

What happens to your Twitter account when you die?

Posted: 15 Apr 2014 05:56 PM PDT



Summary

Among social media websites, Twitter has one of the **simplest policies** related to the death of a user. Simply put, Twitter will work with an authorized representative of the deceased user's estate to deactivate the account and will not provide any access to the account. The policy, **which was announced in 2010**, previously offered a backup of public tweets, but that language was later removed.

Who can make a request?

According to the Twitter policy "a person authorized to act on the behalf of the estate or with a verified immediate family member of the deceased" can make a request.

What information is required?

In order for us to process an account deactivation, please provide us with all of the following information:

1. The username of the deceased user's Twitter account (e.g., @username or twitter.com/username)
2. A copy of the deceased user's death certificate
3. A copy of your government-issued ID (e.g., driver's license)
4. A signed statement including:
 - Your first and last name
 - Your email address
 - Your current contact information
 - Your relationship to the deceased user or their estate
 - Action requested (e.g., 'please deactivate the Twitter account')
 - A brief description of the details that evidence this account belongs to the deceased, if the name on the account does not match the name on death certificate.
 - A link to an online obituary or a copy of the obituary from a local newspaper (optional)

Please send us the documentation by fax or mail to the following address:

Twitter, Inc.
c/o: Trust & Safety
1355 Market St., Suite 900
San Francisco, CA 94103
Fax : 1-415-865-5405

What actions can they take?

The only option is deactivating the Twitter account. Previously Twitter's policy included an offer to provide an archive of public Tweets to the family, however the following text was removed from their policy sometime between [August 3, 2011](#), when it last appeared in the Internet Archive, and [May 1, 2012](#)

If we are notified that a Twitter user has passed away, we can remove their account or assist family members in saving a backup of their public Tweets.

The following text, which first appeared in the Internet Archive on May 1, 2012, is also in the [current](#)

policy.

In the event of the death of a Twitter user, we can work with a person authorized to act on the behalf of the estate or with a verified immediate family member of the deceased to have an account deactivated.

Note that captures in the Internet Archive between August 3, 2011 and May 1, 2012 are incomplete, therefore the exact date of the policy change is unknown.

Are there other options?

In theory, you could leave the password of your Twitter account to a family member or friend and they could continue using the account, unless an authorized person (as defined above) chooses to contact Twitter. The account could also remain untouched. You may also want to create an automatic backup of your Tweets using a service like [Recollect](#).

What's our take?

We previously covered the policy announcement, and applauded the efforts to provide a backup of public Tweets. With this offer now removed, we believe the current policy is a step backward. I believe my comments from August 2010 are still valid:

Twitter allows families of the deceased two options: remove the account and/or provide the family with an archive of public tweets. I have to commend them for providing the archive. That's more than Facebook will do. The [blog post regarding Facebook's policy](#) is littered with comments about losing the wall posts of the deceased.

[Jeremy \[Toeman\] mentioned](#) that the policy lacked the idea of desired intent and I agree there as well. I would say, however, that their policy doesn't specifically exclude that concept. If a user asks their digital executor to either delete or archive their Twitter account, they would be in luck. That said, the ideal situation would allow Twitter users to specify their wishes before their death, perhaps in their account settings.

I have to ask why deletion and archiving are the only options. Why not allow profiles to stay in place with a memorialized indicator? Perhaps even dedicate space on a user's page to replies that they receive following death. There are opportunities here to design a much better memorial to the user, rather than ushering their profile away as if they never existed.

To summarize my points quickly: Having a policy is better than not. Users should have a choice in their accounts' disposition. Social networks need to shift from dealing with death to designing for it. Their services hold great potential as memorials and, out of respect for their users, they should embrace it.