
Broadband beyond the grave offers web service for the dead

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Fascinating as it may be, the internet is no good to you when you're six feet under. Or that has been the assumption. Yet now a website dedicated to that vast and previously overlooked group, the dead, is starting to prove being online is vital even when you are permanently offline.

Users of YouDePARTed.com can issue posthumous instructions for everything from their funeral to feeding their pet, cancelling bills and magazine subscriptions, organising their will and other financial matters, sending final letters to friends - and foes - and delivering a valedictory video address summing it all up.

All that's required in this life is a computer, some inputting, and a minimum of \$9.95 (£4.93) a year. Once a user has died, and it has been confirmed to the site by designated family members or friends, the content is released as he or she instructed.

The idea came to co-founder Collin Harris after the death of his own father in 2000. 'We had no information about anything, even down to the key to his desk, so we had to get a locksmith,' Harris recalled. 'He had two safety deposit boxes but we never found them.'

'My stepmother has his ashes but we don't know what he wanted us to do with them. I got thinking, what would happen if I died suddenly? How is anyone to know what you are responsible for and where everything is?'

Harris and his son, Nick, set about building an electronic safe deposit box where people can store such information until it is needed. A sample account on YouDePARTed contains information such as 'Cover letter to family', 'Where to find my will', 'Here is how I want my burial to be handled', 'My pallbearers', 'Phone bill', 'The family business - how to run it', 'Gift to my childhood friend Al', 'Dental insurance', 'Keys to the storage locker' and 'Turn the water off to the shed before winter'.

When the account owner dies, the site can send emails and post traditional letters, including orders to cancel bills and subscriptions.

Harris, 51, a software entrepreneur, insists that he has made security paramount, using the same encryption technology that America's National Security Agency employs to transmit classified documents, and undergoing a daily audit by a security firm, HackerStopper.

'I can't look at your account even though I did a lot of the programming,'

he said. 'To say nothing wrong can ever happen is idiotic, as the Titanic demonstrated, but the damage caused would be small.'

The Harrises launched the site from their home in Incline Village, Nevada, but it has attracted 10,000 users worldwide.

He is not sure if anyone has yet stored a video message to say goodbye. 'I don't know if I would,' he mused. 'With everyone sitting around to watch it, it would be a bit like a Hollywood movie.'

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