



Daniel M. Isard

Aftercare, Outreach and Pre-Need

The next frontiers

By Daniel M. Isard

The older I get, the better I get at consulting. That is not braggadocio; I think it is a fact. A consultant is a person who learns something and then sees how it applies in the real world. In order to test this hypothesis I have needed many years to witness this profession. In 1985, I learned about pre-need. In 1986, I learned about aftercare and outreach programs. Today, I can see clearly how they work, don't work, and how they may work together.

Let me start with a simple definition of each:

- Pre-need is the advance planning of a funeral, including the selection of services and merchandise, which may or may not be prepaid at the time of pre-arrangement.
- Aftercare and outreach is the care, help, support or supervision given to people after the funeral service is concluded to help families be prepared to continue without the deceased in their life. They can be programs, meetings or educational events.

**From Traditional To Contemporary
Fabhaven Is At The Heart Of It All.**



Give your clients the selection and variety they demand for their loved ones.

PDM Fabhaven Inc. is an innovative industry leader in design and manufacturing of cremation urns, vaults, and granite monuments. Specializing in etchings and portraits. Their international craftsmanship and unparalleled level of expertise is the driving force behind over 23 years of service.



Eternal Products

PDM Fabhaven Inc. 251 Carrier Drive, M9W 5Y8 Toronto, Ontario 416.798.2818 1.800.361.8682 www.fabhaven.com

Aftercare and outreach are essentially the same. If you wanted to have a balloon send-off with children who write notes, tie it to the bottom of a helium balloon and release it into the sky, that's an aftercare event. When you have a program that honours veterans as a group, it is an outreach program. Both programs give you an opportunity to demonstrate to your community that you are the most knowledgeable person in this community on death, dying, grieving and surviving.

Aftercare and outreach are essentially the same. If you wanted to have a balloon send-off with children who write notes, tie it to the bottom of a helium balloon and release it into the sky, that's an aftercare event. When you have a program that honours veterans as a group, it is an outreach program. Both programs give you an opportunity to demonstrate to your community that you are the most knowledgeable person in this community on death, dying, grieving and surviving.

Pre-need has many dynamics to it. In this case I am going to focus upon only one dynamic which is the ability to have leads provided to facilitate a pre-need program. I have found that many companies have tried to use aftercare programs to generate leads for pre-need. If the sole purpose of the aftercare program is to sell pre-need or generate leads, the aftercare and the pre-need components will each fail.

Aftercare is not a lead-generating faucet for pre-need. Imagine you have 200 people attend a holiday help program. If you do the program correctly and make it worth their time, you are going to have people who are impressed with your business. Are these people more inclined to want to prearrange with you when they are of the mind to do so? Of course. Now imagine you gather the same 200 people together and have your pre-need counsellor take families off to the side to try and get them to prearrange before or immediately after the event. How are these people going to feel? They are going to feel betrayed. Have you ever gone on a 90-minute tour of a resort knowing that it was a sales pitch? You understand the trade-off is the free meal they are giving you. However, these families are going to feel lied to. They didn't come to the event to be fodder for salespeople. They came for the event. Aftercare will generate leads but the event itself must first and foremost stand on its own.

You must understand that aftercare is a form of altruism. Altruism is something you do for non-commercial purposes. Altruism is a form of philanthropy. Pre-need, on the other hand, is a commercial endeavour. This whole concept of altruism versus commercial in aftercare is altruism; selling pre-need at the event is commercial.

So, if aftercare is a must do, how can it impact the results for pre-need? There are six categories I have labelled as aftercare programming possibilities and each has its own way of helping a firm create pre-need leads.

1. Global Programming: Aftercare events that are unlimited in their scope of influence. For example: you write an article on survivor's benefits and place it on your web page; you will be surprised to see the quantity of people who have read this and the wide area the readers come from. Pre-need in this case can be part of the article and allow people to understand the imperative of prearranging and how it can help survivors be prepared.

2. Large Programming: Events that involve a large group all participating at one time. I see many Remembrance Day and other group events at funeral homes and cemeteries. Pre-need can be the list of those who attend. Videotape the event. Offer to get a copy of the video to these attendees for free. That is a form of a pre-need lead.

3. Mid-Sized Programming: Events that involve a mid-sized group all participating at one time. This can be a group of survivors of a particular disease, such as sponsoring a CIBC Run for the Cure team. The pre-need opportunity could be in the sponsorship extensions from the event.

4. Boutique Programs: Events that appeal to a small group at one time. For example, a survivors education series of 20 people at your funeral home. These people could be positively influenced to pre-need if one of the topics deals with elder financial planning and pre-need is a part of that subject.

5. One-on-One Programming: Your staff working with one person at a time. A funeral followup counsellor works well in helping a survivor complete the tedious paperwork required to turn over accounts and change title. Pre-need is as simple as making sure the survivor spells out their last wishes and sets aside money to provide for this.

6. Reverse Programming: This is when families adopt your business. Imagine you have a special veterans memorial program. Maybe there are veterans who have memorabilia that they would like to have displayed. If you display it as part of your local exhibit, their donation of this material to you is akin to their adopting your business. At that point, the pre-need is all but written.

Keep this in mind as you make decisions for your business. It is no longer an option to provide aftercare and outreach services. The only decision is how much aftercare you can afford to provide. The cost of aftercare and outreach are basically advertising and promotion. Advertising and promotion

should be six per cent of a funeral home's revenue. Aftercare and outreach programs should be part of this bucket along with media, websites and public relations.

In my experience, case count increases as you increase your aftercare programming. Think about all the workshops owners go to learning how to increase case count? I guarantee, case count, no matter at what level you do any of these programs, will increase. This is because families are going to feel they are getting value. Pre-needs are going to increase.

Some of you still might not be convinced that aftercare is part of your business plan. Let me explain why it most definitely should be.

1. You are staffed to serve a family when one of their parent's dies. It will be about seven to 10 years until the surviving parent dies. Aftercare will keep your relationship with the family and especially the surviving children current, so that they will be predisposed to use your firm at the time of the surviving parent's subsequent death.

2. You claim you are the best business for the community but are you providing all the services that we know the best businesses provide? You need to set the bar high for the profession and that is not based on having a more ornate casket showroom.

3. Your services must provide the bridge to the survivors to learn to cope. Aftercare and various outreach programs help the survivors. This profession spends more time helping survivors than the deceased. Aftercare is an organized way to provide for this.

4. Consumers must see you in a different light than just the person they pay when a tragedy occurs. They must see you as an ongoing resource. Aftercare provides that portfolio of services.

5. This business has changed in the past 100 years. In 1910, 60 per cent of all deaths were people under 25 years old, 20 per cent were ages 25 to 65, and 20 per cent were over age 65. Today, 2.5 per cent of all deaths are age 25 or younger, about 20 per cent

are aged 25 to 65, and therefore more than 77 per cent are over age 65. We are providing funeral services to those who have had a complete life today whereas 100 years ago there was so much mourning due to the life that was snuffed out with its potential unknown. Today, we need to help survivors prepare to continue surviving.

There are other businesses that have examples of pre-need. Home Depot invites consumers to come in and complete "do-it-yourself" classes. You go to the store, take the class and then you buy stuff. Cooking stores have classes to teach you how to cook certain things using their utensils, because the sooner they make it easier for you, you buy the products used. Hospitals are now doing it. Churches are even doing aftercare. They are the least qualified to do aftercare. I am not trying to be anti-religion, but they have only one

answer. Their answer may be similar to yours, but in most cases it is far more limited. You have a whole plethora of opportunities, and they have just one.

In the past 30 years we have seen that pre-need is going to be a part of every funeral home marketing plan. Generating the leads in the most efficient fashion is an area that aftercare and outreach programs can be the next frontier! 

Dan Isard, MSFS, is president of The Foresight Companies, LLC, a Phoenix-based business and management consulting firm specializing in mergers and acquisitions, valuations, accounting, financing and customer surveys. He is the author of several books, and the host of THE DAN ISARD SHOW at <http://funeralradio.com>. He can be reached at 800-426-0165 or danisard@f4sight.com. For copies of this article and other educational information visit www.f4sight.com. Connect with Isard and The Foresight Companies by following them on Twitter at @f4sight or on Facebook.

"He really deserved it."

(Using his Goodwill as an asset, that is)

BMO Bank of Montreal® recognizes that the best-established funeral homes offer an asset that doesn't necessarily appear on financial statements — Goodwill.

As part of our comprehensive program developed for the Funeral Services profession, BMO Bank of Montreal takes into account Goodwill as part of a funeral home's enterprise value. Whether you are seeking financing for acquisition or succession — real estate or vehicles — get the financing you need by taking advantage of your reputation and heritage. Call Pat Matthews, Manager, Industry Programs at 1 877 629-6262; in the Toronto area call (416) 927-5348.



BMO  Bank of Montreal

® Registered trade-mark of Bank of Montreal.