

A Fear of ‘Streaming’ in the Deathcare Industry

by Trajan Schulzke

IN OUR LAST EDITION, we highlighted an issue affecting funeral businesses serving today’s digital consumers. We dubbed the condition “PTSD” (post-traumatic stream disorder), noting that a majority of funeral professionals, having personally suffered an extremely stressful, shocking, or emotionally demanding experience when live streaming for a family, continue to resist actively offering live streaming as a service.

Not just Stories, but Reality

This week, I spoke with a funeral home manager who told me his staff will no longer offer to live stream or even record a funeral ceremony for any of the families they serve. They’ve been yelled at, belittled, and pelted with profanities, he explained. “If a family wants to bring in their own camera or iPhone and try to record or live stream the service themselves, that’s fine. But my staff won’t offer it.”

When live streaming became necessary in early 2020, 80% of funeral businesses live streamed their very first funeral sometime between February and June. Now, four years later, many of the same business owners who quickly cobbled together a streaming solution so that they could continue operating their businesses are quietly ignoring the potential in modern digital technologies to enhance family and guest experiences surrounding the death of a loved one.

For some, business is getting tougher. Elaborate funerals are fewer and further apart, and cremation and secularization are changing the ways in which funerals are being celebrated. The ability to understand digital services and customer engagement are beginning to prove to be essential survival skills.

What’s Changed?

By the time pandemic concerns had dwindled in late 2021, offering condolences and paying one’s final respects virtually had become broadly, socially acceptable and even welcomed by many families. The practicality of live streaming a funeral became more apparent, as it enabled families to be

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more inclusive. More family members could be invited and more friends from community organizations and faith communities could also attend a funeral—without requiring the immediate family to host crowds, lodge family from out of town, and organize meals and receptions.

I understand that event planning and meal catering are very important ways in which funeral directors assist bereaved families; however, offering live streaming, so that more people can attend a funeral service, will not stop a family that would like to host a big event from doing that. And people who already would have made the effort to attend a funeral in person are not going to change their plans just because the family has also chosen to live stream the funeral.

To the contrary, funeral businesses today can reach, serve, and connect with even more individuals and families than ever before—building relationships with future

customers who, equally, suffered a loss, have a direct connection to their local community, and for whom they enabled their virtual attendance, providing something of particular value to them in that moment.

The Modern Funeral Business Tragedy

In a time when the social acceptance, practicality, and demand for digitally enhanced services is growing in lockstep with families’ expectations that their funeral home should be able to assist them with a simple, refined, and affordable funeral streaming solution, many funeral businesses are still providing inadequate access to modern services. In their present attempts to meet (what most families consider their) basic digital needs, the online experiences families and guests are having don’t align with the extreme care and professionalism those businesses demonstrate in all other aspects of their businesses.

This tragedy affects growth and future of the business and profession. When funeral businesses don’t (or won’t) offer premium digital experiences to help include family members and guests unable to attend, it negatively affects consumers’ perceived overall value of the services offered. A demonstrated lack of digital competence and quality may not change a customer’s choice of funeral home today, but it will certainly affect their future purchasing decisions and what they tell others about their experience.

The Path to Change

The need for a digital transformation can be intimidating, especially given some of the traumatic digital service experiences that color our pasts. I always encourage funeral home owners and managers to begin by looking at the digital tools they already know: their websites and live streaming.

A funeral business' website is a business tool for finding, educating, and engaging existing and future customers. Its primary purpose is not akin to the old obituaries page in the classifieds section (if you remember newspapers). Similarly, live streaming is not a technology commodity to be tacked on thoughtfully to your professional services.

Like your website, streaming is also a business tool that says a lot about what matters to your business and can benefit you by creating and strengthening valuable relationships for your company and your brand. The secrets for both tools lie in the ways in which they are able to gather data for you and permission to connect with visitors and online guests.

With that in mind, start to consider how these tools could be better used by your business to meet consumers where they are, and deliver the kinds of modern


experiences they expect you to offer with the same quality and professionalism you are otherwise known for.

The Road to Recovery

The solution for some may be to ease back into streaming by recording funeral ceremonies for the families you serve. It's a low-risk way to help your staff become more comfortable with streaming again and to begin changing how you talk to families about your services. You'll find funeral streaming platforms that offer mobile apps with an offline recording option that can also automatically post the recordings to memorial pages.

If your funeral home is live streaming today, but not delivering aligned or properly refined online funeral experiences, take a look at purpose-specific funeral streaming platforms that emphasize the guest

experience and also allow families to personalize their broadcasts and know exactly who attended virtually.

As a final thought, in one specific respect, time is on your side. After four years, the best funeral streaming platforms have become simpler, building on advancements in technology, and they're also more reliable. If you haven't looked at what new funeral streaming platforms can offer, consider reviewing what you have in place to ensure the online funeral experiences you're offering families today are helping your business...not hindering it. 



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