LEGACY ARCHITECT RVA / FREE GUIDE

How to Handle Online Accounts After Someone Dies

Find the official Google and Apple request routes, protect important photos and files, and organize account follow-ups.

ORDER IN YOUR ABSENCE

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By Legacy Architect RVA, Richmond, Virginia. Updated October 16, 2026.

Begin by identifying the accounts, deciding what information needs to be preserved, and checking each provider's process for a deceased user. Requesting data, closing an account, and reusing a device are separate tasks. A saved password does not automatically give a family member authority to access an account.

Before you request access or deletion

- Write down the provider and known account identifier, such as an email address or profile link.

- Identify what matters: photographs, documents, ongoing business records, or a subscription that needs attention.
- Check whether the person left legacy-contact instructions or an access key.
- Find the provider's official support page and check who may make the request and which documents it requires.
- Record the request date, reference number, and next action in one place.

Keep identity documents and any access credentials in secure storage. Use the provider's official submission process rather than sending them to an address found in an unsolicited message.

How to request a deceased person's Google or Gmail account

Use Google's deceased-user request form. It separates requests for account closure, funds, and account data. Google reviews requests and does not provide passwords or login details.

If you need photos, email, or other content, resolve the data request before asking to close the account. Google states that it cannot provide account contents later once the account has been closed.

For your own planning, Google Inactive Account Manager lets you arrange what happens to selected account information after a period of inactivity. Record the arrangement in your instructions and keep the contact details current.

How to request a deceased family member's Apple Account or iCloud data

Start with Apple's deceased family member account guidance. If you have a Legacy Contact access key, follow that request route. Apple verifies documentation; other access requests may require a court order or other legal documents, depending on the circumstances and location.

Account access and unlocking a device are different issues. Apple says it cannot remove a device's passcode lock without erasing the device. Before erasing anything or requesting account deletion, check the options for preserving needed data with Apple Support.

What if your family member is incapacitated, not deceased?

A hospital stay, serious illness, or injury can leave someone unable to manage accounts while they're still alive. Deceased-user request forms and legacy-contact programs may not apply. Don't assume that being a spouse, adult child, or caregiver automatically grants account access.

Start by keeping essential services running through authorized channels. Identify urgent household bills, insurance contacts, phone and internet service, and any business responsibilities. Check for existing shared access, authorized-user arrangements, account recovery options, or written instructions, and ask each provider what it accepts from a legally authorized representative.

For future emergencies, document which accounts are essential, who should contact each provider, where important records are kept, and how an authorized person can find recovery instructions securely. The free Readiness Check helps identify where those handoffs are unclear before a crisis.

What about social media and subscriptions?

For each social account, look for the provider's official deceased-user, memorialization, or removal process. Record which outcome is wanted and what documentation the provider requests. Avoid assuming that one company's rules apply to another.

For subscriptions, record the service, billing contact, renewal date if known, and whether other family members still rely on it. Ask the

provider about the appropriate transfer or cancellation process. Flag services connected to stored files, shared family access, or business operations before making changes.

Keep a simple record of each request

A useful account record has six fields: provider, account identifier, information to preserve, official support link, request status, and next action. Keep the sensitive supporting documents separately in secure storage.

For example: “Cloud photo account; family pictures to preserve; access request submitted; waiting for provider instructions.” This makes it easier for the authorized person to see what has been done without repeating a request or accidentally closing an account too soon.

Prepare your own digital instructions while you can

List the accounts that connect everything else: primary email, phone service, password manager, cloud storage, and any business domains or software. Document supported access arrangements and where your trusted person can find the instructions. Ask them to explain the first step back to you, without sharing credentials unnecessarily.

A Life Manual connects those digital instructions with household bills, important records, contacts, and the work someone may need to take over. See how we build it with you if you want help finding the gaps and making the instructions usable.

Where to go next

If you are handling a death now, our account and paperwork checklist helps you organize the wider picture. If you are preparing for your own family, start with the free Readiness Check. Account access decisions remain with the provider and the appropriate legal authority.

Would they know where your digital life begins?

Take the Free Readiness Check. Rather start on your own? The Just-In-Case Plan walks you through it for $29.

Order in Your Absence.

NEXT STEPS

Your first step can be small. Start with the free Readiness Check, or explore what a Life Manual can put in order for your family.

Take the free Readiness Check

Explore services and the Life Manual

REFERENCES & LINKS

Resource 2: support.google.com

Resource 3: myaccount.google.com

Resource 4: support.apple.com

Resource 6: jicplan.legacyarchitectrva.com

Resource 7: legacyarchitectrva.com

Resource 8: legacyarchitectrva.com

About this guide

Prepared by Legacy Architect RVA, Richmond, Virginia. This guide is educational and helps families organize practical information. It does not provide legal, financial, tax, or medical advice. Consult qualified professionals about decisions and legal authority.

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