



Meet Icon: Why VoiceFriend and Caremerge Teamed Up

Ryan Galea first learned the challenges that senior living operators face today the same way that many industry outsiders do: his grandmother became ill. As he worked to get her the care that she needed, he saw the industry's staffing strain, and how that shortage affects both caregivers and patients, and ultimately quality of care.

“She didn't have a great experience,” he says. “This motivated me actually to quit my job, launch this venture, go out and build a leading platform.”

“This venture” is the new senior living communication and engagement company Icon, which formed this year in a merger between Galea's VoiceFriend, provider of the leading HIPAA-compliant, cloud-based two-way communication platform for senior care organizations, and Caremerge, a leader in family and resident engagement.

Icon formed this year in a merger between VoiceFriend, provider of the leading HIPAA-compliant, cloud-based two-way communication platform for senior care organizations, and Caremerge, a leader in family and resident engagement.

To help future senior living residents, Icon is focusing on addressing five key areas where senior living helps residents:

- **Care**
- **Socialization**
- **Independence**
- **Happiness**
- **Health**

Galea was CEO of VoiceFriend, and holds the same position with Icon, which is based on Galea's vision for improving the aging experience in all areas: resident health, wellness and safety, staff happiness, overall communication and taking the industry's staffing shortage head-on.

"We came to the conclusion that the best way to do that was through a combination of communication, engagement, personalization, automation and the use of data to provide insights," he says. "Piece one is VoiceFriend communication. Piece two is Caremerge, which is the engagement. And we're continuing to build up to that ultimate vision of supporting the whole continuum of care and being the only ones in the industry to do so."

How Icon is solving 5 top senior living issues

To help future senior living residents, Icon is focusing on addressing five key areas where senior living helps residents: care, socialization, independence, happiness, health.

"We give staff more time in their day that they can spend with the residents, giving the senior more attention and better care and reducing social isolation," Galea says. "You're able to improve each senior's feeling of engagement, which decreases the risk of developing depression, which has been linked not only to the direct outcome, but also to things like higher risk of heart disease and diabetes."

Icon has wellness-based programming with activity scheduling and recommendations, all of which can optimize a community's programming toward the dimensions of wellness that will keep a given resident healthy, thus also cutting down on the work staff members need to do in managing those activity sign-ups. This strategy, therefore, also ties directly to staff happiness, as the communication capabilities from Icon creates substantive job improvements, as does the knowledge, and logistics, of healthier, happier residents.

"A healthier senior is our primary goal," Galea says. "Ultimately, our north star metric is senior happiness. That's what we're driving toward. We want to make your residents as happy and thriving as possible."

“ We give staff more time in their day that they can spend with the residents, giving the senior more attention and better care and reducing social isolation.”

RYAN GALEA, CEO, ICON

With Icon, proof of resident happiness is more than anecdotal. The company plans to use a mix of data points to quantify resident happiness and generate actionable insights for staff.

“How many activities people are signing up for? How are people reviewing activities? Are they saying that this program’s good? Are they getting visited a lot by family members and getting a lot of phone calls?” he says. “Combining all those factors to create what we call a ‘happiness score’ is all on the map.”

What’s next for Icon

The format of this merger is indicative of the impact Icon can have, Galea says.

“I think pretty much all the acquisitions that have happened in our industry are people saying, ‘Oh, these two companies look like they might make sense together. Let’s buy them and operate them under one brand,’” he says. “They never actually integrate the offerings — it’s still two separate products.”

Instead, he says, Icon will be one product with one seamless experience. The first step was putting the companies together and building a two-way integration between the products. They did that, and now they are working on building the seamless connection so that what was VoiceFriend works perfectly with what was Caremerge, bringing out the best in both.

“The goal is to go toward full, 360-degree experience management so that operators can control that entire experience through this one platform,” Galea says. “We’re building some really amazing products that have a meaningful impact and that people haven’t seen, all to improve the lives of seniors and families and the staff that serve them. Keep watch — we’ve got some exciting stuff in the pipe we’ll all see in the next few months.”

“The goal is to go toward full, 360-degree experience management so that operators can control that entire experience through this one platform. Keep watch — we’ve got some exciting stuff in the pipe we’ll all see in the next few months.”

RYAN GALEA, CEO, ICON



Jack Silverstein
jsilverstein@agingmedia.com