

Re-Engineering Your Technology

Because technology is no longer optional, Isard reveals his Technology Top 16 for all funeral homes.

Somehow, the gravitational forces of the universe ordained it so that people who are technologically adept are drawn to Cupertino, California. Unfortunately, that same force of nature has sent those who repel technology to funeral service.

In the mid-1980s, I made a presentation to a new client in Maine. Back then, I had to ship a banker's box of documents to the client's funeral home a few days in advance of our meeting in case I needed to refer to anything. At one point during this meeting, I realized I needed to see a document that I did not have in the box. I told the funeral director I could call my office and have the document "faxed" to me and asked him for his fax number.

Like many funeral home owners, this gentleman was technologically challenged and replied in his heavy New England accent, "Don't have one." When I scoffed, he politely took me to the woodshed, in this case the third-floor attic of this classic Maine property, and showed me an antique stock ticker, perfectly preserved, with its original glass dome. He pointed to it and said, "This is why I don't have a fax machine!" Alas, what was obvious to him was missed by me. He ex-

plained: "In 1924, my great-grandfather wanted to invest in stocks, and some consultant convinced him that in order to invest in stocks he needed to have a stock ticker, which he bought for some lofty price and had installed for even more money. Now, it is junk. I do not have a fax machine because when my great-grandchildren run this business, I do not want them to bring some 21st century consultant up here to see the money wasted on a fax machine!"

His disdain for technology was well enunciated. His conclusions were flawed but well thought out. I did without the document.

Jump into the time machine with me 20 years later, when I became an owner of a funeral home technology company. We built software and websites used by more than 800 funeral homes and cemeteries. I got to see firsthand how funeral homes used software, spoke to many owners who explained why they didn't use software and even more who thought that the Internet was a fad. During the three years I was an owner of this company, I saw software from the viewpoints of manufacturers, servicers and consumers.

Now, in re-engineering planning, I get

to help funeral homes embrace technology.

Technology Is Not an Option

Technology is part of every business function – from hardware, recordkeeping and communication to finance and operations, service and security. Funeral service simply must recognize that technology complements the workforce of this business.

From the early 1990s, when small businesses first used the computer, processor speed has made the biggest impact on the productivity of the equipment. Prices of computers and software have come down a great deal, and processor speed has increased almost 100 percent every six months through the late 2000s. It has now pretty much topped out; it really doesn't impact anyone if 1,000 lines of code can be computed in 0.0001 seconds or 0.0002 seconds. The speed of communication has increased as well – from the old dial-up modem, where speed was measured in kilobits/second to the current terabits/second. So, in this case indeed, technology saves time.

I recently measured the time it took to fill out/type the forms for a funeral arrangement – almost two hours and 20 minutes! Now, with technology, any half-decent typist can complete the same forms in less than 15 minutes, freeing up about two hours per funeral. If the average funeral director serves 100 families a year, that's 200 hours freed up, or about 10 percent of his or her productive work year.

The cost of data storage has come down dramatically as well. All of the computer files used for *Apollo 11* could now fit on 1 percent of a typical flash drive. Even "Cloud" offsite virtual backup costs are coming down to 25 percent of what they were a year ago.

But hardware includes more than just

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computers and tablets. Personal communications devices, e.g., smartphones and the new wrist phones, are bringing Dick Tracy and The Jetsons to life before our very eyes. There is no reason now that you can't have staff be in constant contact with you. Staffing assignments for multiple locations are easy now, too. The "white board" in every funeral home is now an albatross! The virtual white board is the future.

The use of technology with families is a key issue as well. Staffers who interact with consumers need to have their own business email address. They should be able to send documents, photos and other material to a family day or night. In no time, the paper register book will be displayed in a glass cabinet by your grandchildren, right next to the hand-held fan with the three-digit phone number printed on it.

What Every Funeral Home Needs Now
My Technology Top 16 (in no particular order):

1. A video board in the lobby featuring a 10-minute streaming video on the key points of your business.
2. A large-screen digital display for video memorial in each chapel and visitation area.
3. Management software that is not more than one version behind the most recent version.
4. Modern computers at each work station for all full-time staffers.
5. A high-speed scanner/copier/printer.
6. An electronic registration capture system.
7. Full-fledged real-time accounting systems.
8. Smartphones for each full-time staffer.
9. A fingerprint time clock for security and HR tracking.
10. A website that's up to date, with online preneed arrangement capabilities.
11. Video memorials available in the lobby for replay during visitations.
12. Video capture for services and rebroadcasts.
13. Aromatherapy.

14. Hearing-assistive devices.
15. An email service provider and a good list for mass broadcasting of emails.
16. Social media with in-house and outside support.

Now, back to my client from the 1980s, long deceased, who is looking down on his funeral home. Sir, I know what you're thinking. With your Yankee Maine mentality, you are saying, "All of these items will be obsolete within 10 years, eh!" And you are right. What is the newest of the new is replaced by the newest of the newest ever.

But rather than doing nothing knowing that technology is going to evolve, do it all and budget it to be replaced within a few years with the next new thing. Somewhere, someday, we'll probably be beaming people to funerals. I do suspect, however, that those push pin letters placed on those velvet marquees will outlive all technology! ✦

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COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

Assume every call is a **First Call** until proven otherwise. **Caller ID** information recorded on every call. Repeat the caller's name and their concerns throughout the call so they know they are being listened to and **understood**.

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