

“ The modern survey is not paper. It is not conducted by phone banks calling homes at night because many people are not using their landlines any longer. It is being done by email. ”

And the Survey Says...

Many cemeteries operate with the same business plan they had hundreds of years ago: Someone dies, and he or she gets buried. But the progressive cemetery has enhanced the business plan: Someone dies, he or she gets cremated, and then he or she gets inurned.

Cemeteries are businesses, and they need data to run at their maximum efficiency. We need to be able to use the electronic world to capture the data. The problem is that most ceterierians do not know what data to capture.

The data capture is simple when you realize that more than 75 percent of all cemetery sales (interment or inurnment is immaterial) come from people who already have family or friends interred within your gates. We need to be able to find out more about these consumers, and we need to do it on a proactive basis. Customer surveys are a key part of that ability.

If you gave me the contact information for 100 people that spoke to a salesperson from your cemetery about acquiring interment rights, what could I learn from them?

- I can learn if they bought somewhere or are still looking.
- If they bought, I can learn where they bought.

• If they bought somewhere else, I can learn why they bought at the other location and not at your cemetery.

Do you comprehend how valuable those three insights could be?

First of all, if they bought somewhere else, I can determine my true competitors. However, if they haven't bought anywhere else, now I can determine who to remarket to and what needs to focus on.

Assume half of the 100 people have not bought. That is 50 possible consumers, and on average, that is about four interments each. That is a chance at 200 interment rights, with opening/closing fees, and some percentage of them will buy markers. That is conceivably a million dollars in added revenue.

Let's go back to those who have bought elsewhere. I can survey them to determine what they bought. Maybe they bought the interment but are still shopping for merchandise. Maybe I can address

the problem as to why they didn't buy with me. Maybe it is a salesperson's error. Maybe it is the impression my property is giving. Advance cemetery sales are usually not lost due to price.

It's All about the Data

Do you know what a lead costs? A direct mailing program can have lead costs that are \$50 or more per person. However, if we look at these costs on a per closing basis, the total cost could be 10 times that amount!

So, how much would you spend to retrieve a chance at a sale or the data upon a failed sales effort? I would think this is a small cost, and if you compare those costs to the results of identifying some people that are still in the market, it is not a cost at all.

As a management and financial consultant to this profession, I have to constantly find tools to keep my clients on the most progressive edge of the business. My company, The Foresight Companies, has experimented with

customer surveys for years, but we never liked them. That is, we never liked them until now, because now the survey has met the electronic age.

The modern survey is not paper. It is not conducted by phone banks calling homes at night because many people are not using their landlines any longer. It is being done by e-mail.

The e-mail asks the consumer to take a survey. The company surveying its consumers should not expect a 100 percent response rate. I have seen response rates in the 70 percent range, but that is also rare. What type of response you get all depends on the type of survey being conducted. A survey of existing interment right owners could be 35 percent or up to 50 percent. A survey of those that haven't bought from you might be in the 25 to 35 percent response rate.

We can increase the rate response by offering promotions that will give inducements to people for

Tips for Writing Survey Questions

- 1 Design your survey questions with your goals and audience in mind.** Every question should have a well-defined purpose and a strong reason for being included.
- 2 Each question should be focused on a single topic or issue.** Questions need to be specific, asking respondents about one issue at a time. For example, "Do you know what funeral home will serve you at the time of need?"
- 3 Ask follow-up questions.** This allows you to drill down and get more specific information. For example, "Do you believe it is important to make an advance arrangement with that funeral home?"
- 4 Questions should be brief.** Drawn out questions can increase confusion.
- 5 Questions should be crystal clear.** It should be obvious what the question is asking.

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completing the survey. These inducements are very cheap. They can be coupons for meals at local businesses. This could double the response rate.

When we offer this, the survey can be lengthier, as people are answering your questions for the prize. Remember, Cracker Jack never puts its prize on the top of a box (not intentionally at least). It puts it in on the bottom so people eat through to the reward. Do the same thing with the survey: seek data but reward the

people who give it to you.

In cemeteries we can survey different groups of people, such as nonbuyers, people who have bought interment rights but not merchandise, interment right owners who have not used the interment right (to see if they want to move to other sections of the cemetery), families who just had an interment, and so on.

The modern survey is not like the paper survey. Imagine if you will that I can have some base questions

and subject to the response on any of those base questions, I can ask follow-up questions. In the electronic world of surveys I can do this. I can't do this in the world of paper surveys. This is called an A-B or Logic Reply question.

For example, if a consumer buys an interment right by advance sale, I can ask him or her certain base questions. One might be, "Do you know what funeral home is going to serve you at the time of need?" The consumer has only two answers, "yes" or "no." If he or she replies, "yes," my survey would then ask, "Do you believe it is important to make an advance arrangement with that funeral home?"

Again, the respondent can answer "yes" or "no." If he or she answers, "yes," I can either sell this lead to a nearby funeral home, sell preneed funeral plans for that funeral home or sell final expense insurance directly to the consumer. Do you see how the survey gives you a game plan to provide the best possible service to that consumer?

The key to being the best cemetery in the 21st century is having the most complete objectives and the most complete means of meeting those objectives. That is why you need to think about how surveys can help you serve families. •

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