

Don't Let the 'Automated' SEO Genie Out of the Bottle



*The Good, the Bad,
and the Questionable
Tactics in Deathcare*

by Welton Hong

OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS, a trend in search engine optimization (SEO) has emerged—one that is championed by many of the big names in online marketing. What is that trend? It's the use of artificial intelligence (AI) and data-backed systems to plan, create, and publish content.

Some of the platforms providing these services include SEMrush, MarketMuse, and Ink SEO; but dig into Google and you'll find numerous competitors to these tools.

While these companies don't all provide the same services, the concept is similar: They use existing databases and insights culled from your deathcare website and the sites of competitors to provide advice on SEO and content marketing.

Many offer writing and editing tools that score your content against SEO factors—the idea is that the higher you score in these systems, the better your content is likely to perform in the search engines.

Companies pay a premium for some of these services; so the question for independent deathcare firms is whether there's enough return on investment for them to bother.

The answer: *Maybe.*

It's common for people to misunderstand the “power” behind these tools, thinking they're some kind of magic SEO genie that takes all the work and thought out of the process.

Below, I cover the pros and cons of automated SEO tools and address some of the questionable ways these tools are often used (ways deathcare firms should avoid).

What Services Do SEO AI Tools Offer?

SEO tools can offer in-depth insights into keywords and topics your content should address. For example, if your keyword or topic is “cost of funeral services,” an SEO tool might provide advice about:

- How long the content should be
- What secondary and semantic keywords should be included
- Which subheadings you should consider including
- Which competitor pages are performing well
- What authoritative links you might consider including
- What internal links you might include

Many of these tools come with online content editing tools, especially if you pay for higher-level subscriptions.

The editing tool applies a variety of rules, scoring the content to let you know how well it might perform and

providing tips for making the content “better.” *Better* is a subjective term here, as you'll see in the section on the potential disadvantages of these tools.

Other services provided by some of these tools include:

- Analysis of your existing content
- Content inventories—such as whether you have content already on important topics
- Insight into searcher intent so you can better tailor content
- Content strategy to help you build clusters of content that keep people on your page and drive them toward a conversion
- Integration with other tools and options for managing PPC and SEM campaigns

Pros of SEO Tools

SEO tools can provide easy access to a lot of search data, making it easier to pinpoint keywords, understand searcher intent, and plan content that is more likely to resonate with your audience.

Funeral homes, cemeteries, and cremation providers simply do not have the time, resources, or knowledge to gather this kind of data, so this is certainly more beneficial than any DIY plan. The top tools in this niche offer data options such as:

- Automated keyword research
- Domain analysis
- Backlink analysis
- Monitoring of performance for keywords over time
- Site audits to help you identify and fix performance issues

These tools can provide some guidance for people who know a little about content marketing and SEO but aren't sure what to do beyond shoving keywords onto their pages.

Many of the top options have some machine learning and language AI built-in, which means they can offer some basic advice about what topics you might want to consider and even how you could structure them.

Finally, SEO tools are fantastic if you're just running

low on creative steam—or your marketing team is coming up short on ideas—and you need a springboard. With a few clicks, you can typically generate long lists of topics and suggested titles to spark more brainstorming on your part.

Cons of SEO Tools

The biggest downside of these tools for most funeral homes is cost. As of this writing, SEMrush's pricing structure includes three plans costing \$119.95, \$229, or \$449.95 per month *per user*. MarketMuse plans range from \$79 for a single user plan that allows 25 queries a month to \$1,499 (or more) per month for unlimited users and some extra applications.

For small businesses, such as most independent deathcare firms, these prices are a stretch unless the firm is receiving excellent return on investment (ROI) out of the tool.

Some tools do offer free options you can explore. For example, Ink SEO has a limited free tool that provides

some SEO scoring and content recommendations. However, many experienced content writers and marketers often find these tools stymying to both creativity and quality writing, which brings me to the second big disadvantage of such tools: They're extremely limiting and potentially problematic if you're using them as a crutch.

I've talked to a lot of people who use these tools in place of understanding how to write quality content for SEO and online marketing. Here's a pretty common scenario:

- Someone in charge of marketing for a deathcare firm invests in one of these SEO tools, believing that it will take

almost all the work out of the process

- They enter a keyword, such as funeral home, or the URL for their funeral services landing page
- The SEO tool spits out a ton of information. It might return something like this:
 - You should write around 1,634 words
 - You should include all the following keywords (with a list of 50+ phrases, some of which may or may not make sense with your topic)
 - You should consider including these subheadings and asking and answering the following questions (again, with numerous suggestions, some of which may not apply)
 - You might consider including links to authority pages, with suggestions

If you write content in the tool, it may provide further suggestions. Common style suggestions in these tools include keeping paragraphs and sentences very short, removing passive voice, and reducing use of complex sentences or words.

The problem with these suggestions is that the person in charge of marketing often holds true to the *letter* of them instead of the *spirit* of them.

I've seen marketers push content writers to include all the words, subheadings, and questions as well as write to the rigid sentence structure guidelines in these tools. Often, the result is lackluster content—content that sounds like everyone else, doesn't engage the reader, and doesn't provide any new information for the audience.

Here's something worth considering: If many people are turning to these tools and following the same advice to optimize their content, how optimized *really* is your page going to be?

That's not to say these SEO tools have no value. Keyword research with a few clicks is valuable. A machine culling the internet to see what the competition is doing and summarizing it for you—including word counts, headings, and topics—is valuable.

But if you don't know what quality content looks like for your audience and you rely solely on these tools to tell you, you may backpedal any potential ROI.

Avoid Misusing These Tools

Here's an example:

- You already post a decent amount of content and your own analytics show that anything over 1,000 words sends *your* audience running. Your best conversion rates are with content between 600 and 800 words.
- You use an online SEO tool to plan content around new topics, such as cremation or veteran's burial benefits. The tool suggests writing pages of 1,300 words or more.

Knowing what you know about your audience, you should probably ignore that particular suggestion. Instead, take the keywords, topic clusters, and other information and create relevant posts of around 700 words to best engage your target audience—because for *your business*, quality content isn't 1,300 words.

Here's another example:

- You previously found a copywriter with a voice and style that is ideal for your deathcare business. The writer delivers compassionate, helpful content that people actually read, enjoy, and respond to.
- You invest in an SEO tool and ask the writer to start using the built-in editor, requiring a certain score to be achieved before submitting the content. The truth is that achieving a specific score in one of these built-in editors can remove the writing style that is so valuable for your content.

[M]any experienced content writers and marketers often find these free tools stymying to both creativity and quality writing, which brings me to the second big disadvantage of such tools: They're extremely limiting and potentially problematic if you're using them as a crutch.





First, learn a little about online marketing and why various tactics are important. Second, learn a lot about your audience and how best to communicate with people who might be interested in your services.

Instead, you might give the writer all the SEO data—keywords, suggested subheadings, links, questions to ask and answer—and have that person incorporate the information into articles using the voice and style that has worked well so far.

Ultimately, the best way to ensure ROI when using any online marketing or SEO tool is to avoid relying on it as a be-all, end-all.

Takeaways

- First, learn a little about online marketing and why various tactics are important.

- Second, learn a lot about your audience and how best to communicate with people who might be interested in your services.

Then you can marry what you know with the information that comes from SEO and marketing tools to create unique, brand-appropriate content that performs well in search, resonates with the deathcare demographic in your area, and drives more engagement and conversions. 📧

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