

ESTATE PLANNING IN THE DIGITAL AGE

While most would agree that the digital age offers countless advantages to one's life, few people realize how important it is to take precautions so that technology does not wreak havoc after one's death. Many people give careful consideration to the identification of beneficiaries, what insurance should be purchased, and whether to prepare a living will and durable power of attorney. Among the conversations regarding what bank accounts, real estate, and retirement funds you and your loved ones possess, electronic accounts seem to be commonly overlooked.

However, an increasing number of people manage their financial affairs online, so this issue is becoming more pervasive. As you and your loved ones plan your estates, we recommend that you discuss your active online accounts and share your passwords for the accounts that you would like your relatives to be able to access. Alternatively, you may consider keeping an updated list of your electronic accounts and passwords in a safe deposit box.

In the event that your loved one passes away without sharing any passwords, certain service providers such as AOL, Earthlink, and Hotmail have established guidelines so that relatives may access email accounts of a deceased. Generally, Internet service providers are committed to maintaining the confidentiality of a member's email account, so the process may be an arduous one. For example, America Online requires a copy of a death certificate and some type of documentation that the survivor is an authorized personal representative. Gmail requires relatives to present a death certificate, proof that the family member is a legally authorized administrator of



the estate, and documentation of an email showing that the survivor had been contacted by the deceased from the Gmail account at issue. Ebay requires similar proof in order for a family member to gain access to a deceased eBay seller's account. However, eBay will not grant such access to a buyer's account.

In addition to email and financial accounts, an increasing number of people are using the Internet to store and share their photographs online via Internet photo galleries such as Kodakgallery and Flickr. If this is the only storage mechanism used, then valuable digital photographs may be lost if a loved one passes away without sharing his or her password with others.

The easiest approach to avoid such digital age dilemmas is to plan in advance by making a list of all relevant accounts and passwords and sharing it with your family or making sure they know its location. Also, be sure to update these lists periodically. Passing on your electronic passwords may be done in conjunction with the organization of other estate planning paperwork, and is yet another step to ensure a smooth administration process.

Tanya K. Shunnara

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Cats According To Dave Barry

Cats are less loyal than dogs, but more independent. (This is code. It means: "Cats are smarter than dogs, but they hate people. ") Many people love cats. From time to time, newspapers print stories about some elderly widow who died and left her entire estate, valued at \$3,200,000, to her cat, Fluffkins. Cats read these stories, too, and are always plotting to get named as beneficiaries in their owners' wills. Did you ever wonder where your cat goes when it wanders off for several hours? It meets with other cats in estate-planning seminars. I just thought you should know.