



The Basics of

Visibility



Digital and in-person experiences work in concert to inspire customers to select your firm.

BY JAROD BERNAT

For decades, funeral service was a relationships business built on word-of-mouth marketing, referrals from clergy, name recognition and having a building on Main Street. Although that foundation still matters, it is no longer where the decision-making process begins for most families. Now, that process mostly begins online.

The 2026 *Funeral and Cemetery Consumer Behavior Study* (FCCBS), conducted by Foresight and Fortitude Research and Marketing, gives us insight into consumer preferences and the ways in which funeral professionals can improve their reach and services based on said preferences.

The FCCBS data quantifies exactly what percentage of people start their decision-making process online, and that is 81%. Yes, 81% of future consumers intend to research funeral and cemetery options online; notably, within the past two years, only 60% of customers did. As this percentage goes up, improving your online presence becomes vital to long-term success.

Among those who intend to research funeral options online, 78% plan to use Google, and 69% plan to visit provider websites. Both numbers have been climbing year over year. If your digital presence isn't ready for that moment, you are losing families before they ever walk through your door.

This article breaks down what the data says about the consumer journey, offers practical guidance for improving your visibility within your community and explains how these findings should shape your business planning for the year ahead.

The Online Front Door

The FCCBS data makes clear that online research is not fringe behavior reserved for younger, tech-savvier individuals. It is now the default starting point for funeral arrangements. Digitally, consumers desire three things from a funeral home: transparent pricing, general location information and reassurance from reviews.

Pricing appears to be the most important factor. For the fourth year in a row, pricing visibility was rated as the most important online feature; 67% of consumers say it matters. Yet most firms still fall short. Over 70% of locations post their prices via a PDF of their General Price List. Only 26% have an interactive tool that lets family members customize and compare options.

When consumers were asked what they wanted to access online but couldn't, "detailed cost information" was cited by 22% of consumers. This selection trailed only "built-out descriptions, pictures, videos and virtual tours," cited by 24% of consumers. In other words, families want to see your facility and understand your prices before they call.

Reviews carry significant weight in the research process. Nearly 70% of future customers consider online reviews important in the search for the right funeral home. However, 53% of consumers say they trust reviews on third-party sites, such as Google and Yelp, more than those posted directly on business websites. Only 29% trust the reviews on funeral home websites more. This means your online reputation lives largely outside your control – on platforms you don't own but must actively manage. The good news is that firms are getting better at this. Eighty percent of locations now prompt customers for reviews, which is up 17% from last year.

It's also worth noting that going "all in" on digital doesn't mean abandoning your physical presence. Nearly 90% of recent customers physically visited the location they ended up selecting, and one-third of them visited at least one other funeral home in person. The average family visited three locations before choosing a funeral home. This statistic only reinforces the importance of maintaining an equally impressive online and in-person image.

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Where the Profession Is Falling Short

The study has identified a persistent and troubling pattern: Deathcare professionals consistently overestimate how well they are serving and educating their communities. This "perception gap" shows up across nearly every measured category, and it represents both a warning and an opportunity. Those who bridge this gap and harmonize their offerings with consumer desires will be the ones who set themselves above the rest.

The gap between professionals' and consumers' perceptions is especially wide when it comes to education and product awareness. More than 90% of professionals believe they offer education about pre-planning, but only 29% of consumers recall receiving it. This 64-point gap is the largest in the entire study.

Worryingly large gaps also exist in education and awareness about urn options (54 points), general cremation memorialization (52 points) and keepsake products (51 points). Overall, 59% of professionals believe consumers are well-informed about products and services; meanwhile, actual consumer awareness sits at just 29%.

This disconnect is a reputational issue as well as a revenue issue. The study flags cremation memorialization, preneed arrangements and online cremation arrangements as areas where the awareness gap is likely causing real and measurable missed revenue.

Closing the Gap

Given these findings, funeral home owners and managers should treat online presence and community education as core operational priorities, not afterthoughts. A few actionable steps stand out:

1. Build your pricing page around transparency, not just compliance.

A PDF of your General Price List satisfies the Federal Trade Commission disclosure requirements, but it does not deliver what consumers actually want: an easy, dynamic way to see and compare costs. Consider a dedicated pricing page or interactive pricing tool. This single change would address the top-ranked online expectation for four years running.

2. Invest in visual content.

Photos, video walk-throughs and virtual tours are common types of content that consumers wish to see online. Interestingly, the data also shows that new facilities are less important to consumers than previously assumed. Professionals overestimate the importance of a modern environment by 20 points and the importance of a modern audiovisual system

by 30 points. Consumers care most about the basics: cleanliness (90%), appearance/decor (84%), parking (83%) and private viewing rooms (80%). Your visual content strategy should showcase these fundamentals clearly.

3. Build a systematic review-generation process.

Considering consumers trust reviews on third-party platforms nearly twice as much as on-site testimonials, firms should make review requests a standard, even automated, part of after-service follow-up. Simple, low-cost tactics, such as embedded review reminders in post-service surveys, are often the most effective ways to collect reviews.

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4. Treat education as an active, verified process.

Given the enormous gap between what professionals believe they are communicating and what families report actually receiving, firms should build in a verification step. This could be as simple as a supplementary handout describing available service options or a checklist that's reviewed with family members before they leave. The goal is to close the gap between "we offered it" and "they understood it."

5. Invest in community outreach.

When professionals were asked what their organizations should prioritize to improve their visibility and grow their preneed business, "community outreach and events" was the top answer, cited by 30%. This outpaced even direct email, mail and social media advertising. The study is careful to distinguish community outreach from community partnerships. The popularity of the former as an answer suggests direct, hands-on engagement (e.g., hospice outreach, seminars, informational sessions) outweighs passive sponsorship relationships.

6. Think of professional-association involvement as a business strategy.

Funeral homes that are actively involved with associations such as NFDA, ICCFA and state associations report higher rates of preneed-program engagement, better pricing transparency, and notably higher employee engagement and satisfaction. Association involvement can lead to improved awareness of consumer trends and education gaps, ultimately giving directors the ability to engage in more meaningful conversations with families.



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Business Insights Into Business Plans

None of the data in the FCCBS is useful unless it becomes part of a concrete operating plan. The findings should be translated into the following strategic priorities:

- **Marketing budget:** Shift spending toward website development (e.g., pricing tools, photography, video) and systematic review generation. Considering 69% of future customers plan to visit your website directly and 78% plan to search on Google, your digital footprint deserves proportionate investment.
- **Sales and preneed strategy:** If you don't already have a dedicated preneed sales staff, the data strongly recommends it. Funeral homes with dedicated salespeople report an 89% program effectiveness rate versus a 61% rate for those without. Community outreach and educational seminars are the highest-leverage activities to fund.
- **Staff training:** Prioritize training that covers leadership, business operations and technology. These are the training areas most requested by professionals, and they directly support the operational changes outlined above.
- **Performance measurement:** Add consumer-facing metrics to your internal scorecards. Track consumer reviews and usage of interactive online pricing tools to better understand which features and services resonate with your consumers.
- **Association engagement:** Budget for active participation in at least one relevant association, as there is a measurable correlation between stronger preneed performance and higher staff retention and satisfaction.

Before they ever call, the consumers in your market are forming an opinion of your firm, whether it's based on your website, reviews or word of mouth. The data is clear: Most funeral homes have a real opportunity to close the gap between how well they think they're serving families and how families are experiencing their service. Firms that treat online visibility and community education as strategic priorities will be the ones that convert digital first impressions into lasting trust and satisfied families. ☐

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