

Deathcare Service Business Lessons from COVID Will Last a Lifetime

By Welton Hong

Hopefully, even as you're reading this, your deathcare firm has made core changes to deal with the impact of the COVID-19 crisis and resulting restrictions on burial and cremation services.

If you haven't—if the plan was to "weather the storm" and simply wait for restrictions to ease up so you could go back to doing business the same way you always did before, I must be blunt:

These are changes deathcare firms needed to make for quite a while now, well before we ever heard of the novel coronavirus.



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And regardless of how far America has proceeded (and is on the verge of proceeding) in completely "returning to normal," you still need to make these changes. They will help you do business smarter and more efficiently in the digital age. And you'll be better prepared for any crisis—small or large—that arises in the future.

By "changes," here's the short version of what I'm talking about: Most funeral homes in America found they needed to transition into video conferencing when state and local governments mandated social distancing and restrictions on large gatherings.

They also found they needed to provide a "virtual consultation" option for meeting with families for immediate needs. Further, if they typically did "lunch-and-learn" seminars for preneed sales (whether in-house or through a third party), they had to either pause all seminars or transition to *virtual* seminars.

Video conferencing, of course, has also proved itself indispensable for communicating with staff when in-person meetings are too risky. Additionally, cloud-based project management tools such as Trello let funeral directors and other funeral pros manage the disposition of cases more efficiently, without needing to track everything on an old-fashioned physical whiteboard.

Now, I've learned enough about the industry in recent years to know that many funeral homes haven't adopted all of these practices during the health crisis. Depending on their size and location, some might not have adopted any of them. For some of you reading this article, that means you.

And sure, I get it. It's not easy to make big changes even under the best of circumstances, much less when the entire country is dealing with a massive health and economic crisis.

But here's the thing: Even if the coronavirus had never arrived and caused this massive interruption to business practices, it would have been a great benefit to your firm to start using Zoom (or other videoconferencing technology). It would have been a big help to start using Trello, a very user-friendly and inexpensive tool for project management.

These are software options you should be using now, and they're tools you will need to use going forward. So if you've been reluctant to get started, I assure you, it's time to stop waiting and move forward.

Digital, cloud-based tools make business much *easier*, more *convenient*, and more *efficient*. They don't even require a massive financial investment. Some require virtually no investment at all.

Practically since I founded Ring Ring Marketing, I've been able to run it from anywhere. I can communicate with my 50-plus employees, share files, conduct online meetings, supervise projects, and accomplish much more from literally anywhere.

I do it from the office and at home. I do it from hotel rooms all over America and even overseas. I can run my entire business from anywhere, at any time.

And given that I'm constantly on the road when things are "normal," having this tech infrastructure isn't a luxury: It's a *necessity*.

At my firm, we use Trello to manage projects. We use Microsoft Teams for internal communication and file sharing, along with MS Outlook for email. We use Zoom for video meetings, both internally and externally—I alone average over three dozen Zoom meetings every single week. We use MindMeister for collaborative planning.

Look, I love being in my home office in Las Vegas. I love having my staff there. (Well, I did love it—but I also didn't hesitate to mandate that they would work from home as soon as recommendations were announced.) There's certainly a benefit to meeting in person. And I realize that a marketing firm and a funeral home are completely different businesses—you can't simply do everything remotely.

However, you can do a lot more remotely than you realize. Many of you have already realized that to some degree, but the possibilities go far beyond what you might have already imagined.

I should take a moment to briefly talk specifically about

Zoom. As I'm sure you know, a number of security concerns about Zoom were raised shortly after the COVID lockdowns went into effect. Some nefarious hackers have used auto-generated "meeting finders" to randomly find unprotected meetings and troll them with inappropriate content—a practice known as "Zoombombing."

That's certainly worrisome, but the truth is that the number of affected meetings is very small. The important thing is to keep your meeting ID private and to ensure it's password protected.

So make sure all of your meetings are automatically protected. Go to the "Meetings" tab, click the "Edit" button under your personal meeting ID, check "Require meeting password," and put in a password to. It's also a good idea to update your password regularly and be careful with whom you share it.

Zoom is incredibly cheap (it even has a robust free version), and it's by far the most user-friendly of the main video conferencing tools, so I continue to strongly recommend it.

(Note: My firm has no promotional agreement with Zoom, Trello, or any of the tools mentioned in this article. I just recommend them because they're the best options for funeral pros.)

Of course, the effects from the coronavirus go far beyond business. This health crisis has cost many Americans their lives, and for those who contracted COVID-19 and recovered, some will have lasting health impacts from the virus, including quite serious ones.

The coronavirus has had an unprecedented effect the economy, on personal life, on virtually everything we do. How it's affected the business of burial and cremation, and that of celebrating people's lives, is just a small portion of that. However, for everyone who makes a living in this industry, it's an absolutely critical portion.

When I say that the business lessons we've learned from COVID will last a lifetime, I mean exactly that. The digital age is now here in full force. In 15 or 20 years, we likely won't still be using the same digital tools as we are now, but we'll definitely be using digital tools—there's no going back.

Virtually no business, no matter how niche or small, is immune to the need to evolve into a more digital process. We're all learning a lot of lessons due to this health crisis. Learning to adapt and evolve is one of the most important lessons of all.

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