

THE DIRECTOR

MARCH 2019

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**2020
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Going Mobile

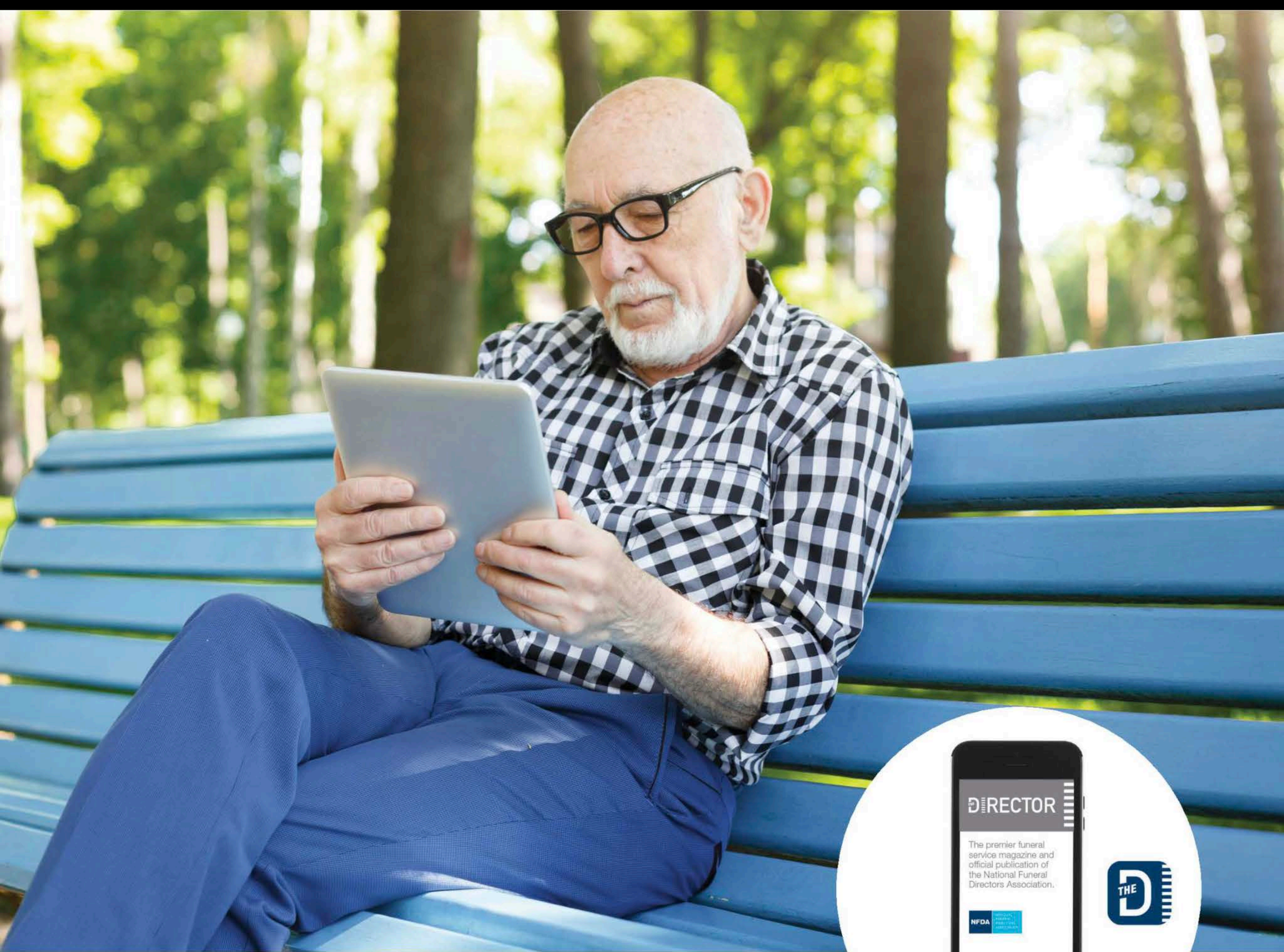
**Google puts mobile first, and
if your firm hasn't followed
suit, its future is at risk.**

BY WELTON HONG

How are you viewing the words you're reading at this moment? (And no, the answer isn't "with my eyes." But if you thought of that, okay, well played.)

You may be reading them in the print edition of *The Director*, the official publication of NFDA. It's also quite possible you're reading the web version of this article on a desktop computer.

And now it's likely that some of you are reading these very words on your smartphone or tablet. *The Director* has made it convenient to do that, thanks to the enhanced digital version it rolled out last summer. It also got its own app ("The Director by NFDA"), making it incredibly easy for NFDA members to read new issues and recent back issues.



In other words, if you're using the app to read this right now, you understand the degree to which mobile devices have become pervasive in our lives. And even if you still prefer reading the magazine in print, you're undoubtedly doing so during a break from checking email and texts on a smartphone or tablet.

Here's the kicker: The same is true of middle age-to-senior adults, a core demographic for funeral homes for both at-need and preneed services.

Recent studies have shown that baby boomers and the Silent Generation (born mid-to-late 1920s through early-to-mid 1940s) are becoming more hooked to their smart-

phones than the millennials/Gen Y/Gen Z Americans who grew up with technology as an intrinsic aspect of their lives. This is particularly true with certain social media platforms, particularly Facebook. While many younger internet users have fled Facebook for Instagram and Snapchat (no matter what generation you're from, youth will always be fickle), its use has grown exponentially with the 55-and-up group.

Facebook estimated it would lose about two million users in 2018, mainly from younger generations. But it still increased its user base overall by close to 170 million users, the majority of them older adults.

Google no longer prioritizes the desktop version of your website when determining how much "authority" your site has.

niently navigate the various pages on the site? All of these elements are critical to a mobile-friendly experience, and they're not comprehensive.

Here's the other consideration: You need to know how your site performs on a variety of mobile devices. At the very least, it needs a great user experience on the big four: Android smartphone, iPhone, iPad and Amazon's Kindle Fire. You won't have your mobile game covered until you've tested out all four popular device types and ensured an excellent experience for potential clientele on all of them.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention an especially critical reason why funeral homes need to focus on the mobile experience – at-need calls.

Following the death of a loved one, families want to get information on deathcare service providers immediately. They might be at the hospital, hospice or their loved one's home. Or maybe they're out and about and just received a call about a death.

What's the fastest and most convenient way to research local funeral homes in the moment? You'll use your smartphone, which provides 24/7/365 access to the internet.

If your business isn't optimized for mobile, it won't rank well when someone searches for "funeral homes near me" or "cremation near [your town here]." And even if someone does click on your result, he or she needs a fast, convenient mobile experience. In the wake of a death, people won't waste time with confusing or problematic sites. They'll just bounce out and move on to the next option.

This is why funeral firms in particular must act immediately to get their sites mobile-friendly. Google knows it. Users know it. It's time for everyone in the business to know it. ☰

Welton Hong is founder of Ring Ring Marketing (funeralhomeprofits.com) and author of Making Your Phone Ring: With Internet Marketing for Funeral Homes.

Live Embalming Demo!

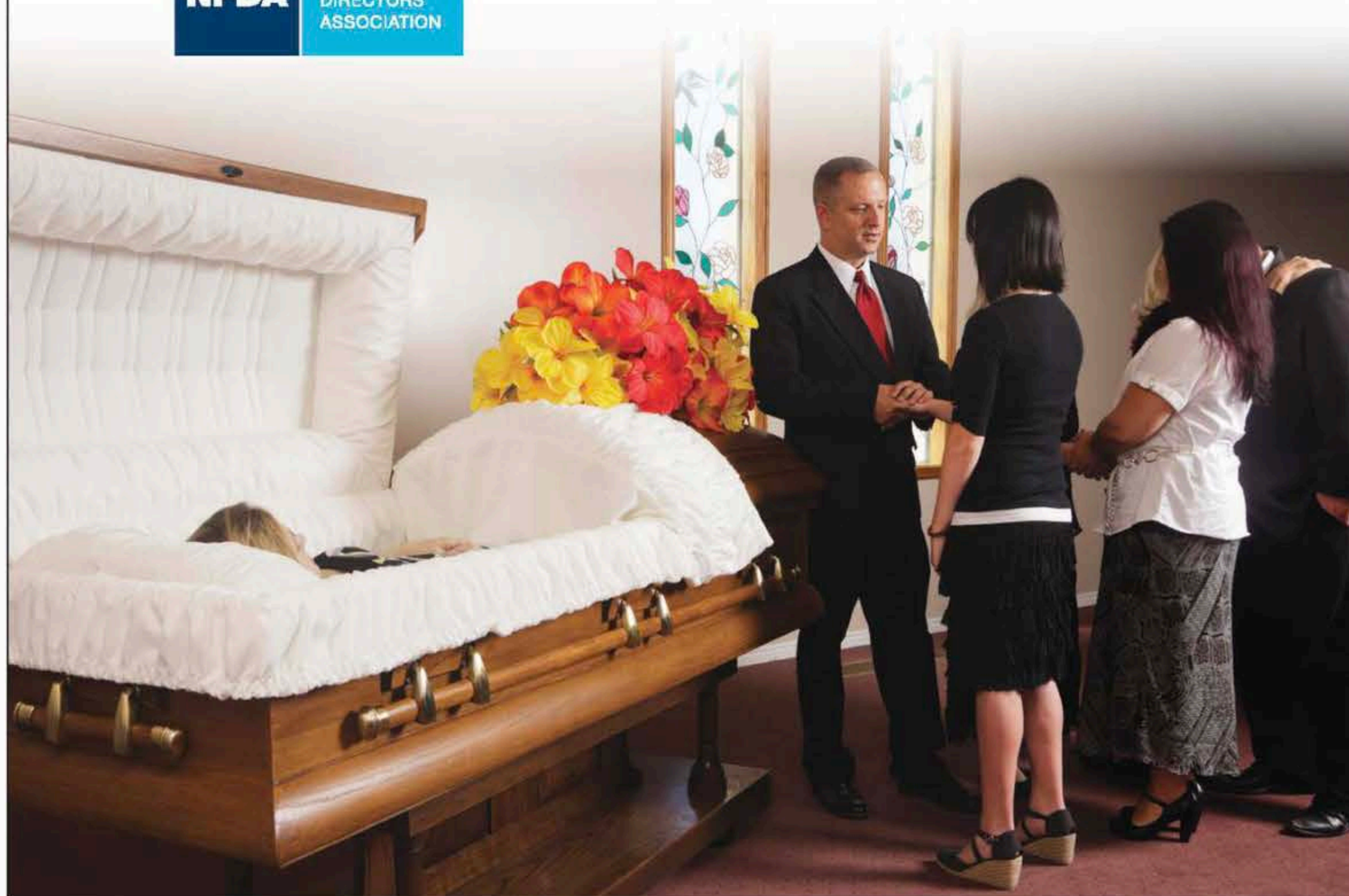
Embalming and Restorative Arts Seminar

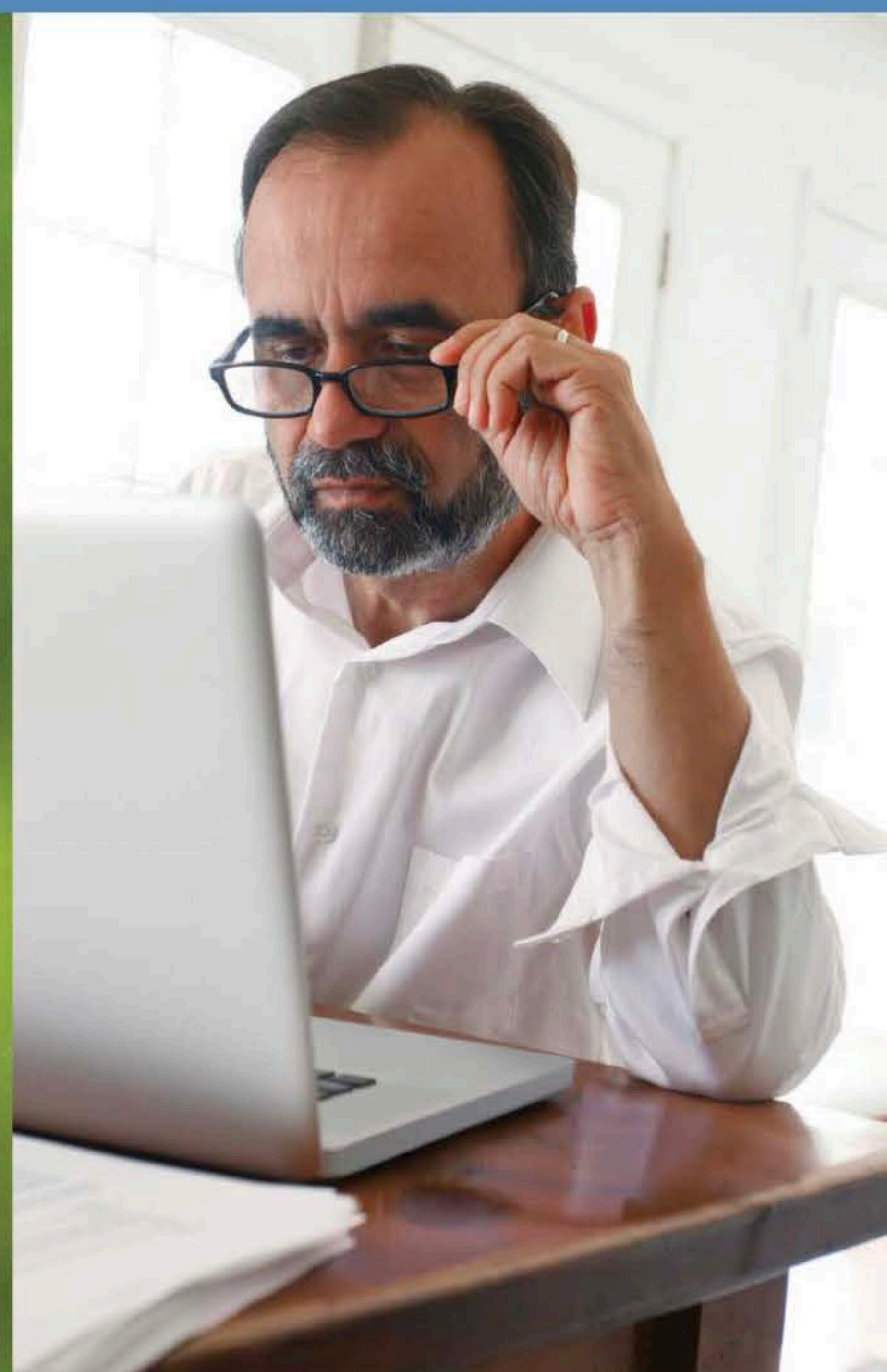
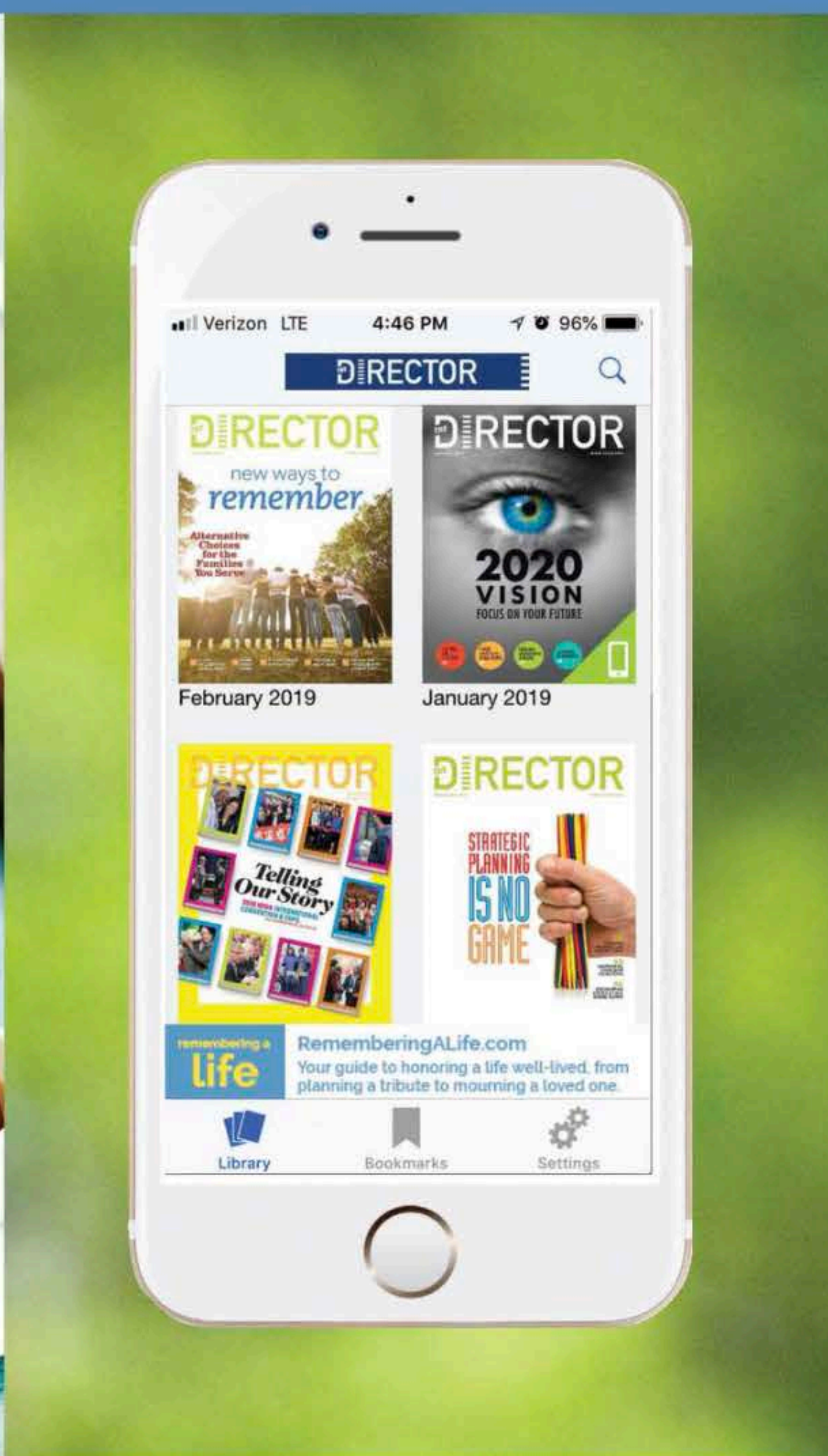
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dexing [being] enabled” for sites they oversee; another flood of such notices went out in September.

And even if your business hasn’t received an official notice, rest assured that Google is already factoring in mobile to your organic rankings.

Simply put, Google no longer prioritizes the desktop version of your website when determining how much “authority” your site has. As the catch-all term for how Google chooses to rank your funeral home in organic search results, authority is critical. It especially matters in whether Google includes your business in its “local 3-pack,” the most sought-after real estate on a search engine result page with “local intent” (meaning your specific geographical area). That all comes from authority.

All the work you’ve done on search engine optimization? That was building your authority. Inbound and outbound links? Authority. Citations of your business elsewhere on the web? Authority. Adding lots of relevant content to the site? Authority.

And that’s all well and good, and it all still matters. However, many independent funeral home websites were

designed when people only visited such sites on desktop computers. The desktop user experience was the only user experience.

That hasn’t been the case for some time. More people now visit websites on smartphones and tablets than they do on desktop computers. Unfortunately, many of these older websites have not kept up with those changes, which becomes obvious when you pull up a website on your phone that hasn’t been optimized for mobile (and doesn’t have a separate website that’s distinctly intended for mobile users). Desktop websites were not intended to be viewed on small screens. They’re hard to read and navigate, especially on a smartphone. (It’s a little easier on a large tablet but still far from perfect.)

Desktop websites also often lack critical functionality, such as click-to-call, which lets someone call your funeral home with just a tap (or, alternatively, send an email message). And they can take as long as seven or eight seconds to load. While that might not sound too bad at first, it’s brutally slow for today’s mobile users, who will leave a page that doesn’t load within three seconds. When mo-

bile users pull up desktop-only websites such as these, most bounce out almost immediately.

They don’t have time to spare because they’ve been trained to expect a super-fast, super-convenient user experience whenever they open a site on their phone or tablet. They do most of their personal or business use on apps that were specifically created for mobile devices. Your website needs to replicate that.

Keep in mind that “mobile first” doesn’t mean mobile “only.” A funeral home will still get a lot of desktop traffic for the foreseeable future. While a particular website that doesn’t have a mobile-friendly version will still be indexed by Google, it likely won’t rank very well against competitors that have optimized their sites.

I don’t know how often you look at your funeral home website on a mobile device, but I recommend we all try it right now. Pull it up on a smartphone – how long does it take to load, are fonts and images clear and easy to read on the screen, can you find links without trouble and conve-

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