

**WHAT'S THE BIG
IDEA?**

THE BIRTH OF THE INFOPAGE

At Peace co-founder John Otto has a new plan for Funeral Planners

Through death comes life. In this case an idea, a product - and a new way of communicating the important information surrounding the death of a loved one.

On Oct 21st, 2005, Sally Webb Beasley passed away. It was her family that discovered what is now known as the Infopage. Sally was well loved by many, many people, so as the family began trying to field the barrage of incoming calls requesting information about Sally's services, Christy Douglas, a web designer and the fiancée of Sally's son John Otto, came up with the idea of using the internet to keep friends and family up to date. Decisions weren't yet concrete, grief was overwhelming, keeping track of who was informed difficult, so the site went up, and anyone that called were asked to simply check back, and told that the site would be updated as soon as the information was available. Over the course of those first difficult days, the online tool eased the problem of spreading information more than anyone could have imagined.

It was Rebekah, the daughter of Sally that saw the Informational Webpage as a viable business idea and a valuable tool for those who find themselves facing the difficult task of spreading the news about the loss of a loved one. Thus the Infopage was born. But it would be over a year later, after creating Infopages for the family's Grandmother and another for a dear friend, that the usefulness of the system became too apparent to ignore. John became working on the how to automate the process, so that no experience was necessary to create the pages. Using his past experience

in writing computer code and enlisting the best techies he could find, development began. After seven months of solid effort, the system was completed, patent applied for and advertising began. There is no similar product - it is accessible, affordable and necessary.

This is a family business to be sure, one born from tragedy and whose epicenter is a concept that would make their Mother proud.

We caught up with John for our seven questions in the midst of his busy day.

Q: What are the biggest surprises about your Infopage?

A: There have been a quite a few. The biggest was how relevant it turned out to be. A friend of the family showed up at my Mother's viewing. He had found out from having the URL of the Infopage emailed to him by a friend of a friend of a friend. He never would have known any other way.

Second place, which I think was very important for us to recognize, was that the usefulness of it was not governed by age. In regards to my Mother's Infopage, the over 60 crowd all used it, and for my Grandmother, there were



continued on page 36

THE BIRTH OF THE INFOPAGE *Continued*

80 year old peers of hers who loved the idea! Everyone evidently is wired to the internet. I could go on, but . . . ok one more . . . When we created our third page for a friend's father, the URL was sent to his daughter in Berlin. When she landed in London on the way to the US, she sent text messages to her entire friends and family list, when she arrived everyone had visited the Infopage and knew the same details as the family. As updates occurred, everyone was kept in the loop.

Q: How do you see this changing the Funeral Industry?

A: Well, the Industry really needs this. The Families need it even more. I see it as giving the Funeral Industry a boost in an unusual way . . . The traditional funeral home services are all still very relevant, but people have become dependant upon new technologies, and in fact embrace it in all sorts of niches of their lives . . . so why not when dealing with death? I think our product gives the individual Funeral Home a badge of credulity. No longer are they just doing things the same old way. We've made our product extremely easy, very affordable, and quick to use for the Funeral Director and the Family. We've designed it to have a minimal learning curve and maximum impact.

Q: Where does the confidence about your product come from?

A: Our approach comes from the angle of a grieving family. Our tests come from actually seeing the usefulness firsthand. So, it's not a matter of confidence about the product. We know it works and have seen it in action. The strength of the Infopage comes from the ability to update it immediately and send it directly to those that need it most. Since it is much more than an obituary or memorial page, it fills a gap in society that quite simply, no one has recognized.

Q: Why didn't you just market directly to the public?

A: We originally considered it, but felt that the traditional funeral home was the best resource for the family overall

and therefore the best home for the Infopage creation. All of the details for services are decided at the Funeral Home. They have the information, the opportunity and desire to use it which makes it easy for the family. We've priced it very low, simplified the billing and created a product like no other. Given the difficulty of the moment, an individual would probably forget to utilize the Infopage. Not to mention, this is a repeat business for the Funeral Home, not necessarily the public. We need the Funeral Director and Planners for the sale, they need the revenue and new service, and the family needs the Infopage. It is a win, win, win situation.

Q: How did you address the liability issues for uploading incorrect information?

A: While the Funeral Director is responsible for entering the actual details surrounding the service times and locations, the Family Approval Contact actually approves the information online. The Infopage isn't live and nothing can be emailed until it's been approved. Any future edits to the Infopage after approval is done by the Family, and there are legal acceptance boxes and buttons when they submit approval. All of the liability is on the Family themselves, we do not, nor does the Funeral Home accept any liability for the Infopage. Plus, the Infopage gets viewed by so many and so often, that any mistakes are quickly found out and fixed anyway . . . so it's really a non-issue.

Q: What other technologies will be added in the future?

A: The next version will have the ability to text the information directly to cell phones. It is possible of course to do that now, but not directly from the Family Approval Page. Our efforts are to create the easiest and fastest manner in which to disseminate the information. We also plan on implementing a feature where the Infopage becomes a sort of Memorial Page after the services occur. It will be different from what is available now of course, but essentially the individual's Infopage will become a lasting, tasteful

tribute to the departed.

Q: I sense that there is more to this business than what's on the surface . . . care to elaborate?

A: Yes, well in a very real sense it is a tribute to our Mother. She was always interested in our business ventures, education, and most importantly acting as a family. She was the mother hen to be sure, keeping her chicks under wing. So the business is dedicated to her. That is why we have created the Sally Webb Charity Foundation. We allow our clients to decide how we distribute a percentage of profits to charity. We took five Charities that she was involved with, and through a poll, allow our Funeral Home clients to cut up the pie. As we grow we plan to give more, as for now our growth is important for the future of the company, so we're dumping as much as we can back in while still establishing her Foundation. Beyond that, we are family which can be challenging all on it's own. What really makes it work so smoothly is how we've been able to recognize our strengths and utilize them for the common good of the company. In other words, we each know what we're best at and are very considerate of each others views. It's really unlike anything I've been involved with before. This tangible difference is very transparent, so people respond to that, it makes for a good time and good business.

Our thanks go out to the At Peace Team to bringing our attention to this exciting new development in the Funeral Industry. The At Peace website can be found at www.atpeace.info. There you'll find detailed information on the At Peace Infopage, charity information, signing up for service and more – you can even contact them to obtain access to an actual online demonstration.
-Dave Copeland

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