

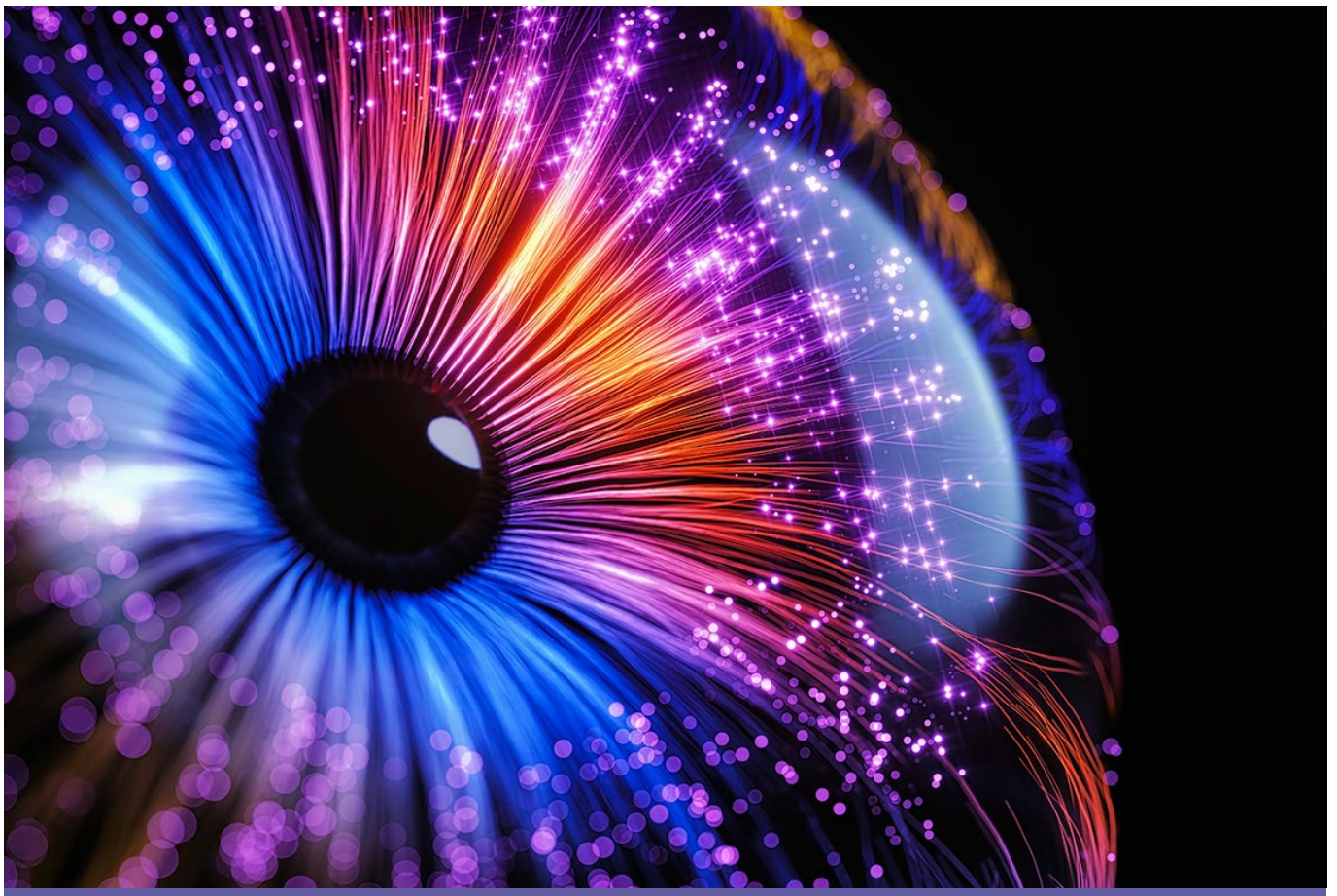


Online wills through the eyes of the consumer

Digital Legacy Insights 2024

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PUBLIC BRIEFING



Introduction

In 2024 Legacy Foresight explored the important area of online wills in its Digital Legacy Insights research programme. The programme looked at online wills from a consumer perspective, seeking to understand more about who is making them and why; how they make their decisions; what their choice criteria is and importantly where charities and charitable bequests fit in.

This report shares the topline findings and key headlines from the research. We are grateful to our learning circle members for agreeing to share the information in this briefing more widely.

Online wills have seen significant growth in the last few years, as the pandemic accelerated digital adoption across all ages in society, people were forced to confront their own mortality and companies and services were forced to adapt and provide more services online.

In a relatively short space of time, the number and variety of online will providers have proliferated, and their products have evolved and become more established and sophisticated. Many providers have seen the charity sector as an opportunity to help them reach a fragmented and saturated consumer market, and several online will brands are now well embedded in the legacy sector.

Online wills are commonly used by charities as a vehicle to recruit potential new legacy donors and whilst there was initial caution and reservation, they are now embraced by legacy marketers as they provide a tangible, measurable way of evaluating their legacy marketing, in a scalable, low-cost way.

There has been much discussion about the relative merits and challenges associated with online wills but little that focused on the consumer perspective. So, this programme aimed to step back and look at the world of Online Wills through the eyes of consumers.

Research methodology

- **Desk research:** To gain a comprehensive picture of the current online wills landscape
- **Members survey:** To provide insight into how consortium charities invest in, support and market online wills, and how they measure success.
- **Consumer survey:** To understand the prevalence of online wills amongst the general population.
- **Qualitative research:** Ethnographic research interviews to dig deeper and explore the experience of making online wills from a consumer perspective.
- **Expert interviews:** Engagement with online will providers sharing their perspective of the market, the audience and trends.

Summary of findings

Our consumer survey provided a comprehensive snapshot of the current prevalence of online wills:

Nearly one in ten people have made a will online and one in five people who haven't yet made a will claim they intend to make it online when they make one.

The **profile of an online will maker skews younger** compared to the average will maker, however, a significant proportion of people currently making their will online are aged 65+

Online will makers are more likely than the average will maker to be affluent, higher social grade, with higher levels of education, working, living in urban areas (especially London and the South East) and have children, although they are less likely to be married.

Charitable online will makers skew even younger, are more affluent and are more likely to be working, be single and have children.

Online wills are more likely to include a charitable bequest

The main reasons consumers are choosing to make their wills online is for **convenience and cost**.

When considering the consumer perspective and behaviours around making online wills there were a number of key learnings:

The **journey to making an online will is not linear** and there are long time lags reported between the initial thought of the need to make a will and action/ execution and sometimes some false starts along the way.

Consumers are carrying out research as part of their decision-making process. They are finding out about the different products and companies but their focus is on making sure the companies are reputable and they aren't being scammed and that the process is easy to navigate, rather than reading the small print behind the specific products. They don't understand the differences between different products and tend to assume that all the companies and products offer the same thing.

Charities' association with online will providers and products **lend credibility and trust** which serves to effectively endorse the products. Charities, therefore, have a big responsibility and could potentially be opening themselves up to reputational risk if the products offered aren't fit for purpose.

There is **confusion over the role of the charity in the online will making process**, especially amongst people in the consideration phase. If people make a will through a charity, are they 'supporting' that charity? What help will the charity provide and is the will making service part of the charity's service provision?

As consumers go through the online will making process and move from the consideration phase to the execution phase, the **visibility of the charity often reduces** with the online will provider becoming more prominent and dominant.

Key considerations

Our research highlighted four key areas for charities to consider when offering online wills to consumers.

1.

Supporter experience of making an online will – how can charities improve the experience in terms of clarity of offering and helping supporters along the journey.

2.

Optimising the potential for a gift – charities need to ensure visibility as consumers progress through the process and given that online wills are bringing in a larger proportion of younger consumers, charities need to consider how to effectively steward supporters over a longer period of time.

3.

The Competitions and Marketing Authority have carried out an important [Review](#) of unregulated legal services which covers will writing providers – how can charities apply the learnings and work with providers to ensure any necessary changes to products are implemented to protect their supporters and mitigate potential risk.



Charities are probably the biggest purchasers of online will writing services (albeit indirectly), they have a huge potential, what they demand will drive what happens.

4.

Managing risk – online wills are a staple in the will making toolkit and consumers are increasingly attracted to them. Charities need to ensure they are providing clear, transparent information to help supporters make informed choices. They also need to ensure that they have processes in place to help protect themselves as much as possible from contention or undue challenges.

Next steps

Digital Legacy Insights (formerly Legacy Fundraising 2.0) was set up to drive discussion on the value of digital legacy fundraising and gain a deeper understanding of how charities are using digital and social media to inspire, inform and steward legacy donors.

Next year's Digital Legacy Insights programme is still under consideration, however, we are embarking on a new stand-alone programme centring on **Stewardship**, in order to help legacy fundraisers develop, refine and optimise their stewardship practices. It will focus on the key principles of stewardship, look to the future to identify the dynamics and trends which will impact on stewardship practices and will seek to understand how supporters are engaging with and experiencing different stewardship journeys and programmes.

This programme is welcoming members until 27th January 2025

For more information or to join Legacy Insights please contact Claire Truswell.

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Legacy Futures

Legacy Futures is the UK's leading charity consultancy that specialises in gifts in wills and in-memory giving.

We are a trusted partner to 330 charities worldwide, supporting them to harness the transformative power of legacy giving.

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Legacy Foresight

Legacy Foresight is best known for its forecasting, benchmarking and research, often working with charity consortia to gain greater insight into Legacy and In-Memory markets.

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Legacy Voice

Legacy Voice helps charities improve their legacy marketing strategies and communications, working with charities large and small, UK and International, turning insight into strategy and action.

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Legacy Link

Legacy Link is the UK's largest team of estate administration consultants, helping to maximise the gifts left to a charity, and adding value at every step of the way.

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