Residents Stay Longer if You Have This in Place

By Susan Saldibar

Is there anyone out there who doesn't agree that one of the best things about technology is its ability to connect us? Connect us to buy things. Connect us to make reservations. Connect us to information. Connect us to each other.

Now, put yourself in the shoes of a newly minted resident in an independent or assisted living environment. Wouldn't you love a portal that lets you connect to everything happening in and around your community?

We now have an expectation to be able to connect. Even if we're over 65.

That's the premise behind the RealPage® (a Senior Housing Forum partner) resident portal, called ActiveBuilding®. And it's a logical premise. Especially in today's world where 40% of seniors now own smart phones; a percentage that will only continue to rise. So they expect to connect to what's happening around them as well as to each other.

Before I talk about a great conversation I had with Jennifer Torigoe, Industry Principal for Consumer Solutions for RealPage, here are some of the things ActiveBuilding enables its residents to connect to:

- Calendar of activities
- Clubs and groups (i.e. Walking Buddies)
- Dining menus
- Amenities within the community
- Photo sharing
- Bulletin board
- Transportation, such as Lyft
- Maintenance for their apartment or room
- Room reservations for visiting guests
- Access keys for visiting family members
- Medical assistance if needed
- Surveys to express their opinions about services and amenities

As impressive as this list is, when I spoke with Jennifer Torigoe, it is the socialization aspect of ActiveBuilding or the "people to people" connections that she believes ultimately provide the greatest value. And there are plenty of connections enabled --- staff to staff to resident to resident to family and so on.

And that personal connection to people and activities with people can do a lot for a community's bottom line as well.

After speaking with Jennifer, I would boil down the benefits to 3 key areas:

1. **Higher Retention Levels:**

   Happy people tend to stay in a community. Giving residents the ability to socially connect with one another, staff and family members from within the building tends to make people happier. So, the ability to use technology to communicate within a senior living environment has created a new dynamic. It's the "glue" that keeps people from jumping to other communities. "Using this kind of technology helps eliminate the feeling of isolation many have, especially when they are new to a community," says Jennifer.

   And it builds staying power for employees as well. "Employees expect to be connected, whether it's to other people, medical records, work schedules or other data," says Jennifer. "Be assured, they are looking at a potential employer's technology as much as at the culture and other benefits."

2. **Added Revenue:**

   We talked about the ancillary income potential. "Being able to keep better track of and bill properly for ancillary services can make a huge difference to the bottom line," says Jennifer.

   Interestingly, according to Jennifer, with the ability to more easily connect and RSVP for services, comes a greater willingness to pay for them. Based on their data from 2011-2015, those operators who tied their special "guest week" RSVPs directly to their payment systems had three times the reservations of those who did not. "It was the availability that made it so much easier to reserve, log and pay," says Jennifer.

   And, she tells me, using these kinds of tools saves time and overhead, which translates into dollar value for community.

3. **Competitive Advantage:**

   I'm a big believer that communities with technologies that allow staff, residents and family to interact have almost boundless potential. And that sells.

   It's proving to be a great leg up for smaller, independent communities, in that it can help them emulate a more sophisticated, larger community, Jennifer explains. "Just the fact that people can see at a glance everything going on around them creates a sense that the community is at a higher level than others; more sophisticated and connected to what's happening," Jennifer says.

I asked Jennifer what she would say to those community operators in older buildings who are still keeping the basics, such as WiFi, on the back burner. "Communities need to get out of the mindset that 'we're fine, this generation doesn't use tech.' Not so any longer. My 82-year old great aunt uses social media," says Jennifer. "It's just the way we live now."