

Product Spotlight

By Patti Martin Bartsche

Integrating Obituaries With a Funeral Home's Facebook Page

There's little question that social media – and particularly Facebook – is here to stay. Recognizing the need to connect funeral homes with the families they serve in new ways, Tributes.com has launched an app for that.

Tributes.com's new Facebook application is designed to allow funeral homes to seamlessly integrate their obituary listings into their Facebook business pages and capitalize on the traffic and interactivity of the leading social network that now captures one out of every 11 Internet visits in the United States.

"Funeral homes are rapidly realizing that their Facebook pages are becoming as critically important to the online experience they offer the circle of grievers mourning those in their care, their regular followers and prospective customers as their websites are," said Elaine Haney, president and CEO of Tributes.com.

Once installed on a funeral home's Facebook page, the Tributes' Obituary application creates a new dedicated and customized obituary area. The obituary area automatically highlights the funeral home's most recently posted obituaries as well as allowing integrated searching of the funeral home's historical obituaries.

Comfortable Interface

While the Tributes implementation is different from other Facebook solutions currently being offered to funeral service professionals, it is comfortably familiar for users, Haney said. "With the Tributes application, Facebook users are able to post condolences on obituaries without having to leave the Facebook environment by using the familiar Facebook 'comment' interface," she said. "And condolences left on obituaries on a funeral home's



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Facebook page are fully synchronized with that obituary's Tributes-powered Tributes.com, the Tributes Network of media partners and, most importantly, the funeral home website."

In addition, if the user chooses, the guestbook entry along with links to the obituary listing and the funeral home's website can immediately be posted to the user's wall. "It's a way to drive more awareness of the funeral home's obituary content among the user's group of Facebook friends,"

Haney pointed out. Families who have placed a loved one in the care of a funeral home that utilizes the application can now be directly connected to extended family and friends that are active members of the Facebook community for support, she added.

Recognizing the importance of Facebook in today's social media world, Haney said she challenged the Tributes technology team to make the Tributes Obituary application look like a natural extension of Facebook.

“We wanted the page to look the same and allow people to comment the same way people are used to,” Haney said. “At the same time, we wanted the information posted to synch to our core database and partners.”

A Positive Reaction

Response to the Facebook Obituary application has been overwhelmingly positive. “Since our beginning just over a year and a half ago, the importance of our website and the quality of our online obituary offering is a major focus for us. Partnering with rapidly developing Internet platforms such as Tributes.com and Facebook has become an essential part of our digital presence,” said Jim Heald, partner and managing director at Heald & Chiampa Funeral Directors in Shrewsbury, Mass. Heald’s brother, John, is also a partner at the funeral home as well as vice president of sales and business development at Tributes.com.

“While the newspapers have long been the means in which to share the news of someone’s passing, it is clear times are changing. People live on their computers, mobile devices and social networks, and we need to be on all of them,” Jim Heald added.

Lisa Baue, CEO of Baue Funeral Homes in St. Charles, Mo., agreed. “We continue to see increased demand from our families for more and better digital solutions,” Baue said. “We know by partnering with Tributes.com that our funeral home will be able to evolve with the changing technology landscape with digital solutions that are specifically designed to satisfy both the changing needs of our business as well as those of the families we serve.”

The new Facebook application is the latest technological advance put

forward by Tributes.com in recent months. The company recently unveiled a completely redesigned homepage and new logo design.

The new homepage design is meant to localize, personalize and simplify the Tributes.com experience at the popular obituary classified site, Haney said.

“We service 2.5 million unique consumers each month, and the site has grown dramatically since we launched three years ago,” she said. “We thought it was time to enhance our brand image and user interface to be softer in tone and more sophisticated in its design while dramatically improving our site experience to be much more personalized for our users.”

Application Benefits

Key components of the new homepage design include:

- Local obits intelligently presented based on the physical location of the user at the time they access the site.
- A streamlined search box integrated into the site header, allowing obituary searching from any area of the site.
- Improved search algorithms to help better ensure users are quickly and reliably finding the results they are looking for.
- The ability to tag obits of friends and family members so they appear on a user’s homepage, allowing users to establish their own personalized “virtual cemetery” experience.
- Simplified access to customization features including obituary alert, saved locations and anniversary reminders.
- A “Living Memorial Wall,” highlighting the continuous activity of site users across the Tributes network.

The local aspect was critical, Haney said. “With the old design,

our users were forced to search for their local information. With the new technology, they get that local feel immediately.” Equally important, she added, was the ability to search quickly and easily. Users can locate comprehensive obituary and service information, as well as interact with the friends and family that need their support in a timely fashion while simultaneously having the ability to make their regular Tributes.com experience their own with immediate access to the obituary news they want and the memorials of loved ones close by.

Building off social networking was also important, Haney said, pointing to the site’s plus remember feature, which allows users to tag relatives, friends and ancestors as well as the Living Memorial Wall, which provides an up-to-the-minute ticker of what users across Tributes.com are doing. “We are taking advantage of social networking capabilities to provide Tributes.com with personalized, unique and interesting content,” Haney said.

Recognizing that the Tributes.com logo was looking a little old, Haney challenged her team to come up with something fresh and new. “From a design standpoint, we wanted to soften the logo. The original logo was more bold; now it has a softer, more reserved look that brings a little more emotion to the brand,” she said.

So what’s next for Tributes.com? Haney said the next technology initiative will be in the mobile area. “In greater numbers, people are accessing information from their smartphones,” Haney pointed out. “We want to develop a mobile version that is a real streamlined version of what we have now. The challenge is how to present content better in a mobile environment.” ❖