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Social Media After a Death

What happens to accounts on each platform, who has authority, and the steps to close, memorialize or transfer access

F-15 · FAMILY

"Accounts outlive their owners. Authority does not transfer automatically. Process is the route."

Billions of people maintain active social media presences, yet most platforms were not designed with death in mind. When someone dies, their accounts do not automatically close or transfer. Each platform has its own bereavement process, its own definitions of authority, and its own restrictions on what families and executors can do.

This reference sets out the current position for the major platforms, the legal framework in England and Wales, and the practical steps available to those managing affairs after a death.

How to use this.

Seven sections cover the legal position, then each major platform or platform group in turn, followed by a priority checklist for executors and families. A reference table summarising available options by platform appears at the end of Section VII. Figures and processes reflect platform policies as of early 2026 — policies change frequently and the relevant Help Centre pages should always be checked for current instructions.

CONTENTS

I The Legal Position — Executors and Digital Accounts

II Facebook and Instagram (Meta)

III X (formerly Twitter)

IV Google — Gmail, YouTube, Google Photos

V Apple ID and iCloud

VI LinkedIn and Professional Platforms

VII Priorities for Executors and Families

The Legal Position — Executors and Digital Accounts

LEGAL FRAMEWORK · ENGLAND & WALES

There is no comprehensive UK statute governing digital assets on death. The position is shaped by existing criminal law, contract law, and each platform's terms of service.

Digital Accounts Are Not Automatically Part of the Estate

In England and Wales, a deceased person's social media accounts are not treated in the same way as physical assets or traditional financial accounts. The executor's authority under a **grant of probate** extends to the deceased's tangible property and conventional financial assets. It does not automatically extend to third-party platform accounts, which are governed by contracts between the deceased and the platform — contracts that typically end at death and prohibit transfer.

The Computer Misuse Act 1990 — a Practical Constraint

Under the Computer Misuse Act 1990, accessing another person's computer or online account without authorisation is a criminal offence. This applies even where the account holder is deceased and even where the person accessing the account is a close family member or a named executor. Using a deceased person's saved passwords or login credentials to access their accounts carries legal risk, regardless of the intention. Families are generally advised to use the official bereavement channels each platform provides.

Platform Terms of Service Govern Access

Every major social media platform prohibits account sharing and restricts access to the named account holder. These terms typically state that accounts are personal and non-transferable. On death, the contract between the user and the platform ends. Executors and family members do not acquire rights to the account under general law — their only route is through the platform's designated bereavement or memorialisation process, which each platform defines on its own terms.

No Comprehensive UK Digital Inheritance Legislation

As of 2026, there is no UK statute that creates a general right of access to digital accounts after death, or that requires platforms to hand over account data to estates. The Law Commission has examined digital assets in its work on digital assets as property (its 2023 report confirmed digital assets can be property in certain contexts), but social media accounts — as personal, contractual relationships — occupy a more uncertain position. Legislative reform in this area remains ongoing.

What Executors Can Formally Do

An executor's primary practical power in relation to social media accounts is to request closure or memorialisation through the platform's formal process, providing proof of death and proof of authority (typically a **death certificate** and, where required, a **grant of probate** or **letters of administration**). Executors may also be able to request that the platform export certain data before closure — this varies by platform. Executors cannot demand account access or log-in credentials as of right.

Scotland and Northern Ireland

The Computer Misuse Act 1990 applies UK-wide. Succession law differs in Scotland (confirmation rather than probate) and the executor's documentation required by platforms may need to reflect this. Platform bereavement processes do not generally distinguish between UK jurisdictions, but local legal advice may be needed where data access is contested or a court order is contemplated.

Facebook and Instagram (Meta)

META PLATFORMS · MEMORIALISATION AND REMOVAL

Meta operates both Facebook and Instagram and provides the most developed set of bereavement options of any major platform, including the ability to memorialize accounts rather than simply close them.

Facebook Memorialisation — What It Means

A memorialised Facebook account is marked "Remembering [Name]" and preserved as a place for family and friends to share memories. No one can log into the account once it is memorialised. The profile, timeline, and existing posts remain visible according to the privacy settings the deceased had in place. Adverts are no longer shown on the memorialised profile. Memorialisation can be requested by any family member or close friend — it does not require executor authority, though a **death certificate** is required.

Facebook Legacy Contact — Set Up in Advance

A Facebook user can designate a "Legacy Contact" in their account settings before they die. After memorialisation, the **legacy contact** can pin a tribute post, update the profile picture and cover photo, respond to new friend requests, and request a download of the account's data. The **legacy contact** cannot log in as the deceased, read private messages, or remove existing posts. This is one of the more functional pre-death planning tools available on any platform and is worth recording in estate planning documents.

Requesting Facebook Memorialisation or Removal

Both requests are made through the "Special Request for Deceased Person's Account" form in Facebook's Help Centre. Families can choose either memorialisation or permanent removal. For removal, immediate family or executor status must be demonstrated; a **death certificate** is required in both cases. Facebook does not provide account access or login credentials to family members under any

circumstances. The process typically takes **two to four weeks** once documentation is submitted and verified.

Instagram — Memorialisation and Removal

Instagram (also owned by Meta) offers a similar process via its Help Centre — searching "deceased Instagram account" directs to the relevant form. The request must come from an immediate family member or executor and requires a **death certificate**. Instagram does not currently offer a **legacy contact** feature equivalent to Facebook's. Once memorialised, the account is preserved but cannot be logged into; once removed, all content is permanently deleted. Timescales are broadly similar to Facebook — **two to four weeks** from verified submission.

Data Download Before Closure

If a **legacy contact** has been designated on Facebook, they can request a copy of the account data before the account is closed. For accounts without a **legacy contact**, Meta does not generally provide data downloads to family members after death. Families who believe important data (photographs, messages, memories) may be stored on the account are advised

to request memorialisation rather than removal in the first instance, to allow time to consider whether data can be retrieved through other means.

X (formerly Twitter)

X PLATFORM · DEACTIVATION ONLY

X offers a more limited bereavement process than Meta. Memorialisation is not currently available — the only outcome is account deactivation and eventual removal.

What X Allows on Death

An authorised person — typically an immediate family member, executor, or someone who can demonstrate a legal connection to the deceased — can request account deactivation. X does not offer memorialisation, **legacy contact** features, or data download requests from third parties. The account, once deactivated, enters a **30-day** holding period before permanent deletion. Content is not preserved in any publicly accessible form after this point.

How to Submit the Request

The request is submitted through X's Help Centre under "Deceased User Account." The form requires the deceased's username or profile URL, a copy of the **death certificate**, and documentation confirming the relationship (such as proof of family connection or, for executors, the **grant of probate** or **letters of administration**). X may request additional information. The process typically takes **four to eight weeks** from the point at which all documentation is verified.

Content Preservation — Practical Considerations

Because X does not offer memorialisation, families who wish to preserve the deceased's tweets or public posts will need to do so independently before submitting a deactivation request. Third-party tools and manual screenshot archives are the most common approaches. Once a deactivation request is submitted and the **30-day** period elapses, all content is permanently deleted and cannot be recovered. Executors may wish to document the existence of the account in the estate file before proceeding.

Ongoing Subscriptions and X Premium

If the deceased held an X Premium (formerly Twitter Blue) or other paid subscription, this is a contractual debt of the estate. The subscription may continue to charge if a payment card linked to the estate remains active. Cancellation of the subscription should be addressed as part of broader subscription management alongside the deactivation request. Evidence of cancellation (confirmation email or screenshot) should be retained in the estate file.

Google — Gmail, YouTube, Google Photos IV

GOOGLE SERVICES · INACTIVE ACCOUNT MANAGER AND NEXT-OF-KIN PROCESS

Google services are often deeply embedded in a person's digital life. Google provides two routes for families — one that depends on advance planning by the account holder, and one for situations where no planning was done.

Google Inactive Account Manager — Advance Planning

Google's **Inactive Account Manager** allows an account holder to designate trusted contacts and specify what should happen to their account after an extended period of inactivity (between three and **eighteen months**, configurable). Trusted contacts can be notified and, if the account holder chose to share data, can download specified data (emails, photos, Drive files, YouTube content) or have the account deleted automatically. This is a powerful tool when set up in advance and is worth recording alongside other estate planning documents.

Next-of-Kin Process — No Advance Planning

Where no **Inactive Account Manager** was configured, Google has a separate process for verified next-of-kin to request access to account data or account closure. This requires a **death certificate**, proof of relationship or executor authority, and a description of what data is requested. Google does not provide account login credentials or passwords to family members under any circumstances. Data access requests are reviewed individually and are not guaranteed — Google may decline depending on the nature of the data requested.

Google Photos and Drive

Family photographs stored in Google Photos and documents in Google Drive may represent significant personal and evidential value to an estate. Access to this data is available only through the next-of-kin process described above, or where the deceased had set up **Inactive Account Manager** sharing. Families should be aware that processing times for Google data requests can be lengthy — Google's own guidance suggests the process may take **three to six months** from the point of submission.

YouTube Channels

YouTube channels that form part of a Google account may contain creative content, subscriber communities, or monetisation arrangements. Channel monetisation (revenue from the YouTube Partner Programme) is contractually linked to the Google account and cannot be transferred to a new account holder as of right. Families may request removal of the channel or, in some cases, data export of videos through the next-of-kin process. Dependent channels, community posts, and comment histories will be affected if the account is closed.

Gmail — Practical Estate Considerations

A deceased person's Gmail inbox may contain records relevant to the administration of the estate — account confirmation emails, subscription records, financial correspondence, or communications with solicitors. Access is not available without going through the formal Google process. Executors who anticipate needing access to Gmail content should include this in a data access request and allow time for Google's review period. Where the deceased used Gmail for business purposes, early application is advisable.

Apple ID and iCloud V

APPLE SERVICES · DIGITAL LEGACY AND DEVICE ACCESS

Apple introduced formal digital legacy planning in 2021. Without advance planning, access to Apple account data is exceptionally difficult and typically requires court proceedings.

Apple Digital Legacy — Set Up in Advance

Apple's Digital Legacy feature (introduced in iOS 15.2, iPadOS 15.2, and macOS 12.1) allows an Apple ID holder to designate up to five **Legacy Contacts**. Each **legacy contact** is given an access key that, combined with the **death certificate**, allows them to access iCloud data after the account holder's death — including photos, notes, messages, and files stored in iCloud Drive. **Legacy contact** designation is made in Settings under the Apple ID profile and should be recorded in estate planning documents alongside the access key.

Without a Legacy Contact — Court Order Required

Where no Digital **Legacy contact** was designated, Apple does not provide access to iCloud content as standard, even to immediate family members or verified executors. Apple's policy is that account content is personal to the account holder. To compel Apple to provide data access without a **legacy contact**, a court order from a court with appropriate jurisdiction would generally be required — a process that is costly,

uncertain in outcome, and can take many months. This is an important reason to encourage advance digital legacy planning.

Device Activation Lock — What Families Can Do

Apple devices (iPhone, iPad, Mac) protected by an Apple ID may display an **Activation Lock** after a factory reset, preventing use by a new owner. Apple provides a process for verified family members to request removal of **Activation Lock** from a deceased person's device — this requires a **death certificate** and proof of purchase of the device. The device itself (the hardware) is an asset of the estate; the linked Apple ID account is not. **Activation Lock** removal enables the device to be transferred or sold.

Purchases, Credits and Subscriptions Are Not Transferable

Content purchased through the App Store, iTunes, or Apple Books is licensed to the individual account holder, not owned. Licensed content (apps, music, films, books, audiobooks) cannot be bequeathed, transferred, or included in an estate for distribution to beneficiaries. Apple ID credits (gift card balances) may be addressed through the estate but are subject to

Apple's terms and are not automatically transferable. Apple subscriptions (iCloud storage, Apple Music, Apple TV+, Apple One) are contractual debts of the estate if active — these should be cancelled promptly.

iCloud Family Sharing

If the deceased was the organiser of an iCloud Family Sharing group, other family members in the group may be affected — shared subscriptions, shared storage plans, and shared purchases may change or lapse. Family members sharing an iCloud Family Sharing plan are advised to check their own device settings and subscriptions promptly after a death to identify any dependencies. A surviving family member can set up a new Family Sharing group where needed.

LinkedIn and Professional Platforms

VI

PROFESSIONAL AND CONTENT PLATFORMS · VARIED PROCESSES

Professional platforms and content monetisation services each operate their own bereavement processes. Revenue-generating accounts may require a **grant of probate** before they can be closed or transferred.

LinkedIn — Profile Removal

LinkedIn provides a form for family members or executors to request removal of a deceased person's profile. The form requires the full name of the deceased, the LinkedIn profile URL, date of birth, and date of death. LinkedIn does not currently offer a memorialisation option — removal is the only outcome available. The profile is typically removed within a few weeks of a verified submission. LinkedIn does not provide data downloads to family members, and account login credentials are not disclosed.

LinkedIn Premium and Subscriptions

LinkedIn Premium subscriptions (Career, Business, Sales Navigator, Recruiter) are contractual obligations that may auto-renew monthly or annually if the payment card linked to the estate remains active. These are debts of the estate and should be cancelled promptly. Cancellation is possible through the subscription management settings if login credentials are available, or by contacting LinkedIn support with a **death certificate** if they are not. Evidence of cancellation should be retained.

GitHub and Developer Platforms

GitHub allows verified family members or legal representatives to request account memorialisation (profile preserved as read-only) or account removal by contacting GitHub Support with a **death certificate** and documentation of authority. Where a GitHub account is linked to an organisation, business repository, or paid GitHub Teams plan, the process is more complex — a **grant of probate** or **letters of administration** is typically required before repository access or transfer is granted. Open-source repositories may be able to be maintained by the community independently of the account.

Patreon and Substack — Revenue-Generating Accounts

Where the deceased operated a Patreon or Substack with active subscribers and recurring revenue, these accounts represent an asset of the estate. Executors should contact the platform directly, providing the **death certificate** and **grant of probate** or **letters of administration**. Revenue that has accrued but not been paid out at the date of death may be claimable by the estate; future subscription revenue depends on whether the account can be transferred to a new operator (platform policies vary). Active subscribers should be notified promptly.

Streaming and Creative Platforms

Platforms such as TikTok, Snapchat, Pinterest, and Twitch each have their own bereavement contact or removal processes — these can typically be located by searching the platform's Help Centre for "deceased account" or "bereavement." Where an account has a large following or monetisation, the same principles apply as for Patreon or Substack: document the account's value, obtain probate authority, and contact

the platform before taking any action. Paid subscriptions on any platform are estate liabilities and should be cancelled as soon as possible.

Priorities for Executors and Families VII

PRACTICAL ACTION SEQUENCE · ESTATE ADMINISTRATION

Managing digital accounts after a death is rarely urgent in the first days, but a structured approach avoids both legal risk and the loss of important data.

1. Cancel Paid Subscriptions Promptly

Recurring subscription charges (Netflix, Spotify, Amazon Prime, Adobe Creative Cloud, Apple One, LinkedIn Premium, YouTube Premium, and others) are contractual debts of the estate. If the deceased's payment card or bank account remains active, charges will continue to accrue. A thorough review of bank and card statements for the preceding three months will typically identify active subscriptions. Cancellation requests generally require a **death certificate** sent by

email or through the platform's support process. Evidence of each cancellation should be kept in the estate file.

2. Identify a Password Manager or Digital Record

If the deceased used a password manager (1Password, Bitwarden, LastPass, or similar), the family may have a practical route to identifying which accounts existed and what usernames were in use — even if the passwords themselves cannot lawfully be used to log in. A note of digital accounts and platform usernames kept with the Will or in a Letter of Wishes is one of the most useful steps any individual can take during their lifetime. Where no record exists, bank and email statements are the next best source of account discovery.

3. Do Not Log Into Accounts

Using a deceased person's login credentials to access their accounts — even with entirely benign intentions — carries legal risk under the Computer Misuse Act 1990. This applies even where the family has physical access to the device and the password is saved. The practical and lawful route for all major platforms is through the official bereavement or memorialisation process. Where

a family member has already accessed an account in good faith before learning of the legal position, taking legal advice before proceeding further is advisable.

4. Download Data Before Requesting Deletion

Where a platform allows data download by an authorised person before closure — Facebook (via **legacy contact**), Google (via next-of-kin or **Inactive Account Manager**), Apple (via Digital **Legacy contact**) — families may wish to do this before submitting a **removal request**. Downloaded data archives can be large and should be stored securely. Once an account is deleted, data recovery is generally not possible. Photographs, messages, posts, and documents held on platforms may have personal or evidential significance to the estate.

5. Consider Digital Memorials

Rather than maintaining a deceased person's original social media profiles indefinitely — which may be distressing to friends and family who encounter birthday reminders or algorithmic posts — families may wish to establish a dedicated digital memorial. Services such as Much Loved and Memorial by Keeper are designed for this purpose, providing a stable, controlled space for

tributes, memories, and photographs. This approach separates the ongoing memorial function from the administrative question of what to do with the original platform accounts.

6. Record Actions Taken in the Estate File

Each social media or digital account that is closed, memorialised, or cancelled should be documented in the estate file: the platform name, the date the action was requested, the reference number or confirmation provided by the platform, and the outcome. This record is relevant to the estate accounts and provides evidence that debts (subscriptions) were addressed promptly. It also ensures that a second executor or a professional appointed to assist with the estate can see what has already been handled.

Platform	Memorialise?	Remove?	Data download?	Who can request	Typical timescale
Facebook	Yes	Yes	Via **legacy contact** only	Family member, executor	**2–4 weeks**
Instagram	Yes	Yes	No	Immediate family, executor	**2–4 weeks**
X (Twitter)	No	Yes	No	Family member, executor	**4–8 weeks**
Google	No	Yes	Yes (via IAM or NOK process)	Trusted contact (IAM) or next-of-kin	3–**6 months**
Apple iCloud	No	Yes	Yes (**legacy contact** only)	Legacy contact or court order	Varies
LinkedIn	No	Yes	No	Family member, executor	**1–3 weeks**

Platform	Memorialise?	Remove?	Data download?	Who can request	Typical timescale
GitHub	Yes	Yes	Limited	Family member, legal rep	Varies
Patreon / Substack	No	Yes	Depends on platform	Executor (probate required)	Varies

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Social Media After a Death — a practical guide to closing, memorialising, and managing digital accounts. Free from the Valoren estate administration series. Platform policies change — verify current instructions at each Help Centre. Not legal advice. © Standard Index Group.