at the cemetery can be based around a holiday that is religious or national in nature. We also see regional and customized events serving as a focus for an event. Regardless of the nature of the event, the steps for maximizing the event are the same.

Do not just throw an event. You get one chance to impress someone. Imagine you had an event for cancer awareness. Be prepared with things for people to do that will give them:

- a) recognition
- b) homage
- c) activities
- d) a sense of being

For example, you can have special badges for all cancer survivors to wear. You can place markers at the grave or interment sites of cancer victims. You can allow activities such as balloon releases or other such events.

Events are enhanced by the larger crowd. A balloon release of 10 balloons is magical, but a release of 100 balloons is something to be seen and appreciated throughout a community.

These events benefit the participants. You might also want to tie in any fundraising events as well. Food is a great adjunct, so long as you have bathrooms and trash receptacles. However, if the food is sold by a group raising money for the same themed charity, that is even better. Keep in mind that this will be a day of mixed emotions for many and the more fun the food is, the better it will help lighten the spirits. In that spirit Cotton Candy is

better than Watercress Sandwiches! I would caution you on very pungent foods. Some clients that have done BBQ have had people complain about the smoke.

Caution also has to be around upright markers. If you do have upright markers on your property they can topple. People assume they don't fall, but they do. Signage should be clear and throughout the area that upright markers should not be played on or climbed on as they may topple which can cause serious injury. I know it sounds like a downer, but it is less of a downer than having EMT show up.

### 3. Make the event an MTV event

Just asking people to come on site and sit and pray is not going to get and keep good size crowds attending these events. Today's events have got to rock the senses. They must be visual as well as audible.

For example, getting people to come to a community wide cancer awareness campaign must have speakers, music and be interactive. Use white bags filled with sand and a small candle for each person to place by the side of the road with their loved one's name written on it gives a feast to the eyes when darkness comes and people can see hundreds of small lights illuminating your site. Music chosen to compliment the event, transmitted through the property both by PA systems and by close circuit radio can allow people to share the three dimensional sight and sounds.

Having a speaker is important; however it should be a public speaker. Don't just have a minister but have someone who will talk to those in attendance. How that person comes into the staged area should also be part of your planning. Nothing says "pay attention" like a group of bag pipers or a band.

Of course, everyone in attendance is being marketed to subtly. They are realizing that the company that can make this event happen must be someone that can do the routine job of caring for a grave!

### 4. Record the event from all angles

How many times did Lucy apologize to Ricky? Well, that same number of times is the number you will tell everyone, "I wish we had recorded that!" Here is what to do.

You want a crew of two video camera people to be recording the event, coming and going and everything in between. The in between stuff most people understand needs to be recorded. It is the coming and going that is so very

important. For example, picture a balloon release. We can visualize the release itself. With two cameras one should be in the middle of the release and the other should be from a distant vantage point to capture the largeness of the event.

Most importantly, you need to capture the actions of the participants getting ready for the event. The shots of their actions are one thing, but if there is a microphone carrying assistant that can ask people the questions as they are drawing on their balloon, and later ask them how the event was for them that is the complete event.

This can be given to people that attended for merely their request. Look at this as goodwill, but also propagating your data base of attendees. People may buy today or in the future. Your job is to identify all those that think your business is a great one. This is no longer a Black and White offering, it is a High Def, multi-media, symphonic experience which appears to be no more difficult than operating an I-Pod.

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