

# 2010 Strategic Marketing Plan For Funeral Service Professionals

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This document will be updated periodically as market conditions change during 2010. All current customers will receive an updated version in pdf format.

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## Table of Contents

Chapter 1 – Introduction .....	1
Chapter 2 – Personal Education .....	7
Chapter 2 – Cultivate Referrals.....	13
Chapter 3 – Become Unique.....	21
Chapter 4 – Resolve Arrangement Problems .....	30
Chapter 5 – Educate the Market .....	36
Chapter 6 – Improve Awareness.....	39
Chapter 7 – 12 Month Action Plan .....	45
Chapter 8 – My Story .....	48

## Chapter 1 – Introduction

Welcome to the 2010 Strategic Marketing Plan for Funeral Service Professionals. The first version of this plan was published in 2009 and this new version has been created to reflect the 2010 market conditions. This document will be updated throughout the year as conditions change and emailed to all past customers.

My name is John Callaghan and I am a professional marketer specializing in the funeral home industry. Many of you who have purchased this information product already know my background, but for those of you who don't, I've included that summary as the last chapter in this book.

In the past I was able to spend a large portion of my time working one on one with funeral home owners to help them grow their businesses. Although effective, this business model is inherently limited by the amount of time available in my busy schedule. In short....demand has outstripped supply (i.e., my time). For this reason, as we enter into a new decade I will shift my focus to spending more time creating training materials and turnkey marketing systems. In doing so I will be able to help even more funeral home owners who desperately need help navigating today's hyper-competitive price-sensitive market.

When I published the first version of this document in 2009 I made the statement that "2008 was definitely a wild ride in the economy". Well if 2008 was a wild ride what in the world would you call 2009!! A global financial meltdown, massive government bailouts, the bankruptcy and nationalization of both Chrysler and General Motors, more unemployment....the list goes on and on.

What will 2010 be like? Who knows? For every expert who says that the recession is over you can find another one who says that we are heading into a prolonged depression and maybe even hyper-inflation.

Here's what we do know... uncertainty paralyzes consumers. It was true in 2009 and it will still be true in 2010. Home sales are drying up, car sales have dried up, and the outlook for funeral homes is just as uncertain.

There are four things that I believe you can count on in 2010.

The first is that the cremation rates will continue to rise – there's absolutely nothing about today's uncertain economy that will stand in the way of that growing trend.

Number two, arrangement meetings will become even tougher. They're hard enough now as it is – it's hard to convince a family to pay for a visitation and memorial service when they really don't understand why. But people will guard their checkbooks fiercely in the coming year – if they don't understand the value of a funeral, they will not spend money on it.

Number three, traditional mass advertising will become increasingly less effective. In tough times, people rely on their friends for recommendations, and they ignore ads. This isn't the first time this has happened – it happens every recession, traditional mass advertising becomes less and less effective, and referral-oriented marketing becomes more effective.

The number four thing that I think you can count on for the coming year...things will change. There's an old adage that goes, "I can't change the direction of the wind, but I can adjust my sails, to always reach my destination." Things will change in the coming year, that's pretty much a given.

In times of change, it's extremely important to have a strategic plan. It sets your direction, and prevents you from getting blown too far off course. I've created this 2010 Strategic Marketing Plan for funeral homes to help you set your direction for the new year. As the economy and consumers change, I'll update this document, and send it out to anyone who's purchased it.

One of the key things that I will caution you on is to not get caught up in the paralysis wave. Now is not the time to sit around and do nothing. Now is the time to strengthen your foundation and prepare for the future. The economy will recover eventually. The question is... will you be ready?

You will notice that this document is written in a very casual, almost conversational style. I did this intentionally so that you read it quickly, understand the material, and begin applying this plan to your own funeral home.

One of the toughest challenges in marketing is to decide what to do first, what to do second, and third, and so on. There are so many options available to you; it's hard to know where to start. Unfortunately, in today's turbulent market, some business owners either do nothing, or they just repeat what they did last year. In today's economy, both of those things are bad ideas.

The following diagram is called the Strategic Marketing Model. It illustrates the major marketing-related activities that I believe you should work on in 2010.

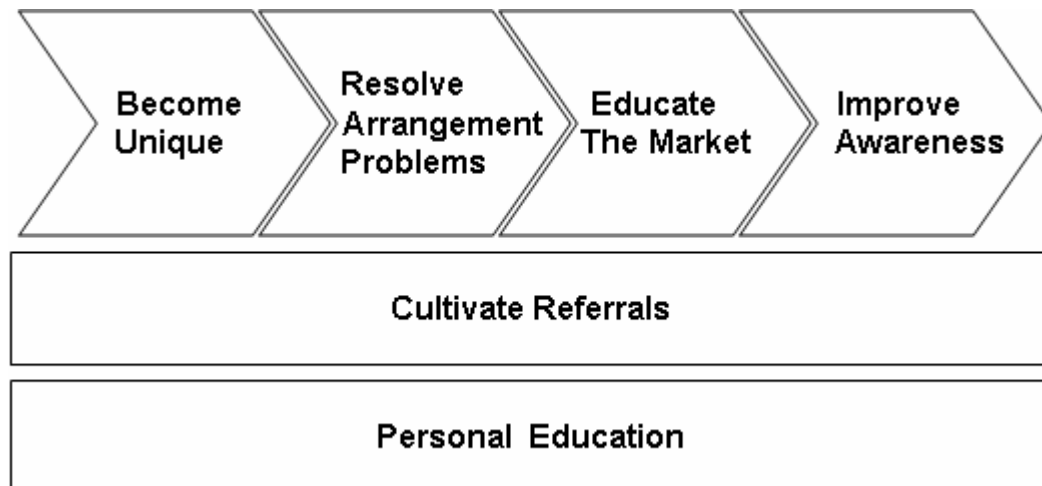


Figure 1 – Strategic Marketing Model

I'll give you a brief overview of each of these areas in this introduction, and the rest of this document will discuss the topics in detail.

The foundation of the marketing model is **Personal Education**, and it is critically important to your success this year. Consumer preferences are changing rapidly, marketing techniques and strategies are changing rapidly, and you have to keep up with it! Just studying what other funeral homes are doing will not help you succeed in today's market. I'll give you specific recommendations on books and other materials that you need to be studying in order to keep up with this dynamic world that we now live in.

The next component is called **Cultivate Referrals**. Research proves that during recessions traditional mass advertising becomes increasingly less effective. At the same time consumers rely upon referrals to guide their purchase decisions. You can let them happen by chance, or you can proactively cultivate referrals. The chapter on cultivating referrals gives you my step-by-step plan for getting more referrals in your local market.

The next section deals explains how to **Become Unique**. One of the golden rules of marketing is that if all things are equal... the deciding criteria is always price. If you have a lot of price shoppers, then there is a significant chance that you have not made yourself unique in the local market. This chapter will give you the basic choices and the procedure for becoming unique.

The next marketing activity is to **Resolve Arrangement Problems**. Consumers have changed dramatically over the past decade, and 2010 will be a tough year for consumers, and for the person trying to make arrangements with them. This chapter gives you an overview of an education-based arrangement process that helps families understand the value of a visitation and memorial service. Remember, if they don't understand the value of a visitation they won't spend their hard-earned money on it.

The next marketing activity is to **Educate the Market**. Today, the vast majority of people do not understand why they should have a funeral, let alone what's involved in one. In this chapter, I lay out specific recommendations for what you need to put in place this year to educate your market.

The last activity is to **Improve Awareness**. You don't want your valuable funeral services to be the best-kept secret in the area, but you also don't want to waste your money on ineffective advertising. This section gives you the 3 components of the only style of advertising that works in a slow economy.

The balance of this document discusses each section of the strategic marketing model, and gives you specific recommendations for actions that will help your business in 2010.

One final comment before diving into the rest of the material... After publishing my 2009 version of the Strategic Marketing Plan I received dozens of extremely positive emails and phone calls from funeral home owners who had purchased

the book and really appreciated the material. Unfortunately, I also heard (through the grapevine) a number of very negative comments from a couple of the long term marketing agencies in the funeral home industry. Apparently they didn't appreciate the fact that someone they considered to be an "outsider" was giving guidance to "their customers".

I guess I could ignore their comments, but that's just not in my nature. Here's my view....

If the long term agencies were doing their job, the industry would not be in the trouble that it is in. Consumers have fundamentally changed and marketing must change accordingly. But the long term marketing agencies are still churning out the same ad campaigns that stopped working ten years ago.

In regards to me being an "outsider"....they're right...kind of. To be effective a marketer must always be in tune with the target market. If I want to market to funeral home owners then I need to have a clear understanding of what it's like to be a funeral home owner. I can then effectively create ads and campaigns that draw you to me. But my focus isn't on marketing to you.

My focus is on helping you market to your prospective families. In order to do that, I need to stay in tune with what families want and what they think about funeral services. In fact, 80% of my effectiveness as a marketer comes from my understanding of today's customers. Only 20% of it comes from understanding you and your funeral home.

Here's a general rule of thumb....if a marketing person is comfortable touring your new prep room they have lost touch with your prospective families and is of no value to you.