

# FUNERAL

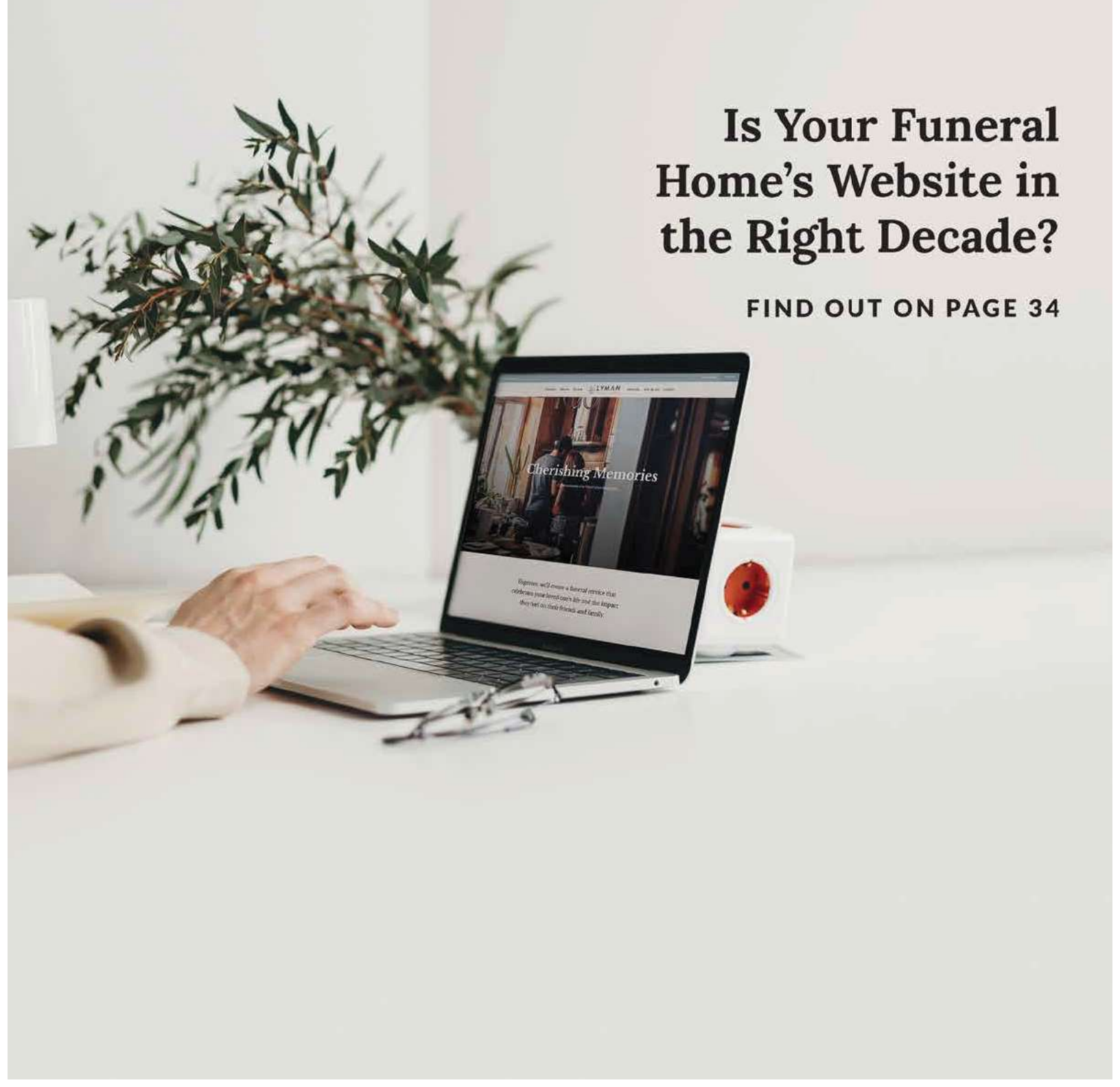
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## BUSINESS ADVISOR MAGAZINE™

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**Is Your Funeral  
Home's Website in  
the Right Decade?**

**FIND OUT ON PAGE 34**



# EVALUATION



## THE REAL FACTS ABOUT HOW ONLINE REVIEWS AFFECT YOUR BUSINESS

BY WELTON HONG

**D**id you ever play the grapevine game as a kid? In this game, you form a line of people. The person at the beginning of the line whispers something to the next person—usually a silly message. Each person whispers the message they heard to the next until the last person in line receives it. By that time, the message has usually transformed.

It's a silly children's game that makes for some goofy translations and much laughter. But it's also an illustration of how information changes as it gets passed around.

I see it a lot when working with deathcare clients. They've heard something about online marketing that simply isn't true because the facts have been passed around and repeated so many times that accuracy has been left behind. And perhaps no topic gets abused by the grapevine more than online reviews.

Allow me to step in and translate some of these online review rumors so you get the right message, even if you're at the end of the grapevine line.

**Rumor: No one pays attention to reviews because most of them are fake.**

Fake reviews are definitely a problem, but consumers know this. About 74 percent of people say they've read a fake review online in the last 12 months. And while it's not always easy to pick fake reviews out of the crowd, consumers are able to identify many of them.

Estimates are that around 90 percent of online reviews are real. But what's more important is the number of people who put stock in them. A whopping 97 percent of people read online reviews as part of their research before choosing a local provider of goods or services—that includes funeral and deathcare services.

And 90 percent of people say they trust the consensus provided by numerous online reviews as much as they trust recommendations from friends and family.

Here's the real, accurate message: Yes, people pay attention to reviews. They even make buying decisions based (at least in part) on them. So deathcare firms need to pay attention to them as well.

**Rumor: Star ratings are all that count.**  
It's easy to see where the confusion on this one might be. This rumor comes from misunderstanding some very true facts.

- People do want to see a decent star rating. Most people won't consider your business if you don't have at least an average of 3.3 stars.
- It's better to have a star rating without text content than no review at all.
- Many people are hesitant to write a review due to time concerns or worries about their writing or what they should say, but they will happily leave a star rating.

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But none of this means star ratings are all that count. People like to see details about how other clientele were treated or what services they engaged with.

When asking for reviews, try phrasing the request with language such as "Do you mind writing a review of our services on Google?" You can let people know that a star rating is also appreciated if they seem hesitant to write a full review, as something is typically better than nothing.

**Rumor: You shouldn't get involved with your reviews, because it looks like Big Brother is watching.**

In the fiction-writing niche, many authors take the stance that reviews are on one side of the wall and authors should remain on the other. The thought is that responding to your reviews is bad form and can make reviewers nervous about giving their opinions about books going forward.

But in most industries, the opposite is true. In fact, more than half of consumers expect a business to respond to reviews—and to do so in just a few days at most.

Responding to reviews also offers benefits for your deathcare firm. It lets you set the record straight if someone has left a dishonest or misleading review. It also shows that you care about the quality of your service and are willing to step up to make things right when someone has a legitimate concern.

And in the case of those reviews that are fake, your response can clue readers into this fact.

**Rumor: One negative review can spell the end for your business.**

A negative review feels like a hard hit, especially if you regularly do everything you can to provide high-quality service to families. But a single harsh review doesn't mean you need to shut your doors.

First, consumers don't put all their eggs in a single review basket. Most want to read at least 10 reviews before forming a final decision about a business, and they take the overall consensus of those reviews.

Second, your star rating is more important than a single negative or positive review. And consumers actually don't expect all five-star reviews—that looks disingenuous, because no one gets it perfect or pleases every person 100 percent of the time.

Instead of worrying too much over a single negative review, take action to encourage more people to leave reviews. That increases the chance that the overall takeaway from your reviews is positive.

**Rumor: People are more likely to leave a review if they're not happy.**

This probably comes from the old word-of-mouth marketing wisdom that says people talk more about your business when they had a negative experience. And it's not incorrect wisdom. Clientele who weren't satisfied with your service tell between nine and 15 people about it.

Businesses take these types of statistics and decide it's not worth asking for reviews. Why ask if people are more likely to leave a review only if they have something bad to say.

In reality, however, 68 percent of people who are asked to leave a review do so. You can drive up your positive review numbers by asking families who appear to be satisfied with your services if they're willing to leave an online review.

The true story about reviews comes down to this: Reviews do matter, and many people will be willing to leave one for your deathcare firm if you ask nicely. And since it's a numbers game, make sure you ask as many seemingly satisfied families as you can in a tactful, kind way. **FBA**

Welton Hong is the founder and marketing director of Ring Ring Marketing (FuneralHomeProfits.com), which specializes in helping funeral homes convert leads from online directly to the phone line. Welton also is a speaker at funeral home conferences and the author of *Making Your Phone Ring with Internet Marketing for Funeral Homes*. Reach him by email at [info@ringringmarketing.com](mailto:info@ringringmarketing.com) or call toll-free at 888-383-2848.

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