



Case study: Woollard & Kent, Canterbury

Nick R Hardy, Director

How did your business identify the direct cremation challenge?

In recent years, the number of phone calls from people enquiring whether we offered unattended services (direct cremations) has massively increased. And people are very clear on these calls about the price they want to pay. So when we started to get about 10 to 15 such calls a month - which never seemed to convert into business - it was obvious to us that if we didn't respond commercially then we would lose the opportunity to serve that part of the market. To put things into perspective, five years ago, we did no direct cremations. The year before Covid, there were three. During the first year of Covid this increased to six. In the second Covid year, we did 10. In the first two months of this year since we installed window displays, we've already done 10.

We also became aware that a national provider was planning to open a direct cremation crematorium nearby and this has created an urgency for us to act.

How did you design a response?

We have two Westerleigh Group crematoria (our closest) around 45 minutes' drive away from our offices and another one locally 10 minutes away due to open soon. When the Diamond Partnership shared its new prices, we signed up without hesitation. Direct cremations are here to stay and the Diamond Partnership price has allowed us to price match 'national companies' and being local we now have the upper hand. With the attended service also being available, we have been able to help families who are left behind, often feeling cheated or unable to grieve. So the 'attended direct cremation service' has helped to bridge the gap. With both the direct cremation and the attended direct cremation, we can further assist the family by offering other services, such as washing and

dressing and the use of our chapel of rest. We also offer a direct burial through our green burial package too, following the same principle as direct cremation.

Promotion has been very important and our advertising strategy is still in development, but so far we've placed large adverts in our shop windows to make people aware that we offer 'low cost' funerals. In the very near future we'll be launching local radio and social media advertising campaigns to drive awareness in our community, and this will include prepaid too.

How has the local market responded to your direct cremation offering?

We've definitely picked up direct cremation services that we wouldn't have otherwise secured, however, we've also seen people who perhaps would have had a traditional funeral opt for an attended direct cremation, with additional services added to the funeral account. The market is changing and we'd rather stop fighting to retain the old and take an active approach and save and grow what we have. We've also observed that people who come in looking for a direct cremation, almost always add on an attended committal because they want to be there in person to say goodbye.

What are the key learnings from your experience?

The main learning is that while offering direct cremation can affect revenue, it's vital to evolve my business model. If we don't offer direct cremation options, it's clear that families will go elsewhere and national providers will benefit at my expense.

Offering direct more proactively has also helped us to understand our clientele better. For example, we now know that there are two types of customer looking for direct cremations. The first is religious - they want a disposal and a service in a church. The second is cost driven, and this can either be A, a family looking to save money or B, an elderly person without much money who doesn't want to put upon others and by pre-arranging a direct cremation they know everything is sorted and the family doesn't need to worry.

Offering direct options also opens up opportunities to build relationships with new families and a chance to serve different markets. And being local certainly gives you an edge on all the other national companies in this changing marketplace. Above all else, being an independent funeral director we can offer the same as a national company but we are still able to offer a local service, using a crematorium which is local to our clients, unlike our national competitors.