

A photograph of a young woman with long brown hair and an elderly man with white hair looking at a tablet together. The woman is pointing at the screen, and the man is looking on with interest. They are both wearing light-colored shirts. The background is softly blurred, suggesting an indoor setting with natural light.

A position paper

Obituaries at a Crossroads

*Four trends and how newspapers
can meet the challenge.*

By Kim Safran
iPublish Media Solutions and Legacy.com

The obituary market is at a crossroads. An aging population will cause death rates to soar for the next decade. Their obituaries will target a transient audience and will be placed by a digital-centric generation with a growing preference for cremation and private-party placement. Newspapers can either prepare their obituary offerings for these new trends and experience massive growth, or they can ignore the shifting market and face continued erosion of what many consider their most vital section and the heart of their community content. iPublish Media Solutions has automated obituary placement for hundreds of newspapers for more than a decade, as the number one intake system in the USA. Here is a list of what we think are fundamental shifts that will transform tomorrow's obituary marketplace, and how to capitalize on these trends.

TREND #1

Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964) are entering the end-of-life stage over the next twenty years.

The number of people passing away in the U.S. will grow by more than 50% from today through the mid-2040s, as the more than 60 million Baby Boomers age through their 70s into their 80s and 90s. Super-growth of obituaries is there for the taking, but only if newspapers respond to rapidly changing customer needs.

TREND #2

Cremations are on the rise.

The demand for cremation is increasing and will exceed 50% of all death care choices by 2035 in all 50 U.S. states and Washington, D.C. The National Funeral Directors Association Cremation and Burial Report (NPNFA) 2021 outlines this new reality: By 2040, the U.S. cremation rate is projected to reach 78.4% versus a burial rate of 16.0%. In Canada the growth in cremations is projected to be even higher: 87.9% versus a burial rate of just 10.9%.*

WHAT DOES THIS DRAMATIC SHIFT IN PREFERENCE FOR CREMATION MEAN FOR NEWSPAPERS?

First, the role of crematoriums in the placement of obituaries will become increasingly important. Not all funeral homes provide cremation in-house, and a growing number of families are selecting direct cremation (the simplest cremation available) often for cost reasons. For newspapers who have not yet directly pursued relationships with crematoriums, reaching out to this market is critical.



Second, the demand for private-party placement of obituaries will also increase. A growing number of families choosing direct cremations also have “some type of memorialization event involving family and friends—without the services of a funeral director,” the report notes. These families are also placing their own obituaries directly with the newspapers, who need to make this process easier.

*Source: 2021 National Funeral Directors Association *Cremation and Burial Report*

Finally, newspapers need to consider price sensitivity and meet community needs with cost-efficient obituary options.

TREND #3

Boomers are the first transient generation.

People of all ages are “on the move” these days, thanks to options created by the new remote economy. Baby boomers, however, are unique: they are the first generation likely to have changed cities at least once. Many are now moving a third time, by the hundreds of thousands. Both retirement and soaring home values give Boomers the freedom to relocate. According to Pew Research Center, 2 million boomers a year have retired since 2011; that number that increased to 3.2 million people in 2020, when they began resigning from jobs at record levels and cashing in on massive home appreciation. Many used the money to downsize and/or buy second homes in vacation-oriented cities (Forbes, 2020). On top of that, their children and grandchildren are also more transient—so friends, family, colleagues, and other connections are in more than one place. The result is, it is quickly becoming more important than ever to place obituaries to be discovered and read in multiple cities--which is a complex task for all concerned, including funeral homes.

THE INDUSTRY NEEDS SERVICES TO ADDRESS THESE CHANGING NEEDS.

TREND #4

Loved ones placing obituaries are increasingly digital-centric.

The generation of digital natives is now responsible for memorializing the Boomers who will pass away in the next decade. They are very comfortable with self-serve options, and the first death notice they write is typically a social media post. They may appreciate a supportive call center that can supply guidance for what goes into an obituary, but they do not “need help” buying online. Newspapers need to make it easy for them and meet high expectations for the online customer experience.

To illustrate the scope of this opportunity: Data from iPublish shows that a full 45% of the obits being placed through the Deseret News digital portal in 2021 were from individual private-party customers.

Consider that the person who places an obituary today may never have interacted with a newspaper before and so are forming a new relationship during a profound passage in their adult life. The link to their obituary may be sent to dozens of friends and the print version kept as a family

treasure. The role of the newspaper in the community is reaffirmed with every obituary that is published. Many may not even realize that obituaries are often paid content. Education is equally important with this changing buyers group.

Today, these four trends create multiple opportunities that demand the industry give obituaries new consideration. Is the family's paid obituary published in a place of honor both in the paper and online? Can friends and family globally find it easily? Could they place it easily? Did they get the options they needed? If they were on a budget, were they offered affordable options?

It's time for newspapers to ask the question:

Are you cementing your role in the community as *the* source of obituaries to document and commemorate loved ones forever in the minds of your readers, their children, and extended families?

THE OBITUARY BUSINESS FOR NEWSPAPERS WILL BE WON OR LOST BY THE ANSWER TO THIS QUESTION.

Maximizing these trends for your community and your bottom line: Some of the solutions to the industry's new challenges are easy to implement and cost effective. Others require more thought and commitment. Success starts with a great online order-entry platform. Self-service

The screenshot shows the landing page for The San Francisco Chronicle's self-serve obituary platform. The header is dark with the 'San Francisco Chronicle Obituaries' logo and navigation links like 'HOME', 'PRICING', 'DEADLINES', 'FAQ', 'CONTACT US', 'VIEW OBITUARIES', 'CREATE ACCOUNT', and 'LOGIN'. The main heading is 'Remember Your Loved Ones' with the subtext 'Place an obituary in The San Francisco Chronicle'. Below this are two white boxes with black headers: 'Chronicle Life Tributes' and 'In Memoriam Tributes'. The 'Chronicle Life Tributes' box lists features like 'Publish a personalized obituary for your loved one in both the print and digital versions of The San Francisco Chronicle', 'Multiple layouts offered', 'Optional photos and icons', 'Includes quarterly print tribute', 'Also appears on Legacy.com', and 'Multiple-day discounts', with a starting price of \$399. The 'In Memoriam Tributes' box lists features like 'Remember your loved one's birthday, anniversary of their passing, or any other day by publishing a tribute in print.', '2-column layout', 'Optional photo', and 'Multiple-day discounts', with a starting price of \$299. Both boxes have a 'GET STARTED' button.

The San Francisco Chronicle self-serve AdPortal Obituaries landing page

and easy order entry is considered an essential option by both funeral homes and private parties and used by hundreds of newspapers throughout the country. The process needs to be simple, effective, and work. It is the first step in the obituary process—one that companies such as Hearst Newspaper are reinventing, working with iPublish to build even better user experiences. We believe it is a commitment worth making. As Stephen Segal, the content director at *Legacy.com* and a former newspaper editor himself, pointed out in a seminal article on the topic for National Newspaper Association, obituaries may be the most undervalued section of the newspaper. While they are not as sexy as an investigative story, they consistently get the traffic, whether the notices are paid or not, and are an essential community service. “Who died today? That question and its answer are about as fundamental and compelling as local news can be,” Segal writes, and he is right.

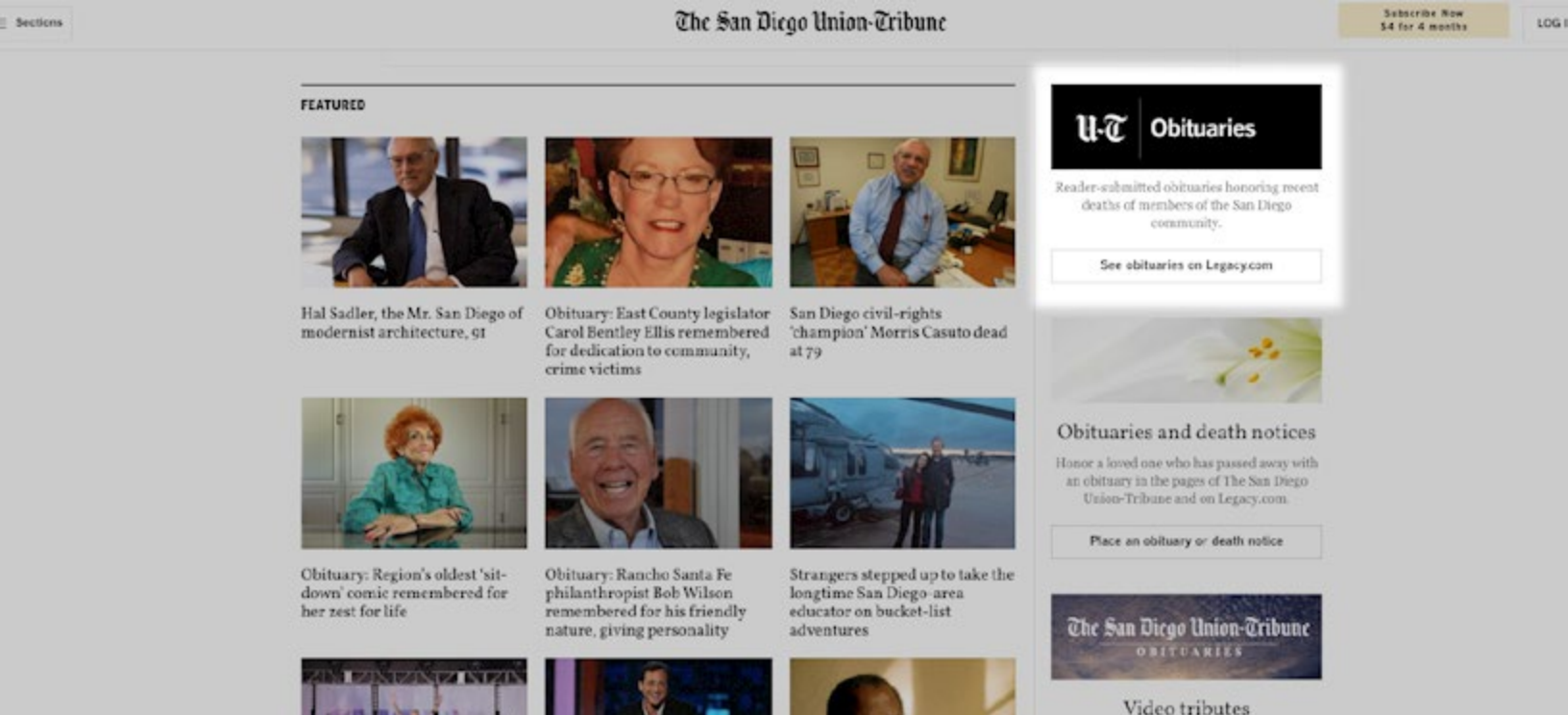
Six best practices to turn obit trends into new business

Here is the list of what newspapers should do to ensure continued relevance and importance for obituaries in the face of these trends:

1. ELEVATE OBITUARY PLACEMENT AS VALUABLE LOCAL CONTENT IN PRINT AND ONLINE.

It’s time to re-examine the reader journey for obituaries at your newspaper from start to finish. No matter how great your user interface is or how efficient the software platforms are, the growth opportunity depends on readers being able to easily find the obituary section, and on these family memorials being displayed as important local content.

In the print version, do paid obituaries feel like a part of editorial? How about on your website? If your obituaries are separated and lumped in with classifieds, move them into a position that brings editorial and paid obituaries close together and with respect. Even if the accounting department considers them classifieds or the call center handles classifieds, paid obituaries are not classified ads to your readers and grieving loved ones. They are not really “ads” at all, but valuable user-generated content. Obituaries are not selling anything, and as Segal points out, obituaries are such high-value local content that whether paid or unpaid, they are top drivers of traffic. Place your paid obituaries with editorial obituaries in recognition of this value, and place all obituaries in an important place in the paper.



The San Diego Union-Tribune obituaries landing page

Next go to the homepage of the website. How many steps does it take to find the obituaries? Is it in the top navigation bar? Are paid obituaries at least prominently linked from editorial obituaries? Make sure they are. Here's an example of how the *San Diego Union-Tribune* separates paid obituaries on the website, but in a way that provides easy access and makes them feel important:

Work closely with editorial to ensure the paid obituaries are easy to find. Elevating obituaries as important local content is a win/win all around—for families, funeral homes, the community, and the newspaper industry overall.

2. ENSURE PRIVATE-PARTY OBITUARIES ARE EASY TO PLACE.

Follow the obituary customer's journey by going to the homepage of the website, where private parties start. Count the clicks to find the right page. It should be no more than two. Google your city's name and the word "obituary" together—that is, "Wichita obituary" or "Riverside Iowa obituary." Does Google show your correct obituary placement page near the top of the search results?

Finally, call the newspaper as if you were a customer needing to place an obituary. How long does it take to find the right person? See if there is a way to shorten the path. Make sure the word "classifieds" is not creeping into the customer experience. They should not have to select "classified" from a phone tree or have someone answer the phone "classifieds." They don't know that obituaries are run by the classified team, and this language devalues the memorial they are writing. Reserve the "classified" term for internal use only, and train the call center to replace the use of "advertised" with "featured" or "published."

Finally, use your print and online assets to educate new generations about the value of obituaries to memorialize and honor their loved one in their community. Remember that an increasing number of families do not use the services of a funeral director, and for them, this may be not only their first experience with the death of a loved one, but also their first experience buying anything placed in a newspaper. Here's an example we love:



Don't let their story go untold.

Share your loved one's story.
obituaries@nptimes.com | 555-333-6666

The Newspaper Times
In partnership with
Legacy.com

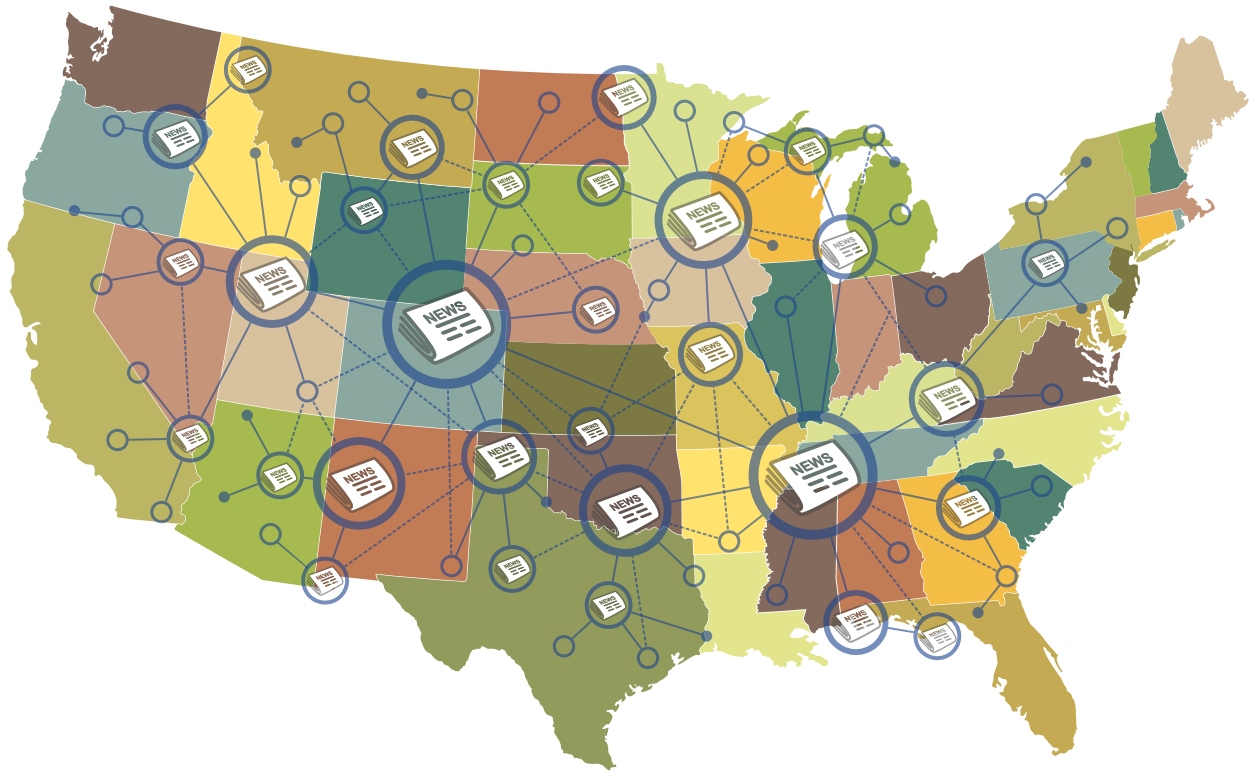
In conclusion, don't assume what your readers understand. Explain to them that loved ones who have passed on can be featured in the newspaper and online with a few simple clicks.

3. AUTOMATE EXTENDED PLACEMENT OF OBITUARIES TO OUT-OF-MARKET NEWSPAPERS.

Another easy way to serve families of transient Boomers is to allow them to place the obituary in multiple cities without retyping information, researching pricing and other repetitive tasks. After a user places an obituary with your paper and completes the transaction, the user is offered additional markets via a link on the confirmation page to Memoriams. They leave your website for Memoriams, however the data and photo entered on your site *carries over* to any additional newspapers the user selects, resulting in a separate transaction. It costs you nothing—you are helping fellow newspapers and they are helping you. Most importantly, you are helping *your customer*.

"Funeral home partners don't always need an out-of market obit, but when they do, it can be very time consuming. In December 2022, a local funeral home with two locations told us when they get those requests, it takes up to 90 minutes with all the back and forth with the newspaper. They asked us to activate Memoriams in AdPortal to cut that time to 10 minutes or less."

Amy Houghtling, Toledo Blade



The *Memoriams* network not only gives families of transient boomers who have passed away an option they may need, but also increases revenues for both the original and destination paper and saves hours of time for funeral homes and call centers.

Here's how it works: Whether the order taker is a call center, funeral home, or private party, when they place an obituary in your newspaper and pay online, they are given the option to click to the *Memoriams* network, which offers self-service for over 3,300 newspapers across the United States.

If they select an additional area, such as "Fort Lauderdale," they see all the newspaper options in that area pop-up. Then they simply select a paper, and the data already entered for the first obituary prepopulates into the same fields in the second newspaper. If a photo was featured, it automatically carries over. A proof and price are provided on the spot, and the user can click to buy with the saved payment method.

There is no work for your paper to do and no cost to your newspaper to participate—other than informing your funeral homes that they no longer need to spend 90 minutes on each out-of-market obit placements. Ninety seconds should do the trick with this amazing new feature.

Think about the time saved researching which newspapers serve a different city and their pricing plans, plus duplication of text, images, and payment methods. The new process is single-sign-on,

write-once, publish-anywhere.

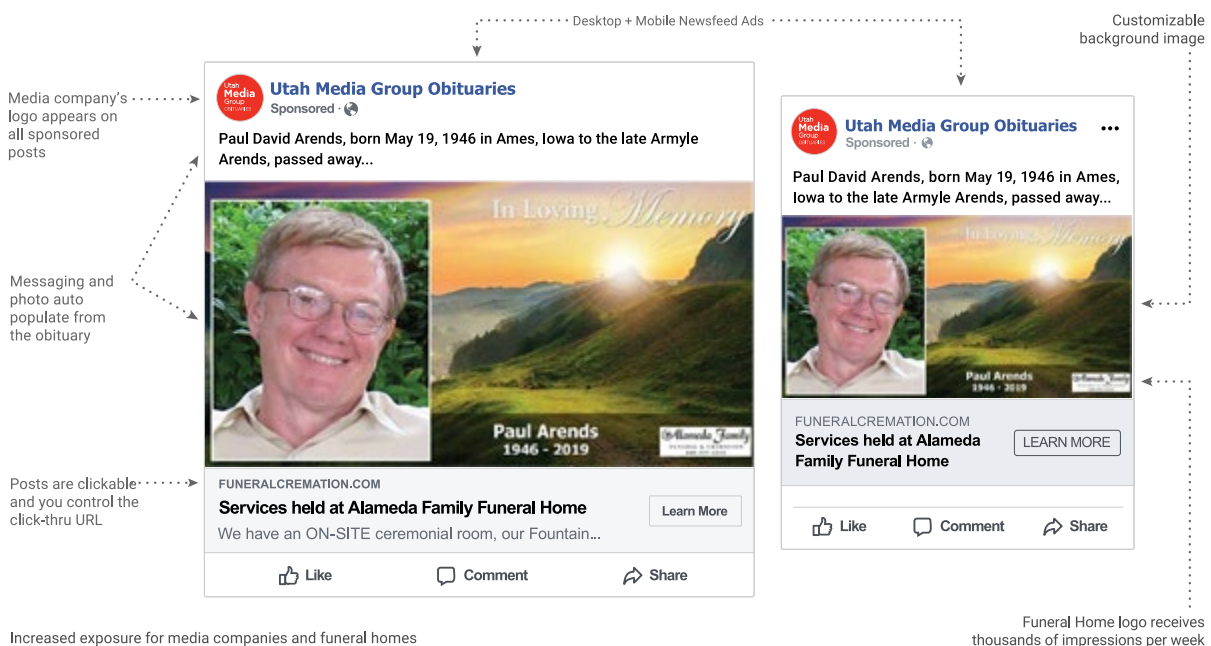
Funeral homes love this feature! And it is good news for baby boomers, the first transient generation, and their families. [Click here to download the Memoriams in AdPortal brochure.](#)

4. OFFER TARGETED OBITUARIES ON FACEBOOK

Remember that the digital-centric generation placing ads for Boomers probably have already made their first announcement on Facebook. So they are interested in sharing the news on social media. However, their posts, according to Facebook's own statistics, only reach about 10% of friends. Targeted Obituaries on Facebook, available as an add-on from iPublish Media Solutions, is appealing because it allows an obituary customer to utilize social media to reach additional, highly defined audiences at a minimal cost.

Here how it works: Once the obituary is placed in the newspaper, the funeral director or family selects from a dropdown of target audiences optimized for obituaries: location, schools attended, hobbies/clubs, affiliations such as religious or civic organizations, military service, and places of employment. The obituary automatically prepopulates a paid Facebook ad and delivers it to the selected audiences. This is not an organic post, but a tasteful ad delivered in-feed, proven to reach hundreds of the "larger ring" of acquaintances the original organic Facebook post could not reach.

The cost is minimal for families and click-through rates are outstanding, running an average between 20% to 40%. Yes, you read that correctly. The newspaper and the funeral home can provide



an amazing amount of comfort and support to families from these Facebook contacts with very little work for the order-takers or cost to the customer. It also generates excellent incremental revenue for your newspaper—another win/win all around.

For a more detailed recap of this program, along with case studies, a short video, and success stories, please [click here](#).

Legacy.com Partnership Benefits

<h3>Exclusive Obituary Focus</h3> <p>Legacy has a singular focus on growing the category and delivering a world class experience.</p> <p>Our goal is simple... make your digital obituary the destination for lasting community memorialization.</p> 	<h3>Product Vision</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Audience Growth Long term consumer engagement with "evergreen" obituary content and new community experiences. 2 Better Monetization Audience expansion will power enhanced monetization opportunities, from targeted advertising to personalized experiences. 3 New Subscribers The conversion of our redesign to LSC, which will lead to new accounts and drive this party data. This data can drive digital newspaper subscription. 												
<h3>Superior Monetization</h3> <div> <div> <h4>Native Ad Units & Sponsorship</h4> <p>Direct ad deals that are highly targeted to our unique audience and digital experiences (funerals, markets, newspapers, local community pages, etc.)</p>  </div> <div> <h4>New Ecommerce Platform</h4> <p>We're upgrading our ecommerce platform to be able to seamlessly handle multiple property categories and to easily ship directly to the "source" via SmartGDS.</p>  </div> <div> <h4>New Memorial Product Offerings</h4> <p>Expanding into the realm of memorial trees, charitable donations, obituary plaques and other keepsakes.</p>  </div> </div>	<h3>Partner Support</h3> <div> <div> <h4>Market Field Work</h4> <p>Experienced team of experts helping you sell into the funeral home channel.</p> <p>Field Work Example: Lindson Obit Placements in the Baltimore Sun</p>  <table border="1"> <caption>Obituary Placements in the Baltimore Sun</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Category</th> <th>March 08</th> <th>February 08</th> <th>March 08</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Obit</td> <td>58</td> <td>17</td> <td>45</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Funeral Home</td> <td>10</td> <td>10</td> <td>10</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> </div> <div> <h4>Customer Support</h4> <p>An award-winning customer support team is included 24/7/365.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$5,500+ Emails and phone calls annually 40,000+ Guest book entries screened daily 5 Years average tenure 30 days of training </div> </div>	Category	March 08	February 08	March 08	Obit	58	17	45	Funeral Home	10	10	10
Category	March 08	February 08	March 08										
Obit	58	17	45										
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5. IF YOU AREN'T USING LEGACY.COM, YOU SHOULD!

iPublish Media Solutions is a *Legacy.com* company, and although there is no requirement to work with Legacy (or vice-versa) it simply makes sense to partner with Legacy for the digital distribution of obituaries.

Legacy.com is the global leader in end-of-life media and has been for years. The SEO benefits alone make partnership a great choice, but the newest release is packed with new features that get your newspaper ready for "The Boomer Boom."

The landing pages have been continually improved for super-clean design, fast load times, and fewer ads.

Legacy.com's new "community pages" pull keywords from obituaries like "high school attended" and group them together so people can find even more obits they're interested in from your newspaper, both past and present. Moderated guest books, pro tools for funeral homes, partnerships with local florists and charities—all this adds up to reinforcing community.

Legacy

Search by Name

Back

East High School Remembers
Salt Lake City, Utah

Share Follow

1,500 Results

Date Range All Type All

Tuesday, February 22, 2022

Joan Higgs
Joan Haight Higgs 1929-2022 Draper, Utah Joan Haight Higgs, 93, our loving mother, sister, grandmother, and great-grandmother, passed away surrounded by family on Thursday, February 17, 2022, in Draper, Utah. Joan was born on January 25, 1929, to Hector Caleb Haight and Phoebe Gertrude... [Read More](#)

The Salt Lake Tribune

Larkin Sunset Gardens - Sandy
Published in The Salt Lake Tribune from Feb. 22 to Feb. 23, 2022.

Wednesday, February 16, 2022

Richard Parmelee
Richard A. Parmelee 1929 - 2022 Richard Alton Parmelee passed away in Northbrook, Illinois on February 12, 2022. He was born in Salt Lake City, Utah on September 7, 1929, the son of Theron S. Parmelee and

ABOUT
The friends they made. The lives they led. The memories they cherished. Here we mourn and celebrate the lives of Leopards who have passed, but whose legacies persist.

Legacy.com is not affiliated with East High School. Photo Credit: undefined

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LOCAL NEWSPAPER OBITUARIES

[The Salt Lake Tribune](#)

[Deseret News](#)

[Lagan Herald Journal](#)

East High School Remembers Community Page on *Legacy.com*

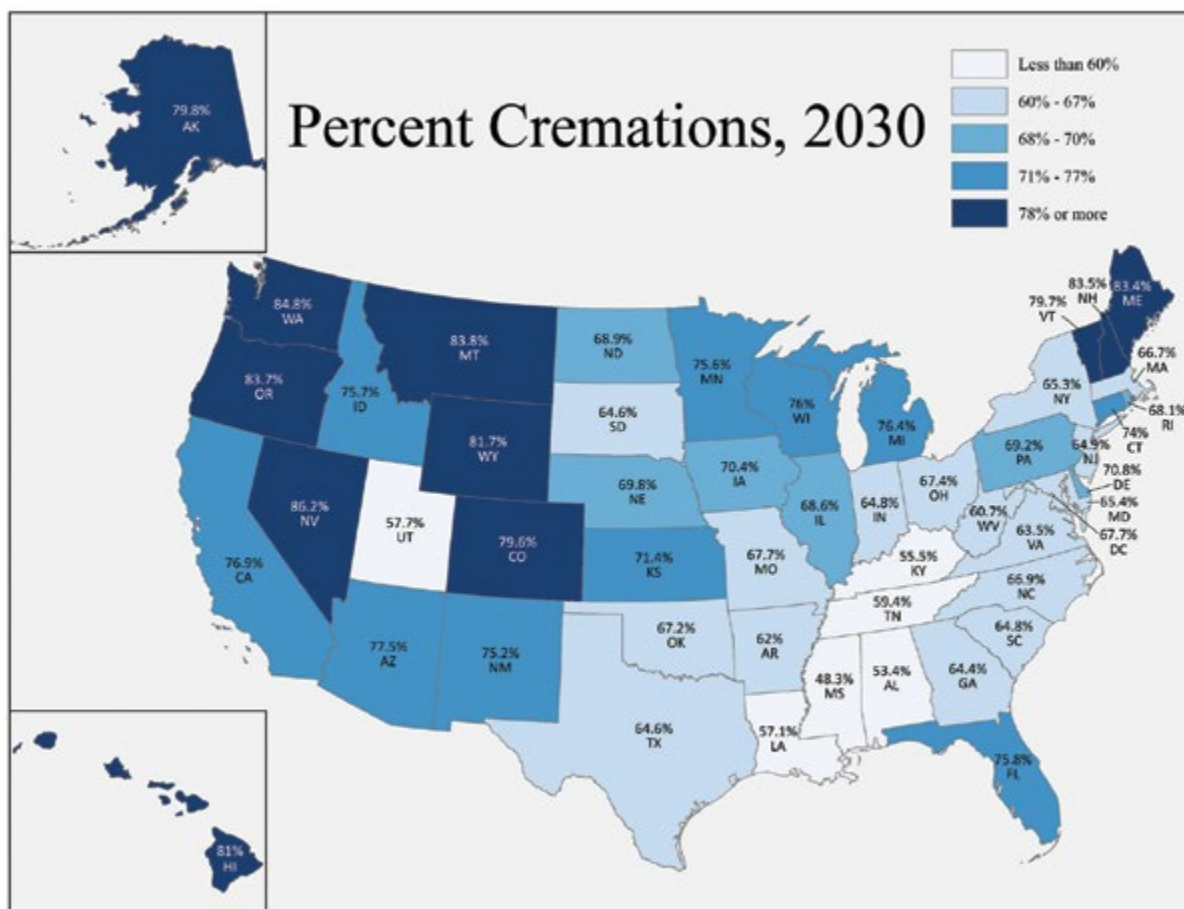
Partnership with Legacy also provides fast and easy ways to direct a reader to your newspaper to place an obituary, helping serve the growing market of private parties placing these ads. Easy connections to local charities, florists and more are part of the evolving *Legacy.com* program, creating revenue and content for you in a tasteful environment with global reach. And you get all the credit for audience traffic (page views/uniques) as well as dedicated ad positions at the top of the page in desktop and mobile.

Legacy.com simply creates the best reader experience possible, while increasing traffic to your pages, in ways that are light years ahead of other companies that simply "post obits" on your web-site.

Lastly, *Legacy.com* offers a wealth of professionally written end-of life content available for partners to use at no charge. Want to sell more end of life display ads? Give great content for readers to connect with alongside those ads. For a more complete overview on new *Legacy.com* programs to build tools for your community, please visit [Legacy.com partners page](#).

6. MEET WITH AND SUPPORT CREMATORIUMS.

There are a variety of ways to reach out to crematoriums in your area. Advance Local Newspapers is working on trial programs to better reach crematorium owners and to educate their customers, who may place a private party obituary, about the important role obituaries play in honoring a loved one.



Meeting the needs of crematorium relationships and families who choose cremation means creating brochures, electronic communications, and referral programs. Remember the importance of providing easy-to-find self-serve obituary ordering to private parties? That is part of this outreach, as are cost-friendly obituary options and continued reader education about the role obituaries have in the community. There will not always be a funeral director to help the family think it through.

Summary

The massive increase in the number of deaths over the next decade can drive a healthy obituary franchise, but that does not mean that real gains are a foregone conclusion. Today newspapers face a “make or break” decision point, as the growing number of transient Boomers at the end stage of life is accompanied by the new expectations of a digital-centric generation who will place their memorial notices. This generation increasingly prefers cremation and will place more obituaries self-service online. It will be the first time many of them have ever interacted with a newspaper, so this experience can cement profound new bonds with the local newspaper or drive them away. Newspapers that rise to the challenge have everything to gain, so we encourage the industry to make a commitment to their community and their own future by creating the right reader journey and offering the right tools to funeral homes and families.

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