



Putting Off Buying That Expensive Technology? Why it Might be a Smart Move

By Susan Saldibar

A while back I wrote about [Vigil Health Solutions](#)' (a Senior Housing Forum partner) integration with Echo, the voice activated "smart" speaker, sold by Amazon. The idea is that residents who are not near or unable to press a call button can, through Echo, still summon assistance. What's so great about the way Vigil works is their ingenious sense of how to use available technologies to add safety monitoring into items we use every day. The technology guru behind all of this is Steven Smith, VP of Research and Development.

Knowing that Steven had recently been to the Leading Age conference, I was curious as to what his take was on the plethora of technology on display --- what's good about it, what the challenges are, etc. Here are a few things that caught his eye.

"Intelligent" Surveillance Camera Technology:

The good: These are sophisticated devices, originally developed for hospitals, that are making their way into senior care. While they shouldn't transmit actual images (due to HIPAA privacy laws), they can send an alert when images reflect out of bounds actions or movements by residents. You can even mount "floating" cameras on service carts and other equipment to keep the devices mobile and unobtrusive. Virtually no movement goes undetected, and they can be tailored to fit an individual's movement patterns.

The challenges: First, the potential to "over-calibrate" this technology can cause false alarms to go off every time someone totters or moves in an unexpected way. Secondly, while it may work great in a hospital setting, inserting it into the homelike atmosphere of a senior living community can be challenging (who wants hospital carts rolling around). Finally, as a technology platform, it may be overkill for many communities, requiring a full time IT presence and ongoing maintenance. That added expense, along with the cost of the technology itself, can put these devices out of reach for many communities.

Real-time Resident Locator Systems

The good: These systems are useful for tracking not only human movement, but equipment as well. Imagine, for instance, integrating it with a building's egress system on exit doors to help track and reduce resident wandering. Pretty good idea.

The challenges: Keeping the locating devices charged is probably the biggest hurdle, according to Steven. Plus, the type of technology needed to track indoor movement is different from what is used to track outdoor movement, so you're typically getting one or the other. Also the cost to actually pinpoint a person's location within a building requires sensors in every single room which, for now anyway, is still very expensive for senior living. In short, there is more work to be done to iron out the wrinkles to make these systems work seamlessly and be put into practical use in senior communities.

The Startup Garage

Here's what really got Steven's attention . . .

Off to one corner of the exhibit hall was the Startup Garage area where visitors could engage in creative discourse with entrepreneurs as they presented their unique new concepts and products for senior living. "This is the real silver lining in an industry where technology is still finding its way into practical applications," says Steven. "These inventors are putting their tech savvy to good use in the form of some pretty innovative applications."

Lots of creative uses for existing technology, but combined in new and better ways.

There were about a dozen different startups; some started by kids with grandparents in assisted living communities, some even started by the seniors living in those communities! What's cool about it is that they observed a need, firsthand, and put their creativity to work, using existing technologies and applications. "And, even though some will undoubtedly fail," says Steven, "the odds are they will give rise to other new ideas."

Case in point was a group of students Steven chatted with who had found a fresh use for Fitbit bracelets, originally designed for use with sports teams. The team had little interest in wearing them, so they repurposed the wearables for seniors, to track movement and vital signs. And, according to early reports, the residents are enjoying some spirited competition for most number of steps!

So what's the takeaway on all this as it relates to today's senior living communities?

It's easy to get caught up with all these shiny new things. But Steven urges community leadership to make sure you have all the basic technology in place first; records, billing, reporting, etc. Keep your goals achievable. (As an example, a good goal might be to make sure you are able to provide quality wifi throughout your entire campus within x months.) Keep it simple. Push the broader goals out towards the future.

"ROI is critical," says Steven. "So when you are ready to invest in technology, make sure you're not paying for someone else's exploratory research," he adds. "Partner with vendors who are using tried-and-true components that have been road tested. They'll be less expensive. And they'll work better."



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