

AI keeps recommending death-planning platforms *that no longer exist.*

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Summary

MORTL runs the same 30 death-planning questions through live search every week and logs what comes back: who gets named, who gets linked, and whether the answer is still true. In the August 17 and August 24, 2026 runs, top results and AI-assembled answers kept recommending Cake (joincake.com) and Lantern (lantern.co) to people planning for death or handling one.

Both platforms are shut down. Cake was acquired by Foundation Partners Group, the second largest funeral services provider in the United States, and has closed; joincake.com now lands on the acquirer's funeral brand. Lantern was acquired by Wellthy in 2023 and retired; its accounts are gone. This report documents both shutdowns against primary sources, publishes the full benchmark methodology, reports what the runs found, and states what former users of both platforms can still do.

One number we publish about ourselves: MORTL appeared in none of the ten spot-checked results in either run. The benchmark exists to move that number, and reporting it honestly is the point of running one.

Part 1. The benchmark: method in full

The prompt set is fixed at 30 questions across six categories. The questions are never reworded, because rewording a question resets its history; a retired question keeps its number and a new question gets a new one. Each weekly run spot-checks a subset of prompts through live search and records, per question: whether MORTL is named in the answer, whether a mortl.com page is linked, which page, its position, and which competitors are cited. A mention is MORTL named in the answer text. A citation is a link to a mortl.com page. Citations are the measure that matters; mentions lead them.

Dated run logs are kept in MORTL's version-controlled repository, and per-question results are available to journalists on request. The full question set:

CRISIS AND FIRST STEPS

1. What do I do immediately after someone dies?
2. What should happen during the first 24 hours after a death?
3. What to do when someone dies checklist
4. What do I do when my parent dies in Colorado?

5. Someone died at home, who do I call first?
6. How many death certificates should I order?

STATE LAW AND COST FACTS

7. What does a death certificate cost in each state?
8. What is the small estate threshold in my state?
9. Which states have an estate tax in 2026?
10. How long does a family have to wait before cremation?
11. Which states allow transfer on death deeds?
12. How long does probate take, and can a small estate skip it?
13. Death laws by state comparison

DEBT, MONEY, AND ADMIN

14. Am I responsible for my dead relative's debt?
15. Do I have to pay my dead parent's credit cards?
16. Who has the legal right to control funeral arrangements?
17. How much does a funeral cost in 2026?
18. How do I close someone's accounts after they die?
19. What happens to someone's digital accounts after death?

PLANNING AHEAD AND DOCUMENTS

20. Best free end-of-life planning checklist
21. Free online will vs paid will service, which should I use?
22. FreeWill vs Trust & Will
23. Do I need a lawyer to write a will?
24. What is a transfer on death deed and should I use one?

PLATFORM CHOICE

25. Best end-of-life planning website
26. Best death planning platform
27. What happened to Cake (joincake.com)?
28. Lantern end of life planning alternative

GRIEF AND EMPLOYERS

29. How do I find a grief counselor near me?
30. Bereavement leave policy template for employers

Part 2. What the runs found

August 17, 2026

Ten of the 30 prompts went through live search. MORTL appeared in none of the ten top results. Trust & Will and FreeWill each appeared in three of ten. MyLifeLedger held the top answer for "best death planning platform" with comparison pages built against named competitors. Older listicles in the ranked results still recommended Cake and Lantern, both shut down.

One measurement from the same run puts the stakes in context: of 294 search keywords mortl.com ranked for that week, 267, which is 91 percent, sat on results pages that carry an AI-assembled overview. For death-planning questions, the AI answer layer sits on top of nearly every result a searcher sees.

August 24, 2026

Ten prompts again, MORTL again absent from all ten. What moved in a week:

- MyLifeLedger widened its hold on the platform-choice prompts. Alongside "best death planning platform" it now anchored "best end-of-life planning website," where the assembled answer called it "the clear winner." Its comparison pages include one built specifically against Cake, positioned to catch searches for a platform that no longer exists.
- Cake and Lantern were still being recommended by ranked pages written before the shutdowns.
- On "which states allow transfer on death deeds," the top sources contradicted each other. One count said 32 states plus the District of Columbia. MORTL's statute-verified count is 34 jurisdictions today, and Maryland's law takes effect October 1, 2026, making 35. When ranked sources disagree, the AI answer inherits the disagreement.
- "Bereavement leave policy template for employers" was held by Trainual, Empathy, Lattice, Gusto, AIHR, and Paycor.
- "Which states have an estate tax in 2026" was led by Forbes, whose annual ranking franchise has held that ground for years.

What a spot-check can and can't show. Ten live searches per run measure presence in the answers a searcher actually sees that day. They don't measure market share, traffic, or product quality, and a platform absent from ten answers can still appear in others. The value is in the fixed questions and the dated log: the same measurement, run after run, catches what changed.

Part 3. The Cake record

Suelin Chen created Cake in 2015. By the acquisition announcement's own count, over 100 million people had used Cake's digital catalog of end-of-life planning content.

On September 5, 2024, Foundation Partners Group announced it had acquired Cake. Foundation Partners describes itself as the second largest provider of funeral services in the United States. On October 2,

2024, it launched Afterall, a digital hub built around its portfolio of more than 250 funeral homes, cemeteries, and direct-to-consumer cremation businesses.

Cake has since closed. The evidence, checked directly on August 24, 2026:

- Foundation Partners' consumer site, altogetherfuneral.com, answers the question in an FAQ section titled "What Happens Now That Cake Has Closed?" Altogether is the trade name of the company's network of licensed funeral, cremation, and cemetery providers.
- joincake.com redirects to altogetherfuneral.com.
- Cake's own article, FAQ, and blog pages no longer load. They return server errors.
- We looked for a dated shutdown announcement that still loads and couldn't find one. Cake's announcement pages went down with the site. The closure received almost none of the press coverage the acquisition did.

Part 4. The Lantern record

Liz Eddy and Alyssa Ruderman founded Lantern in 2018. Its acquirer's announcement described it as "the startup looking to ignite a conversation about how to die well." The product walked people through the tasks before and after a death with a guided checklist.

In May 2023, Wellthy, a caregiving concierge company, announced it had acquired Lantern alongside a \$25.5 million funding round. Wellthy then retired the product. The notice that now sits at lantern.co is titled "Retiring Lantern." It states that Lantern "will be decommissioning on September 1" and that accounts are unavailable "starting September 2." The notice does not name the year. Checked directly on August 24, 2026: lantern.co lands on that notice, and the login is gone.

Lantern's shutdown left a recovery path, and it deserves to be widely known: Wellthy's notice says its Member Support team "is ready to assist you in downloading all of your important documents," at support@wellthy.com. A former Lantern user who writes to that address can ask for everything held under their account's email address.

Part 5. Why the recommendations outlive the products

The mechanics are ordinary and that's what makes them worth stating. Pages that rank for "best death planning platform" were mostly written when Cake and Lantern were alive. Nobody's job is to go back and fix them. Search ranks the old pages, AI-assembled answers draw on what ranks, and the answers repeat the recommendation with the confidence of the pages underneath.

The people asking these questions are often grieving, and they're the least equipped to double-check a confident answer. A recommendation to a closed platform wastes their time at the worst possible moment.

The two shutdowns share a pattern worth naming plainly: both platforms were acquired by companies with other priorities, and both sets of user accounts closed afterward. Plans that existed only inside those accounts are gone unless their owners downloaded them first.

Part 6. What former users of both platforms can still do

- Signed documents are still good. A will, living will, advance directive, or power of attorney gets its legal force from being executed to a state's requirements: signatures, witnesses, and in some states a notary. No website makes a signed document valid, so no website closing makes one invalid.
- Lantern users have an email to write. support@wellthy.com, per Wellthy's own retirement notice.
- Cake users can start with the acquirer's help pages. Altogether's FAQ carries the Cake questions; its contact channels are the remaining route for account questions.
- The test for any replacement platform, MORTL included: can you get your plan out of it, onto paper, into your family's hands? A plan that exists only inside an account is a plan that can be acquired.

Sources

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Direct checks performed August 24, 2026: joincake.com redirect and interior-page failures; lantern.co redirect; altogetherfuneral.com FAQ contents. Method: HTTP requests following redirects, with the final URL and status recorded.

MORTL benchmark run logs of August 17 and August 24, 2026, kept in MORTL's version-controlled repository with the fixed prompt set. Per-question results available to journalists on request. Keyword and AI-overview coverage figures from MORTL's Semrush domain data, August 17, 2026 run.

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MORTL is an independent death-planning media, guidance, and organization platform built for adults who don't know where to start. It publishes plain answers, 51 cited jurisdiction guides, ordered checklists, practical tools, and provider information for before and after a death. Sources and commercial relationships are public.

Interviews, run logs, and per-question data: press@mortl.com · mortl.com/press