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The Funeral Business: Marketing Gets Beyond Gross

Caroline Waxler | Oct 15, 2008 1:01 PM

Good Lord! The [death business](#) has a great outlook but the, ahem turf battle ahead for Boomer bodies has caused some funeral marketers to get creative and aggressive and gross.

Thanks to this article I've learned some terms that I really wish I hadn't: Reef Ball, Shelf People, Urn Enclave...



Creativity... "I just turned 36 and received my first direct-mail piece from a cemetery. It is one thing to pass out of the coveted 18-35 demo. But to learn that the only marketers who are interested in you want you dead ... well ..."

... Everyone wants to make his or her death meaningful.

To that end, Eternal Reefs will take a person's ashes and turn them into a "reef ball" where fish can hang out. George Frankel, head of the Atlanta-based company, said that loved ones call him because they don't know what to do with their "shelf people."

It's never too late to help the environment!

You know. **People in urns, on the shelf.** Turning shelf people into reef balls is not only "green," it actually helps the environment by giving fish a new habitat. Meantime, it gives families something too: a sort of party. **They can bring the ashes to the company's manufacturing hub in Sarasota, Fla. and participate in making the ball.**

Even if one attendee is dead, it's still a family holiday...

"I don't mean to say we put the 'fun' in 'funeral," said Frankel, "but the whole family can come for a beach vacation."

Pampering is key.

Over at the Cedar Park and Beth-El Cemeteries in New Jersey, they're thinking more traditionally but, again, with an eye toward boomer idiosyncrasies. "We live our lives differently," said Lester Kerschner, the marketing manager. **Boomers who have been comfortable in life worry about discomfort for eternity** "If you have your choice between a nice, heated, air-conditioned indoor facility or somebody putting you in the ground," the 60-year-old Kerschner said, you might well choose **the cushy crypt**. At his place, they "can't build them fast enough."

And then there are the fun open house-style events:

Even the most old-fashioned burial grounds are trying to be more welcoming. In Michigan, **members of the Mount Elliott Cemetery Association are hosting concerts, photo contests, charity runs**-- anything to bring people in (while they're still upright).

Tech tricks can help, too:

And when they come in by hearse? There's innovation there, too. The Eagle Coach Co. of Cincinnati has responded to the increase in cremations by **inventing the "urn enclave."** Pull a lever, and the **enclave flips up from the floor of the hearse to hold and display the loved one's ashes.**

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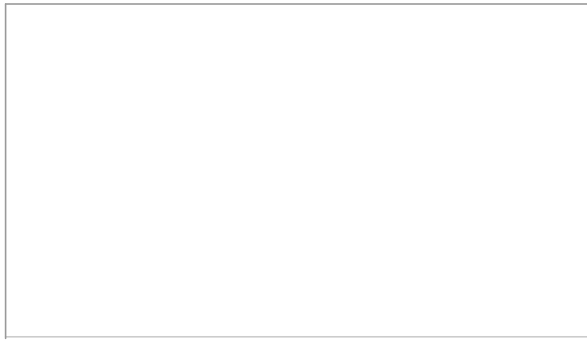


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