iN2L™

Senior Living Idea

Connection is the Key to Occupancy

How Engagement Technology Meets the Demands of Potential Residents and Families

Recent insights from NIC founder Bob Kramer point to the COVID-19 pandemic as being one of the most powerful and defining moments in the history of the senior living industry. According to Kramer, "there will not come a time when we will return to the old normal."[1] In fact, it seems inevitable that all aspects of the industry will be turned inside out, upside down, examined, and re-imagined to better serve a new set of expectations from older adults and their families.

With AARP reporting that 1 in 3 U.S. adults are lonely[2], as well as the knowledge that the effects of prolonged isolation are equivalent to smoking 15 cigarettes a day[3], ensuring that older adults remain connected has been a focus for senior living operators for some time. One interesting byproduct of the pandemic is that people of all ages now viscerally understand the reality of social isolation and loneliness in ways they did not before. Senior living operators can be sure that a new criteria decision-making family members and potential residents will have is how the community will address and mitigate loneliness. In addition to making sure their loved ones are cared for and safe, families will require housing providers to demonstrate how their loved one will be able to remain connected to the people and experiences that matter to them on an everyday basis as well as when precautionary isolation becomes necessary.
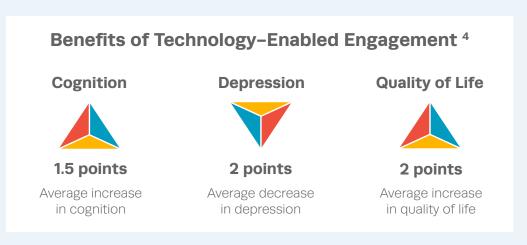
73%

of senior living operators believe engagement technology differentiates their community and the experience they offer residents and families.

While nothing can replace the value of true in-person contact, technology can help provide this life-sustaining connection in a way that is easy, convenient, and more manageable for community staff. An independent survey of senior living operators conducted on behalf of iN2L found that 73% of community leaders believe engagement technology differentiates their community and the experience they offer residents and families. Communities that integrate this technology into their operations will be best prepared to meet the challenges of our next normal, demonstrating that they can keep residents engaged and connected, even during times of extreme caution. Here are three questions potential residents (and their families) will be asking, and how engagement technology can help communities provide answers.

How will I find programs and experiences here that match my personal interests and goals?
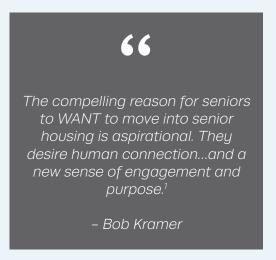
Offering residents access to experiences that interest them is foundational to a comprehensive connection and engagement strategy that is different than a standard group activities program. What really creates a feeling of purpose and fulfillment for residents—and helps reduce depression while increasing other positive predictors of health and wellness—is the ability to continue nurturing interests and passions by tailoring content and experiences to individual preferences. More and more, communities will need to demonstrate how they gather information about residents—not just their histories, but what motivates them, what they want to learn, what they want to be able to contribute to the community—and **use** that information in innovative ways to anticipate their needs and personalize their experience.

Engagement technology offers the ideal platform to help personalize the senior living experience at the individual level. Whether in a staff- or resident-led model, used in groups or individually, it can support many unique use cases and situations. And the benefits of technology don't stop at enjoyment and fulfillment; interacting with engagement content has been shown to improve residents' self-reported quality of life.[4] Engagement technology that is rooted in a wide variety of content curated specifically for seniors allows staff and residents to easily search for and navigate to interactive items that facilitate experiences in learning, physical activity, nurturing spirituality, creative expression, and more. Beyond an activities program, offering residents the choice to design how they spend their time by partaking in virtual classes, religious services, and other opportunities will be an imperative that communities can deliver on more easily with a content-driven engagement solution.

Benefits of Technology-Enabled Engagement [4]

Cognition

1.5 points
Average increase in cognition

Depression

2 points
Average decrease in depression

Quality of Life

2 points
Average increase in quality of life

How will I stay active and engaged in community life when group events might be limited?

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> *The compelling reason for seniors to WANT to move into senior housing is aspirational. They desire human connection...and a new sense of engagement and purpose.[1]*
>
> *– Bob Kramer*

It is interesting to consider that feeling lonely does not necessarily relate to whether a person lives alone. A study from the University of California at San Francisco reported that 43% of the seniors surveyed reported feeling lonely, yet only 18% of them lived alone, with the majority of those indicating loneliness living in nursing homes or receiving in-home care.[5] With a common benefit of senior care's communal living model being the ability to live and socialize in groups of peers, community operators must strive to provide these opportunities in a way that feels organic, personalized, and empowering to residents—regardless of precautionary isolation.

The same engagement content that connects people to their passions, interests, and aspirations can be used to connect them to others who are like-minded. At a basic level, engagement content has the power to bring residents out of their shell. Consider the lifelong pianist who lights up when he discovers engagement technology can enable him to play again, or even just easily revisit favorite genres of music and performers. Imagine other residents watching this, and two other former musicians or vocalists realizing they have common experiences and interests with this gentleman, something they may not have known before. Now these residents have a standing weekly music appreciation session that they enjoy together, even from the safety of their own rooms. To take the concept even further, engagement technology can serve as an enabler for collecting information on residents' interests and using it to help them form connections with others, both inside and outside the community.

How will I stay connected with my loved ones, whenever I want?

The pandemic has shown us that communities already using technology as a critical part of the resident experience have adapted to precautionary isolation and visitor restriction better and more quickly. When evaluating communities, residents and their families will likely be asking what types of technology (able to be used effectively and easily by seniors) and communication programs are in place to ensure that, should visits be limited again in the future, they will still be able to stay connected with their loved ones.

Engagement technology can help meet the need for on–demand communication as well as everyday small moments of connection by enabling digital interaction between residents and the family members and friends in their inner circle—even outside the community. Using video chat instead of in–person visits is one use of technology that many communities have relied on during the height of the pandemic, and one that benefits residents' health, as confirmed by a recent study concluding that older adults who use video chat have a lower risk of developing depression.[6] Engagement technology platforms that include easy–to–use video chat applications make it possible to continue this method of resident–family visiting on a long–term and scalable basis. With no complicated downloads, sign–ups, or setups, residents can operate the tool themselves, putting them in control of when and how often they "see" their loved ones and requiring less work from staff. Solutions that offer the added ability for others to send photos, videos, and secure text messages to residents, organized and easily viewable in personal profiles or albums on the platform, can help create daily moments of ongoing connection that don't need to stop when visits might be restricted.

As we move past the height of the pandemic, the certainty that periods of isolation will be even more necessary again in the future will cause older adults considering senior living to evaluate their options with a fear of feeling lonely and cut off from the world around them. Communities that can demonstrate a plan for augmenting important in–person connection with tech–enabled connection will be best able to reassure potential residents and become the residence of choice.

Older adults who use video chat are **50% less** likely to exhibit symptoms of depression.[6]

Put the power of connection and engagement in your residents' hands. If you're ready to talk with iN2L or would like to learn more about our solutions, please visit iN2L.com.

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