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## Can't attend a funeral? No problem!

By Les Goldberg

Normally, when someone dies, immediate family members find ways to make arrangements to attend the funeral services. But not all the family members and friends, despite their best intentions, can make the journey for a variety of reasons that involve scheduling conflicts, illness, travel expense or overseas military service.

Until recently, their options were limited to written letters, sympathy greeting cards or phone calls.

Enter the world of technology. Thanks to the Internet, digital cameras and video recorders (DVDs), funeral services now can be recorded or broadcast live to anywhere in the world. Whether a soldier stationed in the Middle East, a sailor deployed on a ship in the South Pacific, or an elderly relative unable to travel, they can observe the services and pay their respects wherever there is a computer with online access and/or a DVD disk drive.

According to Neil O'Conner, co-owner of O'Conner Mortuary in Laguna Hills, "funeral webcasting is rapidly becoming a common



option that many families are choosing. We record the entire service and make it available for family members and friends to 'log in' for live viewing, store it online for later access, or send a digital disk to whoever requests it."

O'Conner, whose family has been in the funeral business for more than 75 years, says his company is one of the first mortuaries

memorial services.

More and more funeral homes, cemeteries and funeral associations are establishing Internet presence through websites, search engine optimization (SEO), social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn and others), public relations and online advertising.

Funeral directors say better



to join the ranks of digital

technology and cheaper equipment have prompted more funeral homes to offer webcasting and videotaping services nationwide.

"It's also been more appealing as the Internet has become part of everyday life for many Americans domestically and abroad," said Ellery Bowker, president of North Carolina-based Director's Advantage, which specializes in technological products for the funeral.

The use of funeral webcasting is an emerging trend but hasn't been tracked statistically, though some companies have offered those services for years, said Jessica Koth, a spokeswoman for the National Funeral Directors Association.

Webcasting companies are also jumping in, offering packages to funeral homes that include tripods, cameras with microphones, and cables and cords, either for lease or purchase outright. Some ceremonies can even be webcast to iPods.

The Jenkins-Soffe Funeral Chapels and Cremation Centre in suburban Salt

Lake City began offering funeral webcasts about a decade ago as a way to include overseas missionaries from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in their relatives' funerals, owner Kurt Soffe said.

The centre's funeral packages, which include webcasting, video and audio recording, typically cost about \$300 more than other packages. About one in every 50 funerals at the



centre opts for the multimedia, he said.

"I think that it will become much more popular in the years ahead - much more popular in the sense that more funeral homes will offer it," Soffe said. "Whether more families will select it and choose it, I don't know, because there is really no substitute for coming together as a family."