

Tool erases online data post-death

By Hayley Tsukayama, Washington Post

You may be a stickler for keeping control of all the data in your many online accounts, but what will happen to that data after you die?

It's a question that Google's addressing with the announcement of a new tool, the Inactive Account Manager, that gives Google users the option to have information from inactive accounts wiped from the system.

Those who use the Inactive Account Manager can choose to have their data deleted three, six, nine or 12 months after it becomes inactive. Users can also select "trusted contacts" to receive information from various Google services such as Blogger, Gmail, Picasa Web Albums, Google Voice and YouTube.

Accounts become inactive when users haven't logged in for a certain amount of time, meaning that events other than death could trigger the notifications. According to Google, users can set their own "timeout" period, and then will receive a text message and email to a secondary account when the company deems the account is no longer active.

Users can find the tool on their account settings page, under the heading "Account Management."

Finding a way to deal with social networking and other data has been a much-discussed topic as people put more of their data online.

Facebook, for example, allows users' family members or friends to memorialize Facebook pages of those who've died. Once an account is memorialized, no one can log into it and the

account will not accept new friend requests. Facebook also removes the profiles of deceased people from its suggested lists of "People You May Know."

Content on the profiles of people who've died remain open using the privacy settings users set when they posted the information. To obtain other information from these accounts, Facebook requires a court order.

Family members, the company has said, can request for profiles to be removed.

As ABC News reported, some states have proposed legislation to deal with data after death. A New Hampshire state representative has introduced legislation specifically dealing with social networking data, while other states such as Rhode Island and Connecticut have legislation that deals with what should happen to users' e-mail data after their death.