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The LeadingAge Center for Aging Services Technologies (CAST) is focused on accelerating the development, evaluation and adoption of emerging technologies that will transform the aging experience. As an international coalition of more than 400 technology companies, aging-services organizations, businesses, research universities and government representatives, CAST works under the auspices of LeadingAge, an association of 6,000 not-for-profit organizations dedicated to expanding the world of possibilities for aging.

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Using Innovative Voice and Smart Home Technologies to Enhance Resident Engagement and Staff Efficiencies

Categories

- Connect Asbury staff, residents and families with "best in class" technologies for residents and families
- Deploy custom product development and innovation
- Increase staff efficiency
- Increase resident engagement
- Introduce the latest innovations in voice and smart home technologies
- Create new revenue streams and personalization in the room

Organization Name

Asbury Communities/The Asbury Group

Organization Type

Non-profit Independent Living, Assisted Living, Memory Support, Skilled Nursing

Organization Description

Asbury Communities is the nation's 16-largest nonprofit system of continuing care retirement communities and related aging services, and has been serving older adults for more than 90 years. Asbury Methodist Village is the 13th-largest continuing care retirement community (CCRC) in the country and proudly calls Montgomery County, MD, home. As part of Asbury Communities, Asbury Methodist Village offers independent living options such as courtyard homes, villas, and spacious apartments, as well as assisted living, memory support, and 5-star rated skilled nursing and rehabilitation therapy. These choices, combined with an outstanding tradition of quality and service, help Asbury redefine the expectations of aging services and ensure that there, residents can anticipate more.

Project Description

Upgrade functions and capabilities with innovation:

Asbury and Connected Living (CL) have partnered to roll out a premiere suite of smart home and voice technology at Asbury Methodist Village. The first step was to



update functionality and bring increased capabilities and efficiency to the staff by replacing a number of disparate technologies in the community with the unified Connected Living technology ecosystem. The staff is now able to enter information in one place (an administrator panel) and have that information available on digital signs, resident televisions, the campus mobile app, and on Alexa for the benefit of staff, residents, families, and prospects.

Joint development and creation of efficiency/cost savings:

Given its strong commitment to leveraging technology in order to better serve residents, Asbury partnered with CL through its in-house think tank and innovation team, The Asbury Group, to bring more than 70 new functional enhancements to fruition for residents and staff.

“Our group has worked closely with Asbury Methodist Village and CL to ensure the proper technological foundation—including network bandwidth, Wi-Fi hotspots, and security—is in place in order to effectively integrate these new platforms for resident engagement,” says Nick Patel, president of Asbury Integrated Technologies (AIT). AIT was chosen to help with the CL integration due to its expertise and in-depth knowledge of the senior-living industry.

Innovation & leadership technology integration, voice, and robotics: Upon launch of CL at Asbury Methodist Village, Connected Living, Asbury, and Amazon introduced smart living experiences in the community. This launch included the installation of wireless connectivity, the introduction of smart room devices, and the use of CL's voice suite.

Per Amazon, CL is 6 months ahead of anyone else in the industry. Mike Murphy, head of Amazon Alexa Smart Properties, states, “We knew serving an aging population was going to be an important part of the value, [so] we reached out to Connected Living as the innovative leader in aging technology and services to be at the forefront of launching this new offering.”



Socialization Modality

CL's technology portfolio includes a content management system (CMS), a web-based social network, native iOS and Android applications, digital signage (interactive), digital signage (non-interactive), smart room integration with Alexa-enabled devices, calendar management, integration with multiple restaurant/dining options, community resource/document sharing, email, photo sharing, and an in-house TV channel. The individual components are described below. Although this portfolio is broad, Asbury believes that the simplified design, ease of use, and ample support are the keys to improving socialization through technology.

System Embodient

Desktop, smartphones (iOS and Android), tablets (iOS and Android), voice-activated assistant technology, digital signage (interactive), digital signage (non-interactive), channel insertion (TV channel), calendar/newsletters, Apple watches, and other wearables.

System Deployed

The CL solution provides numerous opportunities for communities to foster engagement and increase communication. In addition to the content features outlined below, Asbury Methodist Village residents enjoyed the benefits of smart home automation technology in their homes, and wellness products such as step trackers.

The following features are the focus of this study:



Digital signage: CL is unique in the industry for its digital sign offerings. CL provides digital signage on multiple form factors (interactive screens, non-interactive screens, tablet-sized screens, horizontal screens, vertical screens, media walls, etc.), and content can be deployed either through a Windows-based content player or a URL. In addition to deploying interactive signage at Asbury Methodist Village, Connected Living also leverages a hardware component that allows for an immediate deployment of a digital signage on monitors already in place at the community. This meant Asbury Methodist Village did not have to allocate additional funds for hardware when looking to add signage experiences throughout its campus.



Mobile app: The CL mobile app (in both iOS and Android versions) is an easy download and connects everyone—Asbury Methodist Village staff, residents, family, and prospects. Features of the mobile application include access to community information, calendars, restaurant(s), community photos, announcements, bulletins, directories, and community resources. In addition, the mobile app creates a socialization experience from private sharing with families to the creation of a “time capsule” experience to share important life stories and moments.

Voice enablement: Through the CL voice suite, Asbury Methodist Village residents with Amazon Echo devices such as the Echo Dot, Echo, and Echo Plus, can ask Alexa questions specific to their community. Examples include “Alexa, what’s for lunch in the bistro next Friday?” or “What’s on the activities calendar today?”

We have found residents are excited to be on the cutting edge of new technology within communities, particularly

when it is fun, respectful, and connected to each other and family.

“We live at Asbury Methodist Village, where we stay active and engaged, both in this community and in the larger community of Gaithersburg. Connected Living allows us to be in touch at home through Alexa and we enjoy her immensely,” say Bernie and Rollie Smith, Asbury Methodist Village residents.

Smart homes: A select number of residents who signed up were set up with Smart Homes as part of the new CL/Amazon Smart Home Suite, and we will be using those rooms as a model for a future roadmap. Residents can also control hands-free smart home devices like lights, thermostats, doorbells, and music. CL provides residents with training and support on how Alexa can be used to perform a wide range of functions related to daily living. “I’ve never been one to shy away from technology. However, this smart living opportunity presented to me by Asbury Methodist Village and our friends at Connected Living has given me the most amazing experience. Asking Alexa to turn on the lights and asking what’s for lunch in the Blue Note Bistro are now just some of the ways this new innovation has really made my life easier,” says Edith Isacke, resident at Asbury Methodist Village.

Business Model

CL’s cloud-based technologies products are offered via a SAAS (software as a service) delivery model, and the price varies on how many products and services are purchased. The mobile app and other products are provided free to the residents. (The community pays a monthly subscription and service fee to CL.) Through CL, there are additional revenue opportunities available, such as concierge services, personalized products (puzzles, mugs, photo books, etc.), and family rides with Lyft.

Implementation Approach

After 10 years of experience launching hundreds of locations across the country, CL has a streamlined “High Tech and High Touch” approach that minimizes staff work by fully supporting implementation and ongoing operations. Deploying the CL content management system at Asbury Methodist Village involved 1.5 hours of training, supported by videos.

CL also offers a 7-day-a-week support team that can remotely take over the equipment and help any staff member.

Like other CL clients, Asbury also has an operations manager who oversees the account through CL.



CL also facilitates in-person overviews and training sessions for the residents. A recent session, for example, introduced Alexa, the mobile app, and new digital signage in the community with more than 70 residents in attendance. Given the impact of the in-person launch, and high attendance, residents who attend such sessions walk away immediately connected and empowered. CL Asbury Integrated Technologies (AIT) provided back-end tech support to Asbury Methodist Village during the implementation and continues to offer ongoing assistance.

Outcomes

- High usage (99.9%) of new CL content management system and high visibility.
- Staff time savings of 40%, given the streamlined single point of entry and freedom from having to work with multiple systems.
- Rapid technology development, showcasing CL's ability to develop new features quickly. Seventy new features were designed, developed, and released
- Cutting-edge voice and smart home capabilities were launched in partnership with Asbury, Amazon, and Sodexo.
- Installation of wireless connectivity and the introduction of smart living experiences.
- Increased communication between residents, community, and families.

Challenges and Pitfalls to Avoid

CL's strategy with Asbury Communities was to fully deploy at one location first, (particularly given the new "smart home" launch), so anything unique to Asbury Methodist Village can be learned first and then deployed rapidly with high quality to the rest of Asbury's communities/sites.

Lessons Learned

The most important lesson learned is that residents are excited about technologies that can simplify their daily lives and keep them active and engaged. CL and Asbury are at the cutting edge, and the future roadmap holds many possibilities. "The wisdom, experience and voice of many seniors is being lost in our society because of isolation. Our companies are leading the voice and smart home revolution into senior living as we continue to empower, connect and personalize services to older adults," says Sarah Hoit, CEO of Connected Living.

Conclusion and Next Steps

With the implementation of CL, Asbury Methodist Village was able to easily provide pertinent information to residents, regardless of their technological competencies or skills. CL's flexible and user-friendly interface allows for a method of communication that is modern, respectful, and relevant for residents and staff of larger communities. The intuitive user experience, coupled with good training of residents and staff by CL, helped create a pleasant community experience for Asbury Methodist Village and to integrate the program into the fabric of the community. By opening up the lines of communication, residents were able to make informed decisions about how they'd like to spend their day before ever stepping out of their apartments and cottages.

Furthermore, by providing information about community events directly through the CL platform, staff effectively reduced the time spent on manually posting this information by 40% and saw 100% readership from residents. Providing residents with direct access to updated community information allowed them to make decisions on their own, effectively increasing independence and control over their lives. The study results have also helped to inform the teams at Asbury Methodist and CL about how today's residents want to access, consume and interact with content and information.

The next phase of the study will use the usage and feedback data to double down on popular new approaches to communications, continuing to increase our understanding of how older adults prefer to use technology to engage with their community, family, and friends.