

THE CREMATIONIST OF NORTH AMERICA

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The Scattering Garden: Providing a Place of Beauty and Resonance

This scattering trend reflects both the rising rates of cremation and a desire to find ritual and connection when dealing with grief.

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Local SEO Success in 2020: Engagement, Voice, Accurate Listings

By Welton Hong

Stop me if you've heard this one before: "SEO is dead." It's not (in the slightest), but I understand if you've been left with that impression.

Whispers about the final knell for organic search make the rounds every few years—often shortly after Google makes a change that throws a wrench into common SEO methods. As 2019 wrapped up, rumors that SEO (and particularly local search) wouldn't survive the new year bounced around a variety of posts around the Internet.

They're just that: *rumors*. SEO isn't going anywhere. Yes, local search is poised for a metamorphosis or two in the near future. It's already crawling into the cocoon or perhaps shedding its chrysalis. But professionals in the cremation industry know better than I do: Change is not death.

Just as the caterpillar doesn't cease to exist because it turned into a butterfly, SEO doesn't die because new factors and methods are at play. For cremation providers and related deathcare firms that want to succeed with local SEO in 2020 and beyond, it's simply a matter of understanding the evolving rules so they can spread new online marketing wings.

Firms That Best Engage Clientele—Online and Off—Will Rank Higher

All the clues point to a prediction that positive engagement will become increasingly important for local search rankings. That's due to a number of factors, particularly online reputation.

Reviews and Consumer Experience

Reviews already factor into where you place in search engine results pages (SERPs). Google has as much as said so, and even if the search giant didn't already affirm this knowledge, it's easy to extrapolate.

Google's Search Quality Evaluator Guidelines spell out what makes a page or website "high quality." Authority and trustworthiness are major factors discussed in that document, and a high number of positive reviews support the conclusion that you're a trustworthy deathcare firm that knows how to provide the right services to clientele.

It's not just about signaling that you're a quality business. According to studies of local SEO ranking factors, Google My Business reviews that include keywords are extremely influential on whether your firm shows up in the local pack results (aka the "Google 3-pack"). That's the box or map at the top of organic SERPs that provides the searcher with the three local businesses Google believes are the best matches for a query.

As we move into the future, it's likely that firms that are doing a better job catering to client needs will rank better online because of these types of factors.

Engaging People Online

It's not just about engaging existing clientele as you provide cremation or other deathcare services. Online engagement also plays a role in local SEO. That's because behavioral metrics are a factor in eventual ranking.

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Basically, it works like this:

- Someone comes to your cremation services site either through an organic query or through links on social media or other pages.
- If your content is relevant and engaging, they stay. They may stick with the initial page for a while because your content is high quality and they want to read it all. That increases time on page.
- They may also click internal links and move around your site, viewing other pages. That increases your page views.
- They don't simply move away from your site in seconds, reducing your bounce rate.
- And they may come back for more content or share links to your content with others.

All this engagement is good for your deathcare firm. It makes a conversion more likely, but it also increases your SEO performance because all of these behavioral metrics contribute to your RankBrain score. And your RankBrain score is a factor in your page rank on Google.

Increasing Entity Authority

While Google hasn't necessarily defined entity authority in certain terms, SEO experts believe it will be increasingly important for future local SEO efforts. (For our purposes, "entity" is defined as your deathcare firm or website.)

Most experts believe Google might measure this authority via a number of factors, including:

- Popularity of the entity, or how many mentions you get online. That includes mentions on social media, in reviews and news items, and via backlinks to your site.
- Positive engagement with the entity, or how well-liked and trusted you appear to be. That goes back to everything discussed above, including reviews and on-page engagement, but it might also include social media engagement.

Voice Search and Keyword Evolution

A 2018 BrightLocal study noted that 56 percent of people used phone voice search to discover a local business within the previous month. Even two years ago, people were already using voice technology on computers (28 percent), tablets (26 percent), and smart speakers (18 percent) to search for local businesses.

At some point in 2020, most experts believe voice search will account for half of all searches, and Gartner, the global research and advisory firm, says 30 percent of searches won't even involve a device with a screen (such as a smartphone).

For deathcare firms, that means evolving content creation to account for voice keywords. People don't speak their queries the same way they type them into a desktop or mobile device. Someone might type "cremation cost" when searching via their computer, but they're more likely to ask Siri or Alexa, "How much does cremation cost?"

According to BrightLocal, close to 9 percent of all voice searches include the word *how*. Other words popular in voice searches

include *what, best, is, where, can, easy, when, why, who, good, and define*.

As 2020 progresses, reevaluate old keyword research to discover how voice search is changing the trends in your niche. You'll likely find some great opportunities to rank for low-competition long-tail keywords, too. Create content that takes these new phrases into account, and go back to old content and update it with voice keywords too.

Accurate NAP Data Remains Critical

You know what they say: The more things change, the more they stay the same. Many of the fundamental elements of search engine optimization aren't getting a major facelift in 2020. For example, a reliance on accurate business listings is still important.


Accurate business listings serve several purposes when it comes to SEO. First, when you include them on your pages and profiles, including your Google My Business profile, they help Google identify you as a local deathcare firm. That makes it more likely you'll show up for searches with local intent such as "cremation near me."

Accurate business listings on multiple sites also increase your authority as a local entity. The more times you appear, the more search engines and others can believe you're a well-respected, high-quality firm. However, it's important that all your listings match, which is where *NAP data* comes in.

NAP stands for (your business's) *name, address, and phone* number. Make sure this information is accurate and presented the same on your website, social profiles, and Google My Business page. You can also reach out to other listings (such as chamber of commerce pages, industry directories, or other review pages) to ensure that your NAP data is published accurately.

Why is NAP so important? It's easier for the search engines to understand the relevance of the information if it all matches. It also ensures search AI recognizes all these citations as belonging to the same entity, which can help with SEO.

Also, if someone conducts a voice search for "funeral homes near me" and hits on your profile somewhere, your contact information needs to be accurate to support a future conversion.

The fact is that SEO isn't dead or even dying. It's simply changing with the seasons. And deathcare firms that can keep up with regular work to their online marketing landscapes—or hire someone to do it for them—will reap the rewards when it comes to traffic, conversions, and revenues in the future. 



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