

Can You See Me Now?

*Transparency's
Importance in
Deathcare's
Online Pricing*

BY GABRIEL NGO

**“A lack of transparency
results in distrust and a
deep sense of insecurity.”**

—Dalai Lama,
Spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhism

IT ALMOST SEEMS AS THOUGH THE DALAI LAMA'S QUOTE is specifically directed at this crossroads where we are, concerning consumer sentiments and online pricing of funeral and cemetery services and goods. I know that you all are probably tired of hearing or reading about online pricing. In the future, we all anticipate having online pricing become a requirement by the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) in some form, shape, or fashion. For some of you, your state already has mandated that you publish your pricing online.



This article, however, is not about the FTC, any mandates, or requirements, etc., it is about what consumers want in this ever-advancing technological world, and why you should give it to them:

- As of 2022, Baby Boomers make up roughly 21% of the population in the United States. Generation X is about 20%, while Millennials (or Gen Y) make up 22% of the U.S. population.
- Gen X's born-on date range is 1965–1979, while Gen Y's is 1980–1996. This makes the early Gen Xers around age 59, and the oldest Millennials at age 44.
- Both Gen X and Gen Y are online shoppers, with around 60%–70% preferring online shopping to brick-and-mortar shopping. This predominant preference spills over to funeral and cemetery decision-making as well.

I want you to think about these three bullet points for a minute. Admittedly, it was a little tough for me to type out the year ranges and ages above, being a latter Gen Xer, myself.

I can distinctly remember my first eBay transaction. Being a huge music lover, my first eBay purchase was an export, very-hard-to-find version of a CD that I just could not find in any physical music store here in Texas (not in Houston, not Dallas/Ft. Worth, not San Antonio, and not even in Austin). I share this experience because Gen X was the beta-tester of eBay/Amazon. For Millennials, it is what they know and expect; and combined, we make up about 42% of the population.

What this means is that your website and digital online presence are becoming crucial for your future as professionals in funeral and cemetery service.

Serving Future Consumers

Here are just a few more “guiding” statistics from Foresight’s 2024 Funeral & Cemetery Consumer Behavioral Study (or FCCBS for short):

- The top two sites that consumers plan to visit are Google and your website.



- 88% of consumers state that they expect to see pricing online in a manner that is simple to find, ingest, and understand.
 - 36% of current families (defined as those having made arrangements within the past 24 months) have conducted research online, while 71% of future families (defined as those who have not yet previously planned a funeral) intend on researching online.
 - 71% of current families have looked for or will look for pricing published online. The statistic jumps to 80% when focusing on future families that be searching for pricing published online.
- Numbers aside, let's focus on the phrase "*simple to find, ingest, and understand.*" Do any of us truly think that our

General Price List (GPL) is easy to read for a client family? Publishing your GPL online might "check the box" regarding any potential FTC mandate, but it does not meet what the consumers are telling us they want. Do we believe that families can easily ingest and understand a GPL without any of us being there to explain and answer questions?

Utilizing your website to present your pricing in the most *strategic* manner makes it easier to connect with families—current and future—when researching your business online.

By *strategic*, I mean designing pricing to directly address or give families/online searchers what they want—pricing that is *simple to find, ingest, and understand.* If you already employ service

FIGURE 1. Funeral Ceremony Before Cremation Package

Our \$5,395 charge for this service includes:

- Professional services of funeral director & staff
- Transfer of loved one to funeral home
- Embalming, dressing, and casketing
- Use of facilities for viewing and ceremony (or supervision of viewing and ceremony at another facility)
- Recording/streaming of ceremony from our chapel
- Cremation process

This charge does not include casket, rental casket, alternative container, urn, any merchandise, weekend service fee, or cash advance items. Additional charges for vehicles that may apply for ceremony outside of funeral home is not included.

If or when the FTC demands that you must publish your pricing online, consider taking control of the situation and become a leader in being transparent. Anything less, according to a spiritual guru, “results in distrust and a deep sense of insecurity.”

FIGURE 2. Funeral Ceremony with Same Day Visitation Our \$6,845 charge for this service includes:

• Professional services of funeral director and staff	\$ 3,200
• Embalming	\$ 1,000
• Same Day Visitation (up to 2 hours)	\$ 550
• Funeral ceremony at Funeral Home (offsite \$795)	\$ 695
• Transfer of loved-one to Funeral Home	\$ 550
• Hearse	\$ 550
• Flower Van	\$ 300
• Recording/streaming of service	Included

This charge does not include casket, rental casket, alternative container, urn, any merchandise, weekend service fee, or cash advance items. Additional charges for vehicles that may apply for ceremony outside of funeral home is not included.

packaging from your GPL, this should translate very easily. If you operate primarily on ala carte pricing on your GPL, it will just take a bit of time and some effort in grouping necessary items that makes the most sense.

The key is to keep it simple and clean for strategic online pricing to be effective. As an example, Figure 1 is the presentation of a package that most consumers might find easier to ingest and understand than by trying to read through a GPL.

Figure 2 is an example of how you can strategically group service items together for strategic ease of presentation when your charges normally are ala carte.

To be clear, there is nothing wrong with having a PDF version of your GPL (with all its FTC-mandated language, terms, disclosures, etc.). But wouldn't you want to control how to best present your pricing online in a manner that speaks best to whom you are trying to connect?

By virtue of there being fewer words and a cleaner presentation of services in both the package and ala carte examples, this already makes it easier for online searchers to read and contemplate.

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Advance Planning

There is certainly warranted trepidation for doing something that you have never done before. Certainly, car and automotive dealerships were vehemently against being required to post their pricing online. Yet, car dealerships did not become extinct.

Now, let's tie this back to the introductory quote from the Dalai Lama as well as the demographic information related to Gen X and Gen Y (Millennials). We live in an age where consumers believe in convenience and transparency. Online searchers

generally rely on disclosure of pricing as an assurance of credibility more so than strictly using online pricing to price shop *per se*—this is especially true when it comes to funeral and cemetery services.

Furthermore, online shopping has become a way of life for Gen X and Gen Y, who are closing in on age ranges where they will become your future client families.

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