

Your Digital Estate

Will drawn up? **Check.**
Trusts created for the kids? **Check.**
Executor of the estate named, health directives signed,
and funeral arrangements specified? **Check, check, and check.**

With all that done, you may think your work is finished. But there's one key facet of 21st century estate planning that many people overlook: [a digital estate plan](#).

Data that can be inherited may include passwords, instructive memos, digital contracts, digital receipts, pictures, medical information, or anything else that a user has access to primarily in digital form. Many of these rely on media that are not owned by the data owner but by service providers such as Google, Apple, Microsoft and Facebook who have varied methods of dealing with the account of a deceased.

Some U.S. states now have laws authorizing executors to access a deceased's digital assets, but Canada does not yet have such laws. Depending on the circumstances, your executor may need court approval to access your digital assets. You may wish to document if it is your intention that your executor should access certain online accounts.

Digital inheritance can also pose a challenge for many data heirs who have limited IT skills themselves. A further challenge comes with the fact that an average person has 25 online accounts in addition to data physically stored on their computers and phones.

Risk of Identity Theft and Content Theft

The need for people to be able to pass on their digital assets has given rise to several companies that specialize in providing consumers with ways to allow their heirs to inherit their digital assets after they die.

Here are some recommended basic steps to follow:

- 1 Make inventory lists of your digital assets and how to access them. Don't store your online account numbers and passwords on the same list.
- 2 Find a safe place to store this information. This could be a safe at your bank, lockers or with a trusted person, such as a digital executor.
- 3 Name a "digital executor." This individual needs to be mature, trustworthy and technologically savvy.
- 4 Write out instructions for what should happen to your digital assets after you die. There may be files or confidential information you wish to have deleted.
- 5 Consider whether you want to post a final message online. Your Digital Estate can be a meaningful legacy to future generations. Pass it on.

Take steps to guard your digital estate!

