

# Houston Chronicle

## Funeral Planner is Up Against a Formidable Marketing Challenge *Venture pushes thinking about the inevitable*

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By Mason Lerner

Mark Duffey thinks his company will completely change the funeral industry – especially if he can get more people to understand what Everest Funeral Package does.

“Our biggest challenge is a marketing challenge,” said Duffey, the company’s president. “Once people experience it, they understand it and recommend us to others.”

Everest, Duffey explained, essentially provides a concierge service for families needing to plan a funeral.

“We help people plan for and handle all the business of a funeral,” he said. “We act as their adviser. We don’t sell caskets. We don’t sell anything really. Just our time.”

For a one-time fee of \$495 a person, \$695 for couples, or \$48 a year, Everest, using its Web site or in consultation with one of its advisers, will put a funeral plan together.

“We will do all the shopping for them,” Duffey said. “We will negotiate prices for them. We help them to get the best deal that they can throughout the process.”

The company operates throughout the U.S. and Canada. If you’ve paid the fee, Everest will help you plan a funeral just about anywhere.

“Wherever you are, we can help you,” Duffey said.

And Duffey is pretty sure the market potential for people seeking to plan their funerals in advance is substantial.

“We just really launched in the U.S. about a year ago, and based on the size of the market, there are a million people a year that actually plan and finance their funeral in advance,” he said. “That number is pretty constant. In addition to that, there are several million people a year who buy final expense life every month, and it’s used for planning and financing their funerals. There are about 10 million people a year who do that. So the market is very large.”

Duffey said that the company is profitable, but because it is a private company he wouldn’t reveal its annual revenue.

To generate business, Everest depends in large part on the recommendations of financial advisers it has a relationship with. James Evans, the director of the University of Houston Small Business Development Center, said that although many people might not be comfortable with discussing funeral arrangements, a traditional marketing campaign might still be the best way for Everest to expand its customer base.

**[www.everestfuneral.com](http://www.everestfuneral.com)**

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“They might just have to bite the bullet and do some hard-core advertising,” he said. “I have seen commercials for funeral homes, so there are companies that do that. They just have to make it clear that while it might be unpleasant, this is something that will happen to all of us, so why not be prepared?”

Evans said that Everest should treat its marketing campaign more or less like any other company, explaining why its service will be more beneficial than anything else out there. It would also be important to detail how helpful Everest could be to the loved ones of the deceased.

Duffey said he recognizes the challenge.

“Nobody has ever done this on this scale,” he said. “It’s just a matter of getting the word out.”

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