



# Learning from Other Industries

*By Tom Levi, AIA and Gracyn Robinson*

Every thriving industry is transforming itself through client engagement: Senior Living and Care (SL/C) is no exception.

SL/C is small, narrowly focused, and evolved as a subset of other larger industries:

- Housing
- Hospitality
- Healthcare
- Dining
- Recreation
- Wellness

Independent living and assisted living are a segment of the housing industry . . . sort of; but you could just as well argue that the “care” portion of SL/C is a subset of the healthcare industry. Likewise, the programming and dining elements of SL/C are really a part of the hospitality industry. And the activities and features provided by SL/C spill over into the world of entertainment, retail, sports, and recreation.

This all makes what we do more complex and exciting: it is filled with both opportunity and stumbling blocks.

## **A New Paradigm**

We know the internet has radically changed everything we do. Broadly, it has made consumers more aware, better educated, and connected -- they can now make major decisions from a remote location. It has also radically changed how businesses compete, leveling the playing field in some ways while making competition much more intense and creating an unexpected, unintended sharing of revenue.

The retail industry, for example, has been hard hit by online purchasing and is struggling to redefine itself to adjust to new customer expectations for greater levels of engagement, experience, and methods of choice.

**This “new normal”** has become a “higher” blend of service, experience, and entertainment. It sounds pretty good except everyone thinks they have this figured out and when you look at every business (not just senior living), they all sound the same in sales and advertising. You could even substitute senior living for their business, and it sounds like it fits. The SL/C industry must now grapple with the best way to provide this augmented level of service to the baby boomer generation poised to enter its marketplace. With all these changes occurring, SL/C will need to create more interactive and dynamic mini-villages or communities than presently exist. They can no longer stand alone as housing and care as they do today.

### **The Boomers**

As the baby boomers become the new dominant target for senior living operators, the industry will have to adjust to new patterns of behavior, expectations, choice, needs, engagement, and connectivity. Healthcare will be a central focal point in terms of necessity, expectation, and service.

Location, purposeful living, and economics will continue to be the primary factors for decision-makers. Yet at the same time operators will need to adapt. New drivers include choices in housing, dining, recreation, entertainment, opportunities for learning, socialization, and the quest to follow one’s passion -- at new levels not seen before.

The great opportunity, to be so bold, is to offer boomers the opportunity to “reinvent themselves”; or if you prefer, to “redefine themselves”. Some will like it, some will not, and some will find new opportunities that they never knew existed or they never thought about. It will all be about individual personal choice or need rather than the industry making choices for the residents.

### **Adapt or Fail**

Whether you are a new generation of senior living leader or an existing national or regional provider; for-profit or not-for-profit, or have legacy communities -- everyone will need to adapt, or they will fail.

We are at that point where senior living must reinvent itself into a place seniors “want to live” and not just “need to live”. To get there it is critical to gain an understanding of these new seniors, what they want (and need) at a level far beyond what is presently known.

## Lessons from Other Industries

Over the course of several articles, we will explore what Senior Living and Care can learn from analogous industries:

- **Housing:** Today's real estate market offers a tremendous variety of living opportunities focused on social engagement, affinity, and affordability — luxury, market rate, active adult, transitional downsizing, co-housing, co-living, timeshare, aging in place, AirBnB, micro-apartments, and many more. Is SL/C missing out on these market segments?
- **Hospitality:** The hospitality industry has taken the concept of personal service and user experience to new heights to provide consumers a menu of environments, activities, and price points. What can SL/C learn from this individualized approach?
- **Retail/Service:** Traditional brick and mortar stores are being replaced by Amazon and other retail websites, where the shopping occurs online and the company delivers the product to the consumer. How does this affect SL/C public lobbies, living rooms, stores, and mailrooms? How does it affect the method of supplying services?
- **Recreation and Travel:** Digital Integration lets seniors utilize Virtual Reality environments to replicate travel through a new type of sensory experience that can extend to virtually any area of interest. How will this affect social engagement in tomorrow's SL/C?
- **Entertainment:** As movie attendance dropped with the advent of in-home movies and cable TV, national theater chains rolled out VIP service for baby boomers with reclining seats, bar service, and appetizers. How does SL/C position itself to offer its residents an array of choices they can't find elsewhere that will bring them together?
- **Health, Wellness, and Sports:** Today's seniors do not just want to live longer, they want to live well longer. Trends in diet, exercise, mind/body connection, sports, and clothing have spawned new industries that cater to an active lifestyle. What new services and spaces does this imply for the SL/C industry? How does a company align itself with the idea of living well longer?
- **Dining and Casual Food:** Morton's Steak House, Legal Seafood, Olive Garden, Panera Bread, Chipotle, Au Bon Pain, McDonalds, Burger King, and Starbucks, as well as local fine dining or boutique restaurants, have all thrived in a crowded marketplace by distinguishing themselves with a unique menu, dining experience and adaptability. What are the takeaways for the SL/C industry concerning choice, method of choice, food quality, communal food preparation, wellness, and dining as an experience?
- **Technology:** Last – one of the largest disrupters in business and society in the past century – the technology revolution. In and of itself since post-WWII, Korean War, and early 1950s in the US and the world, it has influenced all the above industries and many more. It has driven innovation, information, knowledge, safety, connectivity, pleasure – positive and negative. It's improved old industries, created new industries and helped

replace industries that refused to rapidly adapt to new methods and change. The boomers will bring a new level of technology culture to Senior Living and Care the industry has not seen before and will change it – we believe for the good of all involved if everyone works together. One test to consider – what technology would you bring or want it you lived in your own community?

Senior Living and Care is about new choices the boomers will expect and demand – are you prepared for them?