

# What happens to Facebook account when you die?

**Survey says majority want to deactivate their account, some want to entrust it to someone**

DUBAI

Staff Report

A majority of Facebook users surveyed in the UAE said they wish their account would “die” as well or get deactivated if they die and one in four consider including their accounts in a will.

Some social media channels such as Facebook have a ‘legacy’ option that enables users to choose a ‘Legacy Contact’, or a person who would look after their account in the event of their death. Not everyone is comfortable of being memorialised, however.

The Dubai International Financial Centre Wills and Probate Registry (the Registry) polled UAE residents on how they want to protect their digital footprint and social media legacy.

More than half of respondents or 53 per cent have thought about what happens to their digital footprint, including their social media accounts, messages and uploaded data online, once they pass away.

An overwhelming majority (89 per cent) said they wish their social media account to be deactivated.

The registry’s findings are contrary to a 2016 research report by the University of Massachusetts, which produced the startling statistic that, based on current Facebook trends, profiles of late users would outnumber living users by 2098. Facebook has more than one

## What to do

How to have a Legacy Contact on Facebook:

- You can tell Facebook in advance what you wish to happen to your account if you pass away. Go to your Facebook Account settings > General > Manage Account and the options will be displayed.
- The account can either become a ‘Memorialised Account’ where friends and family can gather and share memories after you pass away.
- The account can be permanently deleted. To do this, go to the same settings and select ‘account deletion.’
- To choose a Legacy contact, click that option and the legacy contact will be able to (1) pin and post on your timeline, respond to new friend requests, (3) update your profile pictures.

billion users globally.

The findings differ, however, as the US report made predictions based on their calculations, while the registry surveyed 110 residents in the UAE.

## Virtual asset

Just under half or 42 per cent of those questioned consider their digital footprint an asset.

One in four respondents said they would include their social media accounts in a will or succession plan. This suggests that what happens to a person’s social media or digital footprint has become a significant consideration for succession, and

not limited to property or financial assets anymore.

Sean Hird, Director, DIFC Wills and Probate Registry, said this thinking of passing on all assets makes sense as the majority of people nowadays spend as much time online as offline.

“This highlights just how important it is for individuals to think about what happens to their prized possessions. We strongly encourage individuals to start their life admin so that their assets, including digital and physical, are handled according to their wishes after death,” Hird said.

Partners are the most preferred custodian of social media accounts of many users. They entrust them to run their social media as ‘legacy’ pages.

## Overriding parents

However, nearly one in two respondents would not wish to give access to their mums, even when they’re no longer around.

To prepare people for the unexpected, Friends Provident International (FPI) earlier this year published a guide titled ‘A matter of life and death’, which helps expatriates and their advisers consider the implications of an untimely demise.

Philip Cernik, Chief Marketing Officer, FPI said: “Whether for social media or business purposes, there are multiple accounts that we administer, and we encourage users to make a note of any online accounts, which can then be left with a trusted family member or friend.”

Hird said including one’s social media assets is not a service available at the Registry.