The Mind-Boggling Future of Remote Engagement

By Susan Saldibar

My 92-year old mom is not tech savvy. And it's not because she couldn't be. It's by design. She prefers face to face communication or the telephone. And if she is going to press any buttons, it'll be to turn on the TV. Always has, always will.

I, on the other hand, am pretty much wired for sound, from my iPhone to all the apps I use to my laptop, social media, you name it.

This is the gap that senior living community operators are struggling to fill; from one generation to another of seniors.

Communications Technology

I caught up with Kian Saneii, CEO and Founder of [Independa](#) (a Senior Housing Forum partner), who continues to be on the cutting edge of communications technology, having delivered his share of seminars and keynotes on some great topics, such as where this industry is headed.

In one of his recent presentations, Kian cited some interesting stats from Pew Research about older adults. Here were three that, together, made me do a bit of a double take:

- Only 17% of older adults use a tablet or smartphone
- Only one third of older adults own a computer
- Yet, older adults spend an average of fifty-one hours per week watching TV!

Fifty-one hours per week watching TV? Wow. How many of us boomers remember our moms snapping off the TV after our requisite 2 hours per day was reached? Didn't they say something like "too much TV is bad for our brain cells"? Interesting.

Remote Engagement

What was interesting about the presentation was Kian's take on the future of "remote engagement", a popularized term for interacting with people and processes remotely, be it from the comfort of your own home or senior living community apartment. Here are three areas where he sees the greatest growth in remote engagement, all of which work together to form, what he refers to as the "all-in-one holistic platform":

1. **Family Engagement** - The ability for seniors and their families to "connect" and share things remotely that they used to share when physically together. These include:

   o Video and photo sharing
   o Life Stories
   o Call Buttons (virtual telephone)
   o Music Stations
   o Personal Calendar sharing

2. **Organizational Engagement** - The ability to provide input, organize and share remotely within the senior community, with family access as well. Areas include:

   o Care Journals
   o Activity Calendars and Reminders
   o Dining Menus
   o Automated Check-Ins
   o Educational Content (Videos)
   o Surveys
   o Services

3. **Integrated Remote Care** - The ability to share critical health and medical records among staff, residents and approved family members. These include:

   o Accessibility across a wide range of devices that can track:
     ▪ health
     ▪ activity
     ▪ environment
     ▪ safety and fitness
     ▪ wellness concerns
   o HIPAA FDA Class 1 regulations and issues
   o Healthcare integration

What is interesting about the deep bench of capabilities outlined above is how many can actually be accessed through that device our moms kept clicking off: the TV. Independa has developed technology that basically turns any TV into an interactive computer. That means today's 80-something year old seniors can click their remotes and engage with family, friends and just about everything going on outside their rooms. The technology also works on tablets and mobile devices to create a closed engagement loop; virtually no one is left unconnected.

Endless Possibilities

The implications of remote engagement in the above areas is mind-boggling. The technology cat is out of the bag so to speak. Networks will keep getting faster. Devices will keep getting smarter and our expectations will continue to rise accordingly.

As those 80-year old moms realize they can click the TV remote and access the world around them, I can't help but wonder: How are senior living communities going to keep up with her?