Put Your Cemetery Online – Free and Easy

Russ Hanson Sexton, Wolf Creek Cemetery, Polk County, WI.

This is meant to be a highly interactive document, so click on the links as you read through it.

Google your cemetery, i.e *Pleasant Valley Cemetery Polk County WI* and see what comes up. If you are like many small cemeteries all you will see is a Find A Grave link, possibly one from a genealogical site and maybe a Google map showing the location. And that is all! Google a large cemetery *Evergreen Cemetery Menomonie WI* and you get a very nice website with just about everything you ever dreamed.

You think wow, that sure is nice, but we don't have that kind of money to spend on a website and think about the $1000s of dollars and a person hired to keep it updated. And so you say maybe someday…

Well, I am here to tell you how to do it yourself if you have some simple computer skills, or if not, you can borrow a high school kid to do it for you – and FREE (although I recommend a McDonalds Gift card reward for the kid).

I am the volunteer sexton for the Wolf Creek Cemetery, in NW Polk County, 10 miles north of St Croix Falls. We are a small cemetery, 6 acres, and about 15 burials per year and maybe 15 grave purchases per year. As we have been around since 1857 and we have thousands existing burials. We do not have any paid staff, contracting for mowing, digging etc and doing lots of volunteer work to serve the local community's needs.

At a cemetery board meeting a few years ago, we decided the cemetery needed a web presence. And I said "I will see what we can do for free." And the rest of this is the rationale and how we did it free. You should stop now and look at our Wolf Creek Cemetery site to be properly motivated. Be sure to click on the tabs at the top right to go to the various pages of information. Note: Our site is pretty new and we are still thinking about what we might want to add to it.

You might ask "Why should we have a web presence?" The primary reason we think is to make it easy for folks to find out information about the cemetery without bothering us with phone calls! Rules, costs and contacts are most often asked for burials and gravestones. Genealogical questions are quite common. Rather than a person on the phone or in person, the information can be by email, website, and events from our calendar or posted on our social media page. Along with the savings in time and effort, we have had more grave sales as folks find us through our online presence.

Google Map Location. If you search for your cemetery and it doesn't show up on a Google map when you search on its name, then you should add that as a location. I never expect to remember how to do that, or for that matter most internet stuff, so I just do a Google search *How do I add my cemetery to Google locations?* Asking questions in normal language works fine. We have the Google Street View of our cemetery along with the map location from an internet search.

An email address. The best I have found is to create an account using Google's Gmail. Wolfcreekcemetery@gmail.com not only gave us free email, but opened up 15gb of free cloud file

storage, allows for free website creation as well as many other quite wonderful tools –FREE. Post your email address on a sign at the cemetery along with your rules. I set up the Gmail account to forward emails to my own email account so I don't have to log in and check the cemetery one. An email contact is vastly nicer than a phone call as I have time to do thoughtfully answer the question rather than try to wing it on the phone. If you don't have one, just go to mail.google.com and sign up your cemetery.

A Facebook Business Page. Start on your own Facebook page and click on the little orange pages flag on the far left of the screen to get into the create a page setup. It is easy and you can be share the editor role with others so several folks can post information. Ours is [WC Facebook](#) We try to post something weekly to keep folks interested not only events, but obituary links, historical notes, interesting graves etc. If you are not clear on how to do this, search YouTube videos on *how do I set up a Facebook business page for beginners?* It is completely FREE!

A Website.   Having gotten your email address and Facebook business page, you are likely feeling quite accomplished and are ready to create a website using Google's absolutely free and easy hosting.   Before starting, try finding a few cemetery websites and choose a pattern from one you like – maybe [Forest Home](#) in Milwaukee. We don't expect ours to be quite so fancy, but we can do a very good one easily.

A new website can begin with just a single page with the core information. A photo of the cemetery is nice, two better. A map of our location would be nice or at least the street address. Our contact email address and if we have a regular mail address or phone contact. Maybe a couple of the most commonly asked questions on that first page (i.e. costs). And a link to our Facebook page, and a link to our rules and regulations would be nice, although they can be on another page as we get things developed. This is the place where if you feel lost, you find that high school kid who likes computers.

To build the site yourself, log in on a computer using the cemetery Gmail account. That switches you from yourself to the cemetery account. Go to   *sites.google.com*. There you have various templates to create a new website, with sort of a fill in the blanks approach.   The website building is easy and high level, much like using a word processor where you insert photos, text boxes, photo carousels, the Google calendar, and more. The site is not visible to the public until you click the PUBLISH button, then as if by magic, it is live and the world can see you!

Website addresses (URLs) are free if you use the sites.google.com preface for your cemetery as we did with https://sites.google.com/view/wolf-creek-cemetery/home   However if you want something like WolfCreekCemeteryWI.com or WolfCreekCemetery.org, then you have to go to a domain service and pay for it yearly, maybe about $13/year and take a couple of simple steps to make that work. We wanted to be free, so didn't buy one. The URL works fine and if you do a Google search to find *Wolf Creek Cemetery Polk Wisconsin* our link pops up in the first three results with the Findagrave and Facebook for our cemetery. Having wolfcreekcemetery.org would be like frosting on the cake, but we are happy with the free link.

Google Drive. We have taken our internet use a step more. We have scanned all of our cemetery records and put them on our free 15gb of Google cloud drive as pictures of the pages, cards or receipts and forms.   Google does an amazing thing with the images of our records – it automatically turns them

into searchable text, even the handwritten ones (if they are at least moderately readable) and so we can search all of our cloud drive files for Mariette and up pops the image of the 1912 map where some Mariette family are buried and the name is written in the map. That is absolutely wonderful to make old records useful. It makes my sexton job vastly easier, especially with the genealogy queries. And we can choose to share an old record with a single person via Gmail, or we can share a photo or a folder of photos with everyone in the world, or maybe with just our board members. Here is a page from the Town records with a meeting minute involving the cemetery perpetual care funds 1938 Record.

Note- to fit our records into the free 15gb, we compressed the scans. You can buy more storage space but we were aiming to be FREE!

If you have questions, you can send them to wolfcreekcemetery@gmail.com and they will be forwarded to Russ Hanson who believes you too should have an online presence for your cemetery. And if you want to get even fancier, try a QR code FREE too at this link.

Figure 1 The Wolf Creek Cemetery Maintenance Committee discussing driveway improvements. Russ is on the left with the metal detector looking for the road boundary metal markers from 1938. We are very dry this spring in a sandy cemetery.