

Your building is not the moat. Your building is the castle.

Constructing a Moat Around Your Funeral Home

Seven layers that protect the castle.

GATES

Win-Calls-Now
Checkout

WALLS

Visibility
Reputation

DEPTH

Content
List
Backlog

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The castle, and the moat around it

Most funeral homes have spent decades building something worth protecting. The people, the building, the family name, the care, the relationships and the reputation. This framework does not dismiss any of that. It asks what protects it.

The Castle

Your people. Your facility. Your care. Your reputation. Your history.

These are good answers, and they describe what owners have spent a career building. But they do not yet tell you what stops a competitor from reaching the castle.

The Moat

The moat is not simply another thing you are good at. It is the protective layer around the business.

It should be difficult to reproduce. And the best moats become stronger the longer you operate them.

THE DURABILITY TEST

Could a competent, motivated competitor reproduce this within roughly six months?

Yes = Head start. Protect it while you have it, but do not build your strategy around it.

No, and it compounds = Moat.

URGENCY IS NOT DURABILITY

Gates

High urgency · Low durability

Walls

High urgency · High durability

Depth

Low urgency · High durability

Intentionally empty

Low urgency · Low durability

A flat list of seven would suggest every layer is equally durable. They are not. Some deserve attention because they hurt right now. Others deserve attention because competitors cannot easily reproduce them. Nothing in the framework is both low urgency and low durability, because that would be filler.

Gates: close them

Low durability. High urgency. A competitor can close the same gate quickly, so a Gate is not a durable moat. But if your Gate is open, everything upstream leaks through it. These are the fastest and often cheapest areas to fix.

1. Win-Calls-Now

Visibility earns the call. Win-Calls-Now decides whether you keep it.

This is the share of inbound contacts that reach a person or capable system able to help. After-hours calls. Overflow during a service. Price-shopper calls. Forms. Chat. The leak is often invisible because nobody produces a monthly report showing the calls that disappeared.

Do this week: call your own after-hours number at nine at night and experience the entire journey as a family would.

2. Checkout

Can a family begin, select and pay when they are ready?

Checkout is owner-facing language. The family experiences care. The owner sees the operational system behind it. A callback form is not the same thing as Checkout. The highest score means the family can select and pay online and the file reaches the team automatically. Some families want to talk. Others want to begin at eleven at night. The strategy should serve both.

Do this week: walk your own online arrangement path end to end and note the exact step where it stops short of a completed transaction.

WATCH FOR

The most common mistake is fixing the Gates and stopping. Closing a Gate can produce a quick gain, but a competitor can close theirs just as fast. Build Walls and Depth behind the gain.

Walls: hold them

High durability. High urgency. If a family cannot find you, nothing downstream gets a chance. If they find you but cannot see current evidence that other families trust you, the same problem appears. Walls compound, but they also require continuous maintenance.

3. Visibility

Are you named when a family goes looking? Search. Maps. Answer engines.

Visibility is no longer only about ranking in a list. Increasingly, families receive summarized answers. Being one of two or three firms named inside an answer is different from ranking seventh on a page. Do not assume your historical market position automatically appears inside a modern answer.

Do this week: ask several AI engines who they recommend in your city and write down the order.

4. Reputation

Volume. Recency. Response. Not just stars.

Almost every funeral home has a strong star rating, which makes stars alone a weak differentiator. The stronger questions are how many reviews are arriving, how recently, and whether the firm responds. Reputation also strengthens Visibility. That interlock is important.

Do this week: count the reviews you received in the last 90 days and compare that number to the firm ahead of you.

THE INTERLOCK

Reputation feeds Visibility. Visibility feeds Calls. Calls create Content. Content feeds Visibility.

A market leader is difficult to displace because the layers reinforce one another. A single moat is a target. Interlocking layers are the goal.

Depth: build it

High durability. Low urgency. Nothing usually breaks tomorrow when you neglect Depth, which is exactly why firms neglect it. These layers take years, and that is why a competitor cannot buy their way into the same position next quarter.

5. Content

Every service can create a lasting asset. Obituaries. Articles. FAQs.

A funeral home performing three hundred services a year has three hundred opportunities to create lasting digital assets from work already being done. The question is whether those assets accumulate on the firm's own domain or disappear elsewhere. Blog content and FAQs broaden the range of questions a funeral home can answer. The advantage compounds mechanically.

6. List

People you can reach without paying a platform. Past families. Pre-need prospects. Community contacts.

The List is weaker in funeral service than in industries with frequent repeat purchase. Its strength comes from referral, long-term presence and pre-need. The important distinction is owned attention versus rented attention. A list that never receives communication is not much of an asset.

7. Backlog

Pre-need contracts written, funded and held. The strongest layer.

Backlog means contracted work not yet delivered. It does not mean work you are behind on. This layer is different because it removes calls from the future market. Every other layer helps you win a call that remains available. Backlog takes the call off the board. The vulnerability is concentration: if production depends entirely on one person, the system may be more fragile than it appears.

SEQUENCE

Close the Gates. Hold the Walls. Build Depth. Do it in that order, and do not stop after the first one.

WHY DEPTH WINS

Content, List and Backlog are easy to neglect and difficult for a competitor to reproduce quickly.

SCORE YOUR FIRM

The scorecard

Score each layer 0 to 3. Do not overthink it. You are looking for the shape.

0 Does not exist

1 Exists, nobody owns it

2 Running, inconsistent

3 Systematic, measured, improving

TIER	LAYER	0	1	2	3
GATES	Win-Calls-Now	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Checkout	☐	☐	☐	☐
WALLS	Visibility	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Reputation	☐	☐	☐	☐
DEPTH	Content	☐	☐	☐	☐
	List	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Backlog	☐	☐	☐	☐

Gates ____ / 6

Walls ____ / 6

Depth ____ / 9

The total of 21 matters less than the three separate numbers. A single total can hide the most important problem.

READ THE SHAPE

Low Gates, strong Walls and Depth. An open gate. You are earning the call and losing it.

Strong Gates, low Walls and Depth. A temporary advantage with nothing durable behind it.

Strong Gates and Walls, low Depth. Well run but undefended.

Strong across all three. A multi-layer moat.

YOUR NEXT 90 DAYS

Pick two layers. Not seven.

Choose the two layers with the greatest combination of exposure and opportunity. Assign each one to a named person. Attach a number. Then rescore in 90 days.

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