

If you have customers, you have a resource to tap when deciding how to develop your cemetery property.

Cemetery Impossible

How to decide what to develop on remaining acreage

Dear Dan,

My cemetery is 60 years old. We have 40 acres of land to develop and about three acres developed for sale. We average 300 sales a year. The issue is, how do we determine what to develop these 40 acres into?
Developmentally Delayed in Des Moines

Dear Triple D,

Your quandary is very easy to resolve. I strongly recommend doing two things:

1. Survey your existing consumers.
2. Hold public meetings.

Never in the history of communication has conducting a survey been easier than it is today. Today we can send a survey to families and ask them questions about how they see their relationship with us.

You should be surveying your families throughout the year. Ask them how satisfied they were with the process of working with your cemetery. This can include questions such as:

- Why did you elect to purchase a grave at our cemetery?
- Why did you choose the section you chose?
- Why did you choose the number of graves you chose at this time?
- What did you appreciate about the way we served you?
- Who in our organization gave you exceptional service?
- Were you satisfied with the price you paid for:
 - Interment rights?
 - Memorial merchandise?

With that being established, you can then ask questions about the future of your business:

- Would you make use of an outdoor gathering place for memorial events?
- What features would you like to see in a memorial gathering place:
 - Indoor or outdoor?
 - Ability to play music?
 - Cooking or grilling capability?
 - Seating?



You can then ask them about future interment options:

- Would you want us to offer more interment options for cremation?

No.

Yes:

- Ground inurnment
- Above-ground inurnment
- Indoor glass-front niches
- Memorial sites for those who are not placed here

- Would you want us to build a mausoleum?
- Would you consider buying a crypt?
- Would you consider buying a niche?

The survey should be done electronically. You will get just as many results as you would with a paper survey, and faster. Also with an electronic survey, if someone drops out before

completing it, the partial result is recorded.

You should routinely survey your families. If you collect e-mail addresses, you can communicate with your families easily and frequently. You can keep the families you have a relationship with informed of your plans, operations, outreach and updates. You can let them know about new ideas or issues, let them know your point of view and solicit theirs.

If your cemetery has a community area where you can seat 50 people, you can host public meetings. You can hold educational workshops, aftercare-related gatherings or meetings to talk about your cemetery's future plans. Feel free to call meetings to unveil (pardon the pun) new areas for development.

Any chance to bring people onto your property is good. Coming to a cemetery or combination property without the stress of a funeral or interment gives a family a chance to see and truly appreciate its beauty and what it offers as a place for memorialization and remembrance.

This will also make them more interested in participating when you ask them for input about the direction your cemetery should take in planning for the future.

After implementing this survey and bringing people in for meetings and presentations, you will have a clear picture of what your master plan needs to include. □

by Daniel M. Isard, MSFS



1.800.426.0165
danisard@theforesightcompanies.com

ICCFA Magazine author spotlight

► Isard 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 frequently speaks at industry conventions.

More from this author

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Editor's note

The Cemetery Impossible column is written by the staff of The Foresight Companies. **If you have a question you want to be featured in this column, please send it to danisard@f4sight.com.** Dan Isard or a member of his staff will call you to get more information and a recommendation will be provided via this column, helping not only you but also others who are facing similar challenges.