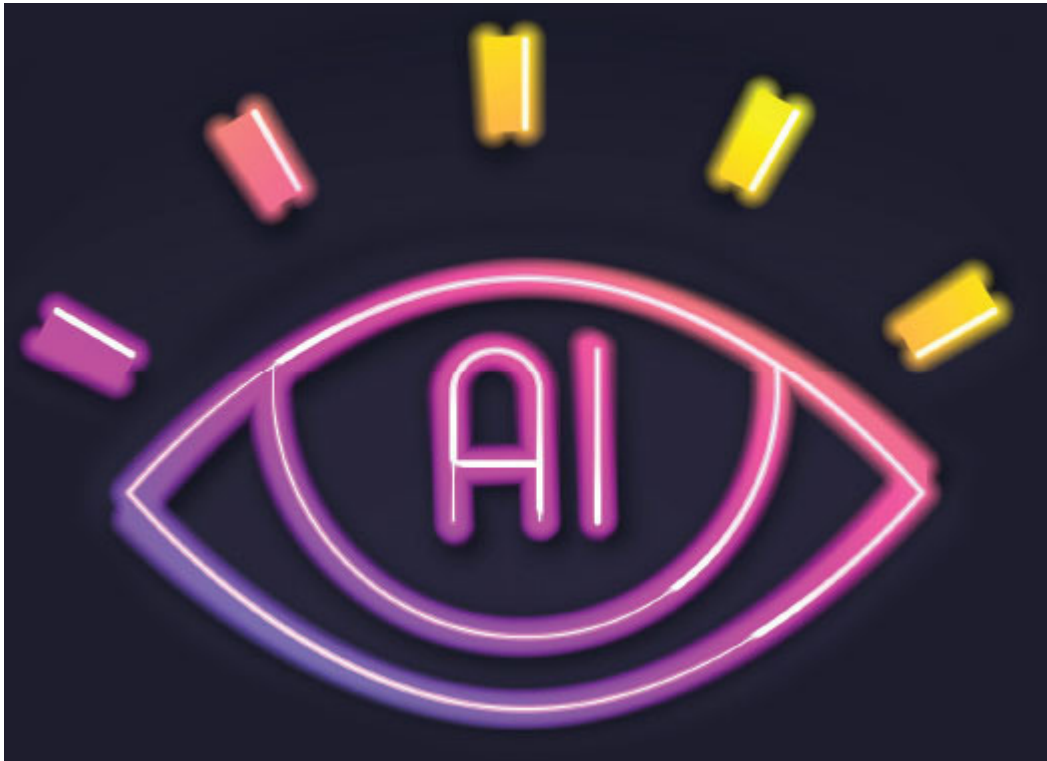


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# The Funeral Director's Guide To Artificial Intelligence

BY WELTON HONG



You're probably starting to hear about how businesses are capitalizing on the extensive capabilities of artificial intelligence (AI). And if you're short on time, as I suspect you are, you're also probably starting to wonder if there's anything AI can do for you.

To put it simply, yes. AI is not exclusive to tech enthusiasts; it's for funeral directors, too.

The term "AI" might come across as futuristic and the idea of implementing it ambiguous and overwhelming, but I promise it's not as complex as it sounds. Basically, AI is a technology allowing computers to perform tasks that typically require human intelligence. It mimics how humans would perform a variety of

tasks, such as writing, creating visual art or even playing games – and a heck of a lot more. A quick Google search will provide a taste of what this advanced technology can do.

Before I explain why your funeral home should experiment with AI, I need to clear up one thing. Incorporating AI into your funeral home isn't about being trendy or outshining your competitors (although it might accomplish both); it's about helping your staff members serve families to the best of their ability.

AI-powered technology can be very helpful in funeral service in creating personalized marketing and services for families, streamlining day-to-day tasks and providing support when people need it most. The key lies in understanding the various facets of AI and how they can be integrated seamlessly into existing practices.

So, while your understanding of AI might extend about as far as the latest action movie (you're not alone), that shouldn't stop you from taking advantage of its versatility and accessibility.

Some folks are a bit wary of bringing this emotionless technology into such a personal industry, and you might be one of them. Trust me, I understand. Deathcare is a nuanced landscape for AI. Funeral service requires compassion, empathy and privacy, and while AI can do a lot of things, experiencing human emotions isn't one of them. Also, it isn't foolproof. Consider that confirmation that we *all* really do make mistakes – even AI.

This is why I have a cardinal rule: Use AI to *support* humans, not *replace* them. In addition, I highly recommend that you integrate AI with not only ethical guidelines but a hefty amount of transparency as well.

Now let's explore not only how AI can change the game in the services you provide but also how to use it responsibly.

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## Embracing AI

Funeral directors are in the business of providing support during families' most challenging times. And while AI doesn't share our human emotions, it can still help you tailor your services to meet the unique needs of every family.

One of the most significant AI advantages is its ability to analyze large amounts of data quickly and accurately. For funeral directors, this means being able to understand and anticipate the needs and preferences of the families they serve on a much deeper level. AI algorithms can sift through past interactions, feedback and preferences to suggest highly personalized service options.

Imagine suggesting funeral services, music, readings or themes that resonate perfectly with a family's wishes – all thanks to AI's knack for understanding preferences. It's like having a behind-the-scenes helper who remembers every detail from past services and all feedback. This personal touch can make a substantial difference in the grieving process for families.

Now let's look at a part of your job that virtually no one enjoys – administrative work. AI can be a lifesaver in this arena. AI can take over many repetitive and time-consuming tasks, such as recordkeeping, form filling and compliance checks. This automation reduces the risk of human error and ensures that these essential tasks are completed efficiently and accurately. It also provides funeral directors with more time to focus on providing compassionate care. It's like having an ultra-efficient assistant who never gets tired.

Supporting families through grief is another critical component of what you do, and AI can lend a hand here, too, metaphorically speaking. For example, AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants can offer comforting words, suggest coping mechanisms and even guide individuals to professional help when needed – and it's available 24/7. While these tools don't replace human interaction, they can be a valuable initial support system.

When it comes to memorializing loved ones, AI can create touching tributes and memorials by analyzing photos, videos and other content. These digital memorials offer a modern way to remember and celebrate the lives of loved

memorials offer a modern way to remember and celebrate the lives of loved ones. AI can compile life stories, create video tributes and even suggest music and readings that resonate with the deceased's life and preferences.

Using AI isn't just a matter of efficiency; it's about adding depth and meaning to how we remember the loved ones we've lost.

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## Using AI Responsibly

With apologies to Stan Lee, with great power comes great responsibility, right? When bringing AI into funeral service, you can't just acknowledge the shortcuts you wish to implement; you must also address the risks tied to them.

Ensuring privacy is a huge responsibility in deathcare, as you're handling sensitive information that is often highly personal in nature. Before using AI, make sure you can guarantee that client data is kept safe.

Another area particularly risky in deathcare is customer service. AI doesn't have emotions; it's based on algorithms and data processing. It mimics empathy and understanding based on programmed responses and learned information but does not actually feel or experience emotions as humans do.

While AI certainly can assist in customer service processes, it can't replace the human interaction and meaningful relationships funeral service requires.

When it comes to ethics, only you can decide when it is or isn't appropriate to use AI. And remember, AI isn't always the answer. It is simply an available resource. To prevent you or your staff from going too far with AI, I suggest you establish a set of ethical guidelines for when and how to use AI.

You might run into skepticism or resistance to adopting AI, both from staff and clients. Change can be scary and intimidating. It's important to communicate the benefits clearly and demonstrate how AI can complement rather than detract

services clearly and demonstrate how AI can complement rather than detract from the personalized, empathetic service that is the cornerstone of funeral service.

My overarching advice for using AI responsibly is to maintain complete transparency. Always be clear with families about how you're using AI. This openness fosters trust, and trust is everything in your line of work.

## Funeral Director's How-To

**After reading all this, you might be convinced that you're ready to dip your toe in the water, so how do you start using AI in your funeral home? Don't worry, it's not about turning everything upside down overnight. It's more about finding the right fit and easing into it. I've laid out a step-by-step guide for the integration of AI.**

### 1. ASSESS NEEDS

The first step toward integrating AI is to identify the areas in which it can be most beneficial. Looking at your funeral home, ask yourself, "**Where can AI really make a difference?**" Is it in personalizing services, managing mountains of paperwork or maybe offering grief support? Identifying these areas for improvement is your first step. The assessment should be thorough, and also consider feedback from both staff and families served.

### 2. SELECT THE APPROPRIATE TOOLS

Once you know where you want AI to help, it's time to choose the appropriate tools. The market is flooded with AI tools promising a range of capabilities. **Look for AI solutions that are user-friendly and offer good customer support.** After all, this is your first rodeo. It's also wise to choose scalable solutions that can grow with your business. You don't need the fanciest gadget; you need something that works for your firm.

### 3. START SMALL AND TRAIN UP

Begin with a smallscale implementation. Introduce AI tech to one or two areas and monitor its impact. This **gradual approach allows for a smoother transition and provides valuable insights** into how AI can be utilized more extensively in the future. It also lets your team get comfortable before diving deeper.

Speaking of your team, make sure everyone gets the training needed. Emphasize that AI is a tool to enhance service, not a replacement for the personal touch.

### 4. TWEAK ALONG THE WAY

Once you have AI in place, **keep your ears open for feedback.** What do families think? How is your staff adjusting? Use this information to tweak and improve how you are using AI. The

goal should always be to enhance the level of care and service provided to families.

Integrating AI technology doesn't have to be complicated. By understanding its applications and starting small, you can make significant improvements in service quality and operational efficiency. Always remember that the goal of AI in funeral service is to enhance the care and support provided to families during their time of need.

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