



# Technology That is Key to Creating Inter-generational Experiences for Seniors

*By Meg LaPorte*

There is little argument that digital mobile technology and the rise of social media have changed the course of human interaction in unprecedented ways. One of the most important benefits of such technology is its ability to connect older adults with their relatives—children, grandchildren, siblings, and friends—who are often dispersed across the country and even around the world. Technologies such as email, messaging, and video calling has made it much easier to communicate with loved ones.

## The Importance of Social Relationships

The importance of such linkages cannot be taken lightly, as some studies have found that the quality and quantity of social relationships is linked to mental health as well as to morbidity and mortality. Strong social connections can also impact our lifespan, according to another study. Yet more research has demonstrated that it strengthens the immune system and helps you recover from disease faster.

The individuals who are most vulnerable to social isolation caused by a lack of familial connection are older adults who live alone. In many cases, these are retirement or assisted living community residents whose loved ones are scattered around the country. One company that has made a mission out of ensuring that such connections are not broken is [LifeShare Technologies](#), a Senior Housing Forum partner. LifeShare helps senior care providers facilitate improved connections between residents, staff, and families using existing technology like TVs.

## **Television Makes It So Much Easier**

Being the ubiquitous and user-friendly appliances they are, televisions make it easy for users to connect to the Internet and navigate platforms such as Facebook, email, and text messages with ease. How does it work? “It’s simple,” says Miles McCollum, LifeShare account executive. “A LifeShare box connects to a resident’s television. Using the Internet, the box retrieves information and displays it in a simple format on their TV.”

McCollum explains that a simplified remote control or wireless keyboard is used to navigate the TV programs as well as the LifeShare system. “When a loved sends an email or text message, it shows up on the resident’s television,” he says. “The same is true for social media posts, pictures, and even videos.”

The LifeShare system enables users to respond to messages with a pre-defined or custom response, if desired. Photos are programmed to go into an easy-to-access slideshow without the need for elaborate downloading or formatting. Additional content, such as weather, news, games, music, and podcasts, can also be programmed on the same television. Although there are many residents who are capable of using more advanced technology, McCollum asserts that LifeShare customers prefer to view photos on a large television as opposed to a small, difficult-to-see screen.

## **Staying Up-to-Date With Love Ones**

Rosemarie, a resident-user in Indiana, is very happy with how LifeShare allows her to keep up with relatives in California. “It’s great because it helps me see pictures of my family in California and stay up to date with all my grandkids who are spread out all over the place,” she says.

The daughter of another resident-user is delighted with how her father, who lives some 2,200 miles away, has embraced the technology. “I was amazed at the difference in his socialization from our visit last April to our visit this year in March,” she says. “Everyone in his home knew about our family and asked questions concerning their lives. He may be limited to a wheelchair and a care home, but his mind is able to connect with family that he hasn’t seen for years, share their stories with others, and keep his memory sharp.”



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