



Senior Living Idea

Choosing Senior-Friendly Engagement Devices: 8 Things to Consider

Thinking of purchasing off-the-shelf tablets? Here's what you could be missing.

The COVID-19 pandemic has served as a harsh reminder of the negative impacts of social isolation. In senior living, the need to keep people connected to the people and experiences that matter to them has always been important. Now, as we face a future likely dotted with periods of precautionary isolation, this need for connection becomes absolutely critical. Forward-thinking senior living operators are evaluating everything from housing design to staffing to programming to best serve the changing needs of elders and their families as we transition into our new normal.

Technology is poised to play a more prominent role in the delivery of this new senior living experience—especially on an individualized level—to help staff, residents, and families weather periods of precautionary isolation successfully. But when faced with a myriad of technology options, the choices can be daunting, or worse, made hastily, leaving you to find you are missing out on the value offered through an alternative solution. If you're considering providing tablets or other hand-held devices for residents, you're not alone. Here are eight things to consider when choosing tablets to enable ongoing connection and individualized engagement experiences.

1. Senior-Friendly Design is Everything

Imagine you didn't grow up with technology and probably didn't use it much, if at all, as an adult for either work or personal enjoyment. When you think of a "computer," you think of a large desktop machine (maybe) with many complicated buttons. Now imagine someone hands you a very thin, sleek buttonless tablet that feels like it's made of glass and tells you it's yours to use. You likely won't know what to do with it and will be afraid that you'll break it. And you probably won't use it. A common woe of communities that purchase these types of tablets is that they are put away in cabinets soon after purchase and are never fully utilized. Not only is that a missed opportunity to facilitate engaging experiences with technology—it's a wasted investment. While these minimalist tablets are very popular with native technology users and younger generations, they might not be the best choice for your residents. To take the burden off community staff and ensure optimal engagement (and return on your investment), it's important that residents be able to independently adopt and use whatever devices you choose. Look for a tablet with a design and user interface that will not overwhelm them.

TIP:

Consider physical features like a sturdier body that is integrated with a protective case, a size that is easy to hold, and a screen that is easy to see. In terms of user interface, how big are the "app" or content icons? Can they be navigated easily by someone who may have visual impairments? Are they easy to tap on?

2. Content is King

One of the most important considerations for any tablet, in addition to ease of use and physical design, is what is **on** the tablet—the content, or applications. After all, if this device is meant to support individually led engagement and entertainment, careful thought should be given to what options for interaction should be included. Ideally, before giving any tablet or device to a resident, it will have been loaded with relevant content and applications—like games, movies, audiobooks, and puzzles, for example. Many organizations fail to plan for this when purchasing an off-the-shelf tablet, and therefore must devote staff time to sourcing, curating, downloading, and organizing content to provide the best user experience for their residents. This can take a considerable amount of time and effort and will be hard to maintain on an ongoing basis. If you intend for purpose-driven engagement to be the backbone of the tablet experience for your residents, look for a device preloaded with content that has been vetted and curated specifically for older adults' enjoyment.



TIP:

Even the most robust content library needs to be refreshed on a regular basis. Ask the tablet provider how often they add new content to update the tablet experience for residents. Also make sure at least some of the content can be used while offline, in case WiFi connectivity ever becomes limited.

3. Easy Connection to Others is Critical

The portable nature and larger screen of a tablet make it ideal for ensuring residents have a tool for anytime, anywhere engagement and connection at their fingertips. In addition to connecting with content and experiences, the right tablet can also keep residents connected to friends and family more directly, especially when in-person visits might not be possible. To combat loneliness and to make sure residents don't miss out on important family moments and memories, consider a tablet that can receive digital communication from families, such as photos, videos, and text messages sent from their own smartphones. This personal content should immediately populate into an easy-to-find place on the tablet so residents know at a glance where they can go to browse. To take it up a notch, make sure the tablet offers the ability for



on-demand connection, such as video chat capabilities. This method for conducting family visits became widely used during the height of pandemic and is likely here to stay. A tablet that can easily support this without extra work from staff to schedule and facilitate video chats will be critical.

TIP:

Make sure the tablet offers an easy way for residents to connect with loved ones and other friends via video chat should they be required to isolate. Look for a tablet that includes a video chat tool residents can operate themselves without complicated downloads, signups, or setups.

4. Personalized Experiences Matter

We live in an experience-based culture where personalization is no longer a nice-to-have. To truly connect a resident to what interests them, keeps them happy, gives them purpose, and keeps them engaged, offering a personalized, person-centered experience is a must. For example, Jim might be a lifelong boater who enjoys reading *The Wall Street Journal* every morning and doing crossword puzzles. Liz loves classic movies, baking, and mahjong. Jim and Liz are not necessarily going to use a tablet to connect to the same types of content. And more importantly, they are going to expect the content that interests them to be easy to find without having to sift through what is not as relevant. Whether your community deploys tablets as shared devices among groups of residents or as dedicated devices for individual residents, the ability to customize tablet experiences is important to providing effective engagement. A tablet that offers the ability for residents to “favorite” or bookmark their preferred content for quick access will be the most useful.

TIP:

An important part of personalization involves prediction, like the Netflix model of recommending content based on viewing history. Look for a tablet that offers personalized content recommendations at the individual level to provide the ultimate experience in personal engagement.

5. Data is Key

The consideration to add tablets to your community is not just a decision to add tablets to your community—it is likely part of a larger engagement and resident experience strategy that is being supported by technology. Therefore, data to evaluate the effectiveness of this investment is important. Look for a tablet with community dashboarding capabilities that show, at a minimum, how residents are interacting with the tablet's features and content. Use that data to set goals for ongoing improvement, further personalization of the tablet experience for residents, and as a differentiator for your community. With a tablet that provides usage data, you can also ease the minds of residents' families by showing them how their loved ones are staying engaged with meaningful activities (even when traditional group activities might be limited).

TIP:

Ask the tablet provider to explain what (if any) usage data can be tracked and how the data is analyzed and delivered. This data can be paramount to determining ROI and identifying areas for improvement.



6. Support Makes All the Difference

Many off-the-shelf tablets lack sufficient user training and ongoing support. Even though residents are the main users of the tablet, community staff will need to be knowledgeable enough about the device to acclimate residents to the technology and help when needed. Ask any tablet provider you are evaluating how they will help staff and residents become comfortable with this new tool. Do they provide an opportunity for ongoing or continual learning? Additionally, while some tablet providers might offer limited tech support to help with device malfunctions, this likely does not extend to the content and applications that are on the tablet. In the senior living model, with multiple tablets in any one community, easy access to comprehensive device and content support will provide help with troubleshooting to ensure all tablets are functioning as designed, creating an optimal resident experience.

TIP:

Be sure to ask tablet providers to describe their support model and explain what types of incidents or requests are covered.

7. Security Offers Peace of Mind

Many communities and families are concerned that elders are especially vulnerable to the scams, phishing, viruses, and hacks that are common in today's technology-reliant world. Off-the-shelf tablets that are not designed and provisioned for seniors usually do not include extra safeguards to prevent these incidents from occurring. To ensure uninterrupted, safe enjoyment that puts family and staff minds at ease, choose a tablet that is set up for secure Internet browsing, includes password-protected areas to store individuals' personal photos and address books, and utilizes secure messaging for communications with other devices.



TIP:

Check with tablet providers to be sure their platforms are set up to prevent users from accidentally adding potentially dangerous software or applications.

8. Finding Misplaced Tablets Could Be Necessary

The flip side of the portability feature of tablets is that it is easier to misplace them. Despite best efforts, whether your community operates in a small home environment, neighborhood setting, or hundreds of individual rooms, the likelihood of your staff needing to find a lost tablet within the community is high. Consider whether a vendor of off-the-shelf tablets will be able to help you resolve this situation quickly. Will they have an enterprise-level look at all the devices across your entire resident population and be able to remotely locate any that are lost?

TIP:

Check that the type of tablet you choose has the ability to be tracked and relocated in the event it is misplaced or lost. Being able to quickly recover missing tablets will ensure your investment is safeguarded.

Put the power of connection and engagement into your residents' hands. If you're ready to talk with iN2L or would like to learn more about our senior-friendly iN2L tablets, please visit iN2L.com/tablet.