

A guide to dealing with digital assets

How to deal with social media, email accounts & subscription services of the deceased



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ESTATESEARCH

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Dealing with digital assets

A large proportion of the population will now have some kind of digital footprint. This guide will help you understand the steps that can be taken to ensure digital assets are dealt with properly.



HOW CAN WILLANS HELP?

Our knowledgeable team handles all aspects of wills, trusts and inheritance tax planning and Court of Protection applications. Our work is often for clients who have been with us for many years; in some instances we act for second or third generations of the same family.

Please telephone or email to arrange an appointment.

From the sentimental such as photographs or documents to those with monetary value, digital assets can be defined as anything that someone owns that exists in a digital format. These should all be dealt with as part of the deceased's estate.

After identifying an online account, we can help you to understand the best course of action, whether that be closing, archiving the account or – in the case of some social media platforms – to memorialise their social profile.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Facebook

Memorialisation

Facebook has an option to memorialise an account where a user can nominate a 'legacy contact' to handle their account after they are gone. A legacy contact can make certain changes to the account profile and can request to remove the page.

If the user has not nominated a legacy contact, the immediate family can still choose to memorialise the account, but will need to submit documentation to do so.

[Click here to visit Facebook's memorialisation request webpage.](#)

Account removal

To remove the account of a deceased without a Legacy Contact, you need documentation to confirm that you are an immediate family member or executor of the account holder.

Documentation needed for proof of authority (submit one):

- Power of attorney
- Birth certificate
- Last will & testament
- Estate letter

Documentation needed for proof of death:

- Scan or photo of the deceased's death certificate
- Either obituary or memorial card

The request can be sent [here](#).

Instagram

The process for Instagram is similar to Facebook, however they do not have the option to add a legacy contact. You can still choose whether to memorialise the account or request to have it removed.

Memorialisation

To request for an Instagram account to be memorialised, proof of death is required. This could be a link to an obituary or news article.

Account removal

Verified immediate family members may request the removal of an account.

The following documentation is required for proof of authority:

- The deceased's birth certificate
- The deceased's death certificate
- Proof of authority under local law that you are the lawful representative of the deceased person or their estate

The request can be sent [here](#).

LinkedIn

Memorialising a LinkedIn account follows the same process as closing one. You will need to submit the request [here](#).

Documentation needed includes:

- Deceased member's full name
- URL to their LinkedIn profile
- Deceased member's email address
- Date of member's passing
- Copy of death certificate

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To either memorialise or close a LinkedIn account, you will also need one of the following:

- Letters of administration issued by a court
- Letters of testamentary issued by a court
- Letters of representation issued by a court
- Other court order appointing the requestor as an authorised representative for the deceased member's estate

X (Twitter)

X (previously Twitter) do not currently have a process for memorialising an account. However, you can request that they close the account by completing the form [here](#).

You will then be contacted to provide the following:

- information about the deceased
- a copy of your ID
- a copy of the deceased's death certificate

Snapchat

Snapchat – like X (Twitter) – do not currently have an option for memorialisation. However, you can contact them directly to request removal of the account. You can do this via the form [here](#).

You will need to provide a copy of the deceased's death certificate.

Pinterest

Similarly, Pinterest does not currently have an option to memorialise a page.

Anyone can send a request to Pinterest to have an account removed, as long as they can provide the following details:

- Your full name
- The full name and email address of the deceased's Pinterest account
- A link to their Pinterest account – it will start with 'pinterest.com/' but if you don't know it, you can search for their account

- Proof of death (death certificate or obituary)
- Proof of your relationship to the deceased if you're not included in the obituary (a family tree, or birth/marriage certificate)

This information can be sent via email to care@pinterest.com, headed as 'Delete Request'.

Pinterest is linked to Google, X (Twitter) and Facebook and should be dealt with prior to requesting the removal of linked accounts.

EMAIL

Google (Gmail) – Can also include YouTube

Google users can appoint an 'inactive account manager' who, after a certain period of inactivity on the account, will be contacted to arrange what to do with the Google account and the data within it.

If no inactive account manager is appointed, you can submit a request to close the account [here](#).

You will need to provide:

- Government-issued ID (passport or driving licence, for example)
- Death certificate of the account holder

If a YouTube account is connected to the Google account, this should be highlighted in the additional comments box.

Google will not pass control of an account to anyone not appointed as an inactive account manager, nor will they provide passwords or log in details. In some circumstances, it may be possible to retrieve some data from the account in question.

Yahoo

Anyone can request the closure of a Yahoo Mail account as long as they can provide the following information:

- A letter containing your request and stating the Yahoo ID of the deceased
- A copy of a document appointing

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the requesting party as the personal representative or executor of the estate of the deceased

- A copy of the death certificate of the Yahoo account holder
- A copy of the photo identification of the requesting party

The request can be made online via the Yahoo customer care form, which you can find [here](#).

Microsoft (Hotmail, Live, MSN or Outlook)

Microsoft have a 'next of kin' process, whereby only family members that are next of kin can request the closure of a Microsoft account. Microsoft will not provide log in details, email addresses or password changes, nor will they transfer the account to a new owner.

Contact the Windows Live Custodian of Records by emailing msrecord@microsoft.com to initiate the 'next of kin' process. In your email, you should include:

- Confirmation of an email address you're happy to be contacted on
- A copy of the official death certificate – Microsoft can't accept an obituary, interim death certificate or funeral director statement
- Proof of your identification

They will also ask you to provide details for the deceased, including estimated year of account opening and the last time it was accessed.

If the closure request is accepted, Microsoft will arrange to send you a DVD with access to emails, attachments, address book and messenger contact list (if applicable).

A Microsoft account will be closed automatically after two years of inactivity.

RETAIL / SUBSCRIPTION SERVICES

Amazon

Amazon has a dedicated bereavement support team to assist you in the closing of an account.

Email bereavement-support@amazon.co.uk and include the following information:

- Deceased's full name and email associated with the account
- A copy of death certificate
- Official certified documentation showing that you are the authorised person to access the account
- Valid photographic ID for the named authorised person listed on the letter of authorisation (passport, driving licence, etc.)

Amazon may also request further verification to ensure that you are authorised to act on behalf of the deceased.

Apple

Apple users can appoint a legacy contact which allows that person access to their account after death.

If you have been appointed as the legacy contact, you can use the unique digital access key which was created when you were added. You can do that [here](#).

You will need a copy of the death certificate.

If no legacy contact exists, you will need to sign in to your own Apple account to start the process of closing the account. You can then submit an online request, providing:

- the Apple ID for the account holder
- the required legal documentation for your country or region

More details can be found [here](#).

eBay

eBay do not currently have a process for shutting down a deceased's account. If you have access to the account, you can simply log in and close the account.

You can only do this if there are no pending transactions and the available funds are zero.

If you do not have access to the account, you will need to contact eBay's Customer Service Team directly.

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The following will be required:

- Deceased's full name & email
- Documentation of death (copy of death certificate)
- Proof of relationship with deceased

You can visit their help page [here](#).

PayPal

The executor or administrator of the estate should send the following by email to bereavement@paypal.co.uk:

- A cover sheet, providing the appropriate representative's contact details (name, email address and phone number), stating that the account holder is deceased and that their representative wants to close the account
- Details to help locate relevant account (e.g. email address, phone number, home address)
- The death certificate of the account holder

If any money remains in the account balance, the executor or administrator of the estate should send the following to the same email as above:

- A cover sheet, providing the appropriate representative's contact details (name, email address and phone number), stating that the account holder is deceased and that their representative wants to close the account
- Details to help locate relevant account (email address, phone number, home address)
- The death certificate of the account holder
- If a will exists, we need a certified copy of the will identifying the executor of estate
- If no will exists, we need a statement of who the likely administrator is and their interest in the estate and relationship with the deceased
- A government-issued photo ID of the appropriate representative
- Signed copy of a standard indemnity form

- A note specifying what to do with any money that remains in the account

Please note that if there are others (children, grandchildren, civil partners or other siblings, for example) entitled to a share of the funds on the PayPal account, written confirmation of the intended action or permission for the administrator to provide instruction is required from all named parties prior to taking action on the account.

For amounts under £5000, PayPal require an indemnity form to be entered into by the executor or administrator in advance of releasing the balance. If the balance is above this, PayPal require a grant of probate or letters of administration to be provided before closing the account and releasing the balance.

HOW CAN WILLANS HELP?

Our wills, trusts & probate lawyers have advised many people on including digital assets in their will and lifetime & estate planning.

If you would like any more information on digital assets and how to manage them pre and post-death, please do not hesitate to contact us. ■

With thanks to



The award-winning Estatesearch are committed to building data and technology services to help legal professionals support bereaved or vulnerable clients.

Their services help executors, administrators, deputies and attorneys undertake a comprehensive and efficient search for all accounts within an estate.

For more information, you can visit their website [here](#).