



How Schurz Communications Achieved a 60% Increase in Obituary Revenues

Account Background

Schurz Communications is a family-owned group of dailies and weeklies. Properties vary in circulation size with the largest property, The South Bend Tribune, in South Bend, IN. Their footprint is in Indiana, Maryland, Michigan, Pennsylvania and South Dakota. South Bend was an early adopter of Memoriams, and in a strategy that their then SVP Publishing and Emerging Media, Kerry Oslund called “Bullets over cannonballs,” they elected to deploy there first to test the Memoriams waters before rolling out to the full group. The excellent reception in South Bend prompted full implementation.

Previous Process

Schurz funeral director processes were traditional for their market size. They involved back-and-forth, with funeral homes for pricing and proofing, after receiving the obituaries via fax and e-mail. This was time-consuming and error prone. Most papers had ownership of obituaries in editorial, while a few were in advertising. An approval process was required by editorial prior to final release. Revenues were declining in some markets, or remaining static. There were limited upsells, and little opportunity to affect these after the obituary was submitted to the Call Center or editorial obituary representative. Each market priced differently. Some offered free death notices, others didn't. Schurz goals were threefold: Increase revenue, create operational efficiencies and strengthen funeral home relationships. All of them were more than achieved.

Solution

After best practices consultation with the Memoriams team, new packages and pricing strategies by word were implemented for all the sites. Standard fields of data were collected, ensuring that proper information was always submitted for print and for search of the digital obituary. To start, data was delivered via email, but direct integrations are in progress. They were installing new front-end systems at the time and did not want to expend resources on two integrations. This will eliminate rekeying notices. In some cases, obituaries were moved to the advertising department to relieve editorial resources.

Upsells for additional days in print, emblems and logos for funeral directors were configured, as well as custom market upsells. After a short transition period, Memoriams became the required method of entry for funeral directors. On-site trainings in all markets made the transition easy, and adoption followed rapidly. Jessica Lambert, a funeral director in South Bend, IN expressed passionately, *“Memoriams saves on time and stress. I no longer panic when I have a family request the obit in 5 papers. It's also impressive how good the customer service is.”* Schurz markets have had a very high incidence of out-of-area placements from the Memoriams Network, in addition to their local market revenue increases.

Michael Callahan, Controller at the Herald-Mail in Hagerstown, MD stated, *“Implementing Memoriams has been a very positive experience. Our revenue per order is up 45% and our process has been made so much simpler. Adpay is very easy to work with. This has saved us a lot of time and resources locally.”*

Results

With the implementation of Memoriams, Schurz Communications has achieved their goals.

- Increased obituary revenue volumes per order across the Schurz markets by an outstanding 60%
- 90% average adoption rate average by funeral homes
- Additional network revenues from out-of-market were \$50,000 in 2015
- Significant process and resources savings for all
- Elimination of errors and make-goods
- Increased upsells, particularly for additional days, emblems and funeral home logos
- Free obituaries now required to be placed through Memoriams, eliminating paid resources interacting with a free notice.
- Enhanced funeral director partner relationships with this time-savings process