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Handling Social Media and Email Following The Death of a Loved One

By Amber Rodriguez

As if there is not enough to deal with when you have lost a loved one, there is now email and social media issues to address. Dealing with a loss is overwhelming. We hope these ideas and suggestions will help make handling social media and email a bit easier.

MAKE IT EASIER FOR THOSE YOU LEAVE BEHIND: PUT A PLAN IN PLACE NOW

First, it is helpful to remember that estate planning is not just for the deceased; it is a wonderful way to give guidance and instructions to those you leave behind. With that in mind, instructions for handling email and social media can be included in your Trust or Will. For example, if you do not want your email or social media account accessed after your death, you should indicate so in your Trust or Will. If you want to assist those you leave behind with accessing your various electronic accounts, you should leave account information (location, username, and password) to assist them. You can also indicate how you want each account handled or just leave those decisions to your Trustee or Executor. Either way, providing some guidance and information in your Trust and Will can help those you will leave behind.

This being said, most people will likely overlook this component of their estate plan. If you are an agent under a power of attorney, an executor, or a trustee, how can you access and manage electronic accounts if the decedent has not left you the information needed to do so? This can be a frustrating process, but we have a few helpful hints to assist you.

Facebook:

Facebook has a variety of options for handling the death of a user. Some people prefer to leave the account open for a while to memorialize the decedent. You can do so by submitting the form found at www.facebook.com/help/contact.php?show_form=deceased. The account will be frozen and new friend requests will not be allowed.

If you do not want the account to be left open for memorialization, you can have the account removed. You must provide Facebook with proof of your authority (a copy of the Will nominating you as Executor, for example) and a copy of the death certificate. You can find more information on how to notify Facebook, and close the account, at <http://www.facebook.com/help/search/?query=death+#!/help/265593773453448>. Once the information is received by Facebook, the request will be investigated and removed.

It is important to remember that if the decedent has not left you their Facebook username and password, Facebook is unlikely to allow you access to the content of the decedent's page.

LinkedIn:

For LinkedIn, you can notify their customer service department by filling out a form. Full instructions can be found at https://help.linkedin.com/app/answers/detail/a_id/2842.

Twitter:

Twitter allows loved ones the option to delete the Twitter account of the deceased. It is not, however, a simple process. You can find instructions at <https://support.twitter.com/groups/33-report-a-violation/topics/148-policy-information/articles/87894-how-to-contact-twitter-about-a-deceased-user>.

MySpace:

MySpace (do people still use MySpace?) will only remove or preserve the profile of a deceased user at the request of the next of kin (mother, father, spouse, legally registered domestic partner, son, or daughter) or at the request of the executor of estate. As with Facebook, they are unlikely to allow you to access the content of the decedent's page. Follow these steps for MySpace:

1. Go to <http://www.myspace.com/help?p=/contact> to contact MySpace support
2. Select Your Safety and Privacy for category
3. Select Other for sub-topic
4. Information to include under description:
 - Reason for contact, request to remove or preserve the profile
 - Relationship to deceased (if you are acting on behalf of the next of kin, we will only accept a copy of the death certificate)
 - Attach a copy of the death certificate or obituary. We will also accept the URL to the online news publication or funeral home website.

Yahoo Mail:

Yahoo will not allow you to access the decedent's account without a court order. You can, however, have it deleted. Go to http://io.help.yahoo.com/contact/index?locale=en_US&y=PROD_ACCT&page=contact and select "register or delete an account." Follow the instructions from there. Upon receipt of a copy of a death certificate, your account may be terminated and all contents therein permanently deleted.

Google Gmail:

As with all electronic accounts, you will be unable to access the content of a Google gmail account without the username and password. To delete an account, go to <https://support.google.com/mail/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=14300>. Follow the instructions provided at that link.

Hotmail:

You first have to start off with emailing the Windows Live Custodian of Records by emailing msrecord@microsoft.com to initiate the process. A detailed explanation of the Hotmail options and process can be found at: <http://answers.microsoft.com/en-us/windowslive/forum/hotmail-profile/my-family-member-died-recently-is-in-coma-what-do/308cedce-5444-4185-82e8-0623ecc1d3d6>.

After reading this, I suppose you'll agree that the best thing to do is to leave as much information and direction as possible for those that survive you. Dealing with a loss is hard enough; taking a few moments to put a complete plan in place is one of the best things you can do for your loved ones.

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