

It's at the Epicenter of Your Community, And No One is Using It

By Susan Saldibar

Does anyone out there remember those early intranets (not internets, but those internal company networks)? They were character based, lots of "now enter this," "now enter that" to get to a communication center (or sort of one). Then scroll, scroll to get to the department, and more scrolling to get to the file folder. Whew! It was easier to pick up the phone and call!

Intranet or Messaging Center? What does it matter if it doesn't work?

What got me thinking about intranets is something that Judy Finn, Director of Marketing for iTacit, a Senior Housing Forum partner, told me. "People sometimes refer to the iTacit infrastructure as an intranet, which we find interesting. We consider it a messaging center and a communication hub."

Regardless of what it's called, the important question is do you even have one? If so, do you use it? Because no organization is too small to benefit from communication organization. If you do things right, as Judy suggests, technology can bring people and information together, whether they're down the hall, working a different shift or across town in another facility.

If you have a truly interconnected network using all the latest technology that lets people interact and communicate 24/7, then congratulations! You are in the minority. Well done.

Unless everyone is connected, no one is connected. And younger workers know it!

Chances are, if you're like so many senior living communities, you have a cluster of systems that interact only on one or two levels. So they are, for the most part, disjointed, outdated, and serving no one. Maybe you tried something once and it quickly became outdated, so you went back to bulletin boards and message books.

Aside from the obvious problems, the deeper issue is that younger staff members will get turned off by systems that aren't connected. They simply won't take the time and effort to use tiresome "workarounds" or low tech methods. So if you're barely getting by today, by tomorrow you may have a technical (and HR) nightmare on your hands.

For those of you who are ready to "get on the stick" and revamp your internal communications infrastructure, here's some advice from Judy to make it less painful:

- 1. **Recognize that it's a Group Effort**. IT folks are great (if you have them!) for set-up, but they don't necessarily know what your community wants and needs to hear. Get everyone involved (especially leadership) in deciding what's needed and where information should reside.
- 2. **Focus on the big picture.** How can an automated communication center improve the performance of your team members? What issues can it solve, not just from an infrastructure standpoint, but for the end users. Think problem/solution.

- 3. Make it (dare we say) fun to use. And why shouldn't it be? It should become a seamless extension of your other online tools; intuitive and easy to use. And it can also be a place to strengthen your communication, through engagement and ownership and, yes, fun.
- 4. **Keep updating it.** Or they'll ignore it. This can't be stressed enough. Today everyone is used to a constant stream of news in Facebook and Instagram. You need to establish your intranet/messaging center as the epicenter of all communications. It must be the place to get the very latest documents, files and schedules. If they can get it somewhere else faster, they'll defect.
- 5. **Use it from Day 1.** If new hires learn to find all information in your central communication hub, that's all they'll know. The habit will be established. An added bonus is that it can help simplify and standardize onboarding processes.
- 6. **It Can Be Turnkey.** There was a time when companies had to build their own. Not any longer. There are plenty of affordable cloud-based options. Decide what you need integration, HIPAA compliance, multi-lingual, etc and pick what's best for your organization.

Whether you call it an intranet or a message center or communications platform, it matters today more than ever. Don't underestimate its importance. Get it going now.



