Traffic vs Visitors

Would you prefer to have 50 people drive through your parking lot, or one family to meet in your office with questions about your services, prices and options? Most of us want visitors, not traffic. After nearly 20 years of funeral home websites, it is very surprising that the dialogue in the industry prioritizes website traffic, as many Internet veterans know that "traffic" can be a very nebulous term. Over the past two decades, traffic has been redefined many times over as the industry has evolved, and Web usage has become more pervasive and better understood.

Traffic has always been a loose measure of the success of a website. However, traffic can and has been defined as many things: page views, unique visitors, engagement (time spent), etc. – in other words, a host of different dimensions. In the early days of the Web when everyone believed page views mattered most, some websites would force their users through longer flows (extra clicks) to increase their page views somewhat artificially. Quickly that became bad practice and a bad user experience and monthly unique visitors soon became a better measure coupled with engagement (time spent) on a website as a way to measure its

value and success. However for different types of websites, engagement can (and should) actually be short. For example, engagement on Google or any search engine can be quite brief – as the consumer would in fact prefer – if indeed they are doing their job well and connecting you with the right search result as quickly as possible.

Traffic Flow

Traffic to a funeral home website is an equally nebulous concept, and for the funeral home owner who's somewhat uneducated about the Internet, it is quite easy to make them believe that traffic or page views to

their website are very important. The reality is, page views and traffic in the Nielsen or comScore measurement world are only important to a large destination Internet brand looking to establish a national ranking in a particular Web category and/or sites (publishers/search engines) that monetize their properties with advertising and need as many pages with as many ad impressions as possible that they can sell.

Funeral home websites do not fall into either of these categories. Their rank on the Internet is irrelevant (it would be obscure if it's even measured at all) and in reality the page view counts don't matter either. What really should be most important to a funeral home owner when it comes to their website is ensuring that people who need access to their site can easily locate it (i.e., they have good search engine optimization practices and good integration with the vertical directories and databases frequented most by consumers to locate sites like theirs or the information they contain, such as their obituaries), so when users arrive at their site they provide them with a quality experience and engaging content (regardless of which technology provider powers the site) and that their website design is simple with good cross-promotion of site content and features to encourage visitors to explore, to return (loyalty) and ultimately to generate sales and/or leads.

Collaborative Technology

Assembling multiple technologies to provide users with the best experience when they come to the home page of your website is what matters most – not counting page views or caring which servers on the Internet are accruing those page views in the eyes of the large traffic measurement firms. If your Web hosting provider has done an excellent job in designing your website and seamlessly integrating the technologies and content that you have specified, the consumer who visits your site will experience a single website and uniform brand experience.

> A contemporary website should provide the means to continue to communicate with your site visitors after their initial visit in order to draw them back.

As far as consumers are concerned, for the duration of their visit, they will be at *your* website for their entire experience, regardless of whether or not a company such as Tributes.com powers your obituary section or Event by Wire powers your funeral webcasts. To the consumer, it is *your* website, *your* funeral home. The consumer doesn't care who's powering what technology or who might be getting credit in comScore for the page views that are resulting from their visit, and you shouldn't either. Focus on making sure that whatever blend of technologies are incorporated in your site, they:

- Work well together
- Are easy to navigate
- Provide each of your visitors with the information and/or experience they were hoping for
- Provide some things they weren't expecting that make their visit to your website more memorable

The Power of Communication

A contemporary website should provide the means to continue to communicate with your site visitors after their initial visit in order to draw them back. This can best be accomplished with features like obituary alerts and anniversary reminders. Create a regularly distributed email newsletter that visitors to your site can subscribe to. If you have a Facebook page, a blog or a Twitter feed, make it simple for people to "like" you and follow you. And if you aren't engaged yet in any type of social marketing, don't be intimidated. Millions of consumers and small businesses have proven that Facebook and Twitter are easy to use by the sheer number of new user accounts that those platforms continue to amass daily.

On these social networks, professionals share wisdom, expertise and guidance with people in their communities. Families will benefit from the information you provide, and you can engage in an ongoing dialogue with individuals about topics that matter to them now and in

the future. If you can get on the Internet and type (even if you can't type well!), you can easily engage in social marketing, and there are lots of people who can give you guidance on how to get started both within the industry and outside of the industry. And even better, they are marketing platforms that are free.

Online Obits

Your obituaries are the most important piece of content on your website and the biggest driver of both new and repeat visitors. Without question, you should have the best online obituary platform solution on the market to maximize and to ultimately reap the benefits for your business. The more engaging and interactive obituaries are, and the more content they allow the family to enter/upload (on their own with easy-to-use tools so the burden is not on funeral home staff), the more likely the family will be to nurture those obituaries at your website for weeks, months and even years into the future. And if they invest in the care and feeding of the online memorial of their loved one, it's highly likely that they will encourage family and friends to come back to see the work they've done and the content they've added.

State-of-the-art obituary offerings allow visitors to engage with the obits and support the family with extensions to the typical online memory book such as virtual candles and gifts, photo uploads and audio memories. Story walls allow interactive storytelling with comments and photos contributed by multiple family members and friends to recount shared moments so they are not lost or forgotten. And the seamless integration of e-commerce vendors enables family and friends to easily order flowers and purchase sympathy gifts. They will be grateful that you've made it simple for them and it will generate new revenue for you.

Best User Experience

New and exciting Internet technologies will grow your business by engaging individuals and families in long-term relationships. A productive website will create new streams of revenue and further develop your brand awareness within your community and beyond. If someone convinces you to stick with mediocre technology in order to prevent anyone from stealing your traffic, they are not helping you create the best user experience for your visitors. What they are really doing is attempting to preserve their control over your website environment.

Different technology providers are experts at different things for a reason as a result of their focus and ongoing research and development investment – and the beauty of technology and the Web in particular is that you can integrate different technologies from different providers and take advantage of that expertise to create a premium experience for your visitors versus sticking with a single vendor who does some things well and other things in a mediocre fashion or, even worse, poorly – all in the name of "traffic." ❖