

Safeguard digital afterlife to avoid losing valuable information

By **JESSICA PROKOP**
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As more people move their lives online, new problems are presenting themselves after we die: Who can access our accounts, and what will happen to them?

"All of us have digital accounts nowadays," said Dan Marsh, a Vancouver estate planning attorney.

The issue of digital accounts and content — known in the legal world as assets — is becoming

more troublesome, he said, as companies, such as banks, continue to encourage people to go paperless.

"More and more people have their financial accounts only online. And that increases every day," Marsh said.

He recommends people get a power of attorney and set up a



Dan Marsh
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will or trust. However, he said he recognizes that only a small portion of the population does this.

At the very least, Marsh said online users should read the fine print on the terms-of-service-agreements for sites. Many online companies provide tools to help determine what they can release to fiduciaries — people appointed to manage the deceased's property.

"You as a user have the right to say what you want disclosed. If you don't do anything, then it

gets deleted," Marsh said.

The Fiduciary Access to Digital Assets Act, which was passed into Washington law last year, lays the groundwork for fiduciaries trying to access electronic information held by internet providers. But to assist in the process, Marsh said all online users should leave an instruction letter concerning their digital assets.

Here's how to safeguard your digital afterlife:

- Identify each account.
- List the accounts you wish

to have maintained and their passwords.

- List the accounts you wish to have deleted and provide instructions on how to do so.

- Consider saving some accounts on a disc or memory stick and store them in a safe place.

- If you have photos that you store on the internet, make a backup on a disk drive or disc.

- Select the people you want to handle your digital assets.

- Update your will, trust and power of attorney.