

## Your Social Media Can Now Go Away When You Do

Google recently launched its new Inactive Account Manager to allow users to plan for life after death—at least from the data perspective. The feature prompts you to select a timeout period that will determine the amount of time your account will remain inactive before it initiates. Depending on the selected settings, the feature will then either delete your data or share it with up to 10 family members or friends. To avoid an accidental triggering of the service, Google sends an alert to any cell phone(s) set up for alerts on the account. This safeguard will be especially useful for those who may simply let an account go dormant from a lack of regular use.

While the Inactive Account Manager provides an interesting, though somewhat morbid, solution to an inevitable problem, the feature only accounts for a small piece of your digital pie. You can tell Google what to do with your data from a variety of services, including Gmail, Blogger, Google+, Google Drive, Picasa Web Albums, Google Voice, and YouTube. But the feature currently does not apply to Google Apps accounts. Likewise, the Google Inactive Account Manager also cannot control your other digital pie, including your digital life stored on Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter.

Other options are surfacing that allow you to manage the digital life of departed loved ones. Facebook has an afterlife policy that “memorializes” accounts of the deceased upon receipt of proof of death.<sup>1</sup> Immediate family members may further petition Facebook to remove a loved one’s account.<sup>2</sup> Some states also have statutes that provide parents and/or estate administrators access to the digital life of the recently departed.<sup>3</sup> The number of such laws will likely increase, as state legislatures have passed the existing laws only within the last few years.

The ability to easily retain or delete the entire digital life of the deceased will likely elude us for the foreseeable future. Individuals interact online using a variety of tools created by a number of different organizations. Many people do not take the time to complete the task of configuring each account to handle data after death. Loved ones may also have accounts of which others are not aware. Even with the passage of related access laws, family members or estate administrators likely will not know of every location where data exists. But the Google Inactive Account Manager provides a new approach that will allow you to prepare for the handling of your data. And, let’s face it, a good portion of society has at least some data stored within Google’s realm

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<sup>1</sup> Deactivating, Deleting & Memorializing Accounts, <http://www.facebook.com/help/359046244166395/> (last visited Apr. 15, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g. IND. CODE ANN. 29-1-13-1.1 (West 2012); H.B. 1584, Gen. Sess. (Virginia 2013); S.B. 1044, 61st Leg. 1st Sess. (Idaho 2011); H.B. 2800, 524 Leg. 2d Sess. (Okla. 2010).

that it would like to pass on to family and friends, but it remains to be seen whether users will take advantage of this option.

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