



Digital Assets—Are You Planning for Them?

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What happens to your email, usernames, passwords, banking information, Facebook profile, and photo/video storage accounts when you die? It is a question most people have not considered, but should. Without proper planning and documentation, your on-line information may become inaccessible and may eventually cease to exist.

You might assume it would be fairly easy for a family member or personal representative to gain access to your online accounts after your death. This is usually not the case. The service provider determines who owns the account when you die and how—or if—they want to release any information. Some internet service companies consider an account to be private property and will not share passwords or emails to the decedent's family without legal action. Other companies may require a copy of both a death certificate and estate planning documents to provide access to an account. Different service providers have different requirements for these types of situations.

There are ways to help prevent obstacles and frustration for your loved ones when accessing your online accounts after you die. One solution is to have a portable flash drive containing your usernames and passwords and provide it to a family member or friend to access upon your death. Another option would be to use an inexpensive password management program that serves as a vault for your passwords and account information such as LastPass or 1Password.

Not only is it important to determine if and how you will give others access to your digital property, but to also know if you should grant access within your estate planning documents. Upon the next review of your estate planning

documents, consult with your attorney to determine if it's appropriate to update the language to give lawful consent for service providers to disclose the contents of your on-line accounts to the appropriate people.

Here are some examples of digital assets you may want others to have access to upon your passing:

- Computers and email accounts
- Social networking sites and blogs
- Bank and financial accounts
- Companies with which you have automatic bill-pay
- Cell phones, personal digital assistants, and other electronic devices
- Online services (online storage, records, pictures, etc.)
- Important contact information
- Locations and access information to safes, safe-deposit boxes, alarms, etc.

In addition to logins, passwords, PINs, etc., you should include a description of any assets held in an account or the types of documents found in an online storage location. It's also important to include what you want to have done with the information after your passing—specifying if you want it deleted, destroyed, or passed on to someone else.

All information should be reviewed and updated at least annually. As sign-on or password information may change, and as new accounts are created and/or old accounts are deleted, you will want this information reflected accurately in your records.