

BATESVILLE CASKET COMPANY: BUILDING A WORLD WIDE WEBSITE



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ISYS 203: Information Technology

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Case Abstract

BATESVILLE CASKET COMPANY:

BUILDING A WORLD WIDE WEBSITE

Batesville Casket Company, a subsidiary of Hillenbrand Industries, Inc, is located in Batesville, Indiana, and is the world's largest producer of metal and hardwood burial caskets. In 1996, James J. Kuisel, head of the sales and marketing information technology group, proposed that Batesville Casket create a website. He hoped the website would provide a resource for funeral homes, and offer the public information about Batesville Casket Company's products. Additionally, he hoped that the site would help combat recent negative news reports about the funeral industry.

Batesville Casket researched available services, and chose to outsource the layout and design of the site to a Cincinnati advertising firm, and chose Indianapolis-based I-Quest to host the website. Batesville Casket Company developed the content, structure, and tone for the site. The initial release of the site revealed some problems that Batesville needed to address, but once these issues were resolved, the site logged nearly 2,000 visitors daily.

As Batesville Casket moves forward, they need to consider how to keep the tone of the site appropriate, while leveraging their leading place in the industry, and using their relationships with other funerary service providers. Additionally, Batesville should expand the site to include new services for both their vendors and the public. Batesville Casket Company should:

- Continue to focus its website strategy towards informing customers about the funerary process, and building relationships with other funerary services.
- Use its website as a primary source of information for customers and funerary industry partners.
- Continue its relationship with I-Quest for hosting.
- Stop outsourcing web development, and begin to develop the site with internal employees.
- Build B2B and B2C relationships by offering web-enabled services on the website.

Case Analysis

Batesville Casket's World Wide Website

Synopsis:

Batesville Casket Company, a subsidiary of Hillenbrand Industries, Inc, is located in Batesville, Indiana, and is the world's largest producer of metal and hardwood burial caskets. In 1996, James J. Kuisel, head of the sales/marketing information technology group, proposed that Batesville Casket create a website. He hoped the website would provide a resource for funeral homes, and offer the public information about Batesville Casket Company's products. Additionally, he hoped that the site would help combat recent negative news reports about the funeral industry.

Batesville Casket researched services, and chose to outsource the layout and design of the site to a Cincinnati advertising firm, and also chose Indianapolis-based I-Quest to host the website. Batesville Casket developed the content, the structure, and set the tone for the site. The initial release of the site revealed some problems that Batesville Casket needed to address, but once these issues were resolved, the site logged nearly 2,000 visitors daily.

As Batesville Casket moves forward, they need to consider how to keep the tone of the site appropriate, while leveraging their relationships with other funerary services. Additionally, Batesville should expand the site to include new services for both their vendors and the public.

Recommendations:

Batesville Casket Company has an excellent start with their web strategy. The Company needs to continue to focus further development towards fulfilling the initial goals set by Kuisel. The website should continue to help people prepare, and plan for the death of a loved one, while being careful to keep away from the negative press currently surrounding the funeral industry.

Batesville Casket should evolve to using its website as a main source of information about the Company. The content of further print materials should stem from the website, not the other way around. Keeping the web current, and developing materials from that content helps avoid factual errors and outdated information from Batesville's print materials.

Additionally, the up-to-date information on the website can be used to keep retailers of Batesville Casket products trained on the newest product information. By placing this information on the website first, Batesville Casket's retailers will have the information instantly, and do not have to wait for printed materials to be shipped to their location.

Batesville Casket should continue its relationship with I-Quest as a service provider. I-Quest's price for hosting is reasonable, and by using I-Quest Batesville does not have to invest in training its employees on web support, and also does not have to invest in quickly depreciating server hardware.

Batesville should explore long-term web strategies, which should include:

- B2C Relationships: Batesville Casket could create a service where a customer could design a customized casket on the Batesville website, and have that casket delivered to a funeral home of the customer's choice.
- B2B Relationships: Batesville Casket should develop web-enabled casket ordering for participating funeral homes. These funeral homes should also have access to an online catalog with all available caskets.

To achieve these goals, Batesville Casket's IT departments need to take control of all aspects of web development from the advertising agency. Kuisel states, "we feel that we would have been better off if we had done the development work ourselves." Batesville Casket can either hire two or three web developers, or could train existing IT employees to take over control of the site's design. Occasionally, outside consultants can be brought in for problems that cannot be solved internally.

Case Analysis *(continued)*

Analysis:

Batesville Casket Company was founded in 1906 when James Hillenbrand purchased a floundering casket making company. He renamed the company Batesville Casket, and began growing the operating into a solid business. Currently, Batesville Casket operates 70 distribution warehouses, and several manufacturing plants in the United States, Canada and Mexico. The Company serves nearly 22,000 funeral homes, providing these businesses with caskets, urns, and information to help individuals with the grieving process.

Batesville Casket Company has made it a priority to provide high quality and craftsmanship in their products, and also adds value to the process by providing assistance and information to those that are terminally ill, or preparing for the death of a loved one. Batesville has maintained its top position in the market by offering services and features with its products that are not available from other vendors. These include a close relationship with other funerary services, and the development of leading edge products.

In the 1950s Batesville led the industry in developing personalization for caskets and urns. In 1954 Batesville introduced the Memorial Record Tube™, which allows loved ones to enclose personal mementos and memories of their loved ones inside the casket. Recently Batesville Casket has started the Living Memorial™ project, which plants trees in memory of loved ones. To date, over 9 million trees have been planted with the program. Finally, Batesville is moving into the area of customized caskets, including caskets with customized corner details, and customized decoration—such as the logo of a favorite sports team screened onto a casket.

In early 1996, Batesville Casket reorganized from a traditional organization, to a Strategic Business Unit (SBU) structure. The new structure reorganized Batesville Casket's different product lines into several different operating units. These units are:

- Burial Urns
- Premium Products
- Standard Metal Caskets
- Wooden Caskets
- “Essentials” (Composite Materials) Caskets

Prior to converting to an SBU structure, the Information Technology group was centralized, but after the transition, the group was decentralized to better serve the individual SBUs. Around that time, Kuisel encouraged Batesville Casket to consider using the World Wide Web for sales, marketing, and to help grow business.

Batesville Casket wanted to accomplish several goals with its website. Kuisel hopes the website will “promote the value of the funeral, and the important role of the funeral home director...educate consumers on the funeral process, and the product choices available... [and] make available resources that provide support in the human process of grief.”

When the website was proposed, Batesville Casket had no experience in website design, and decided to outsource web development to a Cincinnati advertising agency. Batesville Casket provided content and structure for the website, and the advertising agency was responsible for layout and design. Batesville chose this advertising agency because the firm had won a number of awards for web design.

Once the website was released to the public, some initial problems became apparent. The homepage, while visually stunning, took over two minutes to load for the average modem user. Very few people had the patience to wait for the page to complete loading, and customers were lost. When Batesville Casket investigated the situation further, they discovered that the advertising agency did not have real experience in web development, and had outsourced these

Case Analysis *(continued)*

award-winning sites. To make the site functional for modem users, Batesville Casket redesigned the site.

Batesville Casket also had some issues with the content for the site. A large portion of the site's content came from print material Batesville had developed over the years. While the information in the documents was still relevant, many of the documents contained outdated terminology and facts about the Company. In order to migrate this information to the website, Batesville Casket had to pour over each document checking for outdated facts and archaic terminology. Once complete, the initial cost of developing the website was nearly \$50,000—split equally between the advertising agency, and Batesville's internal costs.

Batesville chose Indianapolis-based I-Quest for web hosting. I-Quest offered several services Batesville could not perform internally. I-Quest provides statistics on the numbers of people visiting the site, and which pages visitors accessed most often. In addition, I-Quest is reasonably priced, and already supports several successful websites. Once the site was running on I-Quest's servers, Batesville Casket's website traffic was around 2,000 visitors a day from all over the world.

As Batesville Casket looks to the future for its web strategies, one issue facing the Company was how to use the website to build partnerships. Many retailers are exclusive Batesville Casket vendors, but others carry as little as 30 percent. When it came time to consider linking to partner websites, Batesville did not want to endorse one retailer over another considering that one may be an exclusive vendor for the company.

Batesville wants to cooperate and build relationships with these funeral homes, because not all of Batesville's caskets can be shown in the funeral home itself. Most homes currently offer a print catalog with additional caskets that can be ordered. Finally, when a casket is ordered at a funeral home, Batesville needs to deliver the casket to that home within 24 to 48 hours. Batesville hopes that it can start using the web to simplify this process.

Alternatives or Opinions:

One option available to Batesville Casket is to continue outsourcing the website development. Batesville would not have to hire or train internal employees, but the process for changes to the site is slowed, and the cost for changes is higher. Additionally, the advertising agency does not have the intimate knowledge about the industry that internal employees possess.

Conclusions:

Batesville Casket Company is well positioned to develop and implement a strong web strategy that will grow the Company's business. Batesville's current website is carefully considered, and—after a few initial problems—well executed, and delivered. Batesville needs to begin exploring options that will add value to the website.

Moving forward, Batesville needs to use the website to inform customers of their options, while fostering and growing current and future relationships with partners in the funeral industry. Through internal web development, Batesville can deliver catalogs, instant ordering, and up-to-date information to its customers and partners.

For Batesville Casket Company, the future is in the web.

Group Presentation Slides

Batesville Casket

Building a World Wide Web Strategy



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Group Presentation Slides *(continued)*

Presentation Overview

This presentation will cover:

- History & Overview of Batesville Casket Company
- Development of Batesville Casket's Original Website.
- Next Steps for Batesville Casket's Website
- Possible Alternate Approaches
- Outcomes for Suggested Website Strategies.



Group Presentation Slides *(continued)*

Batesville Casket History

Building a Leading Funerary Business

- Batesville Casket Company is a subsidiary of Hillenbrand Industries, Inc.
- Founded in 1906 when John Hillenbrand purchased a failing casket company.
- Located in Batesville, Illinois.
- World's largest producer of metal and hardwood burial caskets.
- Operates 70 distribution warehouses.
- Operates several plants in the U.S., Canada and Mexico
- Serves nearly 22,000 individual funeral homes.



John Hillenbrand
Founder



Group Presentation Slides *(continued)*

Batesville Casket History

Organizational Change

In early 1996 Batesville Casket Company reorganized its business into a Strategic Business Unit model. The following SBUs were created:

- Burial Urns
- Premium Products
- Standard Metal Caskets
- Wooden Caskets
- "Essentials" (Composite Materials Caskets)



Group Presentation Slides *(continued)*

Initial Website

James J. Kuisel's good idea

In February 1996, James J. Kuisel, head of sales/marketing IT proposed that Batesville Casket develop a website.

Batesville's goals for the website were:

- Promote the value of the funeral in the grieving process.
- Educate the public on the options available to them for caskets and other funerary services.
- Offer Batesville's partners catalogs and tools to give customers.
- Combat negative press about the funeral industry.



Group Presentation Slides *(continued)*

Initial Website

Development of Initial Website

- Batesville developed the web content by using existing print material.
- The site's design and development was outsourced to a Cincinnati-based advertising agency. The agency had won several awards for excellent web design.
- Batesville used Indianapolis-based I-Quest for web hosting. I-Quest offered good prices, and excellent statistics on site traffic.



Group Presentation Slides *(continued)*

Initial Website

Problems with Implementation



- Documents were hard to migrate, sort and manage for implementation.
- Website's design was too image heavy and caused problems with access.

Most of these problems were resolved quickly, and as the site moved forward, the revised site logged nearly 2,000 visitors a day.



Group Presentation Slides *(continued)*

Moving Forward

Batesville well positioned to move forward



- Continue to focus website strategy on informing customers about the funerary process, and building relationships with other funerary services.
- Use its website as a primary source of information for customers and funerary industry partners.
- Continue its relationship with I-Quest for hosting.
- Stop outsourcing web development, and begin to develop the site with internal employees.
- Build B2B and B2C relationships by offering web-enabled services on the website.



Group Presentation Slides *(continued)*

Possible Alternatives

Do nothing, and wait and see

One option available to Batesville Casket is to continue outsourcing the website development.

Batesville would not have to hire or train internal employees, but the process for changes to the site is slowed, and the cost for changes is higher. Additionally, the advertising agency does not have the intimate knowledge about the industry that internal employees possess.



Group Presentation Slides *(continued)*

Looking Ahead

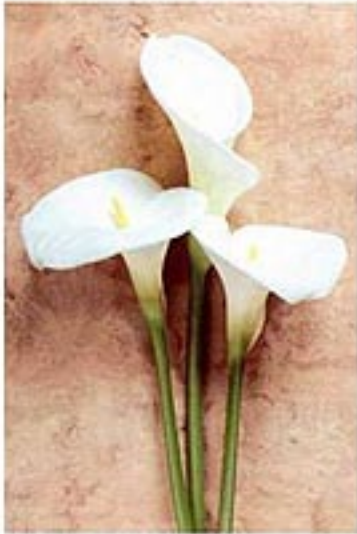
Batesville's business can only grow

- Batesville's current market position gives it leverage to use its website to build business.
- Current website is a good start, and bringing the development in-house will assure the site remains focused on its goals.
- Giving partners catalogs and online ordering will help grow the business, especially in an industry where quick turnaround is critical.
- The website can act as a central communications vehicle for the company.



Group Presentation Slides *(continued)*

Thank you!



Questions?

