

Do our virtual identities fade away when the real life ends, or do we live for ever on cyberspace? What happens to our email and social networking accounts that are either dormant or dead? Read on to find out...



Prakash Babu

Arpita Misra &amp; Sherry M Jacob Phillips | TNN

Have you charted your 'webwill'? Who would you want to bequeath your online property to, after you are gone? Have you insured your virtual afterlife yet?

Weird as these questions may sound, you cannot turn a blind eye to the fact that your virtual avatars reveal many personal details about your lives in the online space.

From confidential bank documents, to photographs of honeymoon, it's all there. Ever wondered what happens to all those precious personal online possessions of yours, God forbid, when that inevitable end comes.

Do they get deleted over a period of time, and if so who does it? Can your loved ones access these data?

While the notion is that any dormant account dies a natural death, internet service providers actually have well-laid rule books to deal with such situations. Says Elizabeth Linder, who

out to a local municipality or requesting an obituary."

While Yahoo Mail accounts are deactivated and removed if found dormant for four months at a stretch, Hotmail treats its own course. "The policy of Microsoft is that if a customer does not sign in to their Hotmail account for 120 days, the account is considered inactive and all messages are deleted and inbound mails refused," says Ratin Lahiri, director (online business), Microsoft India.

#### AFTER LIFE

Researchers observe that there's been a rise in the number of cases where the kin of the deceased have expressed desire to keep the latter's virtual life ticking. So do the service providers actually divulge the deceased's password to the kin?

"Facebook's policy is not to provide login information for an account to anyone other than the account owner. Our standard procedure, when we receive a report that a user is no more, is to memorialize the account. This restricts profile and search privacy to friends only. However, the profile is available for friends and family

#### MAKE ONLINE WILL

A few companies are offering services that promise to take care of the virtual you, once you are no more. A Swedish start-up, 'mywebwill' is offering services that help you tweet, scrap, email or post messages on the wall from beyond the grave. Subscribers can spell out their last online wish and it will be taken care of. So you can actually script a digital will detailing what you wish to do with your online assets. The English version of the site is set to be launched, as per the home page of the website.

So would you want to assort your parallel life and make sure the virtual monsters don't come to haunt you in your grave? Says Padma Priya, a Hyderabad-based medical practitioner, "I don't have important documents online like bank account details, I-T details, etc. I'm anyway quite wary of that on the virtual space. But yes, I have shared quite a few photos with friends and families and have put up their photographs in my accounts. But if any of them were to fall in wrong hands once I'm dead, how would it really matter? Like you said, I'm dead and gone anyway."

Priya is confident her passwords and other online materials are safe with her fiancé, but she feels services like 'mywebwill' could prove handy for those who don't really have anyone to bank on with such confidential information. "I can't expect someone who loves me to immediately worry about my online possessions once I die. In such a scenario, such websites might be actually useful," she explains.

However, not everyone is game for an afterlife social networking. Shiny Anne, a teacher in Kolkata, argues, "What's the point networking with a society when everyone knows you are dead? Let's be practical. At the end of the day, it's the family who interacts with your online friends, when you are 'resting in peace'."

The mathematics teacher feels a little practicality would help in such cases. "I have always kept my twin sister posted on my login and passwords. I know my confidential data is in safe hands," Anne justifies.

While our second lives are increasingly reflecting our primary selves, erasing bounds of time and space, scaling security concerns are but natural. So before you embark on that ultimate afterlife journey, maybe you should make sure the virtual you gets a befitting farewell too.

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## R.I.P...NOT YET

handles international communications and public policy for Facebook, "We honour requests from close family members to deactivate the account of someone who has passed away. Accordingly, the profile and associated information are removed from the site. When we receive a call or a notice from a family member, we conduct an investigation, which allows us to confirm if a person has, in fact, passed away. This may involve reaching

members to leave posts in remembrance," says Linder.

The news of the death of 30-year-old computer graphic trainer Rizwannur Rahman had grabbed headlines for days together in 2007. Rizwannur's body was found on the railway tracks of Kolkata, following his marriage to an industrialist's daughter, Priyanka Todi. Today almost three years later, Rizwannur's Orkut profile is still abuzz. "We keep posting updates on our sir's scrapbook. Even today his scrapbook is flooded with messages, especially on his birthday and death anniversary. Posting messages online is our way of conversing with Rizwannur sir," says Jayant Banik, one of Rizwannur's students.

Google has other options. "If the account holder is no more, we act in accordance with the wishes of the next of kin of the deceased or a law enforcement agency. The relative concerned can always contact us using an online form," says a Google spokesperson.

## GO DUTCH, IN EVERY STEP YOU TAKE



A view of Rotterdam, which was the world's busiest port from 1962 to 2004, until surpassed by Shanghai

Preeti S | TNN

Ever wondered what makes the Dutch a perfect example for the phrase 'looks can be deceptive'? Well, a stroll on a street in the Netherlands will prove it beyond doubt. You might bump into an informally dressed man riding a bicycle who actually could be a minister. It is unacceptable to flaunt wealth, so even many high-

#### ABOARD ABROAD

ranking managers are dressed more casually than their employees. No celebrities, no frills. All are the same.

Hence 'going Dutch' is not just a common habit of sharing the bill when you dine or drink together with friends. It is part of their tradition of equality and sharing. "If you

rare to witness a rat race as jobs are plenty for the qualified. "People are non-competitive in a positive sense. That makes the whole atmosphere stress-free," says Jitendra.

#### PEDELLING THEIR WAY AHEAD

The bicycle is their lifeline, as everyone, irrespective of their age and job, ride them with equal excitement. Separate cycle tracks across the country encourage this eco-friendly mode of transport. "At times, it seems the bike paths are wider than the roads. It's an experience in itself to see people riding through the rain and the wind, whilst holding on to an umbrella, or on a rare sunny day holding onto a dog leash, with an elegance that can only be termed as being Dutch," says Jaskaran Sandhu, research engineer in Delft University of Technology.

#### When they act indian

The only time the Dutch go over-board and explicitly violate the rules is while riding a bicycle. As an Indian you may wonder why a Dutchman actually stops his car for a red traffic signal in the middle of the night. But put the same Dutchman on a bicycle and he/she will act Indian, he becomes a non-conformist.

Bob Hoekstra, CEO, Opportunity India Consulting, The Netherlands.

think you are coming from a good breed, you need not mention it, it's not appreciated. All people are born equal and live equal," says Bob Hoekstra, CEO, Opportunity India Consulting, The Netherlands.

The office hierarchy has no meaning, at least not in the sense that a lot of energy is put into understanding "who's in charge of who". A productive atmosphere with good business relationship is typically preferred over a strict pecking order. Simply put, the Dutch like to have things done in a pleasant atmosphere so that everyone is comfortable to agree or disagree.

It's natural for them to be frank and open-minded. They do not appreciate polite answers that avoid real issues. Criticism is a sign of involvement, not of rejection, so if a Dutch criticizes an idea, it is likely that he is simply attempting to refine it. Even the bosses are careful in expecting others to yield to their power. "Inspiraak" is a common term which means everyone involved has a voice in decisions.

"If you have a point, do not hesitate to disagree with your seniors or managers. It's considered healthy and constructive. The decisions are usually consensus based hence they might take some extra time than usual," says Jitendra, who did a Master's in aerospace engineering from Delft University of Technology, the Netherlands.

Known as the 'business travellers of the world', they are ready to acquire any skill or speak any language that makes business sense. Hence expect virtually everyone to speak English, apart from German or French. In their learning skills, they have emerged as an accommodative society. Moreover, it's

#### EQUALITY RULES

Shops are closed on Sundays and after 6 pm everyday. That is part of the equality paradigm as everyone, including businessmen, is entitled to have a family life.

#### GIFT OR BRIBE?

Avoid giving gifts until you have cultivated a personal relationship with your Dutch counterparts. An expensive gift may be considered as a bribe.

#### BE SIMPLE

Don't demonstrate emotion or use exaggerated hand gestures at business meetings.

#### WHAT'S IN A SALUTATION?

People don't pay much attention to salutations. However, in a business/social environment it's normal to use first names. For very formal situations, one could use Mr/Ms.

#### INDIAN FOOD

Indian food is available at Tokos run by people of Indonesian background, though meat is at the heart of a Dutch meal.

#### DOUBLE-TAKE

If you are overweight, no need to ask what your Dutch friends think of your weight, they will volunteer comments.

This is an occasional column that will familiarize you with countries that you may have to travel to or live in, especially for work. If you have experiences to share, do write in to preeti.patil@timesgroup.com

## eTIDINGS

### Know if your Gmail is hacked

Did you know, you can find out if someone has hacked your Gmail account? At the bottom of the Gmail page, look for "Last account activity: xx minutes ago on this computer. Details". If the account is simultaneously opened elsewhere, this message appears: "This account is open in xx other location at this IP (xx.xxx.xxx.xx). Last account activity: xx minutes ago. Details".

Click on "Details", a new window opens giving particulars of the previous

five account operations, and any concurrent activity. Ideally, you must see this notification on that page: "This account does not seem to be open in any other location."

Gmail has now introduced additional security alerts. The 'detail' log will have, besides the IP address, the state and the country from where the account has been accessed. If it has been accessed from an unlikely location, (possible hacking) you will find a message: "Warning: We believe your account was last accessed from ...."

Of course, it's an automated system alert. The program assumes that the place from where you regularly log in as the likely location, and if the account has been accessed from any other place, even if it's by you, the system will trigger an alert.

### A lot more on Yahoo Mobile

Yahoo is in the process of unveiling a snazzy interface for its mobile version. On one page, there are a lot of easily accessible information cleanly arranged. It can be customised, and the best part is it has added a feature called Social Pulse, which allows one to access social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter.

### Twestival raises \$450,000

The twitter festival, Twestival, held on March 21, across 175 cities around the world, raised more than \$450,000 for Ireland-based charity Concern Worldwide's education projects, technology blog Mashable, reported quoting Twestival founder Amanda Rose. "Compared to last year's total of \$250,000, contributions to Twestival Global 2010 grew by more than 80% during its

second annual fundraising event," Mashable said. Seven Indian cities — Bangalore, Chennai, Goa, Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata and Kochi — pooled in Rs 3.5 lakh; out of which Bangalore's contribution was over Rs 1.1 lakh, said Vijayanthi K M, regional coordinator for India.

### Comments on Buzz

How much of a Buzz the new application within Gmail is making may be a matter of debate, but Google is trying its best to address the users' concerns. Users whose Buzz postings had attracted a large number of comments, complained that all the comments appeared in an expanded form, filling up the screen and making it quite a task to scroll through. Gmail has announced on its blog the following improvisations:

- If there are 3 or more previous comments (made before last visit to Buzz) or new comments (made after the last visit), they are collapsed into a group.
- The last 2 new comments are expanded.
- If there are too many previous and new comments, they are collapsed together in a single line.

# इलमिटेन by इंसक्रिट

Though ancient, Sanskrit is not alien to information technology. What makes it compatible to computer softwares is its extremely well structured form with finer distinction of vowels and consonants based on pronunciation.

Preeti S | TNN

NAMASTE.... That's a customary Hi from Ajit Krishnan, a software engineer in Seattle, to every mail he sends. His passion for Sanskrit has not just crossed the countries, but has surpassed the language boundaries. For the generation that thinks in English and feeds on burgers, Sanskrit is no longer Latin. And Ajit's blogs in Sanskrit are a testimony to the fact that English is no more the quintessential medium for bloggers.

That the worldwide web is replete with online Sanskrit learning classes, translations, blogs and softwares mirrors the fact that Sanskrit is ancient, but not alien to information technology. Students in the US and

UK, for instance, bring out a Sanskrit webzine called Vishvavani (<http://vishvavani.blogspot.com>). There have been eight editions since its launch in 1997.

"Instead of reading about Sanskrit, I now read Sanskrit. The possibilities are endless," says Ajit. The current fascination is fuelled by the linguistic perfection of Sanskrit that has sustained it for thousands of years. What makes Sanskrit compatible to computer softwares is its extremely well structured form with finer distinction of vowels and consonants based on pronunciation. That has been endorsed by NASA, which has said that the world's oldest spiritual language is the only unambiguous spoken language on the planet.

"Though I started blogging in Malayalam, I switched to Sanskrit later and I find the latter more comfortable," says Jyothirmayi P C, a lecturer in Bangalore, who has been blogging in Sanskrit since 1997. The blog of Yaajushi, 23, from Maharashtra, is a journey into a new world. From hobbies to movies to her views on smoking and games, everything is in Sanskrit along with an English translation.

The language's foray in technolo-

gy got a boost in 1987, when Forbes magazine stated that "Sanskrit is the most convenient language for computer software programming." What has eased blogging in Devanagiri are different kinds of softwares like Translator and Baraha.

"While in the US a few years ago, I came across a bunch of Sanskrit enthusiasts and attended some spoken Sanskrit sessions. Among the Sanskrit

#### CLASSIC COMMENT

friends, we used to speak mostly in Sanskrit. When they were not around, it seemed to be a good idea to blog in Sanskrit to keep in touch with the language," says Arun, an engineer in Chennai.

The Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC) has developed softwares in Sanskrit, Devanagiri, Hindi and Marathi. And the most convenient and popular keyboard is the one in Sanskrit.

For youth, a Sanskrit keyboard and Hindi software could be a perfect desi configuration for a computer. But the use of the software is low. Veda Varidhi P Ramanujan, head of C-DAC Bangalore, however says: "The growth here need not be linear. I hope it be-

comes exponential." A simple, dhoti-clad 'vadhyaar' complete with 'naamam', Ramanujan is a rare combination: A Sanskrit scholar and an engineer. "More than the language, it is the structure of the thought process and its cognitive modeling that make the science or abstraction most suitable for designing and implementing computer technology. More than the grammar of Sanskrit, it is the science of grammar elucidated in Panini's rules that makes it convenient for automatic representation," he says... TATHASTU

#### Read them if you can

- <http://samskritapatrika.blogspot.com/>
- <http://kalidasa.blogspot.com>
- <http://nimittam.blogspot.com/2008/05/blog-post.html>
- <http://yaajushi.wordpress.com>

#### To blog in Sanskrit

- Download [www.baraha.com](http://www.baraha.com)
- Install baraha on your computer
- Once installed one of the executables will be Baraha direct
- In the main window, type the transliteration.

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