

# MEMENTO MORI

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## When a Child Dies A Celebrant's Personal Journey

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The Role of the Celebrant

# Can You Hear Me NOW?

*'Voice' Search  
and Its Role in  
Deathcare Marketing*

by Welton Hong

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## “Let your fingers do the walking.”

**O**NCE UPON A TIME, that line was a part of a brilliant marketing campaign for the printed *Yellow Pages*. It implored consumers to save time and energy by looking up business listings in this free phone directory instead of walking (or, presumably, driving) around town.

Of course, that old-school way of looking up businesses has long been replaced by internet research. Your fingers are still occupied, of course, but they're far more likely to be typing (or swiping) on a keyboard than flipping through a book.

However, you might not realize that in 2020, even that process of business research is steadily losing steam. Instead, many people are learning about local businesses—including cemeteries, cremation providers, and other deathcare service providers—by simply using their voices.

No typing. No swiping. All they do is say, “Hey Siri,” or “OK, Google,” to wake up a smart device and then ask a question. They might ask what today's weather will be or what's in the news today.

They might ask a historical fact or check their shopping list.

Or, having learned of an unexpected death in the family, they might very well ask Siri or Google (or another service) for information on local cremation providers, for example.

And they'll get it. This is happening more every day.

### The Future is Now: Voice Commands

Over the last several years, mobile technologies have become convenient and affordable, earning widespread adoption across every demographic. We can get information and even act on many things just by using our smartphones and tablets.

The idea of using one's voice isn't exactly new. In old science-fiction movies and television shows that took place in the “far-off future,” characters often made things happen just by talking to computers.

Buck Rogers and Captain James T. Kirk were accustomed to gaining information and making things occur simply with their voices. That surely seemed exciting to viewers, who could hardly get their own kids to do their chores even after asking them 100 times.

Voice commands don't always work great with kids. They *might* work okay on a well-trained dog. And they certainly don't work at all with cats—cats will never do anything you tell them to do, and they definitely won't stop doing anything you want them to stop doing.

But some things have changed. Specifically, for several years now, we've been able to get computer-powered devices to execute commands. And over the past year or so, these devices have skyrocketed in popularity.



That's why it's critical for deathcare pros in 2020 to understand that consumers now interact with their world in very different ways.

### Virtual Devices and Assistants

You've probably used voice search on everyday items in your home such as the remote control for your television cable service or satellite provider. Just ask for "movies starring Anne Hathaway" or "free action movies" or "Hawaii Five-O," and the computer in your cable/satellite box pulls them right up.

It's just like that, except devices such as Google Home and Amazon's Echo let you do much more. Voice search has become massively popular over the past couple of years, as virtual personal assistants, such as Google Assistant, Apple's Siri, Microsoft's Cortana, and Amazon's Alexa, have seen widespread adoption among everyday consumers.

If someone needs immediate information on deathcare services, he or she can simply ask a device (often called a "smart speaker") for that info.

In just a couple of seconds, the device returns results matching the person's search request. Some newer devices even have screens to display the information. And many now let you do Wi-Fi calling.

### Picture this:

*Tonya is at home, making breakfast, when she gets a call that her mother has passed away. Her mother didn't have a plan in place, and it's Tonya's responsibility to make arrangements ASAP.*

*While still making breakfast, Tonya can ask her device for "cremation services near me" or "burial services near me" or whatever. The device relays information for several options. If it has a screen, Tonya can even see the results.*

*Tonya tells the device to call one of the businesses. Tonya speaks to someone at the home and begins a conversation to make arrangements for her mother.*

All in just a minute or two. All while still making breakfast.

Yes, that is how some people are getting things done right now. And that's just going to keep growing into the future. Voice control is becoming incredibly powerful in how people interact with their world.

### Your Website and Voice Search

Over the past several years, mobile has overtaken

desktop for search. Google now prioritizes the user's mobile experience over the desktop one, so we've worked with our clients to focus on mobile optimization.

And now there's voice. It can't be ignored. To take full advantage of the possibilities with voice search, your website needs to start adding voice optimization to the process.

That doesn't mean it's time to forget all about desktop or mobile optimization. Desktop remains important. Mobile is even more important. But voice absolutely must be considered, because there's a rapidly growing trend of users searching by voice.

The 2019 holiday season had tons of smart speaker devices on sale to the public. Commercials saturated the airwaves showing people controlling all sorts of things by just speaking to a device.

The American consumer will always choose the most convenient way of doing something, as long as it's affordable. As smart speaker systems have dropped in price and gained in utility, more Americans have opted in.

So should you optimize for the desktop, mobile, or voice experience? You really need to do all three.

### It's About Convenience

Amazon Echo devices let people immediately order products just by speaking to them, using the Alexa intelligent voice search feature.

If you have Amazon Prime Now delivery service where you live, the item you need will arrive at your front door within a couple of hours. Talk about convenient!

Apple, of course, is doing the same thing with its Siri voice search. Siri users can

search just by talking to their Apple watches now.

Of course, deathcare is a completely different industry than retail. But that doesn't mean it's immune from technological advances such as voice search. This is the new way business gets done.

Many consumers have a "cross-device journey," beginning their research on one device and eventually completing it on another.

That's another reason you need to optimize for desktop, mobile, and voice. But as far as priorities, mobile remains number one for now. Keep in mind that:

- Mobile advertising represents almost 75 percent of all U.S. digital ad spending
- 80 percent of internet users own a smartphone



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**The American consumer will always choose the most convenient way of doing something, as long as it's affordable.**

- 57 percent of users say they wouldn't recommend a business with a poorly designed mobile site

### Perfect for the Deathcare Demographic

Some deathcare professionals remain skeptical of whether people in their 60s, 70s, and 80s use technology enough to justify a substantial investment in online marketing, much less tools for mobile devices and seemingly "cutting-edge" techniques, such as voice search.

There's a danger here of pre-judging others in the AARP crowd based on one's own experiences. While some seniors aren't especially inclined to adopt technological innovations, others absolutely love it. Regular smartphone use among older people has skyrocketed over the past several years.

But voice search is growing with this demographic even faster, and there's good reason for that. As we get older, many of us have trouble seeing, our hands and fingers also may suffer from arthritis and/or carpal tunnel syndrome, making it painful to type or even use a tablet.

**Many consumers have a "cross-device journey," beginning their research on one device and eventually completing it on another.**

With a smart speaker, you don't need to be able to see. You don't need to use your hands. You don't even need the device to be especially close to you. All you need is your voice and your ears.

And while it's true that hearing also diminishes as we get older, smart speakers are designed with volume levels

that can be set very loud as need be.

Smart speakers are perfect tools for people with ability limitations, whether they're disabled per se or simply dealing with diminished sight or mobility due to age. That's exactly the demographic deathcare service providers target for not only immediate needs but also pre-needs, cemetery plots, etc.

Voice search is both the future of search and the present. The time to start optimizing for voice search is right now. 

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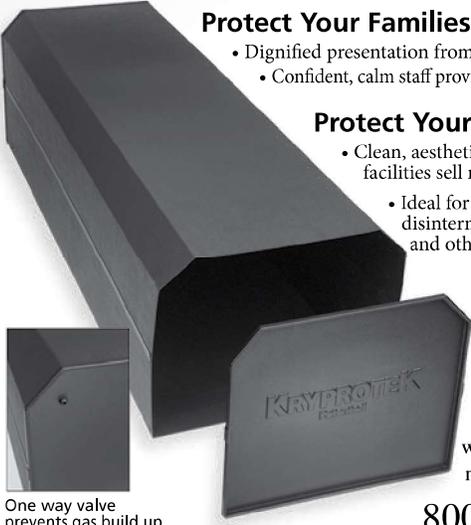
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