



PAULA RICE:
DIGITAL ESTATE GUIDE

DIGITAL ASSET ESTATE PLANNING

Quick Start Guide

Congratulations on taking your first step!

Why Digital Asset Estate Planning Matters

In today's world, most of our lives are connected to the digital space. Family photos, email accounts, social media profiles, online banking, and subscriptions are all part of one's life story. But here's the thing: most people don't think about what happens to all of this when they're gone.

A common mistake is thinking that traditional estate planning covers everything, but digital assets are often left out. For your family or executor, knowing what needs to be done and having access can be challenging. Unattended accounts may cause confusion or pose potential security risks, making these accounts prime targets for unauthorized access or even ongoing subscription charges.

A good friend of mine went through this. Her dad had an old-school estate plan, but his digital life? Not so much. She spent months trying to sort it out, devices and photos that she couldn't access, locked accounts, and subscription services still charging fees. It was a tough reminder of how important it is to plan for your digital assets too.

Managing your digital legacy might seem overwhelming, but it doesn't have to be. This guide provides steps to assist you, regardless of your technical skills. With some effort, you can help your loved ones manage your digital assets, prevent potential risks, and make it easier for everyone involved.

Let's keep it simple and easy to handle. Putting in the effort now can really pay off down the road.

Disclaimer: This guide is for informational purposes only and does not constitute legal advice. Completing this guide does not create a legally binding document. For a comprehensive estate plan, consult a qualified attorney or use estate planning software.

What Are Digital Assets?

Digital assets are accounts, information, and files that make up your online life. It's not just social media, think about financial accounts, cloud storage, and digital purchases too. Taking an inventory of these assets is the first step in digital estate planning.

Here are some of the most common examples of digital assets:



Social Media Accounts

Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and X (formerly Twitter) are likely to hold personal memories, photos, and connections.



Financial Accounts

Your financial accounts include online banking, PayPal, Venmo, and cryptocurrency wallets. These may hold cash or other assets, so it's important to provide detailed login credentials and instructions for handling security protocols like two-factor authentication.



Subscription Services

Services like Netflix, Spotify, and Amazon Prime have auto-renewing subscriptions.



Email Accounts

Email accounts, such as Gmail, Yahoo, or Outlook, are the hub for communication, financial records, and auto-pay billing information.



Cloud Storage Services

Platforms like Dropbox, Google Drive, and iCloud store photos, videos, and important documents. These may include family photos or important financial records.



Digital Purchases

Digital purchases like e-books, music, movies, and other licensed media may hold sentimental value but are most likely non-transferable. Leave clear instructions on how to manage these purchases.



Websites and Blogs

If you own websites, blogs, or domain names, they may have branding or financial value. Provide instructions on whether you want them kept active, sold, or archived.

Hidden Risks of Ignoring Your Digital Assets

It may not seem like a big deal to leave accounts or profiles open, but it poses a *bigger* issue than what you might think. Without a plan, these accounts can create more stress for a grieving loved one or worse, pose a more serious risk like identity theft.

Unattended accounts and devices come with challenges like:



- **Unauthorized Access:** Hackers often target inactive or forgotten accounts.
- **Financial Drain:** Subscriptions or services can keep billing your estate even if the service is no longer being used or consumed.
- **Lost Memories:** Photos, videos, or important documents stored in the cloud could be lost forever.
- **Identity Theft:** Each year, the identities of an estimated 2.5 million deceased Americans are stolen. Thieves steal personal information from obituaries, public records, and social media to commit fraud, such as opening credit accounts or filing false tax returns (source: IDX).

Planning ahead protects your executors or loved ones from these risks and finding themselves in an even more difficult situation. For example, ensuring your executor has access to important accounts can prevent hackers from exploiting those unattended profiles. It also allows your executor to close subscriptions, access important files, and protect your identity or legacy.

Taking time now to organize your digital assets isn't just practical, it's the best way to make sure your loved ones know what to do when you are gone.

Where to Start

Digital asset estate planning can feel overwhelming, but it doesn't have to be. The best way to begin is by starting small and focusing on what's already in your hands, quite literally.

Here's how to get started:

Step 1:

Look at Your Phone



Your smartphone is a treasure trove of digital assets, making it the perfect place to get started. Start off capturing:

- **Apps You Use Every Day:** Social media, banking apps, payment apps, and cloud storage.
- **Photos and Videos:** Consider how you want your digital memories shared, stored, or secured.

Email accounts are the central point of your online life, typically where everything comes together. Use your email to:

- **Search for Subscriptions:** Review your inbox for recurring payments, newsletters, or streaming services.
- **Find Linked Accounts:** Use search terms like “welcome” or “registration” to identify accounts linked to your email.
- **Secure Your Email:** Since most accounts are tied to your email for recovery, this account should be prioritized in your plan.

Step 2:

Check Your Email



Step 3:

Review Your Bank Statements



Financial accounts reveal more digital assets than you might expect. Look for:

- **Online Banking:** Record account details for your digital asset estate plan.
- **Recurring Payments:** Note subscriptions or services you may want to cancel or continue.
- **Investments or Crypto Wallets:** Include login details and any security information tied to these accounts.

Once you've identified key assets, start documenting them. This simple checklist will help you organize the information:

1. **Account Name**
2. **Username/Email:** Note the email or username tied to this account.
3. **Purpose:** Is it personal, financial, professional, or something else?
4. **Action Plan:** Will this account be closed, memorialized, or transferred?

Step 4:

Use This Checklist

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>

Why Start Here?

Focusing on what is most familiar things like your phone, email, and bank accounts will help you build momentum. These are the digital assets you interact with daily, making them easier to track and document. Once you've got these down, you'll feel more confident moving on to larger, less obvious categories like online businesses or cloud storage.



Take-Action Tip

Set aside just 30 minutes to go through your phone and email to get started. You'll be surprised how much progress you can make in a short time. We've also created a Quick Start Worksheet to help you document these accounts as you find them. Download it and keep it handy as you take the first steps in planning your digital estate.

Quick Action Steps: What to Do Next

Now that you've identified your digital assets using the Quick Start Worksheet, let's take the next steps. This process isn't a one-and-done, you've got to revisit and update regularly or as your digital life changes. Here's a checklist to help you organize, secure, and maintain your digital asset estate:

1

Inventory Your Digital Assets

Use the information you've collected so far to create a complete inventory of your digital assets.

Make sure it includes:

- Account names.
- Associated email addresses or usernames.
- Important details about each account (e.g., purpose, value, or significance).

2

Research Account Options

Each platform has its own rules about what happens to an account after you're gone. Look into whether accounts can be memorialized, transferred, or closed. For an overview of platform policies, see the **Digital Asset Estate Planning Book**.

Research the choices available for your accounts, such as:

- **Memorialization:** Some social media platforms allow accounts to be memorialized.
- **Transfer of Ownership:** Certain platforms permit accounts or content to be transferred.
- **Closure:** Many platforms allow accounts to be permanently closed.

3

Decide on Access and Ownership

For each account, decide what should happen. Capture your preferences so your wishes are clear.

- **Keep Active:** Document who should take over access or ownership.
- **Memorialize:** Decide if this option makes sense for social media accounts.
- **Close/Delete:** For accounts no longer needed, note that they should be closed.

4

Secure Your Information

Make sure your information is safe and accessible

- Use a password manager or digital vault to store login credentials securely. Never write down your passwords.
- Include security questions and two-factor authentication details, where applicable.

5

Name a Digital Executor

Choose someone you trust and who is tech-savvy enough to understand and execute your instructions.

Make sure you provide them with the information they'll need to:

- Access and manage your accounts.
- Document your wishes for each asset.
- **Identify a Backup Digital Executor:** Choose a backup person who can step in if your primary executor is unavailable.

6

Document Everything

Write down all instructions, including your inventory, account-specific wishes, and any access details.

If you want a more detailed template for documenting everything, the upcoming **Digital Asset Estate Planning Book** provides a comprehensive guide.

7

File With Your Attorney or Estate Planning Software

Once everything is organized, make sure you this is included as part of your overall estate plan.

- Share it with your attorney to file alongside your traditional estate plan.
- Use DIY estate planning software to upload and store this information securely.

8

Schedule Regular Updates

Your digital estate plan is a living document that needs to be updated as your digital life changes.


Set a reminder to review and update your plan:


- Add new accounts or assets.
- Remove accounts you no longer use.
- Confirm your instructions still align with your wishes.





Take-Action Tip: Build Momentum with Key Steps


If you're feeling overwhelmed, start small. Focus on these priority steps to make quick progress:

 **Inventory Your Assets** - Identify the accounts, subscriptions, and digital items

 **Secure Your Credentials** - Use a password manager to organize and protect your login details

 **Document Your Wishes** - Decide on the future of each account

 **Assign a Digital Executor** - Choose someone who will carry out your plans and inform them

 **Commit to Updates** - Set reminders to revisit your digital estate plan regularly

Take 15–30 minutes to tackle one step today—you'll be surprised how much progress you can make!

Bringing It All Together

Taking control of your digital assets isn't just about security or organization—it's about leaving a thoughtful and manageable plan. By following the steps in this guide, you've taken a first step toward creating a digital legacy that documents your wishes and reduces stress for those who will manage these accounts.

This is an ongoing process, and that's okay. As your digital life evolves, your plan should, too. Update your inventory regularly, revisit your instructions, and make sure everything aligns with your wishes.

If you're ready to take the next step, there's more help available:

- **Follow Us on Social Media:** Stay connected with updates, tips, and actionable advice.
- **Explore Our Website:** Visit www.digitalestateguide.com for helpful blogs, resources, and tools to make the process even easier.
- **Join an Upcoming Webinar:** Learn more about digital estate planning and get your questions answered in real-time. Keep an eye on our website for dates and details.
- **Watch for My Upcoming Book:** Dive deeper with the upcoming **Digital Asset Estate Planning Book**, which provides templates, account-specific details, and step-by-step guidance to simplify the process.

Every step you take today will help remove complexities and answer questions your executor or loved ones may have tomorrow. The effort you're putting in now, organizing your accounts, choosing a digital executor, or securing your information, will make a world of difference later.

This guide gives you a strong start, but there's more help available. The **Digital Asset Estate Planning Book** dives deeper into platform policies, legal considerations, and detailed templates to help make all of this easier for you.

Let's make digital asset estate planning easy, doable, and something you can really be proud of.

Sample Template

Use this sample format to get started.

Category	Platform or Account Name	Username/Email	Action Plan	Notes
Social Media	Facebook	john.doe@gmail.com	Memorialize	Keep active for memories
Financial	PayPal	john.doe@gmail.com	Transfer/Close	Transfer funds to estate account and request closure
Cloud Storage	Google Drive	john.doe@gmail.com	Keep Active	Contains family photos
Email	Gmail	john.doe@gmail.com	Keep Active	Central to all accounts; secure

Ready to take action? Download the full, editable version of this template on our website at www.digitalestateguide.com.