

GRAPHIC MATERIAL AS AN ELEMENT TO ENHANCE PERSONALISED FUNERALS

M.C.D. MANO

ABSTRACT

Personalised funerals are defined as modernised, innovative, customised and specialised types of funerals. Personalised funerals are performed to reflect the individual's life and what he or she has accomplished (Broadbent 2002; Wolcott 1999). The aim of this study was to establish if there is a niche in South Africa for graphic material for personalised funerals. The importance of a personalised funeral is to comfort the attendees and avoid the funeral being too traumatic. One of the main questions that arose during this study is how well South Africans react to the idea of personalised funerals? Traditional funerals are gradually being improved by means of creating a more modernised and customised funeral. Funerals now include pictures, photographs and even slide shows of the deceased person (Jenga 2001). Informal receptions with bright colours and even a party after the services are becoming the preferred method (Edwards 2002). Orchids instead of roses, favourite songs instead of Bach, touching poems instead of traditional prayers (Wolcott 1999), slay coffins instead of a plain wooden coffin (Eybers 2007) all emphasise the need for personalised funerals. The aim of the first questionnaire was to establish if there is a niche in South Africa for graphic design material for personalised funerals and to assist with the various design implications that can be used in a funeral pamphlet. A second questionnaire was developed in order to include the opinion of a professional in the funeral industry, which could be beneficial in the design process. Through analysing these questionnaires, various design concepts were developed and applied to funeral pamphlets. The funeral industry already provides various services, for example catering, hiring of tents and vehicles. Why not graphic designers? The author of this study postulates that this could possibly develop a trend or need in South Africa, and expose more and more South Africans to personalised funerals.

Key words: Personalised, customised, innovative and design implications.

1. INTRODUCTION

Personalised funerals are defined as modernised, innovative, customised and specialised types of funerals. Personalised funerals are performed to reflect the individual's life and what he or she has accomplished (Broadbent 2002; Wolcott 1999). It allows people to opt for an alternative to traditional funerals and as such, families can look forward to personal and individual services. It is about breaking away from traditional practices and allowing the ceremony to present characteristics of the deceased person. Matson (2001), for example, reported that more people want a celebration and want to break away from traditional mourning. Funerals are traumatic and may cause emotional distress for those attending and for that reason one should not disregard the attendees of funerals (Matson 2001; Misesk2007; Poole & Germino 1998).

The aim of this study was to establish if there is a niche in South Africa for graphic material for personalised funerals. The main idea of a personalised funeral is to remind the attendees of the way the deceased lived life. The importance of a personalised funeral is to comfort the attendees and avoid the funeral being too traumatic. The main significance of a personalised funeral is to provide the opportunity for the loved ones to reflect on the meaning of the individual's life (Wolcott 1999; Xiong 2006).

Several questions arose during this study, namely how South Africans react to the idea of personalised funerals. Could personalised funerals develop a trend or need in South Africa? Will personalised funerals be more comforting for the living than traditional funerals? The answers to these questions will show the importance of the present study regarding the impact that a need for personalised funerals may have on the graphic design industry.

2. PERSONALISED FUNERALS

Traditional funerals are gradually being adapted to suit modern day requirements by means of creating a more modernised and customised funeral. Simplified and impersonal funeral programmes are one of the main methods that are being used in South Africa. Current developments outside South Africa concerning funerals entail some people opting for expedited and less traditional methods and are choosing to customise memorial and funeral services (Poole & Germino 1998).

Funerals now include pictures, photographs and even slide shows of the deceased person (Jenga 2001). Informal receptions with bright colours and even a party after the services are becoming the preferred method (Edwards 2002) which, in its turn, leads people to wanting to film the service (Misek 2007). This greatly contrasts with traditional services where a eulogy might be delivered and after the service an uncomfortable conversation with refreshments.

There has been funerals that may have shocked the attendees, for example, a certain woman held her husband's funeral in a nightclub, hired his favourite swing band and served foods and wines that he used to enjoy (Edwards 2002).

There are also funerals that may have helped to comfort the attendees. At the funeral of Markus White, a teenager who was a victim of crime, 19 white doves were released, with each dove representing a year of his life. Sixteen monarch butterflies were released at Knox's burial. At Cole's funeral, balloons were released. Both these teenagers had violent ends (Xiong 2006).

Another trend that has been identified, is that funeral programmes now tell a story. At the funeral of Rev. Joseph Sylvester, ten pages of colour photographs were inserted in the funeral pamphlet. One of the photographs was of him at a church gathering and the other was a photograph of him falling

asleep while reading the Bible. The aim of the photographs was, of course, to allow his family, friends and acquaintances to remember him the way he really was (Jenga 2001).

Another new development concerning funerals that has been identified is the broadcasting of funerals live on the internet. One of Northern Ireland's oldest undertakers has been one of the first to provide funerals on the internet by broadcasting the funeral services live. This provides the solution for distant family and friends who are unable to attend the funeral. The infrastructure to provide this service has already been put in position in a number of churches in Co Down. According to Jim Clarke, who manages the business with his father, they are simply adjusting to the changes in the community (Sharrock 2007). This could be seen as a personalised funeral as internet funerals are unique and modernised. However, this could also be seen as accommodating the loved ones left behind. The example of internet funerals indicates that funerals can be more directed towards the attendees, their needs and circumstances.

Johan Eybers (2007), from the Sunday newspaper *Rapport*, reported that a British coffin maker has developed a range of themed coffins which contribute to personalised funerals. Mr. Richard Mullard, a South African, ordered a coffin from Vic Fern and Company. The coffin was designed in the shape of a slay. The reason for this is that Mr. Mullard wants people to remember him for the numerous expeditions that he undertook to the North Pole when he was younger. He fears that the older he gets, less people will remember this important part of his life, but which will now be remembered at his funeral. Mr. Hannes Wilken, director of Dove's Funeral Home (2007), voiced the opinion that designer coffins are unknown in South Africa and he is not aware of anyone that has requested a specially-designed coffin. This may be due to the fact that the communities' opinion and beliefs about death and funerals may still be very traditional

Orchids instead of roses, favourite songs instead of Bach, touching poems instead of traditional prayers (Wolcott 1999), slay coffins instead of a plain wooden coffin (Eybers 2007) all emphasise the need for personalised funerals. Slide shows (Jenga 2001), themed funerals (Broadbent 2002), the filming of funerals (Misieki 2007) and photographs inserted in the funeral programmes (Jenga 2001) all clearly signify the requirements of personalised funerals. Launching a loved one's cremated remains into Earth's orbit or to the moon and then watching the voyage online indicates that the need for personalised funerals may be outrageous, however, it is being done (Burt 2001).

If the need for personalised funeral arises in South Africa, it could have an impact on the graphic design industry. South Africans, on the other hand, may not opt for personalised funerals, which in its turn indicate that there is no need for personalised funerals in South Africa. However, one should not forget that a South African has already ordered a customized coffin. Could this not develop a trend in South Africa? Could it be that South Africans are not really exposed to personalised funerals as the coffin maker is from Britain?

3. RESEARCH PROCESS AND RESULTS

The aim of the questionnaire was to establish if there is a niche in South Africa for graphic design material for personalised funerals and to assist with the various design implications that can be used in funeral pamphlets.

Questionnaires were distributed amongst one hundred students which were divided into four groups. All students were conveniently selected at the Central University of Technology Free State (CUT), Bloemfontein. The first group consisted of white males. The second group consisted of African males. The third group consisted of white females and the fourth group consisted of African females. Before the questionnaires were distributed, pilot testing was done. The questionnaires were distributed on Wednesday 25 April 2007, from 8:00 am to 12:30 pm. The cafeteria, library, parking lots and other departments were the various locations selected to distribute the questionnaires. The questionnaire consisted of nine questions. Questions 1 to 4 involved questions that could influence the choice of answers, namely gender, religious affiliation, age and course studied. Question 5 consisted of fourteen different design ideas that could be used in funeral pamphlets. The questions were scaled on a rating system: 1 = Very bad idea, 2 = bad idea, 3 = average idea, 4 = good idea and 5 = very good idea. Question 5 tested the participants' preferences concerning rose, car and square-shaped funeral pamphlets, the use of predominantly soft colours and the insertion of tissues inside the funeral pamphlet. The aim of question 6 and 7 was to determine how many of the subjects wanted to be buried or cremated and how many of the subjects would keep or discard the funeral pamphlets. Question 8 involved an attempt to determine the participants' preference for personalised funeral pamphlets in comparison to impersonal funeral pamphlets. Question 8 was also based on the same rating system as question 5. Question 8 required of participants to give their input concerning the design of their own funeral pamphlet, voice their opinion on a personal message inserted in the funeral pamphlet by a family member or family members, a friend or even the deceased, and a tribute video being played at the funeral. Question 9 provided the opportunity for the subjects to suggest their personal opinions about breaking away from traditional funerals and their outlook on personalised funerals. The questionnaire took an average of 5 to 15 minutes to complete.

The results of the questionnaires concerning a preference for personalised funerals ranged from 61% to 67%, indicating that the various groups were in favour of personalising funerals.

The results of the subjects' questionnaires were analysed and various key points from the rated results were noted for design application.

Seventy-two people would keep the funeral pamphlets. This indicates the significance of designing a funeral pamphlet appropriately. The highest figures concerning the different funeral pamphlet designs were recorded for the deceased designing his or her own funeral pamphlet, a personal message from the deceased and a personal message from friends and families, as

these overall ratings were 3.00 and even ranging to 4.25. The lowest figures attained for inserting bath salts in the funeral pamphlets which ranged from 1.52 to 2.12. The reason for this is that the mourners would rather receive a gift that would remind them of the deceased, for example a mug that has a photograph of the deceased on it. Inserting tissues in the funeral pamphlet had a high rating among the African males and females (3.84 - 4.44) compared to the white males and females (2.57 - 3.50). The car-shaped funeral pamphlet was also given a low rating, which ranged between 1.40 and 2.08. Even amongst the men, the car-shaped funeral pamphlet was rated very low compared to the butterfly, rose and square-shaped funeral pamphlets. The reason for this could have been because the car-shaped design may be more drastic compared to the softness of the butterfly, rose and square-shaped funeral pamphlets. The results are given in table 1.

Table 1: The mean ratings of different type of pamphlets and their graphic use by the four groups

Different type of funeral pamphlets and their graphic use	African males	White males	African Females	White females
Use of black and purple colours	2.52	2.72	3.12	2.64
Use of warm colours	3.08	3.52	2.64	3.40
Use of soft colours	2.88	3.32	2.96	3.20
Use of hand - made colours	2.12	3.44	3.28	3.60
Use of coloured cardboard	2.92	2.76	3.00	3.28
Use of scented paper	3.36	2.72	3.36	2.84
Rose - shaped pamphlet	3.64	2.88	3.44	2.52
Butterfly- shaped pamphlet	2.92	2.48	2.80	2.24
Car- shaped pamphlet	2.08	2.08	1.76	1.40
Square - shaped pamphlet	3.28	3.12	3.32	3.52
Inserting a CD with photographs of the deceased	2.92	3.80	3.88	3.36
Inserting tissues inside the pamphlet	3.84	2.92	4.44	3.16
Inserting bath salts etc.	1.76	1.52	2.12	1.76
Pamphlet to serve an additional purpose	3.92	2.72	3.60	3.00

Designing own pamphlet	3.28	3.84	4.32	3.00
Personal message from deceased in pamphlet	3.68	4.08	3.50	3.72
Family member writing a message	4.28	3.92	4.12	4.28
Friends writing a message	3.76	3.88	3.52	4.12
Tribute video at funeral	3.40	3.60	3.64	3.04

A second questionnaire was developed in order to involve the opinion of a professional in the funeral industry which could be beneficial in the design process.

The second questionnaire had the same rating and questions as the first questionnaire. However, additional questions were added which included the following. Question 2 inquired about the number of cremations and burials being performed and participants were requested to provide figures. Question 3 was aimed at determining if there may possibly be a market for personalised funerals and if there is, who the target market is. Question 4 proposed the idea of releasing butterflies, balloons and doves at funerals. Question 5 involved different types of gifts that could be given at a funeral and remind the funeral-goers of the deceased. Examples of this are pens that have the deceased person's name engraved on it, a key ring with a photograph of the deceased person and a fridge magnet with an encouraging message on it. The aim of question 6 was to determine what the strangest funeral was that the funeral director had choreographed. This question proved to be very insightful. Question 7 provided the opportunity for the funeral directors to state their opinions on personalised funerals.

The funeral home's that were selected were Doves Funeral Home, AVBOB (Afrikaanse Verbond Begrafnisondernemers Beperk) and South African (SA) Funeral Home (Bloemfontein). The reason for choosing between Doves and AVBOB was due to the fact that they had a similar clientele, the majority of which appearing to be white people. The main clientele of SA Funeral Homes is African people. AVBOB was unable to contribute to this research, as the funeral director was unavailable. The questionnaires were presented to the funeral directors on 25 May 2007. The directors of SA Funeral Homes are Miss Zanele Solfafia and Mr. Tshepo Maqache. The funeral director at Doves Funeral Home is Mr. Herman Louw. Mr. Louw contributed to some of the concepts behind the different design ideas, as each question was provided with reasons for his answers.

Compared to impersonal funerals, Doves and SA Funeral Home favour personalised funerals at 74% and 73% respectively.

Mr. Louw of Doves Funeral Home mentioned that the strangest type of funeral he has choreographed has been the cremation of deceased members of the Chinese community. The deceased is cremated with all of his/her valuable belongings. He also mentions that music played at the memorial services tends to be bizarre, for example the lyrics to one of the songs that was played was about a man trying to climb out of his coffin. Mr. Louw ranked the use of predominately warm colours low as he felt that warm colours, especially red, are associated with Valentine's Day. He also postulated the opinion that there will always be a market for unusual funerals. From experience, Mr. Louw was able to inform the researcher that when funerals have a standard type of pamphlet, only every second or third person will take one, compared to a unique pamphlet where everyone tends to take one. When deciding on a type of funeral pamphlet, he cautioned that money would be an issue, as it seems that the lower income group spends more money than the higher income group are willing to spend. In contrast to this statement, however, he also mentioned that it is the higher income group that will take a unique funeral pamphlet. Doves Funeral Homes asks up to R10.00 for one of their unique funeral pamphlets (thicker, coloured paper), whereas AVBOB asks up to R17.00 for one of their unique funeral pamphlets.

Ms. Solfafia and Mr. Maqache from SA Funeral Homes also described the strangest types of funeral they have choreographed. When a member of a hijacking syndicate died, the members in the gang fired shots into the air and illegal drag racing occurred. They also mentioned that if someone was murdered, they are buried with a knife in order to take revenge on the murderer. Persons that believe in reincarnation were buried with earthly possessions (blankets, money, pillows etc.).

When comparing the comments of SA Funeral Home and Doves Funeral Home, there is a difference in the use of black and purple colours. Doves gave a high ranking of 4 and SA Funeral Home gave a low ranking of 1. This result contradicts the statement made by SA Funeral Home, as their clientele tends to be more traditional. Yet the black and purple funeral pamphlets are the traditional type of funeral pamphlets. Doves and SA Funeral Homes also gave low rankings for butterfly-shaped funeral pamphlets, a car-shaped funeral pamphlet and inserting bath salts (1 was the lowest and 2 the highest). These low figures are all similar to the figures of the subjects that were observed and recorded in the first questionnaire. High ranking results (4 to 5) that were also similar to the subjects' were a personal message from the deceased, family member or friend inside the funeral pamphlet. The different approaches to funerals, for example releasing butterflies and doves, were rated high by both funeral homes, which were scaled from between 3 to 5, whereas the idea of releasing balloons was rated on the scale of 1. The reason for this could be that balloons are associated with parties. The idea of gifts that remind the funeral-goers of the deceased that can be given at a funeral also attained high figures from both funeral homes (4 and 5). Examples of these are a photo frame of the deceased, a pen with the deceased's details and a magnet containing an encouraging message. A pen is a particularly popular gift because, as Mr. Louw mentioned, "Nobody will say no to a good pen". An important fact that was mentioned by Ms. Solfafia is that her clientele, which is

Africans, tends to be very traditional and prefer their old customs. Even though SA Funeral Home had a high percentage of favouring personalised funeral, they still mentioned the important influence tradition may have on their clientele. The results are given in in table 2 and 3.

Table 2: The mean ratings of different type of pamphlets and their graphic use by the two funeral homes

Different type of funeral pamphlets their graphic use	Doves Funeral Home	SA Funeral Home
Use of black and purple colours	4.00	1.00
Use of warm colours	2.00	5.00
Use of soft colours	4.00	4.00
Use of hand - made colours	4.00	5.00
Use of coloured cardboard	4.00	4.00
Use of scented paper	4.00	2.00
Rose - shaped pamphlet	3.00	5.00
Butterfly- shaped pamphlet	2.00	1.00
Car - shaped pamphlet	2.00	1.00
Square - shaped pamphlet	4.00	2.00
Inserting a Cd with photographs of deceased	4.00	5.00
Inserting tissues inside the pamphlet	2.00	5.00
Inserting bath salts etc.	2.00	3.00
Pamphlet to serve an additional purpose	4.00	5.00
Designing own pamphlet	4.00	3.00
Personal message from deceased in pamphlet	5.00	5.00
Family member writing a message	5.00	5.00
Friends writing a message	5.00	4.00
Tribute video at funeral	5.00	5.00

Table 3: The mean ratings of different approach to personalised funerals and their graphic use by the two funeral homes

Different approach to personalised funerals	Doves Funeral Home	SA Funeral Home
Releasing butterflies at the funeral	3.00	5.00
Releasing balloons at the funeral	1.00	1.00
Releasing doves at the funeral	4.00	5.00
A pen that has the deceased persons name engraved on it	4.00	4.00
A mug with a photograph of the deceased person on it	3.00	3.00
A glass that has the deceased person's name sand blasted on it	3.00	3.00
A key - ring with a photograph of the deceased person	2.00	4.00
A candle inserted in a box with information about the deceased person.	4.00	5.00
A fridge magnet with an encouraging message on it	4.00	5.00
A box that has photographs of the deceased person on it and inside it is filled with dried rose petal or chocolates	3.00	3.00
A photo frame with a photograph of the deceased person	4.00	5.00

4. IMPLICATIONS FOR GRAPHIC DESIGN

Many people prefer to keep a funeral pamphlet, therefore it would be recommended to design the pamphlet to serve as an additional purpose, for example a pamphlet that can be set up as a photo frame (figure 1) or even going as far as to design a pamphlet that can be function as a game (figure 2).



Figure 1a. Flower pamphlet stand.



Figure 1 b. Flower pamphlet stand once opened.

Figure 2. This is a deck of cards images include J, Q, K and the joker. Each card contains three facts about the deceased and photograph of the deceased is animated.

Jack diamonds



Queen of hearts



King of spades



Joker



When designing the funeral pamphlet, an important focus will be on the shape of the funeral pamphlet. As seen through the various questionnaires, a different shape may be favoured (for example a guitar-shaped pamphlet [figure 3]). However, it would be advisable to settle with regular shapes (e.g. circular, square and triangular). Unusual shapes like a butterfly (figure 4) or a rose-shaped pamphlet could be used due to the softness of its appearance, but one should be careful for drastic shapes as the preference for the car-shaped funeral pamphlet was rated low amongst the subjects and the funeral directors. However, if the drastic shape is placed in the correct context, it could be

Figure 4. Butterfly box, that can contain chocolates inside



When selecting the choice of colour, one could move away from the use of the predominantly black and purple colours, as they had low ratings. Warm and soft colours were the preferred choices. It would then be advisable when selecting a colour to be aware of the brightness of the colour and even the meaning of the colour. As previously indicated, red is associated with Valentine's Day. When inserting items in the funeral pamphlet, one should be careful, as tissues and bath salts, for example, were rated rather low, as it does not really represent the deceased and is more of a personal gift. Inserting a compact disc in the funeral pamphlet with photographs of the deceased was rated high. Gifts that remind the funeral-goers of the deceased, like a pen that has the deceased person's name engraved on it, a mug with a photograph of the deceased on it and even a photo frame of the deceased were also rated high. This indicates that when one is deciding on inserting items in the pamphlet, that one should rather include items or gifts that represent the deceased and something the mourners can remember the deceased by. Another aspect to take into consideration would be the clientele, as there is a percentage of people that are not fond of breaking away from tradition. Therefore, under those circumstances, it is advisable that the shape of the funeral pamphlet be a normal rectangular shape (normally A5). The colours that could be used would be black, purple, browns and if the use of other colours is contemplated, it should then at least be faded colours.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

When evaluating the questionnaire, the car-shaped pamphlet had the lowest rating. Yet, if the deceased was a vehicle technician this could be appropriate, as high ratings were given to suggestions for designs hinting at personal attributes. It is believed that if the detail about the deceased being a mechanic or a rally driver was mentioned in the questionnaires, that a car-shaped funeral pamphlet would have attained a much higher rating.

While suggesting different approaches to funeral pamphlets, tradition tended to be an issue. When designing funeral pamphlets, one does not necessarily have to break away from tradition, but one could actually contribute to the impact of tradition by including certain shapes, patterns and colours.

A factor impacting on the design of funeral pamphlets is the issue of costs. Mr. Louw (2007), funeral director of Doves Funeral Home, stated that, ironically, the lower income group is willing to spend more money on funerals. Time can also be a dilemma, as there are only a few days to plan and print the funeral pamphlet. A solution to this problem is to design the pamphlet in advance. This will increase the impact of a personal touch, as the deceased can be personally involved in the design process and it can allow the deceased to insert his or her personal message into the funeral pamphlet. Developing and launching a design programme on compact disc would also enable interested persons to design their own funeral pamphlets.

This could prove to be effective if it could be linked with companies offering funeral policies. This will also provide a vital opportunity to present this concept as this is one of the few times that people will think about their own death. Companies offering funeral policies could offer the services of a graphic designer, which can assist one in the design process for one's own funeral pamphlet. The funeral industry already provides various services, for example catering and renting of tents and vehicles. Why not a graphic designer? The author of this study postulates that this could possibly develop a trend or need in South Africa, and expose more and more South Africans to personalised funerals.

In the end, society is not keen to talk or think about death. It may just be that personalised funerals bring a change of heart for some.

6. REFERENCES

Broadbent, L. 2002. Traditional funerals are out - if they've got to go, baby boomers are going to do it their way. *Times*. 14 December 2002.

Burt, E. 2001. Until death do us part, er, party. *Kiplinger's Personal Finance*. Vol. 55:10. p28.

Edwards, B. 2002. Commentary: Unique memorial services held in Hollywood. *Morning Edition*. 29 November 2002.

Eybers, J. 2007. Rus in eksklusiewe, eksotiese vrede. *Rapport*. 25 February 2007.

Jenga, J. 2001. Funeral programs tell a story of life. *Chicago Tribune*. 6 April 2001.

Matson, T. 2001. The last thing you want to do. *Mothers earth News*. Issue 187. p60 - 68.

Misek, M. 2007. Memorial way. *EventDV*. Vol. 20:1. p10 -11.

Poole, M. & Germino, B. 1998. Death and dying, Planning, Funerals. *ANNA Journal*. Vol. 25:6. p642.

Sharrock, D. 2007. Funerals on the internet. *Times*. 3 December 2007.

Solfafia, Z. Personal discussion about personalising funerals at SA Funeral Home. Bloemfontein. June 2007.

Wilken, H. 2007. Personal discussion about personalising funerals at Doves Funeral Home. Bloemfontein. June 2007.

Wolcott, J. 1999. Commemorating a life. *Christian Science Monitor*. Vol. 92:71. p11. 3 September 1999.

Xiong, C. 2006. A guiding light in families' darkest hours. *Star Tribune*. 11 December 2006.