

# The FCCFA Chronicle

Official voice of the Florida cemetery, cremation and funeral industry

## ILLUMINATE AN UNDISCOVERED WORLD



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# Funeral Homes of the Future: How Tomorrow's Funeral Directors May Transform Their Businesses

By Bill Williams

**W**e have been hearing for years about how consumers are changing their views about pre- and at-need planning and how our profession can maximize technology and today's consumer preferences to help families during their buying journey. If funeral directors fully embraced the way consumers seek funeral planning and services, what would their business look like and how would you do it?

Those are fair questions to ask and, quite frankly, the right questions to ask. That's because the old way of finding new customers—local newspaper ads, direct mail postcards, and church or retirement community visits—are no longer as effective in today's digital world as they were a decade or two ago. Sure, you will get some leads, but it is not the way consumers shop for funeral services.

In its 2023 US Funeral Consumer Survey, the National Home Funeral Alliance (NHFA) found that 62% of respondents said the first thing they would do if planning a funeral would be to surf the internet to learn about services, products and prices. The survey also noted that 76% of respondents ranked the in-person appointment as the very last or next-to-last action they would take when planning a memorial service.

To survive and thrive, digital technology must be thoroughly integrated into everyday operations. If not, it is not a question of if, but when, you lose business to

competitors in your local market or the growing number of start-ups and early-stage companies that are making it easy for families to shop, customize, and pay for funeral services from the comforts of their home.

This is how you do it, and the mindset to have to make it happen:

## Think Digital on the Outside

A user-friendly, contemporary-looking website is a must: Will Rogers's famous quote, "You never get a second chance to make a first impression" applies to your business's website. Research from content management system provider Storyblok found that 60% of consumers it surveyed decided within 30 seconds to stay or leave a website—and 20% decided within five seconds. The more time a visitor spends on your website, the greater the likelihood that person may click the "buy now" button.

Help families make informed decisions: Families need, and are looking for, help when planning services or purchasing preneed contracts. To help them on their buying journey, turn your website into a one-stop shopping resource center for information. Provide a variety of "how to" blogs/articles, educational videos, downloadable PDF brochures and checklists and transparent pricing lists. The cost of these marketing materials will not break the bank and could be the

difference between a new customer or a sale lost to a competitor.

## Think Digital on the Inside

Leverage technology to improve productivity: The phrase "do more with less" is probably burned into memory, especially with the cost of doing business continuing to rise. Investing in automation technology will reduce the time your team spends on manual, administrative tasks, such as preneed contract data entry or managing trust deposits and withdrawals.

Enhance preneed trust management: With pre-need contracts often representing 20%-40% of funeral home revenue, deathcare professionals need to have total control of their preneed trust and sales programs—and today's digital tools allow them to do exactly that. With just a few clicks of a mouse, funeral directors have access to high-level and detailed data, including the status of every preneed contract, the market value of an entire trust account, trust transaction history, regulatory reporting deadlines, and more.

Utilize digital tools to mitigate compliance risk: A business's reputation is one of its most valuable assets. One small clerical error can lead to the unwanted attention of regulators, which could severely damage your funeral home's standing in your

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community. Robust recordkeeping and administrative platforms with the latest eContract technology can mitigate legal risks by making sure all contracts are created and updated correctly to comply with state and federal regulations, including the requirements of the FTC Funeral Rule and Cooling Off Rule.


## Offer Modern Service Options

Offer customizable, modern celebration of life options: There is a growing body of research that shows that families want customized, unique end-of-life celebrations. These celebrations are likely to take place outside the funeral home. Think a

meaningful place to the individual, including the beach for a sunset service or happy hour at a restaurant. Consumers are moving away from traditional services inside the funeral home, so you are losing sales if your website does not provide families the flexibility to choose services and products that meet their needs.

But there is another important factor at play here. Consumers who can customize their purchases will pay a premium. The hospitality and entertainment profession learned that long ago, so take advantage of their success.

Having a clear digital and modern strategy will be critical to building and growing your business. These

tools will help you accelerate sales by reaching a larger audience and strengthening relationships with potential customers. Digital technology also can help you better manage internal operations so you and your team will have more time to connect—physically and digitally—with families in your community. 



*Bill Williams is the President and CEO of Funeral Services, Inc.*

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