

Back to the Basics of Leveraging Technology: Building a Robust Website

by Gabriel Ngo

“When used right, technology becomes an accelerator of momentum, not a creator of it”

— Jim Collins, *Good to Great*

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC has forced all of us in the profession—client families, guests, funeral homes, crematories, and cemeteries—into having to adopt new ways of doing things. And once we are open to doing things in a new way, we can never really go back to doing things exactly how they were done before. It is human nature.

We have been forced to lean on technology in order to serve families—virtual meetings online (via Zoom, WebEx, etc.) for arrangement conferences, DocuSign to obtain signatures for contracts and approvals, online streaming of services, etc.

However, this article is not about pioneering technology in deathcare services, nor is it about technology for tech’s sake. Internet, virtual meetings, and streaming services are no longer new or cutting-edge at this point in 2021.

The topic I am tackling has to do with how to think about using technology, moreover the right technology that is suited for you. First and foremost, let’s establish that technology does not create momentum. It does not eliminate poor service, staffing issues, or managerial issues such as improper pricing, profitability, etc.

In fact, if you are likely experiencing operating and performance issues, adopting technology improperly would make these things worse. But, like the opening

quotation, knowing which technologies to adopt helps you build momentum and can be a vehicle that takes you from good to great.

Starting with the Basics: Your Website

Websites, like the other technologies listed above, have been available for quite some time now. And while more and more funeral homes and cemeteries have websites than five years ago, there are still so many websites that essentially are very basic landing pages with a name of the business, a physical address, a phone number, perhaps a grainy picture of the chapel, and maybe a few obituaries listed. No other web pages to navigate. No history or personal statement of service for the community. No personalization with descriptions of services or personal pictures of the owner-operator and staff. No invitation of guests searching for information.

Take It Seriously

Almost every business owner in the profession with whom I have ever spoken, or have had the pleasure of visiting, takes a great amount of pride and meticulousness in the business’s visage and of the facilities, grounds, and even parking lot.


So, my questions are:

- Why isn’t every funeral or cemetery business owner demonstrating the same amount of pride and meticulousness in the look, feel, and experience of his or her website?
- Do these operators not believe that having a website is of any benefit in this profession?

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[Consumers] might learn more about who you are, what you do, how you differ from your competitors, and why might you deserve their trust and confidence.

- Do these operators believe that existing, traditional market barriers such as proximity and geography still provide enough adequate protection?
- Don't they realize that a website is the virtual front door to their business online like how the visage of their facility is the front door to the physical business?

Just as how the physical location where your chapel or facilities are located may have value in curb appeal, convenience, ease of ingress/egress, etc., your website is important because it allows consumers and families the ease of access in discovering you regardless of locale or geography.

And as an advantage to your physical business site, your well-designed website allows for families to educate themselves and answer some preliminary questions they might have on their own time and at their own convenience.

They might learn more about who you are, what you do, how you differ from your competitors, and why might you deserve their trust and confidence. Not to mention that from a marketing perspective, your well-designed website works 24 hours for you and is more cost-effective and flexible than print advertising.

Think Like a Consumer

Need more convincing? Practically every current study shows that well over 90% of consumer and business purchasing decisions begin with online searches of websites.

Furthermore, public perception nowadays is that businesses without a website (or a minimal, poorly designed website) are less professional and less legitimate than competitors who have well-designed and functionally sound websites.

Therefore, it is so very critical that you have a website and why your website needs to be more than just a landing page with sparse, basic contact information. Regardless of whether you select CFS, FrontRunner Pro, FuneralOne, Frazer, or some other vendor, or even if you select someone local providing website design, any of these options can easily provide you with website design or website design templates.

However, you still need to put in the work leading the effort in tailoring your website to your needs and, more importantly, to the needs of the client families you already serve and to client families you have yet to serve.

Excluding other very important web-related topics—such as e-commerce (selling flowers and ancillary products online), search engine optimization (SEO), pricing transparency, third-party website comparison sites like Funeralocity.com, etc., because each is a full discourse unto

itself—you must strategically think about and execute a well-designed website that conveys your brand identity and your value so that your website truly becomes the online front door of your business—one that invites consumers to want to substantively explore and learn more about you.

What to Include

Some helpful tips to having a well-designed, inviting website include:

Appealing & Inviting

A well-designed website should be simple and elegant that is not too cluttered-looking or distracting. Similar to how pristine and presentable you would want your physical facilities to look



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to anyone driving up or just passing by, you would want your website to express the same “curb appeal” and invitation to consumers finding your website online from their search.

Ensuring that the pictures you display on

your website have the necessary resolution so that they are clear and not grainy or fuzzy goes a very long way to the look, feel, and experience for the online visitor.

Personalization

Just as how your funeral, cremation and/or cemetery business has a culture and standard of excellence, you must be able to convey what distinguishes you from your competition. It must communicate your identity and personality.

Pictures and videos of you, your staff, your facilities, along with short biographies or descriptions exhibit a “human side” online.

Oftentimes, I have seen stock banner photos of mountains when the business is in Oklahoma or stock photos that do not display any level of personality or identity of the owner-operator and staff.

If you do not care to share who you are and why you and your team can make a difference with your website’s visitors, then why should they care to want to learn more about you or to choose you?

Educational & Consultative

Remember that statistic about how well over 90% of buying decisions start with online searching? This is where you would want to be as informative as possible:

- What makes you different?
- What value do you bring?
- What is your mission or standard of services?
- What advantages does your firm have over the competition?
- Why should online searchers consider and ultimately choose you over your competitor?

There is so much room here for you to educate your website visitors about the differences between burial versus cremation, the value of being able to keep their loved ones in your care the entire time, the importance that visitations and gatherings have to the healing process, the advantages of pre-planning, and so on.

Easy to Navigate & Easy to Use

Amazon could not have become the retail behemoth that it is without a website that wasn’t easy to use. So please keep in mind that even if your website is appealing and inviting, personalized, and educational/consultative, if there is an overload of words and prose, then it may not be easy to use or navigate.

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Breaking up the educational or consultative written portions with short video vignettes can make all the difference in the world to the consumer experience. Ensure that navigating between pages and within pages on your website is flawless and that there are no broken links.

Keep It Simple

If you noticed, I have spoken very little about technology itself and very heavily on strategically thinking about how technology—in this case, websites—must first be a fit for you.

If something about the business is not good, there is no amount of technology that can make it good. If you are already a good business, then leveraging technology can help you create the momentum you need.

But if you do not properly leverage technology, or do so improperly, your competition will most likely pass you by. ☒




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