

# Dying has an effect on social media too

**W**hat happens to your online profile when you die?

What happens to an online profile is increasingly an important part of administering a person's estate, as well as when drafting a new will or enduring power of attorney.

It is important to consider what should happen to your online profile when you die.

This may include your Facebook account, Twitter, LinkedIn, web pages, Apple or Google accounts and any purchases made.

The providers of these services have different requirements around releasing information or taking any action on someone else's account.

In some situations, the terms and conditions will vary depending on what the account-holder has agreed to.

It is helpful to appreciate what is involved so that you can plan to either enable someone trusted to be able to access the account/s where possible, or to specify the accounts you have and what you want to happen to the digital part of your estate.

Some of the current policies we are aware of include:

**Facebook.**

Broadly there are two options. First, it is Facebook's policy to memorialise the account.

That means the account is secured so no-one can log in and no new friends can be accepted.

Messages can be sent to the account and content shared by the deceased person is visible.

Second is to request the removal of the account.

This requires a copy of the death certificate and would normally be requested by the



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executor of the person's estate or an immediate family member.

**Twitter.**

Will deactivate an account on the request of the executor or an immediate family member, but they need a copy of the death certificate and other supporting documentation.

**Google.**

Has a feature called inactive account manager that enables users to decide what should happen to their account after a certain period of inactivity.

That means that after a nominated period – say six months of inactivity – the account will be deleted.

It is difficult to access the contents of a deceased user's account. For Google accounts, this is a very rigorous process that can include obtaining a court order to release the information.

**Hotmail.**

Allows release of the content of an account to the next of kin of a deceased or incapacitated account-holder, and/or closure of an account.

That process requires proof. In the case of incapacity, proof of incapacity and a copy of the power of attorney is required.

Certain information about the account should be known, such as the email address and the name used to create it, an approximate time it was created

and when it was last accessed.

**Yahoo.**

Does not enable account content to be transferable, even when an account-holder is deceased.

It has a similar process to others for closing an account, including proof of death, that the person requesting is the executor and the Yahoo ID.

**LinkedIn.**

By contrast, LinkedIn does not require formal documentation.

That is because, unlike the other examples, a LinkedIn profile is used to expand a person's professional profile, rather than an exchange of personal information with family and friends.

LinkedIn simply requires that an individual who knew the deceased fill out a form requesting the removal of the deceased's profile.

**Apple iTunes and account.**

Will depend upon the version of the terms and conditions the deceased person has agreed to. These are updated from time to time.

Dealing with all online accounts is increasingly becoming an important part of administering an estate.

It is now part of the winding up of a person's affairs, and should be discussed with your lawyer when making a will and enduring power of attorney to ensure that your wishes are known and made clear to your loved ones, attorney and/or executor.

Column courtesy of Rainey Collins Lawyers, phone 0800 73 34 84. If you have an inquiry, email Alan on [aknowsley@raineycollins.co.nz](mailto:aknowsley@raineycollins.co.nz).

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