Using the Web to Raise Revenue and Awareness

— by Chuck Sornig

At left is a burial and memorial information screen visitors can access on your Website.

In today's economic downturn cemeteries must find new products and services that not only increase revenue but provide value for our families. Community sponsorships to help you gain name recognition and advertising in the phone book is still popular, but cemeterians with a mind for the future realize that the Internet is our future.

Statistics show that a Web-based "SuperPages" site is being accessed far more frequently than the Web-based "Yellow Pages" or "White Pages," and printed versions of these long-standing icons are estimated to be extinct within the near future. In addition, the Web savvy under-40 group seems to be bypassing these sites all together and opting for search engine access to locate what they are looking for.
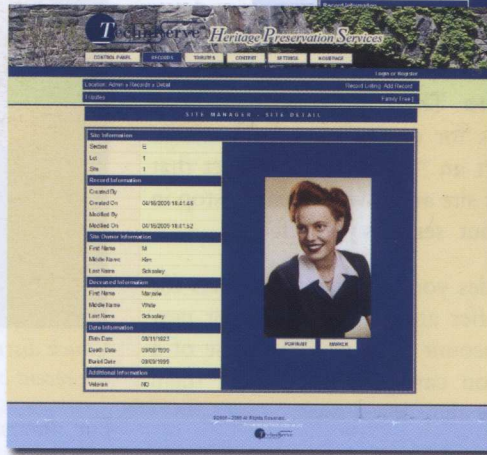
Cemeterians need to take these trends seriously. Do you have a Website for your cemetery? Does it provide up-to-date information about your services, your history, what makes you stand apart from the competition?

As Catholic cemeteries we need to remember to include significant information about why a Catholic cemetery should be chosen as the final resting place of the deceased. But, the thing to remember most when developing a Website is the fact that our future customers are looking to us for more than just simple advertising. There is a wealth of historical information located within your cemetery, and choosing to share some of this online can help raise awareness of your cemetery and offer an opportunity for additional revenue.

Products such as TechniServe's *Comprehensive Mapping Solution (CMS)*, our non-GIS affordable mapping module, coupled with available computer-based burial information can be used to generate new prospects for your cemetery.

For example: It's Saturday evening and a family member wishes to visit the grave of a loved one buried at your cemetery. They visit your Website and see that you offer an online grave locator on your site. However, before they can search the data, they must create a user account to access the information.

Once an account is created we can allow the user to search for a grave location. When they search for *deceased name*, the CMS system can provide them with the name(s) of the deceased they are searching for, the burial date and date of birth, if available. Then, when they select the correct deceased name we can provide them with an overall cemetery map, showing the location of the section within the cemetery as well as a section map showing the location of the grave.

By querying surrounding location data we can also provide the user with helpful information such as the nearby monuments or markers. This option provides a great service to your families. But it can also help drive revenue to your cemetery.

Remember when we requested the visitor to create a user account. We now have the name, address and phone number of a potential client. In addition TechniServe's mapping module can be set up to instantly tell the user that there is not currently a marker or other item on their loved ones space and ask if
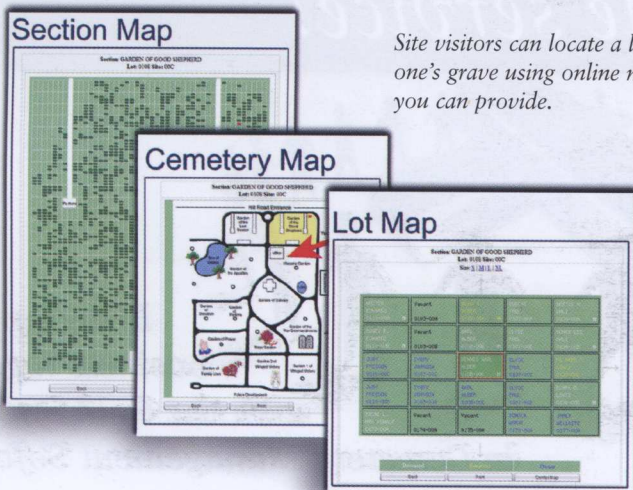
Site visitors can locate a loved one's grave using online maps you can provide.

they would like a counselor to contact them. Or you can suggest they purchase a seasonal grave decoration and offer an online order form.

By requiring the user to create an account, you now have future opportunities to raise customer awareness about your cemetery. These prospects can be added to your cemetery newsletter or other mailing list. They can be added to your email notification campaigns for events being held within your cemetery. You can start an "email only" project that thanks them for visiting your site and invites them to stop in your office to learn more about services you offer.

User information also provides you with new prospects for future business. You can offer an online coupon for new users that will provide a discount on a new purchase of a marker or grave spaces. You can offer to contact them regarding available space near their loved ones.

The possibilities for you with a properly designed Website are endless and offer many opportunities to raise and increase your cemetery revenue.

Chuck discusses his TechniServe product with a member during the recent convention in Omaha.

For almost 20 years TechniServe's staff has been involved with Website creation and enhancements for sites visited daily by 1 user to over 100,000 users.

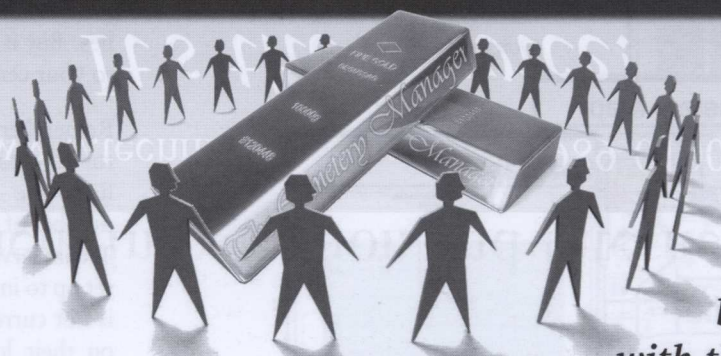Chuck Sornig is the Business Manager for TechniServe, Inc., a CCC supplier member. They are based in Troy, MI. Chuck may be contacted at 248.989.0100.