

Found This Photo Online, Can I Use It?

*A Copyright Primer for Your
Funeral Service Marketing*





by Welton Hong

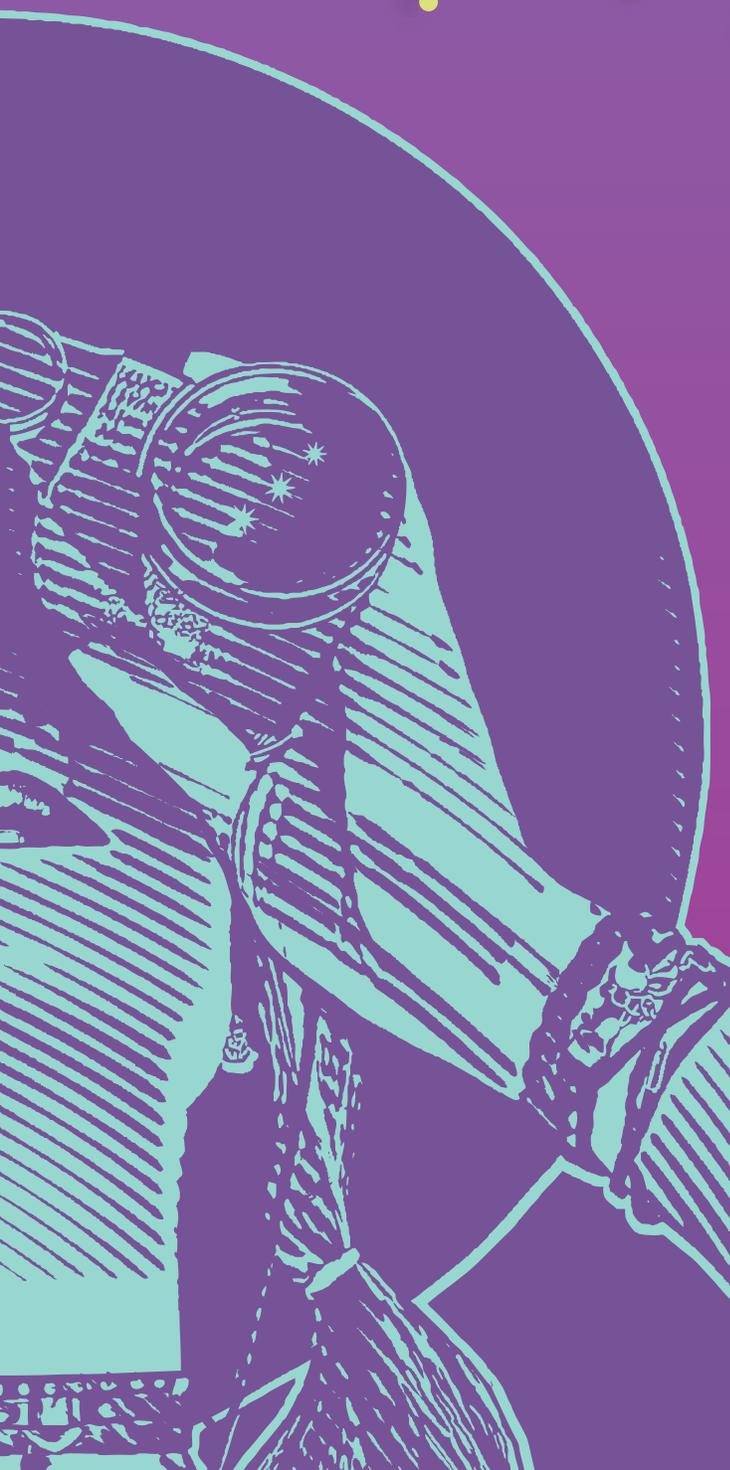
IMAGES ARE POWERFUL IN MARKETING.

BuzzSumo looked at the performance of about a million articles and found that pages with an image for every 100 words received 100% more social shares than similar posts without that many images. And you've probably also heard that Facebook posts with images get more than twice the engagement of posts without images.

Those are just two statistics illustrating how photographs and images drive up the performance of online marketing efforts.

So you might be saying, "I have a deathcare firm, not a graphic design or photography business, Welton. Where am I supposed to get all these images?"

Well, here's what you can't do: You can't just Google the type of photos you want, save them to your computer, and then publish them alongside burial and cremation marketing content. In most cases, doing so violates copyright.



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Licensing and Copyright

I'm not a copyright attorney, but the basics of online photo licensing and use are not too complex. What you need to know for most funeral service marketing scenarios is outlined below, and if you find yourself in a scenario that reaches beyond these facts, you might want to consider consulting a legal professional.

Copyright refers to the legal ownership of the photo or image. Copyright automatically belongs to the creator—the person who took the photo. Typically, you need the permission of the copyright owner to use an image; using a copyrighted image without permission is illegal.

Public domain refers to images with expired copyrights that you can use as you like. While the rules vary, typically a copyright expires 70 years after the death of the creator unless it's renewed by an estate or someone else. In most cases, you're going to be dealing with photos that are copyrighted unless you're looking for historic images.

Creative Commons or CC is an umbrella term for a type of license. This occurs when someone makes work available to be used for free as long as certain rules are followed.

More than half of all consumers want to see more video content from businesses they're interested in, and a quick word from your funeral director or a tour of your facility can do more in a few minutes than thousands of words of content can.

Using Photos You Find Online

You can use photos you find online for marketing if you pay for them, if they're in the public domain, or if they're protected by specific Creative Commons or CC licenses.

If you're looking for a very specific type of photo, the most efficient method is to pay for a stock image via a site such as Shutterstock, iStock, or Getty Images. These are examples of high-quality stock photo sites with extensive collections, so you can almost always find an image that's relevant to your content.

However, if you're including images on all your social media pages, blog posts, landing pages, and other content, the expense can add up fast. You might want to balance paid-for photographs with free ones.

The first legitimate option for sourcing free photos is to choose items in the public domain. Mostly, these will be very old photographs with expired copyrights, so it can be difficult to track down images that work for your content and brand.

The next option is to use images with a CC license. What follows is a rundown of licenses and what funeral service providers need to know about each:

- **CC BY, or Attribution.** This license allows you to use the image, including altering it, as long as you credit the author. So if you use a photograph of people comforting each other on a landing page, for example, you might need to caption it "Photo Credit: Name" or include the credit somewhere else on the page.
- **CC BY-SA, or Attribution-ShareAlike.** This license allows you to use the image, including altering it. But you must credit the author, and any image you create using the photo must also carry a CC BY-SA license. Funeral service providers might want to avoid this one, as you don't want to use an image in your graphic design only to have the infographic or other element you create be subject to the license as well.
- **CC BY-ND, or Attribution-NoDerivs.** You can use the image with credit, but you can't alter it. This includes cropping it to fit your social profile or page wireframe. Choose CC BY images over CC BY-BD images; but if you find the perfect image with this license and it works without changes, you can include it on your page.
- **CC BY-NC** is a CC BY license only for noncommercial use. That means you can't use it in your for-profit deathcare marketing. You might not be able to use it even in a nonprofit or not-for-profit deathcare business.
- **CC BY-NC-SA** is an Attribution-ShareAlike license with restrictions that disallow use in commercial efforts.
- **CC BY-NC-ND** is an Attribution-NoDerivs license with restrictions that disallow commercial use.

If you want to browse for free photographs to include in your funeral home, cremation, or cemetery marketing, check out sites such as Flickr Creative Commons, Pixabay, Pexels, unSplash, or ClipSafari. When possible, set your search filter on these sites for images that allow commercial use. That way, you avoid seeing images you'd really like to use only to find they don't have the right type of license.

Creating Your Own Images

Another option for free or low-cost photos and images is to create your own. You might want to pay a professional photographer to capture product photos for your galleries or take high-quality headshots of funeral directors and other staff for your "About Us" page.

The images you include on social media and even in your blog posts don't always have to be professional. Here are some tips for taking photographs and creating images that you don't have to pay for:

- **Use your smartphone.** Most new smartphones include cameras that take high-res images ideal for social media platforms. Just make sure you crop them appropriately—you don't want the photographs showing up in weird orientations or with half

the subject matter off the screen. That's annoying to your audience and makes you look less professional.

- **Avoid using pictures of clientele.** Unless you get written permission, don't include in your marketing content pictures of clientele, family members, or visitors at funerals. Even if you do get permission, always be tactful and compassionate in how you use these photographs. A family that used your firm for a previous need may visit your site in the future, and you don't want to shock or upset anyone with inappropriate or careless use of their likeness.
- **Try some basic editing tools.** Apps and sites, such as Canva, let you create images using templates and drag-and-drop tools. You can add borders to photos, include captions, or even create more advanced images such as infographics. Canva is free to use, and you can pay around \$12 a month to get a pro subscription that gives you access to the full image library and other tools. Canva has handled the licenses of photos in its library, so you never have to worry about that.
- **Invest in a DSLR camera.** If you want to go beyond the phone camera, especially for on-page content, invest in a midline DSLR. You don't need the same

professional-level equipment a photographer uses, but you do want something that captures high-resolution images and lets you send them to a computer or other device.

- While you're snapping photos, don't forget the power of video for deathcare marketing. More than half of all consumers want to see more video content from businesses they're interested in, and a quick word from your funeral director or a tour of your facility can do more in a few minutes than thousands of words of content can.

Video and image content hasn't replaced text content in online marketing. But images aren't optional—they play a critical role in capturing the audience's attention and ensuring people engage fully with your content.

For example, when someone hears information, they only remember around 10 percent of it three days later. Pair audio information with an image and retention goes up to 65% on average.

Start using images and video in your deathcare marketing; but do so responsibly.

Welton Hong is the founder of Ring Ring Marketing and the author of *Making Your Phone Ring with Internet Marketing for Funeral Homes*.