

# **After You've Given it All Away – Your Digital Afterlife**

by Jeff Davidson

During an average week, 8,000 Facebook users die. It sounds shocking, as if Facebook is somehow contributing to mass death. This is not the case: with 500 million users worldwide over the course of a year, actuarial tables predict that about 400,000 users will pass away over the course of a year.

Each departed Facebook user leaves a digital trail, some quite extensive. A regular user might have made 100 posts and received 100 comments or more in the last several months. One does not have to be a regular Facebook devotee, however, to leave a significant digital trail. Every day, thousands of new YouTube videos appear. Flickr has now exceeded 5 billion photos and images. LinkedIn counts more than 50 million members, many with extensive profiles. The blogosphere boasts 21 million blogs, more than 3 million of which are extensive.

## **Hot on the Trail**

For those who do not participate in the above, one's digital trail could still be extensive. The nation's 20+ million entrepreneurs, all scrambling for market share, positive press, and favorable reviews, have a significant presence within the major search engines, including Google, Yahoo, and MSN. Politicians, authors, celebrities, and anyone who has given a public speech, written a book, or appeared in a movie or television show has a

presence on the internet.

Virtually each of us has a web presence that will long outlive us. In particular aging Baby Boomers, who have embraced Facebook in wondrous ways, represent the largest generational cohort to be confronted with tending to one's digital afterlife, if indeed an individual cares to give this attention. After all, when you die, you die, and who cares what specific URLs on the internet refer to you? Increasingly, many people are starting to care.

Businesses are popping up to help customers manage their everlasting cyber identities. One of the industry pioneers, [www.deathswitch.com](http://www.deathswitch.com), enables customers to continue to send out messages after their death. Why would anybody want to do that? Some customers use the service to atone for wrongdoings or, conversely, settle old scores. Many provide bank and investment account information to heirs. Some express messages that they weren't able to offer during their lives. Some, apparently, want to uphold their reputations as control freaks by continuing to disseminate messages that keep them in everyone else's life.

A new breed of digital afterlife services, such as [www.legacylocker.com](http://www.legacylocker.com), offers a quasi form of estate management, including storing vital account numbers, passwords, and access codes for one's heirs or executors. As increasing numbers of people ponder the nuances of their digital afterlives, such digital afterlife management services may become commonplace.

### **For the Cyber-Morbidly Curious**

The Digital Beyond at [www.thedigitalbeyond.com](http://www.thedigitalbeyond.com) maintains a list of online services designed to help you "plan for your digital death and afterlife or memorialize loved ones," these 20 among them:

[www.1000memories.com](http://www.1000memories.com)

allows users to invite other friends of the deceased to submit photos and stories.

[www.assetlock.net](http://www.assetlock.net)

enables users to upload files, passwords, and instructions to be released to predetermined individuals at their death.

<http://www.bcelebrated.com>[www.chronicleoflife.com](http://www.chronicleoflife.com)

a non-profit organization that promises to keep your data for all eternity.

[www.datainherit.com](http://www.datainherit.com)

offers highly secure online storage for passwords and digital documents.

[www.deadmansswitch.net](http://www.deadmansswitch.net)

provides a simple posthumous email service.

[www.entrustet.com](http://www.entrustet.com)

allows you to list all of your digital assets and decide if you'd like them transferred to heirs or deleted when you pass away.

[www.estateplusplus.com](http://www.estateplusplus.com)

provides a virtual safe deposit box for safe and reliable access to information for planning and emergency purposes.

[www.executorsresource.com](http://www.executorsresource.com)

offers a digital estate planning service to gather and store your important documents, personal instructions, and family stories.

[www.eternitymessage.com](http://www.eternitymessage.com)

sends emails a set number of years into the future.

<http://www.gonetoosoon.org>[www.ifidie.org](http://www.ifidie.org)

writes notes that will only be delivered if you die.

<http://www.legacylocker.com>[www.lifenaut.com](http://www.lifenaut.com)

creates interactive avatars, uploads content, and allows storage of your DNA

blueprint so that you can "create a free back-up of your mind and genetic code.

[www.mylastemail.com](http://www.mylastemail.com)

sends out a batch of emails after you die.

[www.mywebwill.com](http://www.mywebwill.com)

enables you to make decisions about your Internet accounts after your death.

[www.mywonderfullife.com](http://www.mywonderfullife.com)

allows you to leave letters, document your wishes, ensure your pets are taken care of, write your own obituary, and design your own headstone.

[www.myinternetdata.com](http://www.myinternetdata.com)

provides a secure method of storing your digital online information in an encrypted file for safe keeping in the unfortunate event of your death.

[www.online-legacy.com](http://www.online-legacy.com)

allows you to create a website with your family stories, guaranteed 50 years of storage for your memories.

[www.partingwishes.com](http://www.partingwishes.com)

provides services dedicated to the private and secure creation of online Wills, Power of Attorney, Living Wills, Funeral Plans and Memorials.

[www.rememberedvoices.com](http://www.rememberedvoices.com)

lets you record, save, and share the sound of your voice.

[www.virtualeternity.com](http://www.virtualeternity.com)

allows you to upload content and program an avatar that looks like you to tell your story and stand in for you once you're gone.

[www.vitallock.com](http://www.vitallock.com)

provides posthumous delivery of escrowed Video, Image, Text, Audio, and Link messages to family, heirs and loved ones.

## **Notice Me, Please**

In a world where people clamor for constant attention, and for those who obsessively post and tweet each day, it's not surprising that some people desire to leave a digital legacy that, presumably, will last far longer than their own time on earth.

For now, I think it's important to embrace the life that you have, come to peace as your days dwindle down, and depart this earthly plain with your affairs in order. Unless what I've left behind somehow benefits my daughter, I would prefer to leave a small digital trail. The cybersphere is already plenty crowded, far beyond humankind's capacity for absorbing let alone acting upon any of it. Rather than read my last 100 posts, I would rather that you simply think of me kindly.

*Jeff Davidson of Raleigh is a regular contributor to Chatham County Line. He is "The Work-Life Balance Expert®," has written 56 mainstream books, is a preeminent authority on time management, and is an electrifying professional speaker. He the author of "Breathing Space," and "Simpler Living."*