

DIGITAL ESTATE MODULE SUMMARY



LIFE IS FOR SHARING.

PUBLICATION DETAILS

PUBLISHED BY

#DABEI-Geschichten – an initiative by Deutsche Telekom AG
Barbara Costanzo, Vice President Group Social Engagement
Friedrich-Ebert-Allee 140, 53113 Bonn, Germany

FURTHER INFORMATION

<https://dabei-geschichten.telekom.com/en/topics/digital-estate/>

LAST REVISED

Jan 9th, 2020

STATUS

published

CONTACT

engagement-bonn@telekom.de

DIGITAL ESTATE

Digital Estate?

Who wants to live forever? Our data makes us immortal on the Internet. But what happens to our data when we die? And what can you do to manage things while you are alive?

Be Right Back

Imagine you have the opportunity to talk to a deceased person by making a copy of them. That is exactly what Martha did in the Netflix series "Black Mirror". Her friend Ash was killed in a car accident. Using the digital footprints he left behind, Martha created a robot with the same voice, thoughts and behavior as her deceased friend. All she needed was software that examined and evaluated Ash's chat histories, calls, Facebook posts and tweets.

Did You Know...

- ...72% of all Germans use the Internet every day, leaving behind digital footprints.
- ...every 3 minutes a Facebook user dies in Germany. But on the Internet, those users might live on for a long time.
- ...every year, people across the world generate 1.8 zettabytes of data. This corresponds to the equivalent of 200 million feature films.

People Leave, Data Stays

Facts show: Every day we leave behind a multitude of digital footprints. Those footprints do not go away – even after we die. Nevertheless, only 18% of users in Germany manage their digital estate. But what is a "digital estate" anyway?

What Does "Digital Estate" Mean?

What do you think of when you hear the terms "estate" or "heir"? Valuables such as jewelry, cars or money are often associated with it. Today however, life is happening more and more on the Internet, where things get left behind after someone dies. A digital estate comprises all of the electronic data a person leaves behind on a digital device (e. g. computer, tablet, smartphone) and on the Internet after his or her death. This includes customer and social network accounts. Whether on the Internet or on a hard drive – the deceased's messages, photos and images are also part of their digital estate.

WHAT BELONGS TO YOUR DIGITAL ESTATE

On the Desk

- **Accounts**
During your lifetime you create a multitude of accounts, e. g. in online shops or on video portals. These still exist after you die.
- **Offline files**
Those who survive you can still access images, presentations or documents that you saved while you were alive, even after your death.
- **Electronic messages**
Every day you send and receive many messages. E-mails, chat histories and voice messages endure the passage of time.
- **Digital goods**
More and more “digital goods” such as music files, films or video games are being purchased on the Internet. Currencies such as the crypto currency Bitcoin are also included. These purchases remain even after death.
- **Profiles in social networks**
Nine out of ten Internet users are active on social networks such as Facebook, Instagram or Xing. These profiles continue to exist after someone dies.

Scenarios

Leonard (38) is fatally injured in a traffic accident. Despite the will he wrote, unexpected problems arise.

Scenario I

Three months after Leonard's funeral, his family receives a bill. A streaming service has charged them EUR 34.89 for the last three months. Purchase agreements or subscriptions often do not end with death. According to law, obligations of the deceased are transferred to their heirs. Therefore, as the heir, you must pay the deceased's outstanding bills.

However, you can contact the company issuing the bill directly. Recent purchases may still be subject to the right of withdrawal. Or the company is accommodating and foregoes payment.

Scenario II

Two years after Leonard's death, birthday greetings are still being posted to his chronicle. This is always a sad moment, especially for his wife Christina. It is difficult to access a social media account without login data. Many social networks do not allow family members to access the account of the deceased, since their data should also be protected. A similar case has gone to court in 2012: The parents of a deceased fifteen-year old girl in Germany were hoping to access their daughter's account and thus gain insight into her sudden death by analyzing her messages and chats. However, Facebook had already memorialized her account, making it impossible for the parents to log in even though they knew the username and the password. The German Federal Supreme Court passed judgement on the case, deciding that personal data such as social media accounts are passed on to the family. With this judgement, family members could get access to their deceased relatives' social media accounts in the future.

Scenario III

After Leonard's death, Christina wants to look at the private holiday photos stored on his laptop. Since Leonard left her the laptop, there should not be a problem with this. She inherited all of the files stored on the laptop. But not those in a cloud or other online storage. Without a password, you do not have access to this data. If a user has not determined a person who is authorized to access their data, many providers will not issue access to the data.

Scenario IV

As a memento, the family wants access to the deceased's private e-mails, chats and voice messages. However, they do not have the password for the respective services. It is difficult to access user accounts without a password. It is easier if you know the password for the e-mail account. Then you can assign a new password on many websites using the "Forgot password" function. If you do not have a password, you must ask the companies for help. Some providers offer access to relatives if they can present a death certificate. Others however, do not allow access at all to protect the privacy of other users.

MY DIGITAL ESTATE

Digital Estate – But How?

Your digital estate is a very personal thing. If you make the decision now, as to what should happen to your data after your death, many problems can be solved ahead of time for your heirs. In this chapter you will find information and templates to help manage your digital estate.

Digital Estate Social Networks

- Facebook
Who can manage the account? Someone with a power of attorney, verifiable family members, data heir
What is required? Facebook form special requests
What is possible? Deletion of the account, memorializing the account
- Twitter
Who can manage the account? Someone with a power of attorney, verifiable family members
What is required? Twitter data protection form, death certificate
What is possible? Deletion or archiving of the account
- Xing
Who can manage the account? No one, but anyone can deactivate the account
What is required? Contact with the customer service department, death certificate
What is possible? Deactivation of the account

The Legacy Contact

If heirs and relatives do not know a password, they rarely have access to the deceased's social media accounts – even if a will determines that they should. This gets easier if you have determined a data heir or legacy contact, a person of your choice, whose task it is to manage your accounts after your

death. This person can change certain parts of your user accounts, e. g. exchange profile pictures or delete the accounts completely. However, data heirs cannot read private messages.

Status: Remembering

When, for example, a Facebook user dies, his account is often memorialized. The profile can then only be used to a limited extent – for example, messages can no longer be sent to the account. The aim of the “Remembering” status is to remember the person who passed away and the experiences that friends and family shared with the deceased. If a person or their data heir decides against having their account memorialized before their death, their profile can also be deleted.

Help with Your Digital Estate

Planning a digital estate means making a large number of decisions. There are many websites on the Internet to help you manage your digital estate.

DIGITAL ESTATE – THEN WHAT?

#Nachhall?

Writing a will is unpleasant for many people. No one likes to think about what should happen after one’s own death? This is exactly how many people feel about managing their digital estate. Under the #nachhall hashtag the German website “digital-danach.de” collects comments about digital estates. They address thoughts, fears and doubts about this topic. Would people rather disappear from the Internet? Or do they like the idea of “living on” on the Internet?

Rest In Peace 2.0

People have used places such as cemeteries to remember their deceased loved ones for centuries. However, the Internet also offers ways of remembering the deceased.

Online Condolence Book

The death of a loved one is a very difficult moment for the deceased’s family. Therefore, many people who were in contact with the deceased, want to express their sympathy and condolences. Traditionally, condolence books are laid out where the bereaved can write down their memories.

This tradition is now being continued on the Internet. Mourners can express their sympathy on the

pages of large daily newspapers and with other providers. These online condolence books can also be linked to the QR codes of the digital gravestones.

Living on, on the Internet

Our life on Earth ends with death. American scientists are researching a way to store the personality of humans as Artificial Intelligence. In this way, at least the knowledge and the opinions of the deceased would be preserved. Eugenia Kuyda is trying something similar. With the help of chat messages and e-mails, she developed an artificial intelligence that sends her messages similar to those of her deceased husband. Opinions differ on this subject: Should death remain something definitive?

The Right to be Forgotten!

What if something gets on the Internet that you do not want there? Every citizen has the right to have private data removed from the public domain on the Internet. The so-called “right to be forgotten” allows users to prevent links to Google search queries or to report and delete content on Facebook, for example. In this way, private traces on the Internet can be removed.

Settle Your Estate

We know, no one likes to think about dying: But think about tomorrow today and settle your digital estate in time. Your relatives will thank you for it!