

Case Study: Improving Resident Independence and Satisfaction Through Smart Voice Technology

FRIENDSHIP
VILLAGE



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Categories:

- ◆ Prolonging Independence
- ◆ Improving Quality of Life
- ◆ Increasing Resident Engagement

About the Organization

Organization Name: Friendship Village of Kalamazoo, MI

Main Contributor:

Ken Greschak, Director of Fund Development and Life Enrichment

Organization Type: Assisted Living and Memory Care Facilities

Organization Description:

Friendship Village has been offering active senior independent living at its Kalamazoo campus for over 40 years. The community gives residents a range of care and residence options for independent living, assisted living, memory care, and skilled nursing. The Village's onsite amenities include a state-of-the-art wellness and fitness center, healthy and delicious restaurant-style meals, a performing arts center, a woodshop, an art gallery, and a library.

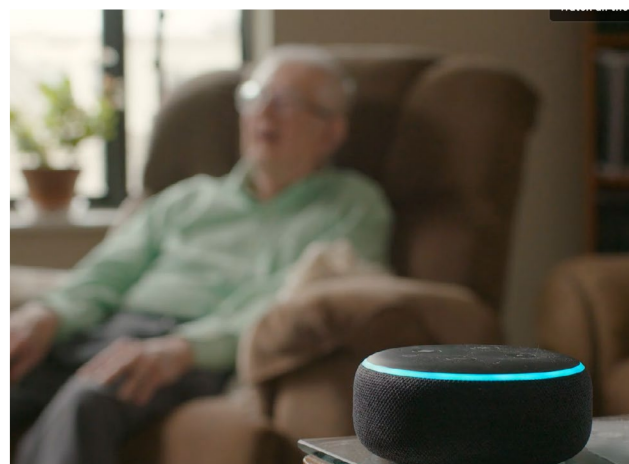
Project Description:

Friendship Village partnered with Caremerge, a provider of EHR and resident engagement technology for senior living, to roll out a campus-wide voice technology platform called Caremerge Voice. The technology leverages the Alexa for Hospitality platform, which was designed for hotel guests, to utilize its natural language listening capabilities (residents don't have to prompt it with "ask my community" – they just ask their question and Alexa understands).

Representatives from Caremerge's client success team helped leaders at Friendship Village launch and scale the voice technology so that residents could quickly and easily start using their devices right in their apartments. Caremerge Voice allows users to talk to their speakers with natural language, the same way they'd talk to a regular Alexa. The system is smart enough to discern which queries are for community information and which are for the public portion of the Alexa platform.

System Type:

- ◆ Voice assistant technology
- ◆ Amazon Echo Dots, tablets, and smartphones
- ◆ Amazon fleet management tool
- ◆ Community engagement platform (calendar synching, community programming information)



System Embodiment:

Echo Dots were installed in residents' apartments and equipped with Caremerge Voice's Alexa skill. Caremerge Voice's partnership with Amazon Alexa uses Alexa for Hospitality's capabilities for simplified, intuitive speaker interaction. In addition, Friendship Village gives residents and staff access to the Caremerge engagement platform via its website on tablets and desktops.

Business Model:

Caremerge's technologies are offered to communities through a Software as a Service (SaaS) model, and pricing varies per solutions package.

Implementation Approach:

Caremerge has rolled out its platform at over 430 communities across the country, bringing an experienced client success team on site for each system launch.

At Friendship Village, a group of Caremerge representatives partnered with Ken Greschak, director of fund development and life enrichment at Friendship Village, to implement and scale the technology using Amazon's fleet management tool. This tool gives community directors one central dashboard to manage all campus devices, which makes it easy to add or remove speakers.

Friendship Village also utilized a phased approach and rolled out the technology to small groups first to help build best practices. The community used Caremerge Care Packages, a digital success tool that supports its engagement clients.

Advantages to the Approach:

What distinguishes the Caremerge Voice platform from other voice technology designed for senior living is its ability to process natural language requests. A resident can simply say, "Alexa, what's on the menu for dinner tonight?" and Alexa will answer, no prompt necessary.

Top 5 ways residents are using Voice:

1. "What are the events today?"
2. "When is [event]?"
3. "What are the announcements?"
4. "What's on the menu?"
5. To look up a resident.

The alternative, available through devices that aren't powered by Amazon, would be a requirement that users signify their intent with prompts like "Ask my community" for a community-specific request. Alexa for Hospitality also offers fleet management for devices, unlike other platforms.

Caremerge's easy-to-use technology has been embraced by tech-savvy residents who want access to the latest tools. But it's also practical for residents who may have difficulty using other devices, such as desktops or tablets, due to low vision or fine motor issues.

Because residents can use their smart speakers in their own apartments, Caremerge's voice technology system enables residents to be more independent and get the information they need when they want, where they want.

Crucially, voice technology can increase connectivity in senior living communities and help stave off feelings of isolation and loneliness among residents. In and of itself, the act of talking to an Alexa every day provides a feeling of comfort and familiarity. Plus, the platform itself is designed to make it easier to circulate information about activities and events so that residents can always be in the loop about what's happening in their community.

Outcomes:

Residents at Friendship Village who used Caremerge Voice reported feeling more connected to their communities and more independent, and 100% of residents use their smart speakers on a monthly basis. The voice technology system was a natural fit in the community, which has a mix of experienced tech users and residents who, for a number of reasons, have difficulties using other devices.

Friendship Village of Kalamazoo was one of the first senior living communities in the United States to use Alexa the natural way on fleet management with Name Free Skill Innovation (NFSI). This just means residents can use Alexa for community-specific information the same way they use it for any public facing skill. **In one week after NFSI (removing Ask My Community), we saw an increase of 30% usage of Alexa devices by residents. Ken said that he wouldn't have been able to do this without Caremerge and Alexa for Hospitality.**

In addition to boosting engagement of residents with the community, and hence their well-being, the Caremerge platform has also improved conversion rates on Friendship Village's wait lists. Community leaders used the technology to keep prospective residents engaged with the community while on the waitlist.

Waitlisted residents can enjoy a smoother transition upon moving into Friendship Village if they've already used Caremerge's platform: they're able to make friends with current residents beforehand, who can support during their transition and get a glimpse of what life as a resident is like.

This helps boost waitlist conversions: "One of the best benefits I've seen is keeping waitlist residents engaged, or people waiting to come into the community. They actually have access to what's going on in the community, events going on; they start to build memories and experiences before they even move in. And that helps with a higher conversion rate, they're more likely to become a resident."

– Diana Duncan, Director of Sales and Marketing at Friendship Village

Challenges and Pitfalls to Avoid:

Implementing a new technology system at a senior living community is daunting. Deployment, user training, and system management can be difficult without the right help and resources.

This is why Caremerge sends a client success team to facilitate every senior living voice technology rollout. Caremerge's experience deploying at over 400 senior living communities provides its team with a range of case-specific insights that can guide communities just starting out with the technology.

Senior living community directors will be wary of implementing any tech device that has a steep learning curve and complicated system management. Caremerge Voice chose to partner with Amazon Alexa because of its advanced natural language structure and fleet management tool. It's both easy to use by residents and easy to manage for providers.

Lessons Learned/Advice to Share:

The notion that older adults are averse to technology is false. Increasingly, current residents and tech-savvy Baby Boomers making the transition into senior living communities expect their communities to leverage technology to make their lives better.

The experiences of residents at Friendship Village with the Caremerge platform show that larger technology trends, such as voice assistant devices, can be significantly impactful in senior living. Smart speakers transform every apartment into a personal information center, enabling residents to be more independent and receive more personalized information, services, and care.

Technology platforms can be a differentiator for senior living community directors looking to attract prospective residents. Friendship Village's success using Caremerge's platform to engage waitlisted residents shows that the potential of this technology goes beyond improving just current residents' quality of life.

But every senior living community has unique needs and concerns, and voice assistants are by no means a one-size-fits-all solution. It's important to choose a provider and technology partner wisely.



For best results, start slowly with pilot programs, and develop plans for a full integration after hearing what users have to say about the technology. Incorporating resident and staff feedback is critical to ensuring that communities find the solution that works best for everyone.

Video testimonials highlighting this project are available on-line by clicking [here](#).