

Social Media: You Can't Take It with You



Ben Franklin stated, “In this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes,” but in today’s world, what you leave on social media after you die will certainly define your legacy for generations.

Many people make preparations for death through estate planning and creating a last will and testament, but do you consider your digital assets in these preparations? Digital assets are defined as images, multimedia, and text content files. These are the files you have created and saved on your computer or mobile phone.

We live in a society where 74 percent of all adult Internet users connect to one or more social networking sites, according to the 2013 Pew Research Internet Project. On these social networking sites, we share our digital assets with our network of followers.

Upon your death, what will happen to your social media accounts and all of the content you have shared over your lifetime? This is a serious question all generations must now consider and discuss with loved ones.

Social media platforms give you options on what can be done with accounts when the owner dies. Let’s look at the options for the five most popular social media sites used by American adults: Facebook, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Twitter, and Instagram.

Facebook

Facebook provides users with the option to determine how they would like to leave their account upon their death.

Facebook offers a feature called the **legacy contact**. This feature allows users to select a person to manage their Facebook account upon their death. This person will be able to notify Facebook of your passing and memorialize your account. The legacy contact will be able to write a post on the top of your Facebook wall to notify your followers of your passing or arrangements. The legacy contact will also be able to respond to pending friend requests and change your profile and cover pictures. You can give a legacy contact permission to download all of your pictures, wall posts, and profile information from your account. A legacy contact will not have the ability to login as you on your Facebook account or view your private messages. The legacy contact setting also gives you the option of choosing to permanently delete your account when you die. You can decide now if you want to memorialize your Facebook account or have it permanently deleted upon your death through your legacy contact.

A **memorialized account** will add the word “remembering” above your name to let Facebook friends know this

a memorialized account. A Facebook account will remain how an individual left it before his or her death. All pictures and previous posts will remain on the account. The privacy settings of the account will determine if friends can still post or share content to the individual’s timeline. Friends will be able to send direct messages to the memorialized account. Facebook does not suggest a memorialized account as a friend or send birthday reminders for the individual.

If a loved one has died and did not identify a legacy contact in his or her settings, then a family member or executor of a will can request Facebook to memorialize or remove a Facebook account. Facebook requires proof of death via a link to an online obituary or similar documentation. There are [forms](#) located on Facebook to memorialize or remove an account.

To set up your legacy contact, login to your Facebook account and select **settings**, then **security**. You will see the option at the very bottom to select your legacy contact and choose if you want have your account deleted upon your death. [Directions are available](#) from Facebook on how to set up a Facebook legacy contact online.

LinkedIn

LinkedIn allows anyone to report a profile of a person who has passed away. You must complete an online [form](#) and provide a link to the online obituary. You will have to provide personal information about the individual such as email address, date of death, last employer, and so forth.

Pinterest

Pinterest allows a family member or loved one to deactivate the account of a person who has died. To deactivate an account on Pinterest, an email must be sent to care@pinterest.com. The following information must be included in this email: full name of the person requesting to deactivate the account, full name and email address of the deceased person’s account, link to the Pinterest account of the deceased, documentation of death, and the relationship between the person making the request and the account of the deceased. Specific [directions](#) for deactivating an account are available from Pinterest.

Twitter

Twitter will work with an authorized person to remove the Twitter account of a loved one. An immediate family member or executor of the estate can request that an account be removed by completing an online [form](#). Upon receiving the request, Twitter will then communicate via

email with the individual requesting the account be removed. The person will have to provide information about the deceased, a copy of their photo ID, and the deceased's death certificate. Twitter will not provide account access to anyone regardless of relationship to the deceased.

Instagram

Like Facebook, Instagram gives you the option to memorialize or delete an account. Again, when memorializing an account, no one can login to the account. The settings of the account will remain the same and will determine what information friends or the public can view. All of the posts made by the deceased will remain available for viewing. Anyone will be able to send direct photos or videos to the memorialized account. Instagram will not allow the memorialized account to appear in searches on the platform.

To memorialize or remove an Instagram account, proof of death will be required. Instagram requires the following information: deceased person's birth and death certificates, proof of authority under local law to represent the deceased person, and an obituary. To request to memorialize or remove an account, you will have to fill out an online [form](#).

Another Option

When requesting to remove or delete the account of a loved one, there is no guarantee this action will be undertaken in a timely manner. You will have to wait on the social media platforms to notify you the request has been completed. You do not have direct access to an individual who works with the company to ensure this action is completed.

What does all of this really mean when you are creating a will? Determine how you want to leave your social media accounts and who you would like to be the executor of your digital assets. Leave this person with the ability to access your passwords and make your last wishes regarding your social media accounts possible. You can decide before your death how you would like to leave your online legacy. We are advised to keep our passwords protected, but this is one case where you will want to consider leaving access with a trusted person.

You do not have to directly give a person access to your passwords while you are still alive. There are multiple password protection companies that will safeguard your passwords until your death. Leave your executor with the contact information of the company that stores your passwords. Upon your death, the executor will be required to provide your death certificate and a lawful document stating they can have access to your passwords. These password protection companies do charge a minimal fee.

An option to avoid paying a yearly fee for this service is to keep your passwords under lock and key and leave directions to with your executor. If your loved ones or an executor have access to your passwords, they can login and delete your accounts without having to request to remove an account through the social media site. This will make the process of removing your social media accounts less stressful on your loved ones and ensure your account is removed. If you choose to memorialize your account, leave specific directions in your last will and testament.

The important issue is to decide what you want your legacy to be on social media and how you will fulfill this through your last will and testament.

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Information Sheet 2011 (POD-01-16)

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Produced by Agricultural Communications.

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Extension Service of Mississippi State University, cooperating with U.S. Department of Agriculture. Published in furtherance of Acts of Congress, May 8 and June 30, 1914. GARY B. JACKSON, Director