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**ICCFA Magazine
author spotlight**

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MANAGEMENT/DESIGN

The day of the huge funeral home is coming to an end. Funeral homes of the future should invest in smaller but more flexible spaces to meet the changing needs of consumers.

Why the funeral home of the future will be small

Change is inevitable; progress is optional. In order to thrive in the future, the physical footprint of your business has to be rethought and redesigned.

Today’s consumers have a pervasive need for simple, expedient and personalized funeral options. Your facility needs to be as adaptive to each family as you are.

Today’s funeral homes are generally large facilities located on expansive grounds with ample parking and garages for many automobiles. Years ago, the needs of the consumers—two-day visitations, floral tributes, all open-casketed services—dictated the need for this type of fixed-cost structure. However, as consumer preferences change, our facilities must change as well.

Today, 73 percent of global business executives say consumer behavior has changed significantly in the last three years. This includes their actions toward the funeral profession.

Today, consumers are wired and connected, and thus want their needs to be instantly met. They want services streamlined and simple. Shifts in religious affiliations have created changes to cultural norms that relate to ceremonies and rites surrounding death.

As cremation rates climb, casketed case counts decline, as does the need for storage of caskets. Technology dominates the world we live in. Using technology, you can have a virtual showroom requiring no more space than a TV monitor on a desk or wall.

Families are choosing for all services to occur on the same day and at one location. Society is transient and extended families often no longer make the journey to attend the services. They watch the video or webcast.

With the rising cremation rate, there are fewer trips to the cemetery. This fact and

same-day services all point to less space being required. The need for physical space literally diminishes.

Another example of consumer’s preferences changing funeral services is the shift in religious affiliation. A rising number of people say they are “Nones,” meaning they have no claimed spiritual affiliation. Only 44 percent of consumers feel a religious component to funerals is important.

Today, celebrants are used more than ever to conduct the service. Consumers are telling us they want something different, and we have to adapt on all fronts, including our facilities, to meet those needs.

A smaller footprint and streamlined services does not mean lower quality service. Instead of relying on the traditions of the past, funeral homes are expected to deliver personal messages, experiences, services and so much more to each family served.

Most critical for the funeral homes of the future is the need for flexible, adaptive space, space that can convert from a “chapel like” area for one service to a reception center for the next, space equipped with the latest technology, space that can be personalized to create a unique experience for each family.

Change is not coming, it is already here. The funeral industry is in the mature market state of equilibrium, which indicates little or no growth or innovation. To stay viable and grow market share, we must rethink our roles and business models.

The funeral homes of tomorrow must be able to provide consumers with simple, efficient, personalized service. In order to meet those needs, the (successful) funeral home of the future will occupy a smaller, and more importantly, a more adaptable space. □