



The Changing Face of **FUNERAL SERVICES**

OPTIONS ARE THE KEY TO PROVIDING CUSTOMER SERVICE.

the funeral industry needs more freedom to meet consumer needs, says longtime director, Tom Brownjohn, principal of TR Brownjohn Memorial Home, (Katoomba, Springwood, and Lithgow).

Tom has been helping families deal with death, grief, and final goodbyes for almost 20 years. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Tom is the first generation in the business so he is not bound to any sacrosanct traditions. He has seen many changes in the practice, particularly over the last decade.

He, therefore, has established a funeral home that provides what he calls “A Memorial Service.” The Memorial Service is supported by a unique Concierge Service which provides the friends and family with a broad range of personalised services for the grieving to help remember their Loved One in the most respectful and auspicious manner.

Australia’s funeral industry is changing as Australians’ spiritual practices and attitudes to death change.

While the future is impossible to fully predict, these changes give a clear indication of how Australian funerals will look in the near future. When it comes to the tone and style of funerals, many Australians now overwhelmingly prefer relaxed and reflective ceremonies rather than solemn, serious affairs.

This attitude undoubtedly will affect the funerals of the future regardless of the methods or technologies involved.

We have seen technological advances, increasingly dispersed families, financial realities, changing spiritual beliefs, cultural attitudes, and environmental awareness which have all contributed to the decline of the traditional funeral.

Tom has said, “What’s happened in the last 10 years is that not only are the cultures changing,

but the entire way we do business is changing. The baby boomers have been abandoning many of the traditions that have held sway for decades”

For these many decades, traditional funerals have consisted of the viewing of the deceased, a funeral service, a cemetery burial or cremation, and reception.

But many funerals these days tend to be more personalised, with social media memorials, digital slideshows, and video or musical tributes. Many, if not most, employ non-denominational celebrants and focus, not on the grief from the deceased’s passing but on a memorialisation of the accomplishments and the love in the deceased’s life. This changes the cries of sorrow to the tears of joy and love.

In light of the above, Mr Brownjohn has been the first principal of a funeral home in Australia to officially designate his business “A Memorial Home” and to concentrate his efforts on providing a living memorial to the deceased. These “Celebrations of Life” have become popular because more people are taking control of their funeral arrangements, which allows them to plan the memorial ceremony exactly as they see fit.

These ceremonies or “Celebrations of Life” help the bereaved meet their mourning needs so that, ultimately, they can reconcile their grief and go on to find continued meaning in life and living.

It is essential that funeral directors educate families about the purposes of funerals and help them craft ceremonies that will help set them on a path to healthy mourning.

Families need help understanding that funerals are essential rites of passage, and true love never dies but is merely transformed into something more profound.

In recent years, funerals have started to become less exclusively sombre affairs, with people

increasingly choosing a “Celebration of Life” over a traditional funeral.

You may have attended quite a few of these ceremonies already, as more and more families request them.

These “Celebrations of Life” allow for a variety of personalised touches, such as requesting attendees to wear the deceased’s favourite colour or playing their favourite songs as opposed to more traditional music.

Australians don’t want the same old wine in the same old bottle. There’s a huge movement to redefine the funeral as one of life’s many celebrations.

It is the small independent funeral director who is leading this transformation. In Australia, as in many other parts of the world, the mortuary business is controlled by 2 or 3 publicly traded companies whose vested interest is in maximising profits and dividends for the shareholder.

The independent Memorial Home is geared in the other direction: providing the client with a service and a reception that best captures the journey of the deceased.

There’s no doubt that funerals are difficult, but personalised touches - such as eulogies delivered by close friends and family, and memorial websites - can help with the grieving process.

It is clear that the private or family-owned businesses offer a range of personalised, intimate, and affordable services that best meet the desires of the newer generations. Many times in history, cemeteries, as a public area, were used for family outings and picnics and not as an area to be avoided.

Perhaps the wheel has turned again and cemeteries need to become a family destination for the living.