



TECHNOLOGY

Dealing with taboos and embracing the digital age

Utilising technology can seem like a daunting task if you haven't dipped your toe into the computerised water yet.

The modern person wants to be able to have everything at the click of a button and easy-to-access information. Gone are the days where the Yellow Pages reigned supreme, the internet has now become the go-to source of knowledge and details. The directory has in fact now moved online and provides names, addresses and telephone numbers of over two million UK businesses. By using technology to your advantage, you can help gain a respectable reputation.

The funeral sector has begun to utilise technology more but what impact will it have? Peter Billingham, founder of Death Goes Digital, explains: "To ask if digital technology will change the funeral sector is like asking if Brexit will change Europe. We know the answer is yes. The hard part is knowing how.

"Pay attention to disruptive technologies. These are the forces upending the world,' said the futurist, Jason Silva. Are these disruptive technological forces now upending the funeral sector? Without a doubt, yes. Digital disruption has changed forever the way people deal with the death of a loved one. The vocal taboos around death are no longer silent. The conversation online around death is more open, more accessible and that can only be beneficial to us all.

"Today when you want information about something in life, you pick up a

"Good, bad or indifferent, if you are not investing in new technology, you are going to be left behind."

Philip Green, chairman of the Arcadia Group

mobile phone and search the internet. Why should it be any different when you need information about death? Fresh approaches to deal with death, funerals, grief and loss launch across the web weekly impacting the funeral sector. The creativity and ingenuity are endless. Modern funeral planning businesses or online services offering direct cremation, for example. Alternatively, there are now numerous apps to store your final wishes and digital memorials. Some will fall by the wayside, but some will grow and prosper. Which of these will last?

"It is impossible to predict how the future and the pace of this change will affect the funeral sector. All we know is that it will. The wise action is to pay attention to these disruptive technologies. Then to change and adapt your funeral business with them. That is what I am trying to do.

"I am interested in using technology as a celebrant to serve funeral directors better. A successful celebrant builds trustworthy, reliable and supportive relationships with funeral directors. One technology I use to help in that process is online scheduling – You Can Book.Me (<https://youcanbook.me/>).

"It is not always possible to answer a funeral director's phone call seeking

your availability. That can sometimes be frustrating when needing to finalise details quickly with a family. What if there was a way they could know if you were free and book that time without contacting you? This simple online scheduling tool does that. I understand, of course, that not every funeral arranger will use this service. For those who do, however, this technology can save time and improve the service I can offer as a celebrant.

"The funeral sector will continue to change through digital disruption. This shift in our industry is exciting news. Those funeral businesses who pay attention to these upending forces will see many opportunities arise. There will be new and different ways to serve our families dealing with the greatest disruption of all, the death of loved one. Will you be one of them?" ■

Peter Billingham is a celebrant in Bromsgrove and the surrounding areas of Worcestershire. Peter is the founder of Death Goes Digital, a consultancy guiding the bereavement industry to significant impact online. He is an author and podcaster. You can find out more about his work at www.deathgoesdigital.com