

# Understanding Funeral Marketing Automation

By Welton Hong



"Machine learning" and "artificial intelligence" might sound like strange concepts for funeral service, but trust me, they're already making a big difference in this industry.

But let's start with what marketing automation *doesn't* mean:

- It doesn't mean letting machines run the show or relying on computers to make all your decisions for you.
- It doesn't mean removing people from the process in favor of "cheaper" machines.
- It doesn't mean giving up control or even taking all the work out of your funeral home marketing processes.
- It doesn't necessarily mean a huge expense to implement state-of-the-art technology.

Here's what it *can* mean: more effective marketing that drives higher conversion rates and redeems some of your time and resources so you can concentrate on serving clientele to the best of your ability.

## Ways Funeral Homes Can Employ Marketing Automation

When asked why they use marketing automation, businesses often point to lead generation and nurturing. More than 60 percent of marketers use automation to find and generate leads for sales funnels, and over half use it to nurture those leads and increase the chance they'll convert to clientele eventually.

Other benefits of automation can include increased sales revenue, better consumer engagement, more productive marketing processes, and the ability to fully measure and understand marketing performance. That lets you make decisions to drive more effective campaigns in the future.

But automation doesn't have to be complex. Here are a few easy ways you can implement it in your funeral home marketing practices:

### 1. Automate email campaigns.

Email marketing can be extremely lucrative. It drives an average return of \$32 to \$42 for every dollar you spend on it, and along with your website, it's really the only thing you "own" when it comes to online marketing. Your social media profiles could be deleted tomorrow, and Google might create an algorithm change that drives you to the bottom of search engine results pages (SERPs).

But managing those lists and email campaigns manually is a mistake. First, it can take a great deal of time to ensure you're sending relevant content at the right times to the correct people. Just managing unsubscribe or follow-up emails can become a full-time job if you're handling them manually.

Luckily, email is one of the easiest things you can automate. Many providers, including Mailchimp, AWeber, and Flodesk, offer free or low-cost options for managing these processes.

Some ways to build automation into your email campaigns include:

- **Personalization:** Have your email service merge people's names into emails to increase engagement or swap out images or information in the email depending on audience demographics such as age, income, or location.
- **Maximizing open rates:** Mailchimp notes that average open rates across all industries for its clients is around 21 percent. You can increase your open rate by ensuring subject lines are relevant, that you're sending emails at the best times of day and week, and that you're not sending too many messages. But testing all of that manually can be a real headache. Implementing automatic testing and scheduling can save you a lot of time.

- **Automating drips and follow-ups:** If someone signs up for your newsletter, you shouldn't have to manually launch the process. They should get an immediate confirmation and thank you email and start to receive the newsletter as a matter of course. If someone indicates they're interested in preplanning, they shouldn't have to wait for someone to get back to them to know your firm is ready to help.

## 2. Use chatbots.

Have you ever navigated to a site and had a chat window offer assistance after only a few seconds? That's probably a chatbot. Depending on how they're implemented, chatbots drive engagement rates between 35 and 90 percent.

Other businesses aren't necessarily staffing their websites 24 hours a day with chat customer support, and you don't have to either. Chatbot technology can handle many basic queries and help streamline communication and workflow while providing consumers what they want: an immediate option for assistance.

Just a few things you can do:

- Answer basic questions such as where to find answers about services, what the phone number and address are, when a funeral home is open, and how to get to the business.
- Make appointments for people who want to learn more about services or preplanning or signing people up for webinars on preplanning.
- Determine whether someone is in an emergency at-need situation so the call or contact can be routed to an on-call funeral director.

## 3. Create automatic marketing workflows.

Sometimes, the best place for automation isn't

consumer-facing. If you're spending a lot of time shuffling marketing work back and forth between team members, freelancers, agencies, and others, you might want to look into automatic workflow processes.

This can be as simple as setting up a Slack channel with Google Drive connections. That way, people get updates when changes are made to Google docs so they know it might be their turn to handle a piece of content.

It can be as complex as setting up a project or task management system via Trello, Asana, Podio, or other providers. While all of these software programs are unique, they almost always have some level of workflow automation capability that lets you develop rules and processes to ensure work is handed off to the right people without someone having to remember to email it.

## 4. Avoid manual ad bidding processes.

When you launch PPC or display advertising, you have to bid on keywords and placement. Manual bidding doesn't mean bidding specifically on every single ad placement as if you're part of a digital auction. That would honestly be impossible and require someone working full-time or more.

Manual bidding typically refers to setting all your parameters manually and checking back constantly to tweak them for better performance. This still requires a lot of your time, and chances are that most funeral home professionals don't have the analytical marketing expertise to make those decisions accurately and quickly every time.

Which is why even the marketing pros typically use some level of automated ad bidding. Google and third-party resources have gathered millions of **billions** of data points. Automation lets you use all that data and machine learning to increase the effectiveness of your advertising without spending all day on it.



**Welton Hong**

Founder of Ring Ring Marketing®

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**Welton** is a leading expert in helping funeral homes convert leads from online directly to the phone line. He's the author of the book *Making Your Phone Ring with Internet Marketing for Funeral Homes*. Learn more at [FuneralHomeProfits.com](http://FuneralHomeProfits.com).