

What Happens to Your Online Content When You Die?

More and more of the music, movies, and books we own exist only online, in digital form. What happens to these collections after the owner dies? Surprisingly, while you may want your heirs to have access to the books, music and films that you loved, without a physical copy, these items cannot be easily passed down.

According to most user agreements with companies like Apple and Amazon, when you purchase digital content, you are only purchasing a license to use the content. This license does not give you the right to transfer the e-book or MP3 to anyone else -- even when you die. Instead, upon your death the contract expires and no one else has the right to access it.

There are no solutions to this issue yet. Although many states are starting to pass laws that deal with digital assets, most of these laws concern email and social media accounts, not digital content.

If you own a device that contains digital content, you can pass that device on to your heirs, but there is no guarantee the content will remain. You can also give your heirs access to your passwords so they can access your account. Some estate planners are suggesting that people set up a trust to purchase online content. If the trust owns the content, the contract won't expire when you do. However, these trusts have not been legally tested yet. Until the law catches up with technology, this is a legal gray area.

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