



REPUTATION IS REVENUE: Why Funeral Homes Can't Ignore Reviews Anymore

by Welton Hong

The family had just left the arrangement conference. It wasn't an easy meeting — those never are — but something about it felt right. The daughter paused at the door, turned back, and said, "You made this so much easier than I expected. Thank you."

That moment? That's where most funeral homes get it wrong.

Because what typically happens next is...nothing.

No one asks for a review. Or worse, someone sends a generic email a week later, which is after the emotional connection has faded. The opportunity is gone.

And that's the reality of online reviews today: Success has very little to do with the platform and everything to do with timing and human connection.

Too many businesses treat review generation like a technical process revolving around automated emails, scheduled texts, and templated follow-ups. These tools have their place.

While these tools can help identify happy families (they should be encouraged to leave a public review) — and divert

families who are unhappy into a private feedback channel, which can help funeral homes address problems before they end up online in a public forum — the truth is that technology still can't engage in personal interactions with the family.

That type of familiarity and connection can only be cultivated by funeral directors who directly serve families — and too often, they fail to recognize when a family is extremely happy...or when they may be less than pleased. Or, even if they do notice the signs — regardless of which category the family falls into — they simply do not appreciate how much positive reviews can drive revenue up and how much negative reviews can curb market share growth.



WHY MOST REVIEW REQUESTS FAIL

I've had hundreds, if not thousands, of conversations with funeral home owners across the country about how they can generate more positive reviews – and reduce the negative ones.

In helping them, I've come to a simple conclusion: Most review requests fail because they simply miss the moment that actually matters.

When a family feels genuinely cared for — whether on the at-need or preneed side — that's when they are most open to sharing their experience. Not months later. Not buried in an inbox. Right then, when the gratitude is real.

The most effective approach is also the simplest, and it will outperform any review tool, even the one we offer. It's this: Ask in person.

Train your staff to recognize when someone is not rushed, not distracted, but sincerely grateful for how you've served their family. In those moments, a simple request goes a long way. Simply ask, "If you have a moment later, we'd really

appreciate a review—it helps more than you know." It doesn't feel transactional. It feels honest.

Beyond that, lean into the relationships you've already built. A quick, friendly phone call from a trusted voice will outperform a dozen automated messages. People say yes to people — not to systems.

And then there's visibility.

Review reminders shouldn't be hidden — they should be easily seen. On printed materials. On follow-up cards. On your website. Even on your business card.

These gentle reminders should not feel aggressive or as if you are begging for approval. Rather, they should feel consistent and convey that the voices of the families you serve matter.

But even when you get the "ask" right, timing is also paramount.

Consumers expect to be asked for a review the same day — or within a few days — of their experience. That window matters.

As a general rule, sooner is better, ideally within three days. I realize that deathcare isn't like other industries, and you must tread carefully. With that said, there really is no excuse not to ask a preneed client for a review shortly after serving them, as they are in a much different place emotionally than a grieving family you've served on an at-need basis.

Even families who have suffered an unexpected loss, however, should be tactfully encouraged to leave a review when you know they are happy with your services. Be sure to frame your "ask" in a way that focuses on providing the same level of service to future families who may not otherwise appreciate the level of care you bring to your community.

The bottom line is the smartest operators don't guess — they test. They pay attention to when responses come in, when engagement is highest, and they refine from there. Because ultimately, reviews aren't just about volume. They are about capturing authentic sentiment while it's still fresh.

THE STAKES ARE HIGH

Think about your own behavior.

If you walked up to a restaurant and saw reviews posted near the entrance, wouldn't you read a few before deciding to go in?

Nearly everyone does. In fact, 99% of consumers read reviews. They are no longer a "nice to have" — they are the front door to your brand.

Even more powerful: 72% of people who leave reviews do it as a reward for great service. That means your happiest families aren't just giving feedback — they're becoming unpaid advocates, extending your reputation long after the service ends.

But it doesn't stop there.

According to a 2026 BrightLocal Consumer Review Survey:

- 97% of consumers read online reviews for local businesses.
- 41% "always" read reviews when evaluating a business.

In other words: Online reviews are no longer a marketing channel — they are part of the buying infrastructure.

I'd also note that most consumers believe that responding to reviews is part of the customer service a business should provide. In fact, BrightLocal Consumer Review Surveys from 2023 to 2026 show:

- 80% of consumers are likely to use a business that responds to all reviews.
- 89% expect businesses to respond to reviews.
- 37% say a response to the review itself is an important trust factor.
- 42% are unlikely to use a business that ignores reviews entirely.

My point is that even if you're outperforming competing funeral homes in terms of getting reviews, you still need to monitor and respond to them. If you are not, then you are not only missing an opportunity — you're delivering an incomplete experience.

Let's drill down a little bit more into a topic many funeral homes don't like to think about: negative reviews.

Simply ask, "If you have a moment later, we'd really appreciate a review—it helps more than you know."

Believe it or not, there is an upside to negative reviews that many funeral homes overlook.

Multiple 2025 consumer studies from firms such as GatherUp, Trustmary, and BrightLocal all suggest

that about 70% of customers who have left a negative review will do business again with the company if their complaint is resolved. If you are lucky, they will even update their rating or delete a negative review.

The reality is that thoughtful and timely responses to reviews, including negative reviews, can have a dramatic impact on your online reputation.

EARNING VISIBILITY

Star ratings, review volume, and recency all influence how and where you show up online.

Research from Retail Touchpoints shows that reviews heavily influence purchase decisions, and research from PowerReviews shows that recency is a key factor, with roughly two-thirds of consumers prioritizing reviews from the past few months when evaluating businesses.

And now, with AI-driven search tools analyzing review content to determine which businesses get surfaced, the implications go even deeper. If you're not being reviewed, you're not being referenced.

At the same time, review fraud is on the rise.

In fact, on March 27, 2026, the BBC reported that the British competition regulator had launched investigations into five companies as part of its crackdown on fake reviews and misleading online ratings.

One of the companies under investigation is Dignity in the United Kingdom, which is now under private ownership and not to be confused with SCI's "Dignity Memorial" brand in North America. The firm is being investigated over questions about whether it asked staff to write positive reviews related to cremation services, which may have given customers "a potentially inaccurate picture" of customers' feedback.

All this is to say that reputation management is no longer just about looking good online. It's about being chosen. It's about ranking. It's about retention. And increasingly, it's about protecting trust in a world where authenticity is harder to prove.

If you want your funeral home to grow, reviews are not optional anymore.

They are the voice of your families — amplified, archived, and working for you long after the service is over.

The only question is whether you're capturing them when it matters most.



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