

Marketing

By Welton Hong

In Today's Marketing World,

Mobile Is First ... and Second, and Third ...

A few years ago, I was advising death-care clients to make the *mobile experience* – how visitors interact with funeral home websites on mobile devices – just as high a priority as the desktop experience.

About a year ago, the technological and marketing landscapes had evolved, so my advice did as well.

With the rapid, widespread adoption of smartphones and other smart devices by everyone from grandparents to grandkids (and all ages in between), it frankly was obvious: We don't just live in a digital age anymore. We live in a *mobile* age. We live in a world where the internet is always available to us, no matter where we are or what time it is. The issue is no longer finding a way to get connected – it's finding a way, at least on occasion, to get *disconnected*.

And that's not easy now that we're in the era of "the internet of things." It's not simply a matter of using a desktop computer, tablet or smartphone to get online.

You can find "smart" variations on all sorts of common household items right now. In America alone, we're so crazy about smart devices that we've networked virtually everything.

Just for fun, read the following four descriptions and try to guess which one is fake:

Smart water bottle. It tracks your hydration levels, reminds you when it's time to have a sip and even monitors the quality of the water inside it.

Smart blender. This blender lets you see the nutritional aspects of your smoothie or other concoction in real time. You don't even have to enter the names of the ingredients; the blender's sensors handle that for you.

Smart litter box. It monitors your cat's bathroom habits, cleans itself after use and can send an alert to your phone every time Mr. Fussy Face does his business.

Smart duvet cover. This duvet has its own dual-zone climate control system (you and your bedmate can choose your own temperatures) and also literally "makes the bed" for you, resetting itself to its original place automatically.

Have you figured it out yet, or do you need another minute?

Well, here's the answer ... *they're all real.*

Yes, all four are actual products. Yes, *even the duvet cover.* It's called the "Smartduvet," naturally. You can order this item right now at Smartduvet.com, if you're so inclined.

That's just the tip of the iceberg regarding "smart" products, but I won't dig into them further now, because ... well, this article is about funeral home marketing, after all.

Unless you're ready to start promoting a line of "smart" caskets – an actual thing, albeit not one I expect to catch on anytime soon – you don't need to know everything about smart devices.

But you do need to understand how completely and totally American life has changed just over the past four to five years. For better or worse, it's almost impossible to avoid being connected to the internet today. Welcome to The Internet of Things.

So, what does this mean for you, specifically, as a death-care professional? Well, it means you need to be marketing to people where they connect to the internet now.

Every year that goes by, fewer Americans do that through desktop computers. They do it through

phones (mostly), along with tablets, smartwatches and smart speakers. Only the last of those items is intended to remain stationary, for the most part, in your home. (And it's why voice search is becoming more important by the day.) As for the rest, they're all mobile.

So, let's get back to the new advice I teased at the start of this article.

Right now, as you're reading this, I don't want you to make the mobile user experience (aka UX) just as important as the desktop one for your clientele. I don't want you to make mobile *slightly* more important. I don't want you to make mobile *significantly* more important.

Here's what I want you to do: **Treat mobile like it's the *only* way people access the internet.**

That probably sounds a little crazy to you. Frankly, it sounds a little crazy to *me*, and I wrote it.

But I fully stand behind it, particularly for owners of independent

funeral homes. Far too many of these death-care professionals are still dragging their feet on evolving with the new technology. Now, a significant number of them are facing an existential threat.

It doesn't have to happen. These firms *can* evolve with the times. They *can* continue providing excellent service in their communities while working in concert with the rapidly changing technology around us.

But it requires opening up to the realities we all face in 2019 and beyond. Literally everything about business (large, small, or otherwise) changed when the internet came into popular use in the 1990s – and especially so near the end of that decade, when broadband became widely used.

Right now, we're in the middle of another sea change. We've put the internet in people's pockets. We've all but directly wired the internet *into their bodies* – and rest assured, that's bound to happen at some point.



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Which is why it's a loser's game to focus your attention on marketing to people specifically on desktop computers. That's simply not what online marketing means anymore.

I know what you might be thinking: The demographic you're targeting in death care is far more likely to still use desktop computers than the average American consumer.

Sure, that's true. You still want to advertise both at-need and preneed care to older people. And yes, many still have desktop computers in their homes.

But here's the thing: Even among Americans in their 60s and 70s who have desktop computers, many also have smartphones now. And it's often easier for them to quickly access information on these light, handy devices than bother heading into the den to look up something on the desktop.

And if we look at Americans in their 50s, keep in mind that most Americans on the younger end of that demographic grew up with personal computers in their 20s (some even in their late teens).

They're extremely comfortable with technology. The same is true with those in their 40s.

My point is this: Even previously technophobic people have come around to the digital age. To some degree, they've had to do so. It's hard to still write a paper check or consult a print phone directory when few institutions around you still partici-

pate in those systems.

So, if you have a website that's death-care services, it's time to optimize it for smartphones. Failing to do so is simply dooming your firm to failure. Don't completely ignore the desktop UX, of course, but clearly understand that it's purely second-fiddle now to your "real" funeral website – the one people see on their phones.

Mobile, Mobile, Mobile – Have I Mentioned Mobile?

As you're aware if you've read any of my recent articles in American Funeral Director, by far the most dominant player in online search is Google.

About 90% of all online searches are done on Google, which is why you virtually never hear someone about to do a search say they're going to Bing this or Yahoo that.

Funny note: Earlier in this decade, several TV shows on the CW Network, including "Gossip Girl" and "The Vampire Diaries," entered into a product placement agreement with Microsoft, which owns the Bing search engine. This led to characters ridiculously saying, "Let's Bing it" and constantly doing Bing searches, even though Bing has never been popular enough for any of that to be remotely plausible.

(With that said, I'm not knocking either Bing or Yahoo. They have their uses. Just understand that

they're goldfish compared to the whale that is Google.)

When Google makes a move, the digital landscape quakes. So when Google officially moved to its "mobile-first index" in spring 2018, the writing was on the wall. Google was telling every business that it would prioritize your mobile UX over your desktop UX when ranking your site in search results.

That's not complicated; it's as simple as it gets. Google moved on from the desktop. It's the smartphone's world now.

Don't get me wrong: I'm not saying smartphones will forever rule the internet marketing world. I already mentioned that smart speakers (they use technologies such as Google Assistant, Amazon's Alexa, and Siri) are helping voice search grow in popularity.

But smartphones are the name of the game now, and even if we start using other devices more commonly to access the internet, we're still talking about a mobile experience overall.

We're simply not going back to a time when websites will be regularly seen on bulky monitors connected to heavy desktop computers. The present and future are light, portable, *mobile*.

So that's what people will expect when they check out a local funeral home website for either immediate needs or preplanning. And it's what Google expects when determining how much *authority* your site has. The more authority, the better you rank.

If your site looks terrible on a smartphone, Google doesn't hold you in high esteem in 2019. The site needs to look good. People should be able to navigate the site easily with a single finger. They should be able to call you with a single click on the phone. These are essential features today.

We're living in an increasingly mobile world. To ensure that your firm not only survives but *thrives* in it, act now. •

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