

Still Life

Sunset Coffins launched their unique product in the last edition of the BIFD Journal. They had the opportunity to showcase their coffins at the BIFD Conference and Exhibition and were the obvious choice for the celebrated Still Life treatment. It is a collaborative company effort; again providing an insight into the qualities that set successful happy companies ahead of their competition. Thanks to Alison Ancrum for pulling the strands together, and to Steve Ancrum and the team for their candid honesty. The company's website can be found at www.sunsetcoffins.co.uk

How did you arrive at what you are today?

What we are today is Sunset Coffins Ltd, and that is the creation of two gentlemen called Jeremy and Steve, who are friends. They have different skills and interests and yet have a common affinity when it comes to running a business and wanting to provide the best for their customers.

Jeremy, a Funeral Director was frustrated with some of the cardboard coffins available, i.e. their reliability and appearance. He knew of a locally produced board made from 100% recycled newspaper and wondered whether this would be suitable for making an environmentally-friendly coffin.

Steve, who designs and makes bespoke products for a range of clients including museum grade presentation cases for prominent artists, rose to the challenge. Steve, a perfectionist and his team spent two years experimenting with many different prototypes (which included two cremations), while working closely with Jeremy who could offer advice on using a box with a body in it and other trade knowledge. It was decided that it should be launched at the bi-annual NFE show this June 2009 (otherwise they would have missed another two years). From the very valuable feedback received from Funeral Directors who visited the show, more improvement took place. We now have a

beautifully finished product which is used very successfully for both burials and cremations.

What is the best advice you have ever heard?

There is a local haulage company who have as their motto "love a lot, trust a few, but always paddle your own canoe"seems pretty good advice to us.

What is your typical day?

As Sunset Coffins is still a very young company (with experienced businessmen at its helm), there is no such thing as a typical day. We are constantly evaluating and carrying out continuous improvement and investment, but we think that this is what makes it all such fun. At the beginning of each day we assess what remains from the previous days tasks, what is new and what has priority and as always, what could be done better. Sunset Coffins has a team of positive and vibrant people who share a pride in the finished product as well as the service they provide to the Funeral Directors.

What is the most significant development within the funeral industry that you have encountered?

Probably the "green" trend and everyone's increasing awareness of environmental issues. That is why we have introduced this unique environmentally friendly coffin, which is totally biodegradable.

Have you thought about your own funeral beyond pre-payment?

Here are some of our staff's comments:

Sometimes we play fantasy funerals where we pick the best bits from what other people have chosen, for example, the best venue, the best hearse, the best songs and the best vicar.

Green as possible please, with low carbon footprint.

I haven't thought of my own funeral but I know what I would like for my wife (should she die first, of course.)

The funeral is for those who are left behind I don't see how I can decide on my own.

A religious one would be too rigid for me so I will be looking at the alternatives.

I want people to have a party as part of the funeral.

My Dad didn't want a fuss, but I regret not

having anywhere where I can visit him. So I am going to be different.

Have you ever refused a clients wishes?

We are always open to suggestions subject to product liability issues. No reasonable request is ever refused. We are here to please our customers.

What is the most significant benefit to your job? And the least attractive aspect?

The flexibility of being able to make decisions and seeing that we have achieved something (being able to paddle our own canoe!) seems to be the most significant benefit.

The least attractive is probably all the bureaucracy (resentment about being a tax collector for the government).

Which is the most significant funeral in your memory?

As a company it has been interesting to observe how making these coffins has impacted on the team. We had a member of the public contact us directly because of a local newspaper article. He was arranging a funeral for a young relative and was keen to tell us his story. It was very moving and made everyone at Sunset Coffins realise how significant every funeral is and that we are dealing with a very significant event in peoples lives. So I think we would like to say that as a team we feel that all funerals are significant.

Does the media have any influence in people's decision making, with respect to choice?

It was television and radio that everyone immediately thought of when the team was asked this question. It wasn't surprising therefore that the instant reaction was a negative one. That is, the media can have an overwhelming negative influence on people's choices and that it does not always seem to take enough responsibility for the possible effect that it has. It was generally thought that the public are brainwashed and



subconsciously told what is right and what is wrong and that sadly there are perhaps people out there who do things only because it seems the right or fashionable thing to do.

However, we also think that the media can have a very positive role in getting accurate information over to the public, which has got to be a good thing. How many of us buy gardening magazines for ideas or use books when studying? If people have knowledge, even if it is just a small but accurate piece of data, they can then make further inquiries. This could then be used to help them when they are having to make a decision about something.

Do you carry anything routinely with you at work that is personal to you – where did it come from?

Some of the responses from the staff:

Three small smooth pebbles of different colours, which I picked up from Newgale beach and keep in my coat pocket to remind me of three friends.

I have a Swiss Army pen knife (not sure where I bought it). This replaces the one I lost which my wife originally bought me.

My reading glasses I bought from Boots the Chemist for £2. Brilliant for stopping me bumping into things!

Which piece of equipment could you not do without and/or which one is a complete luxury?

We asked everyone for their opinion:

We couldn't do without the phone or the Internet. They seem to be vital tools for

communication. Some of the younger members of our staff cannot imagine how they would conduct their social networking without the aid of their mobiles!

I couldn't do without my personal/work diary, which is also a bit like a comfort blanket! Every day there is something new and different, so my Filofax helps me keep track and ensures that I still get a bit of "me time" (the luxury) and yet no-one gets forgotten (the essential).

Someone said that their car was an absolute essential, otherwise they would not be able to travel to work and work in such a fun place. But that it was also a luxury because he had chosen that particular model and really enjoyed the cross country trips to and from work.

Everyone has their opportunity here at the factory to make the coffee/tea or do the lunch run but no-one likes washing up, so the dishwasher is classed by everyone as a luxury and also as an essential.

We have two Aeron office chairs that we acquired from a sale of refurbished products. They are fabulous and everyone likes to have their turn at sitting in them. We would like to acquire more!!

Which question would you have liked to be asked and why? How would you have answered it?

What motivates me/what makes me get up in the morning? Because I am never asked that question. What makes me get up in a morning is knowing that there is the possibility that I will be challenged with overcoming problems. There is almost always a solution to a problem and I enjoy finding it.

