How Technology is Impacting Our Communities: A Viewpoint From Brookdale

By Josh Studzinski, Director of Marketing, Caremerge

Technology has the incredible ability to bring generations of people together and bridge the gaps that separate us both emotionally and physically. This is one of the key takeaways from Caremerge's new Trailblazers In Senior Living initiative that features pacesetters in our field that have implemented new and innovative ideas aimed at delivering transformative experiences to residents, families, and caregivers. (*Caremerge is a Senior Housing Forum partner*)

The purpose of the series is to raise awareness of the challenges and opportunities impacting family, community, and staff; deliver thought-provoking discussions that may inspire change in senior living communities; and provide a collaborative forum to share ideas with other executives in the senior living industry.

For our first trailblazer interview, Asif Khan, Caremerge founder and CEO, sat down with Andrew Smith, Brookdale's director of strategy and innovation. We hope you will enjoy the results and find something useful and interesting.

Bridging Generational Gaps

Video chat has been the most impactful and important technology for residents, families, and caregivers at Brookdale, Smith told Khan in the interview. "We've seen it bring family members together in a powerful way and use it to connect face to face," he said.

Indeed, video chat creates an excellent opportunity for grandchildren and grandparents to build strong relationships with each other. "It keeps family ties strong, despite the distance, and helps to prevent social isolation among residents," Smith explained.

The Magic of Video

With regard to reducing social isolation among residents, Smith explained, it's important for us to stay grounded in what they need. "Since there is a lot of variability in their technology acumen, it can be a challenge to meet everyone's needs. We try to educate everyone about technology."

"What I love about video chat and other technology for residents is that you connect with others—with family members, fellow residents, and more—over just a conversation about one thing," Khan added. For example, he noted, if someone brings up the fact that he had flown a certain plane while serving in the military, you have the technology at your hands to look up the plane and have a discussion about it.

"It could last for hours or even a whole day," said Khan. "That shared experience, it creates a simple touch point; it helps me understand that person better, and it's so important to have that connection."

Meeting Expectations

"Regarding our residents, I feel we are meeting and even exceeding their technology expectation. In assisted living and independent living we are meeting or exceeding expectations, but with family members, we are not meeting or exceeding their expectations," said Smith.

Today, family members expect to transact business no matter where they are but the senior living industry is behind in that regard, both Khan and Smith agreed. "We can create a lot of value by mimicking innovation in other industries," Smith observed. "Looking at your bank statement online, for example, is something that residents or family members can do, but the industry is behind in that regard. Innovation for us is being able to show your bill digitally."

Not only that, but the adult children of seniors are using Amazon Prime, Uber, Grubhub—their experience outside of senior living is totally different. "It's important to remember that family members bring in expectation we have to meet that," Smith said.

Taking the time to find out how to meet the expectations of residents, as well as family members and staff, especially when it comes to technology, is also important, Smith advises.

In the end, he adds, technology is a very positive thing: it can drive transparency, quality, and consistency, three very important elements of senior living.