



Paper or Plastic?

by Jeff Harbeson



A few days ago while assisting Mrs. Commander at the grocery store, there was a shortage of "baggers" that normally place our purchases into bags at checkout. Of course being the man of action that I am (Mrs. Commander issued a command), I jumped into position and began performing the bagging myself. As you read this post, here is where you insert "well, you have finally found something that matches your talent" comments. I'm old enough to remember when all the groceries were placed in paper bags which meant if something leaked or if it was raining, the bags disintegrated and the contents would spill out.

As our society changed, someone invented the plastic shopping bag that eliminated the leaking/disintegrating problems. Additionally, the plastic bag also was less expensive to manufacture and I recall something about saving trees making the plastic bags environmentally better. During this time of transition, we were asked "paper or plastic" by the bagging staff at most grocery stores...remember?

The environmental superiority of the plastic bag took a turn for the worse as they do not fare well in trash dumps and identified as a litter hazard. Then, in some states, the paper and plastic bags were "outlawed" or taxed. A consumer must purchase an environmentally friendly bag for repeated use or reuse the plastic they had from "days of yore."

If you read my blog, you know that I am one that enjoys providing analogies about the funeral industry (see *Funeral Directors: Are You Practicing Basic Blocking and Tackling Skills* and *The Hotel and Funeral Industry: What Can We Learn?*). There was a time (not so long ago)

that we all went to the funeral home and it was assumed that we would have a burial (just like we got paper bags at the grocery store). At some point, and perhaps about the same time we started getting the question "paper or plastic," consumers increased their want for cremation rather than burial while at the local funeral home. Just like the transition from paper to plastic, cremation is becoming the preferred choice over burial for consumers. Consumers are shopping online for their funeral needs and DIY choices are becoming popular (just like bring your own bags to the grocery store to "save the environment"). Not only are consumers not pining for the paper bags, but some are not even going to the local grocery store (ordering online and grow your own)! See the shift?

Unfortunately as a whole, our industry is still acting like we are going to have a huge comeback to the paper bag era. The casket companies continue to try convincing the sheep that "paper will never go out of style" offering useless contracts, taking up valuable funeral home space with "showrooms" (Hallmark stores... how well are they doing?), and of course charging more/discounting more, etc. etc. Consumers are flocking in droves to the internet for information, yet few funeral homes post any pricing forcing the consumer to either call or "stop by" if they want information. I have asked this question many times; if you were shopping online and the website had no pricing information, what do YOU do?

Our society is continuing to change for many reasons including diffusion and views about how we treat our dead is certainly noticeable. What is your funeral home doing to transition from "paper to plastic"? **FBA**



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