The Bytes and Beneficiaries Blog™

Posting After a Passing: Why You Need a Social Media Plan for Death

Introduction

When my mother passed away, I did what more and more of us are doing these days…I posted about it on Facebook. She was a loved person, and most of my friends either knew her or knew of her. I wanted to let people know about her passing and share details about the upcoming funeral services. Because of that post, a close friend of mine flew in from San Francisco to attend her services in upstate New York and returned later that day. I was moved beyond words. But the

post also sparked unexpected and unintended tension. My brother was surprisingly upset; he believed the traditional newspaper obituary was enough and regarded the post as a violation of her and his privacy. Of course, we made up, but the guilt for the pain I caused lingered. I've since heard similar stories from other families, where well-meaning online sharing led to conflict or confusion. In today's world, a social media plan after death isn't just thoughtful—it's necessary.

The Power and Risk of Posting

Today, social media is often the primary way people learn about a death. Over 4.9 billion people use social platforms globally (Statista, 2024). For many, especially those who live far away or aren't in regular touch, a post may be the only way they learn about a passing in time to act, decide on their funeral attendance, offer condolences, or simply be there emotionally.

But not everyone involved agrees on when or whether to post. Not family members, friends or even, co-workers. And the stakes are surprisingly high. Done right, a social media announcement can bring people together in mourning. Done wrong—or too soon—it can cause unintended emotional pain and frustration.

True Story: The Crash and the Upload

In a small city a few years ago, a man was tragically killed in a car accident. The crash happened in a familiar intersection to many of the city's inhabitants. Bystanders, trying to help others avoid traffic, took photos of the wreck and posted them online. Some of the man's friends recognized the crushed car and went to the local hospital, only to discover he had died. His wife, meanwhile, hadn't yet been contacted by the police or spoken with the hospital doctors. When she arrived at the hospital and saw the friends gathered in the lobby, she immediately understood what had happened. "I was shaken and horrified," she said. What should have been a personal and private moment, robbed her of digesting what happened and preparation for wave of emotions and required next steps, could have been prevented.

What Can Go Wrong Without a Plan

- Family disagreements over who should post and when

- Loved ones discovering the death through social media before being personally told

- Emotional distress from posts that are too early, too vague, or too revealing

- Cybercrime: Fake fundraising campaigns, memorial pages, or phishing attempts

- Digital identity theft of the deceased—also known as ghost fraud

What Can Go Right With a Plan

- Clear, compassionate communication about services and memorials

- Timely notifications that respect religious and cultural customs

- Comfort for distant friends and family who might otherwise be left out

- An organized space for sharing memories and condolences

- Fewer family arguments and more coordinated support

Best Practices: Social Media Death Planning Checklist

- Discuss social posting preferences with loved ones, especially those with terminal illness

- Prewrite messages or gather thoughts in advance

- Choose platforms wisely (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn) and consider privacy settings

- Designate a trusted individual to post, monitor responses, and report abuse

- Be sensitive to tone and timing—avoid abrupt or overly detailed posts

- Work with professionals to create a digital communication directive

Netiquette: Thoughtfulness in Grief

At The Digital Death Clinic, we provide clients with our “Top 10 Netiquette Tips” to navigate social media gracefully after a death. Topics include:

- Respectful language and tone

- When to tag (or not tag) the deceased

- How to respond to inappropriate or premature posts

- Reporting and removing fake fundraisers or phishing links

- How to manage tribute pages and comments over time

For Professionals: Don’t Ignore the Digital Conversation

Deathcare advisors, estate planners, and legal professionals must integrate social media strategies into end-of-life conversations. Clients look to professionals for peace of mind—and that includes how their story ends online. Having a plan in place not only reduces chaos but also protects estate value and emotional wellbeing.

Final Thought

In a world where news travels faster than grief can settle, a single social post can carry enormous weight. Some families bond through online remembrance. Others fracture over a poorly timed update. The difference is usually a plan.

Don’t leave your final message—or the burden of it—to chance. Start planning your digital departure today.

Call to Action

If you're unsure how to prepare your social strategy for end-of-life communication, help is available.

Contact Lee Poskanzer at The Digital Death Clinic to begin building a plan that protects your legacy, honors your wishes, and eases the burden on loved ones.

The Digital Death Clinic offers expert guidance on digital estate preparation, directives, communication planning, and netiquette coaching. We help individuals, families, and professionals plan for the emotional, technical, and legal aspects of digital death.

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Disclaimer

This blog is not intended to be legal advice. Neither Lee Poskanzer nor The Digital Death Clinic is providing legal representation. Readers should consult their own legal counsel for advice related to estate and digital property planning in their jurisdiction.

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