



How to Choose the Best Senior Living Engagement Technology

A Buyer's Guide from Icon

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Introduction

Communities are investing in technology to meet their customers' needs and expectations more than ever before. But with so many options to choose from, it can be overwhelming to figure out which vendors make the best partners or what technology you need.

This guide gives a comprehensive overview of how to choose the right senior living engagement technology for your community's needs, goals, and budget. We walk through everything from selecting technology for the first time to identifying issues with your legacy system to promoting the adoption of your new one.

Remember: you are the expert on your needs and what makes your community unique – this guide is here to help you find the perfect technology partner.

If, after reading, you're still not sure where to start or are ready to learn more, we're happy to walk you through the selection process. (We're just one click away!)

Read on to better understand the elements of choosing and implementing the best senior living technology for your community.

6 Signs It's Time to Look for New Engagement Technology

Resident and family expectations have changed. Today's residents and families expect to be engaged via technology. Sixty-one percent of older adults now have a smartphone, and tech-savvy millennials are the primary population of adult children.

When choosing a senior living community, families are increasingly looking beyond its physical space and toward its digital footprint. They're evaluating a community's technology suite. And because of that, it's especially important you deploy and use the right systems. So here are six signs you need a technology upgrade or a new tech partner.



Residents and families aren't happy with the tech, say they feel uninformed, or have low adoption rates

Picture this: it's been a few months since you implemented your engagement platform. Despite your hopes that residents and their families would line up to use the tool, less than a third of that group has registered. And your data shows that only a tiny fraction of those folks use the platform at least once a week. Stumped, you run through what you did before investing in this technology. You...



Confirmed your existing infrastructure (WiFi speeds, bandwidth, etc.) could support it;



Announced this product across various digital channels (email, phone call, and text) and in person.

So this isn't a technical or awareness issue.

Maybe it's an issue with comprehension. You ask families and residents to contact you with their thoughts on the platform. You're flooded with a range of dissatisfied responses, from "It doesn't load on my iPhone" to "I don't know how to RSVP to events."

The only thing that's consistent here is residents' and families' unhappiness with your platform.

The Takeaway

When residents and family are making similar complaints about a "solution," that often means it's the problem.



The tech won't integrate with other systems

Let's say you were sold on a communication platform that the vendor said could soon offer [interoperability with dozens of other solutions](#). Cut to nine months later and that interoperability is nowhere to be found.

You learn that your communication platform doesn't play well with [Amazon Alexa devices](#). This alters your plan to purchase a fleet of Echo Shows for your residents' living quarters.

Plus, your platform has never integrated with your digital calendar. Staff has to regularly file the same information in two places: your calendar and your communication platform.

In summary, this senior living tech...

- Prevents you from adopting new technology
- Hurts your existing platforms' effectiveness
- Forces staff members to repeatedly do the same tasks

The Takeaway

If a vendor can't offer you the [integrations you need](#) right out of the box, or hasn't made progress on that front, that's a sign you need to look elsewhere.



Staff is spending too much time on admin work

Since revamping a portion of your life enrichment strategy, you've noticed a change:

- Staff members are constantly fielding phone calls
- The team is regularly printing calendars
- Representatives are distributing printouts consistently

The only thing it seems they aren't doing is engaging with residents like they used to.

You know this revamp – meant to improve accessibility and expand reporting – is necessary. And you don't want to take a step backward. But you also know that this current system, built on manual processes, isn't working for your staff. It doesn't scale with your life enrichment program.

You need a way to streamline this administrative work so your staff can do what they do best: engage with residents and families and use those conversations to fuel improvements down the line.

The Takeaway

If your staff is buried in paperwork and can't interact with the community around them, it's time to find technology that saves time while promoting widespread engagement.



Your customer support requests are piling up

Over the past several months, you've been having issues with your solution. And your [customer success](#) representative hasn't resolved any of the requests you've sent. Sometimes these issues take time to resolve, but you feel stranded.

Meanwhile, your solution grows more dysfunctional. Your staff is trying their best to develop workarounds. Residents are coming to you with questions that you can't answer. Usage rates are dropping. And all you can do is continue to send customer support tickets and pray your vendor gets back to you.

The Takeaway

If you're dealing with month-old support tickets or an endless stream of dial tones and voicemail greetings, it's time to find a new senior living tech partner.



Residents aren't attending – or scheduling their own – events


You've put together an activity calendar that integrates various dimensions of wellness and even includes some remote-friendly options. But residents just aren't showing up. In fact, residents don't seem to be *around*. Most of their time is spent in their rooms, away from others.

You find out that residents are having trouble establishing and maintaining connections with their peers. In the past, residents have tried to host their own movie nights and barbecues, but it's been a logistical nightmare. Beyond distributing flyers and knocking on doors, there's no way to easily organize interested parties or quickly communicate any changes.

In short, residents don't feel empowered to take their social lives into their own hands.

The Takeaway

If your residents don't have tools – like member directories, activity planning templates, or [customizable groups in your resident portal](#) – to independently promote their own social enrichment, it's time to find another platform.



Staff turnover is consistently high

You know about the staffing shortage in the senior living space. It's not new. Plenty of communities are feeling its effects. But lately, your turnover rates have risen and remained high.

A few years back, you tried adopting a communication tool, but it never stuck. And you didn't follow up with other vendors. Too much work. So your staff continued to do their jobs with your paper-based system (that is, until they started leaving).

You hold a staff meeting to understand the cause of this turnover. The answer: time-consuming manual processes.

The Takeaway

When your employees feel the only way to relieve their workloads is by leaving your community, it's time to find technology that simplifies and automates manual tasks.



What Kind of Engagement Technology Do You Want?

Whether you're selecting technology for the first time or looking for a tech upgrade, you need to get your lay of the engagement technology landscape. And not all platforms are created equal.

Read on for four types of technology that make up the bulk of that landscape and what you need to know about each.

Community Engagement Solutions

While [61 percent](#) of senior living operators plan to invest in tools that fall under the community engagement umbrella this year, “community engagement” is still a fairly broad category. Here are the core components.



Resident engagement platforms

These are [portals that residents use](#) to view activity calendars, make dining reservations, sign up for community events, organize activities, and much more. If it deals with your residents, it likely lives on here.



Smart voice devices

Smart voice devices offer greater accessibility and hands-free convenience to residents who want to know what’s going on in their community. A simple “Hey, Alexa...” lets residents hear about everything from the soup of the day to whether the mail has been delivered.



Digital displays

Like smart voice devices, [digital displays](#) broadcast information to your residents without requiring them to log on to any platforms or applications. Just program what the displays show, whether it’s activity calendars, daily menus, or live streams of community activities, like choir rehearsals and concerts.



Form builders

Form builders, as the name implies, make it easy for staff to [create forms related to resident activities](#) (transportation requests, leave-of-absence notices, satisfaction surveys, etc.). This technology also stores every form and response, which helps staff quickly organize and distill important takeaways.



In-room TVs

Similar to digital displays, in-room TVs broadcast content to residents. But in this case, the resident has full control over the programming. With the right integrations, residents can use these TVs to take virtual pilates classes, watch the news, review the dining menu for the week, and enjoy whatever other form of entertainment they wish.

Life Enrichment Management Software

With [tools such as digital calendars](#), life enrichment staff can reduce time spent on calendar management by 80 percent. That's because this software centralizes everything staff may need to know before, during, and after an event.

Not sure if a room is available? Don't know whether residents liked a similar event in the past? Want to see how many people attended your event? All of those insights – and more – live in the resident life management software program.

Communication Tools

While a resident or family engagement platform is great for sharing community information, it's not ideal for time-sensitive messages. Why? Because the user must A) have the application installed and B) remain logged in to the application.

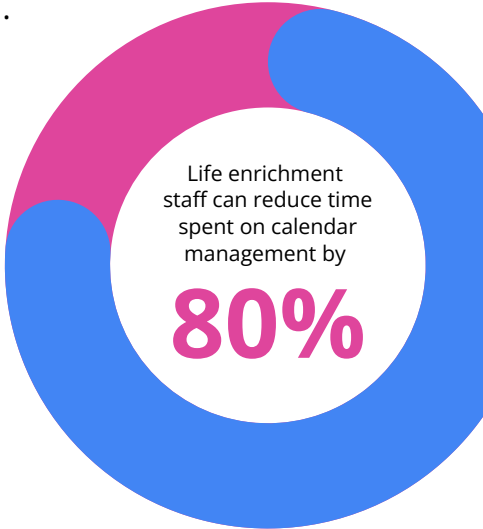
Conversely, communications tools let you share time-sensitive information with staff, residents, and families via text, email, phone call, or Alexa-enabled device.

Ever need to fill last-minute shift openings? Notify your whole staff about an impending training deadline? How about sending appointment reminders to residents and their family members?

Communication solutions (like our own [Bi-Directional Communication Tool](#)) make these messages easy for staff to send and for recipients to notice.

Family Engagement Platforms

These portals offer loved ones visibility into a community. That's why the best of them give family members a direct line of communication with staff via a HIPAA-compliant messaging system. Some family engagement platforms also let staff upload photos, messages, and documents to the portal's homepage. Think: [invitations to holiday brunches](#) or updates on rec center renovations.



Life enrichment staff can reduce time spent on calendar management by

80%

Find Your Ideal Senior Living Technology Partner: Factors to Consider

Knowing what to look for and what questions to ask make all the difference when it comes to finding the right vendor. Here are seven categories – and their related questions – to help you cut through the noise and find the piece of engagement technology that fits your community.

Ease of Use

- How straightforward are the workflows? Ask each vendor to walk through workflows you anticipate residents will use frequently, like dining reservations.
- How many clicks does it take to access basic functions? (More than two or three can get frustrating fast!)
- How much staff time and effort is required to update and maintain the platform?
- Does the product have robust universal search capabilities?
- How many years has the platform been around? A mature platform often incorporates years of user feedback, industry best practices, and specific features tailored to industry needs.
- How experienced is the vendor in implementing technology and growing adoption?
- Request case studies and referrals.
- What support is provided during implementation and what the process looks like?



- ☐ Does the solution offer personalization and customization? How much?
- ☐ Can you customize the branding? Can you control branding at the corporate level?
- ☐ Does the platform offer a custom forms builder or will customers need to purchase a third-party application?
- ☐ Can users add custom pages in the community engagement portal? Is there a limit on how many pages can be added?
- ☐ Is the solution modular, i.e., can customers purchase pieces of it and add over time, or do they have to purchase everything at once? - A modular platform lets you choose modules that best fit your needs, ensuring a tailored experience. Platforms that lack a modular architecture may force you to adopt features or functionalities that aren't relevant to your organization, leading to unnecessary complexity or inflated costs.
- ☐ Can staff easily configure and customize the platform themselves? Avoid platforms that require custom engineering work.



All-In-One Capability

- Could this vendor's technology handle virtually all of a community's senior living engagement needs?
- Does the platform support omnichannel interactions across mobile apps, web portals, email, SMS, phone, smart home devices, TVs, and digital displays?
- Are features, functionality, performance, and user experience comparable across all platforms and devices? For example, does the Android app offer the same functionality as the Apple app? Is performance the same?
- What devices does the platform support?
- Does the platform support one-to-one and one-to-many communication?

Resident Empowerment

- How does this technology help residents live their fullest lives, whether related to building relationships, exploring hobbies, or improving wellness?
- Look for features that empower residents to make choices, such as developing and managing their own events, activities, or social groups.
- Can end users customize their communication preferences for where they want to be communicated with?



Reporting & Intelligence

- ☐ How easy is it to capture data points? How about reviewing them? Analyzing them? Are data visualization and reporting tools included?
- ☐ Can reporting be easily done at both the corporate level and the community level?
- ☐ Can users customize the data points they collect? Think about the data points you want and ask whether they're available. For example, you may want data on resident application utilization, activity attendance, or family satisfaction.

Interoperability & Security

- ☐ Does the platform integrate with my existing technology?
- ☐ Is the integration real-time?
- ☐ Does the platform have an open architecture and APIs?
- ☐ Does the platform adhere to industry standards for security, such as SOC II and HIPAA?



Wellness Focus

- ☐ Does the technology include wellness courses and content?
- ☐ Does the platform let residents set wellness goals and track their progress?
- ☐ Does the platform provide activity recommendations to residents based on their interests?
- ☐ Does the platform provide insights into how programming can be improved?


We know how important it is to find the right piece(s) of technology to support the members of your senior living community. It's not an easy decision, and it's not one that you make on a whim. But when you find the right platform, [when you find the right partner](#), that choice becomes clear. The value is too high to pass up. [To access our senior living technology vendor guide, [click here](#).]

To access a printable version of the Senior Living Tech Factors checklist, click the button below.

[Print Checklist](#)



Boost Adoption from Residents and Staff

A photograph of three people, two women and one man, standing outdoors and smiling. The man in the center has a long white beard and is wearing a straw hat, a white shirt, and red suspenders. The woman on the left is wearing a pink top, and the woman on the right is wearing a yellow top. They are all looking towards the right. In the top right corner, there are two overlapping circles, one blue and one pink.

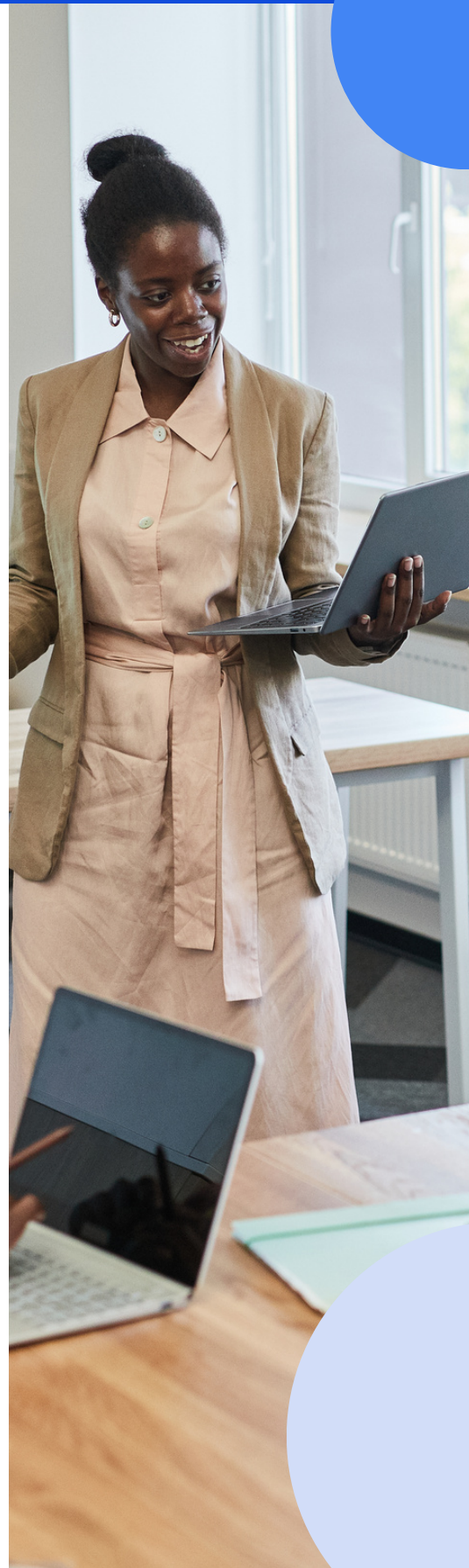
We're huge proponents of structured implementation processes. The clearer the process, the greater the odds that technology will flourish.

But that doesn't mean implementing new technology – and growing adoption rates – is easy. Far from it. (In fact, one of our clients tried nearly 10 different vendors before landing on us and successfully deploying our tech.) Still, there are clear strategies you can use to increase adoption and see ROI more quickly. Here are five.

Deploy pilot programs that involve staff members

Commonly, communities use pilot programs to assess a piece of technology from the resident point of view. We suggest taking this a step further: invite your teams to your pilot programs.

This is valuable even if the technology you plan to implement – a resident engagement platform, for instance – doesn't target your staff. Why? Because staff members can evangelize the tech and help your residents grow more comfortable using it.



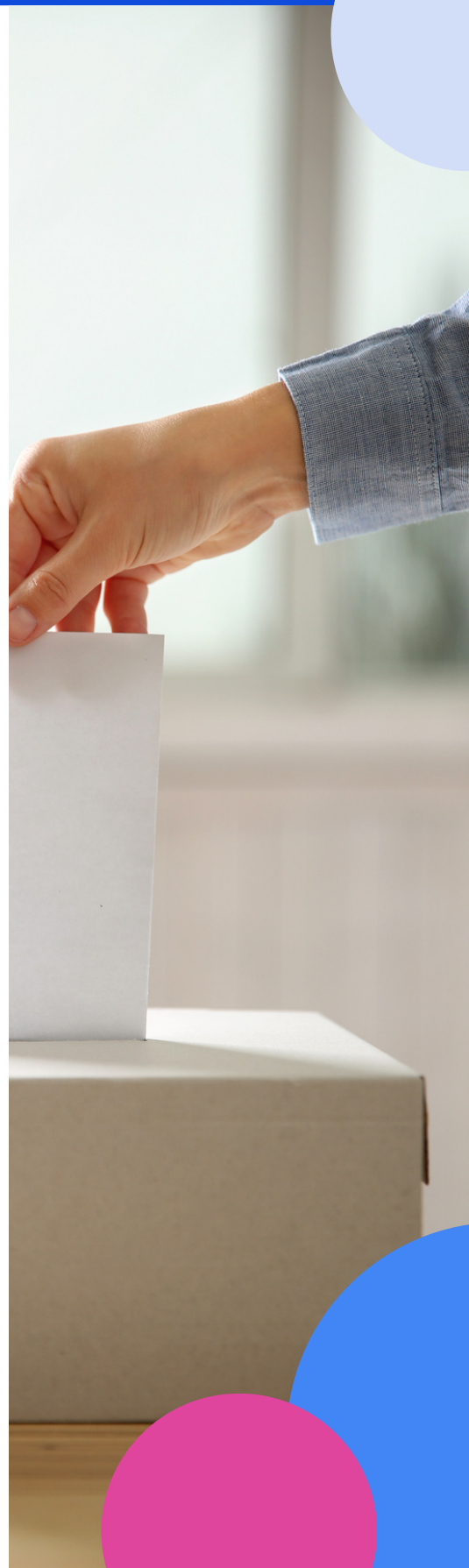
Make it easy to share feedback about the tech

Once you've finished the pilot program, you'll want to gather feedback from folks in the pilot. The key here is making it as easy as possible for those staff members and residents to offer insights. They already took the time to learn about a new digital calendar or [voice assistant device](#). You don't want to make this feedback stage feel too taxing or time-consuming.

To make sharing feedback a simple process, try leveraging different modalities. In other words, offer a mix of digital and in-person options. You might...

- Email participants a survey that measures aspects of the technology.
- Put up tip boxes in communal spaces for participants to jot down opinions.
- Program a small town hall for participants to openly share their thoughts.

The main aim here is to gather as much information as you can so you're able to make an informed decision about senior living technology.



Schedule ongoing training sessions for your entire community

If during your feedback session(s), you uncover common negative experiences, you may need to repeat steps one and two. But if all signs point to this being the right platform for you, then it's time to plot out additional learning opportunities.

Your tech partner should have training resources and offer best practices. The best partners (*cough cough*) even come onsite for the implementation process. But a tech partner can't cover every aspect of your ongoing training.

To increase training opportunities, you may...

- Find staff members who can lead the training.
- Build relationships with nearby high schools or community colleges that can deliver training.
- Tap into your pool of tech-savvy residents who feel comfortable educating their fellow community members.



Gamify aspects of your adoption process

[Gamification has gained lots of traction](#) within the training world for its ability to engage learners in novel ways. But you don't need a learning management system (LMS) to experience the benefits of gamification. You can DIY it.

If adoption rates are low, try creating weekly competitions that encourage staff to learn – and regularly use – technology. Some of those may include goals like:

- Find staff members who can lead the training.
- Create a new life enrichment event.
- Correctly input attendance data.
- Successfully build or edit an [emergency communication template](#).
- Directly message family members via your family engagement app.
- Share your first community-wide message on the resident engagement platform.



Use reporting and analytics to fuel your adoption efforts

Whether you're an operator who manages 10 communities or an activities director who oversees one, [you need data to support](#) your adoption initiatives. That means prioritizing technology with robust analytics and reporting features.

Want to see how residents from each of your senior living options (assisted living, independent living, active adult, etc.) are using your tech? Break down user data by those segments. Worried staff members aren't using your [communication tool](#)? Review the number of sent messages since onboarding.

Remember, data helps you save time and personalize tech adoption strategies. That's valuable at every stage of your senior living technology journey.





The Best Senior Living Technology Engages Your Entire Community

It's daunting to implement a new piece of senior living technology. That's especially true if you've already adopted a solution that didn't yield the intended results. But what costs more than a new solution? A legacy platform that doesn't meet your needs.

The right piece of senior living technology can help you cut costs – [and pad your bottom line.](#)

Positive outcomes like revenue growth and increased engagement don't just happen, though. They require the cooperation of your residents, families, and staff. And that means it's your job to check in with them before, during, and after your search for a new piece of tech.

But once you have your community's buy-in, the sky's the limit.

Interested in senior living technology that promotes engagement, saves time, and cuts costs? Still not entirely sure what you need? [Reach out.](#) We'd love to help!