



Cloning & Preservation

Innovation and
Experimentation in
Pet Memorialization

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by Welton Hong



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Seniors Are Savvier (at Tech) than You Surmise

Maybe you've never even heard of a "smart speaker," much less used one. Perhaps you'd be shocked to learn that people can make phone calls, check their emails, and monitor their pulse rates all on a wristwatch.

It's possible you have no idea that people can set their own home's temperature from around the world, simply by using an app on their phone (or on the aforementioned watch).

And it's conceivable you can't conceive the notion of 1,000 other technological wonders being used right now by average people across America and the world.

Don't Overthink It

As deathcare professionals, you've almost certainly heard of some of these technologies. You might know how affordable and convenient they've suddenly become in the last couple of years. You might even use a couple of them yourself.

But if you're like the majority of people I meet in deathcare—and my apologies to those of you who don't meet this description—you *don't think modern technology really applies to your audience*.

Here's what I mean: You know modern life is full of all sorts of cool doodads and gizmos, all of which are currently connected to "the cloud," but you don't think many of these items are really being used by the age demographics you target for deathcare services.

The prevailing notion, if we're all being honest here, is that your audience is just too old for such things.

If you're a funeral home owner providing at-need and pre-need services, you're not thinking about using tech to reach someone on a cutting-edge smartphone, such as the Samsung Galaxy S10 or the iPhone XS Max.

If you're a cemeterian, you're not focused on how you can promote your perpetual care services through a variety of digital processes. If you're a cremation urn and jewelry vendor, you're not considering how you can leverage these new tech innovations to sell your wares.

Again, it seems like a good idea to clarify that I'm not referring to everyone. Just like there are early adopters for tech devices, some forward-thinking businesspeople in deathcare are always looking for an edge.

But let's face it: They comprise a minority. As a whole, deathcare remains well behind the eight-ball on accepting and leveraging the incredible power of innovation.

That's especially true of the Internet of Things (IoT), which refers to the billions of physical devices worldwide that are connected to the internet, collecting and sharing data.

At this very moment, IoT is reconfiguring the way life (and business) is done worldwide, yet many people reading this article right now are just learning about the term for the first time. Even though I've written about it before. In fact, I wrote about it in this very magazine!

This isn't the first time I've tried to open people's minds to the fact that virtually all the gadgets (sans transporters) from the original Star Trek series actually exist right now. But I feel the need to hammer on it again:

Yes, teenagers and twentysomethings are using these technologies like crazy. But so are a whole lot of people in their thirties and forties. And so are a surprising number in their fifties and sixties. And just in the past year, we're seeing massively increased adoption by people in their *seventies* and even *eighties*.

Deathcare and high-tech don't make for an odd mix. In fact, given all the ways new technologies assist people with sight, hearing, and mobility challenges, every major analyst in the field anticipates skyrocketing growth among seniors.

It's time for everyone in deathcare—not just a small group of visionaries—to realize the truth: The industry's future is incumbent upon accepting and embracing the digital age.

Smartphones and Smart Speakers

We all know some seniors—a grandmother or grandfather, possibly a great aunt or uncle—who remains leery of technology. They're fine with a landline and an old-school answering machine.

Smartphones and Smart Speakers

Maybe they use a mobile phone, but it's an old flip phone, and they have it "in case of emergencies." You've never received a text from them, and you never will.

Sure. Such people still exist. But they are not the majority of senior Americans today. We still have that (terribly outdated) picture in our heads.

Please think about that for a second. It's not that most seniors are tech-phobic. It's that we keep hanging on to that old stereotype. We think the 70-year-olds of 2019 are the same as the 70-year-olds from 15 or 20 years ago. And that's absolutely wrong.

Apple CEO Tim Cook turns 59 this year. Microsoft founder Bill Gates turns 64 this year. With all due respect to these computing leaders, they're not spring chickens. *They're literally the demographic you're targeting.*

If you're around middle age and know even a little about computers, there likely was a time when you had to help your elder parents with some pretty basic IT assistance over the phone or in person. And perhaps you still do, but they're almost certainly much more knowledgeable in those areas these days.

That's because many of them have learned to be proficient on their smartphones and tablets. And why did they become so proficient? Because the devices make it easy to stay in touch with family and friends, navigate unfamiliar neighborhoods, plan for an upcoming vacation—and a million other options.

The devices made their lives better, so they took the time to learn them. It's as simple as that. Today's sexagenarians and septuagenarians aren't the same as their parents. Today's seniors have seen the power of technology and appreciate just how beneficial it can be.

It's convenient for people to think of most retirees still hanging on to old-school (non-smart) cellphones, if they have a mobile phone at all, but that's not true. According to the Pew Research Center, more than half of mobile phone users ages 65 and older use a smartphone—and that number keeps growing steadily.

Just over 60 percent of 65- to 69-year-

olds own smartphones, whereas just over 50 percent of 70- to 74-year-olds do. While that obviously doesn't mean everyone in the AARP crowd is using a smartphone, it is indicative of massive adoption over just the past few years. And it's increasing every year.

But at this rate, smartphones have nothing on smart speakers, particularly ones that also come with displays (ensuring their utility with the hearing impaired).

These devices would be the Next Big Thing if not for the fact that they're already here and already incredibly popular with older users. When smart speakers are paired with other smart devices around the home, seniors with mobility issues can use the devices to control lights, locks, and the thermostat, for example. All the user has to do is speak.

Additionally, users can set medication reminders on the devices or order grocery deliveries (or even have hot food delivered). That's all in addition to features such as live video chat with family members around the world.

What This Means for You

You can't ignore the writing on the wall any longer. Traditional types of media still exist, certainly, but as digital media keeps becoming easier to enjoy by people in the deathcare demographic, you'll need to put more focus there.

Voice search is becoming a total game-changer with seniors. You'll need to optimize your marketing efforts for voice search so that your deathcare business can be easily found (and attractively described) when someone searches for your services over a smart speaker or other voice search method.

You need to be prepared to fight for the best position on search engine results pages, both by ranking high in organic search and getting great exposure with pay-per-click (PPC) ads.

You need to ensure your online reputation is sterling, because once the vast majority of your target audience is regularly online, reviews will tell them more about you than any advertising will.

I could name a dozen more reasons. But the most important takeaway from this article is that middle-aged and older people—and that includes those from their mid-50s to pushing 90—are opening up to technology far faster than many people realize. Don't let them get away just because you're not ready to evolve. □

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