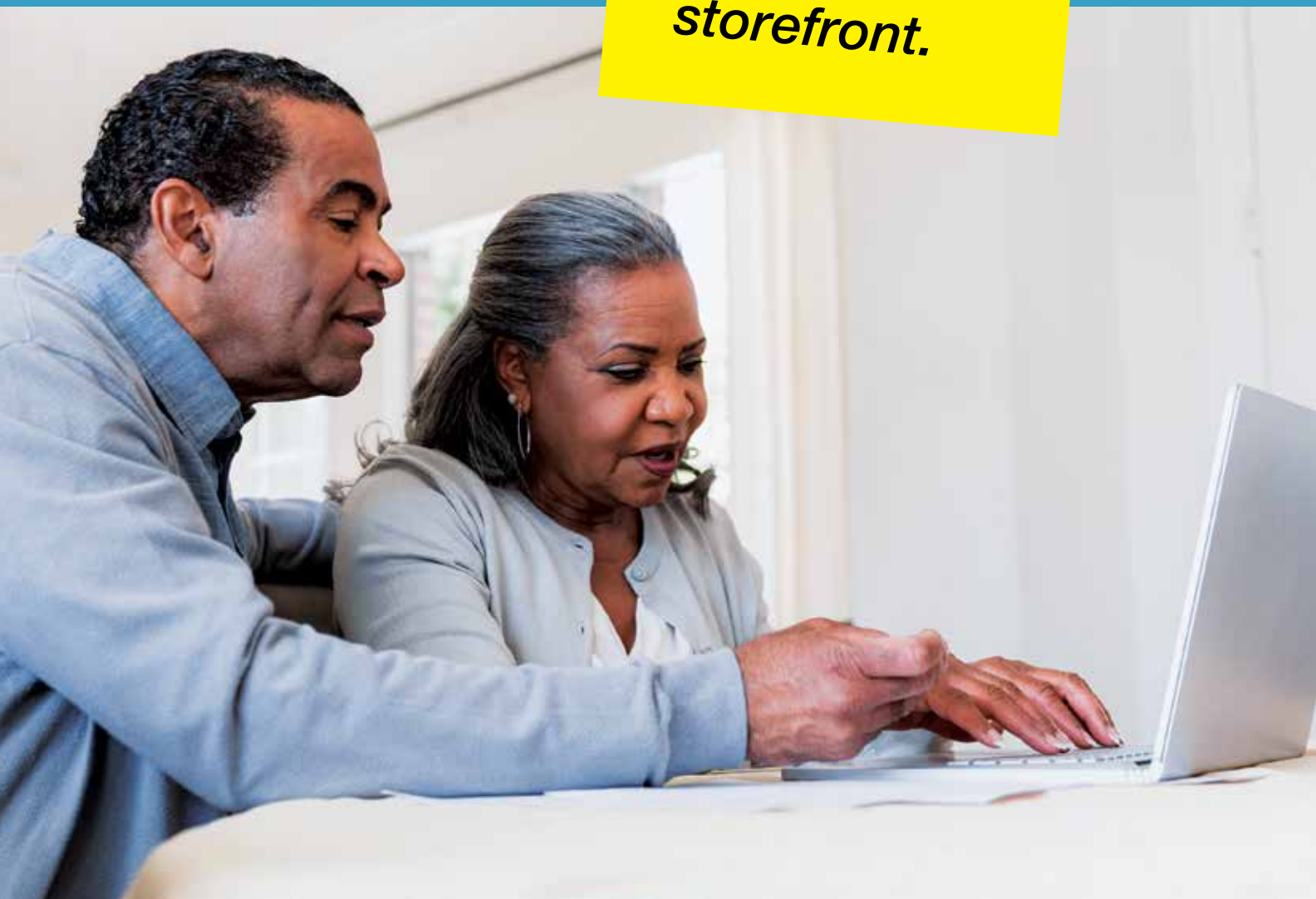


# It's What Consumers

# Want

BY BILL WILLIAMS

*Four ways  
your firm can  
benefit from  
an online  
storefront.*



I cannot state this strongly enough: Our industry must do a better job of providing price visibility to help families make informed decisions when planning and purchasing end-of-life celebrations. Families have more choices than ever before, and funeral homes simply must make it easy to select and purchase services. If not, they risk those families opting for the lower-cost, lower-margin services of more forward-thinking competitors.

As with most purchases, consumers looking for at-need or preneed services typically do some online research to gain a better understanding of what options are available and how much they cost. In its 2023 Cremation and Burial Report, NFDA found that more than half of consumers (55%) visited a funeral home's website when planning services. More than a quarter (26%) made all arrangements online.

Unfortunately, consumers are still having a difficult time planning and pricing services during their online search. Here is a prime example:

NFDA estimates that 40% of funeral homes offer cremation arrangements online. That is a big increase from 25% in 2019, but cremation is one of the fastest-growing areas in the deathcare industry and yet 60% of funeral homes are not providing families with the information they need.

There's more. Far too many families still need to call or visit a funeral home to get pricing and service information. It inconveniences consumers and opens the door to competitors.

## Digital Customer Experience Drives Success

When it comes to building a preneed trust program and growing sales, research shows that a strong digital customer experience is key to success. Survey results from PwC reinforce the value of a good customer experience through technology. The findings revealed:

- Nearly 80% of consumers say that speed, convenience, knowledgeable help and friendly service are the most important elements of a positive experience.
- 43% of consumers would pay more for greater convenience.
- While customers want e-commerce to be elegant and user-friendly, they value convenience and access to the right information above design.
- And a word of caution: 17% of consumers will walk away entirely from a brand after just one unpleasant experience.

One of the best ways to help families make funeral

arrangements and build goodwill with consumers is by incorporating a digital storefront on your website. A well-organized, user-friendly e-commerce section provides families with more control over what they wish to purchase. The easier it is for consumers to find what they need, the longer they will stay on your website and the better the chance they will make a purchase.

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## Benefits of E-Commerce Storefronts

There are multiple ways your firm can increase sales with a well-designed e-commerce platform:

**1. Make online checkout easy.** If your website does not offer families an easy way to purchase services online, then you will likely miss out on sales. Consumers expect, with a few clicks of a mouse, to be able to add items to a shopping cart. They also expect to have a variety of payment options. Both of these directly affect the planning and purchasing experience. When the process is simple, there is a greater likelihood that the consumer will make the purchase. The flipside is that a clunky website can lead to frustration and lost sales.

**2. Simplify preneed planning.** Consumers today are looking to complete most, if not all, of their funeral planning online. A robust website with a variety of preneed and preplanning options is essential to helping families create the kind of service that meets their needs. A digital preneed planning tool benefits the customer and your business. Families win because they can purchase the services they need on their own time, during late-night, early-morning or weekend hours. Your funeral home wins because your team spends less time helping families plan and can allocate more time to building your business.

**3. Provide transparent pricing.** A frequent consumer complaint is that they are often surprised at what they call "hidden costs" or fees they cannot clearly understand. Our industry is moving forward in this area due to changes to the Federal Trade Commission's (FTC) Funeral Rule. But if your funeral home is not making it easy for families to view prices, you will lose sales to competitors that are – it is that simple.

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**4. Offer 24/7 access to contract documents.**

In today's interconnected online world, consumers expect to have around-the-clock access to their accounts with important service providers. Funeral directors must have the same mindset when it comes to their customers. Here is a quick example: Let's say a funeral director gets a call at 2 a.m. and must transfer a decedent into the firm's care. Understandably, the family members are unsure of any preneed arrangements or payment status. The director can then pull out the phone, search for the contract and verify that there is a preneed trust and that it is also fully funded. All of this can happen overnight, at inconvenient hours or on weekends, with no need to call the office or follow up with the family.

**Embracing Digital Storefront Options**

There is no debate about the advantages of having a user-friendly digital e-commerce platform. Firms that offer accessibility in pricing and convenience to customers – especially for families that are grieving and going through one of life's most difficult challenges – will earn trust and further positioning for long-term success. They will also comply with both existing and potential future FTC rules.

The bottom line is that it is time to invest in the online resources your customers are searching for. Your firm can benefit, both now and in the long term, by exploring the business advantages of providing an e-commerce storefront that provides to customers transparent pricing, ease of use, efficiency and enhanced preneed service and product offerings. ☰

*Bill Williams is president and CEO of Funeral Services Inc. and serves on the FSI Board of Directors. He joined the company in 2001 as vice president and was named president in 2003. Under his leadership, FSI has expanded to offer services in more than two dozen states.*

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