

This is the App Residents "Really Wanted"

By Susan Saldibar

Some developers, when they hear clients say "But, wait, what we really want..." just nod, sigh and continue down their (hubris-lined) path to develop exactly what they wanted to in the first place. (No joke, I've witnessed this.) So, what I like about the folks at <u>Vigil Health Solutions</u> (a Senior Housing Forum Partner), who I've been covering for a while now, is that they consider a comment like "what we really want" as an invitation to collaborate.

Jacquie Brennan, Vigil's VP of Operations, told me this happened recently while they were developing a much anticipated emergency call and check-in app for senior living residents. In this case, the "wait, what we really want" moment came in the form of a request to make the app do even more! Customers wanted an app that would let their residents communicate, anywhere, anytime, with a specific department (i.e. Someone has a leaky faucet and needs maintenance to fix it. A tap, a text and it's communicated).

From a "call system" to a "communications app"...which is what they "really" wanted.

"Our customers are noticing that residents in Life Plan and other independent living communities are becoming pretty tech savvy and are used to using apps on their smart phones," says Jacquie. "So, what started off as a call system specific add-on has been expanded into more of a communications app," she adds. In other words, giving them what they "really wanted". Pretty cool.

Vigil previewed their new app, "Vigil Connect", at LeadingAge last month to an enthusiastic reception. Here are some of the things the new app can do:

- Handles emergency calls. For residents who are forgetful about carrying their emergency call pendant (or simply don't want to) they now have a way to raise an internal emergency call by the press of one button. Of course, they can still just call 911.
 But if you have first responders on site, which many of the large independent living communities do, they can get the first call.
- Allows residents to check-in. So, if a resident is supposed to check in every day and he or she does not do so, the staff would know to check on them.
- Allows residents to send direct messages to the individual who can best serve their needs. This involves an easy to navigate screen with large print for those with vision challenges. A simple tap will connect them. Then they can leave a message.
- Allows staff to receive these calls and messages on the Vigil Mobile app on their phones so that they can respond accordingly, wherever they might be.
- Tracks and logs a record of each request. This is useful for reporting purposes and to make sure no request goes unnoticed.

The good news is that all this is coming soon to users of their Vigil Cloud, Jacquie tells me.

What I like about Vigil Connect is that it allows communities to kick their services up to a higher level. And, as Jacquie points out, it demonstrates to residents and family members that they care enough to invest in the latest technology. And it won't bust the budget. "We know our customers want to keep up with the times and this will be an effective way to add services at minimal cost," Jacquie says.

"Allowing residents to communicate directly with staff through apps puts us one step closer to eliminating some of the capital costs associated with call systems," Jacquie adds. But, before you start doing cartwheels, a couple things to note. As with any smartphone technology, a lot will still depend on the reliability of your community's WiFi and availability of cell phone coverage. And with all new tech, the regulations often take a while to adapt. So, replacing your emergency call system with an app may not be next year's project. But Vigil will be ready when you are!

"Today's residents, especially in independent living, are driving a new level of innovation that is really exciting," she says. "Steven and our development team depend on our interactions with users to challenge us and help drive us to the next level. It's that collaboration that we feel helps us build better solutions." And, I might add, ones that they "really want".



