

Technology and Changing Demographics Driving the Future

by Tanya Scotece, PhD, LFD

WE HAVE ALL SEEN AND HEARD THE STATISTICS; cremations are on the rise, attendance at services is on the decline, full-service funerals and memorials are being replaced with social gatherings of remembrance, and margins are being squeezed. Why?

Some say it's because of the decline of organized religion. Others believe it may just be a shift in venue. A study of U.S. Census Bureau and U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data provides other clues. These data show that Americans move more than 11 times in their lives and change jobs just as many times.

In fact, at any given time, more than 10 percent of the U.S. population is in the process of moving. So, it may not be solely due to a decline in organized religion, or that people don't want to go to funerals and memorials—it may simply be that people can't be there in person.

Elevating the Role of Funeral Directors

This new reality provides an opportunity for funeral homes and the directors who service their local communities to stem the tide in the decline of services and margins by shifting their primary focus from transportation, paperwork, and vanilla service details to helping loved ones through the grieving process—regardless of where in the world they live or the circumstances preventing them from attending the service.

Dr. Alan Wolfelt of the Center for Loss and Life Transition reminds us why funerals are important:

People who take the time and make the effort to create meaningful funeral arrangements when someone loved dies often end up making new arrangements in their own lives. They remember and



reconnect with what is most meaningful to them in life. They strengthen bonds with family members and friends. They emerge changed, more authentic, and purposeful. The best funerals remind us how we should live.

By shifting the funeral director's focus toward helping loved ones in their darkest hours, regardless of whether they can be at the service in person, it elevates the value and importance of the funeral director's role in helping transition loved ones from grief to healing.

Given that families and communities are now widely dispersed, this focus can no longer be local. It must become global. Without this shift, as reported in *The Economist* last summer, funeral service professionals will be competing on price for smaller and smaller pieces of a pie that is decreasing in importance to consumers.

Finding a way to allow families to attend remotely could be the solution to this ever-growing challenge.

Incorporating Remote Attendance

As a professor of Mortuary Science at Miami-Dade, I interact daily with the funeral directors of the future and am always on the lookout for tools and resources I believe will make them more successful and our industry stronger.

I was first introduced to TribuCast™ at the American Board of Funeral Service Education conference in Miami in the spring of 2019

where I met TribuCast co-founder Bruce Likly. In the past, I had only been privy to webcams that were very difficult for funeral homes to assimilate into their practice, so I was intrigued by this new product and their intense focus on helping families and communities grieve more effectively regardless of where they live or what their circumstances were when a loved one passes away.

What amazed me the most during the demonstration was how simple it would be for funeral homes to use and how helpful it would be for today's families.

Owen Chester, student: "I liked TribuCast because of the computer-age we live in; it takes funeral services and memorials to the next level."



I was thrilled to hear and see the interaction students had with the product and Bruce’s demonstration. Students quickly grasped the concept, its benefits, how to use it, and how families can leverage it.

Having spent more than 12 years in the industry, I am aware of the growing pressures on our livelihood and that most funeral directors have so much to do during a service that the last thing they want to worry about is adding the complexity of live streaming or webcasting.

However, after the TribuCast demonstration, I was really impressed with how easy it is to use, even for a person without a technical background. TribuCast is somewhat like a final message video, but it is created in-house by the funeral director or staff on an iPhone or iPad.

Mariana Scheetz, student: “No one should have to feel bad about not being there for the ones they love in a time of need. TribuCast makes it possible.”

It easily incorporates touching details about the life being celebrated (called Interactive Touchpoints™) to give families unique opportunities to remember and reconnect regardless of their location or life circumstances. It is not cumbersome, is super portable, and is a simple, hands-on tool that is easy to set up.

I invited Bruce to do a virtual demonstration of TribuCast in my classroom because I felt that it was important for my students to learn about this technology. Most funeral home owners, managers, and directors are hesitant about products like this because of the complexity and impersonal nature of earlier webcam offerings.

Patrick Paul, student: “This would be especially good for soldiers in different parts of the world, who cannot attend the funeral.”

Teaching a classroom of upcoming funeral directors can be challenging given all the information they have to absorb, the distractions available to them, their propensity to jump quickly between topics, and their desire to grasp concepts quickly so they

aren’t bogged down. All this makes teaching complex and intricate materials more challenging—especially in a group environment and when done over a Google Hangout video conference call as this class was.

I was thrilled to hear and see the interaction students had with the product and Bruce’s demonstration. Students quickly grasped the concept, its benefits, how to use it, and how families can leverage it.

Jhanelle A. Hayman, student: “As an international student, I was fascinated thinking about ... TribuCast ... allowing an interactive way for those overseas to observe the funeral, and in doing so, aid in the grieving process.”

I would strongly urge funeral directors to look at TribuCast™. It can help elevate their role in helping today’s families grieve more effectively, makes a very nice keepsake and vital family memento for later viewing, and can generate considerable revenue for funeral homes.

The day of the service can be overwhelming for immediate family members. It would be very nice for them to have an enduring tribute like this to watch in the comfort of their homes at their convenience.

In addition, since many people are seeking out 23andMe and ancestry.com to learn more about their family histories, this would add to their resources. For example, a young grandchild could have a live recording of a grandparent included as one of the interactive touchpoints to look back on later in life.

Deondre Terry, student: “With most programs you would need a more high-end camera but with TribuCast all you need is a mobile device.”

All in all, I think TribuCast™ and remote attendance capabilities are wonderful resources for both funeral homes and

families, and it is the next step in the types of services we need to be offering to survive and prosper. ☑



Tanya Scotece, PhD, LFD, is a professor in the Funeral Service Education program at Miami Dade College. After nearly 20 years, she decided to change careers and attended mortuary school, graduating in 2005. She

then obtained a bachelor’s degree in criminal justice and a master’s in criminal forensics followed by a PhD in adult education from the University of South Florida. Tanya is a licensed funeral director and embalmer, a licensed pre-need insurance agent, and a trained funeral celebrant through the ICCFA University College of 21st Century Funeral Services. She was chosen valedictorian upon graduation from ICCFAU in 2011. Her students contributed to this article: Owen Chester, Hannah Weiss, Sandra Pierre, Deondre Terry, Mariana Scheetz, Rina Duvigneaud, Jhanelle A. Hayman, Mikara Bell, Patrick Paul, DaNeil Christopher, Kaylah Brooks, and Zaira Garcia. She can be reached at tscotece@mdc.edu.

2020 ICGFA Annual Convention & Expo
Visit TribuCast
(2019 KIP Award Honorable Mention) at Booth 1093

EXHIBIT HALL HOURS:

Monday, March 30: 4:00 pm–7:00 pm
Tuesday, March 31: 12:00 pm–5:00 pm
Wednesday, April 1: 10:00 am–1:00 pm