The Newest Technologies for Seniors

Technology and automation are redefining the way we work, the way we communicate and the way we live. While it’s commonly assumed that new technologies are designed for tweens, teens, and twenty-somethings, it might surprise you to learn how many of today’s bleeding-edge technologies are created for (or are particularly useful to) the people you serve as a Seniors Real Estate Specialist®.

As people stay active and live longer, the growth of the senior population demographic is swelling. Add to that the rate at which Boomers and beyond are adopting technology tools and it’s obvious why smart tech companies are paying attention to the needs and desires of those age 50+.

Right now, smartphones (and tablets) are the backbone of many of the latest assistive, safety, home automation and health-related technologies. New apps and other technologies are being created that make aging in place easier, safer and more feasible. These technologies also help ease the minds of family and loved ones by providing information and communicating data between an aging-in-place parent and their (often geographically far-flung) offspring.

This issue of *The SRES® Professional* examines many of the current tech tools for safe and healthy living, home automation products and emerging technologies to keep today’s seniors happily independent. You will gain several impressive talking points that help you remain the “go-to” resource for all your senior clients and their adult children!

The information provided in this newsletter is for informational purposes only and shall not constitute a promotion, endorsement or approval of any of the products mentioned herein. Further, nothing contained in this newsletter is intended to or shall constitute medical advice. You should consult a healthcare professional before using any medical device or health product.
Mark your calendar!

NAR’s e-PRO® Certification is hosting several one-day technology conferences across North America, starting in April, 2014. NAR Tech Edge is geared toward agents who are eager to learn how current mobile and web-based technologies can benefit their business and clients.

Topics include:
- mobile marketing
- online reputation management
- Google and cloud computing
- content strategy
- social media
- the importance of photos and video, and much more!

Speakers include Bill Lublin, CEO of the Social Media Marketing Institute and Century 21 Advantage; Nobu Hata, NAR Director of Digital Engagement; Maura Neill with RE/MAX Around Atlanta and other technology experts.

Current dates/locations include:
- Chicago, IL - April 3
- Greater Detroit, MI - June 6
- Atlanta, GA - June 20
- Sacramento, CA - August 15
- Cleveland, OH - September 7
- Greater Phoenix, AZ - September 24
- TBA, OR - October 9

More locations are being added! Visit the e-PRO® website for more details and registration information: epronar.com/nar-tech-edge

Connect online with fellow SRES® Designees for news, tips and referrals!
Diabetes – Health2Sync is a new iPhone/Android app and cable accessory that connects smartphones to most legacy digital glucose meters to keep a complete, central log of all readings. The app also offers “partner support” for sharing details with someone else (like a worried adult child who lives far away). Expected to sell for less than $35 later this year.

Oxygen Levels – Masimo’s iPhone Oximeter measures O2 levels using a dongle and a plastic finger clip, and records them on the iPhone. Free app (dongle retails for $250). Android version expected soon.

Cholesterol Testing – Researchers at Cornell University created a smartphone accessory and app that uses a test strip and the phone’s camera/flash to analyze blood for cholesterol levels. Not yet for sale.

In Case of Emergency – Various ICE phone apps store contact and health information, current medications and (in some cases) medical histories right on your phone. Another option is to store these details in a USB bracelet like the CARE Medical History Bracelet. (A great promotional item for your senior clients!)

Fall Detection – The highly-rate Fade app by Iter, S.A. monitors activity and can send SMS messages, email and/or place a speaker-activated phone call if a fall occurs. Free (Android)

Rx I.D. and Warnings – Take a photo of your pills to have them identified (both brand name and generics) and receive warnings of any possible drug interactions. The MedSnap app is free, but requires the purchase of a subscription and a special tray. (Android and iOS)

3 At-Home Health Systems

1. The Health Care Support Chair, by Sharp, is an uber-bulky, space-age looking chair unit that takes all your vitals (blood pressure, weight, heart rate, body temperature and much more), displays them on a large wrap-around set of screens and sends a report to your doctor. Unwieldy and expensive, it’s primarily intended as a replacement for routine monitoring appointments.

2. Sensiotec’s Virtual Medical Assistant (VMA) is a non-contact monitoring device that uses a flat panel slipped under a bed mattress, in a chair or mounted on a wall and records a person’s heart rate, respiration rate and movement. The results can be displayed on an android tablet, a smartphone or at a nurses’ station, if used in a hospital. It’s a non-invasive, non-irritating way to monitor vitals and may extend the ability of older individuals to safely age in place.

3. Telemedicine has been gaining ground. For example, Franciscan Health System (Tacoma, WA) now offers “virtual” urgent care. Using their phone or tablet’s camera, patients connect with a local urgent treatment doctor, who can make a diagnosis about 75 percent of the time without the patient leaving their home. Expect an increase in telemedicine as a way to deliver services more efficiently, while keeping costs down.
More Convenience-oriented Services

Do you use your smartphone or tablet to deposit checks to your bank, pay bills, transfer funds or order a pizza? That’s so 2013. New services are being developed daily: from something as mundane as arranging for pickup, delivery and payment of personal laundry services to science-fiction sounding unmanned drones delivering packages from online vendors (DroneDeploy.com). Any marriage of service and technology that makes life easier and delivers faster results will be a hit.

Grocery Shopping from Home

Home grocery delivery may be a good option for expanding senior independence. Peapod, FreshDirect, Schwan’s and others have been chipping away at this business for years, adding options and expanding service areas.

Among the big players, Amazon has been offering “subscribe and save” (to order items like dry foods, toiletries, cleaning supplies, pet food, etc.) but is now expanding services so seniors (and everyone else) can take advantage of perishable grocery shopping options.

The new AmazonFresh venture, now being tested in limited West Coast markets, offers free same- or next-day delivery (for orders over $35) of fresh fruits, vegetables, dairy and meats. Like Amazon Prime, free delivery comes with a hefty annual fee ($299 for AmazonFresh).

Mass Adoption of Phablets

What’s a phablet? A phone + tablet = phablet. This new breed of larger smartphones are particularly well suited to older users since the screen is larger and easier to read, buttons tend to be larger and some offer brighter screens. Phablets are fabulous!

The recently released Samsung Note 3 is one example. In addition to its physical size (5.7” screen, measured diagonally), the screen is a bright Super Amoled display (Active Matrix Organic Light Emitting Diode) that improves clarity and use in any type of lighting. Useful voice-command options minimize the need to type with onscreen keyboards. As an added bonus, the “S-pen” makes it easy to jot a quick note “old school” style and convert it on the fly (manually or automatically) to typing or other digital use.

Wearable Technology with Monitoring Features

Wearable technology has been an R&D buzz word for many years, but 2014 will probably be the year of the smart watch (with versions that look like a traditional watch or a modernistic wrist band), which can be used to monitor health/fitness during exercise (and while at rest), count steps and calories, operate the music player portion of your smartphone or alert you to an incoming call or text message (even when your phone is across the room, or buried in a purse).

Another version of this smart, wearable technology is a collar for your pet called Voyce (mydogsvoicye.com), touted to “bridge the communication gap” between pets and their owners. It monitors activity rate, heart rate, calories burned, respiratory rate, etc. A companion app maintains a data log to analyze trends, to share with your vet and, if you like, to share on social networks.
Today, many seniors can’t imagine life without their smartphone. Soon, this brave new world will be exploding with domestic technology that will make seniors more self-sufficient, better able to communicate with family, friends and service professionals from the comfort of their own home, and able to more easily modify a home to fit their needs and desires as their abilities and interests change. Here’s a look at what’s heading our way.

Wearable technology options for people may have digital displays and even low-pixel cameras, while others are monitors with “vibration” alerts requiring an app to view and analyze data. Currently, most of the monitors are for fitness and exercise purposes. But it makes sense that they’ll be expanded to do health monitoring, blood pressure, heart rate, temperature, fall alerts, inactivity alarms, health records and other “smart” functions that make it easier for seniors to stay safe, prevent problems and get help without restricting their independence.

Eye and Gesture-Controlled Technology

Assistive technology like eye/gesture controls are expected to take off in 2014, allowing control of technology with a glance, rather than using a keyboard, mouse, or even your voice. The Tobii EyeX controller is anticipated to be available to developers in March, so applications and the associated hardware should be mainstream before the end of the year.

Samsung’s Smart Control Remote may eliminate the dread often felt when trying to learn how to use a new universal remote. In fact, it may make universal remotes even easier to use than a touchscreen smartphone. This product permits a user to browse through shows with a simple flick of the wrist instead of trying to find the right tiny button. Seniors aren’t the only people who will sigh in relief over that option!

Leapmotion (leapmotion.com) is a touchless computer experience that allows people to operate programs with hand gestures in thin air (no keyboard or mouse required), ostensibly creating a more organic, natural user experience. Software is currently proprietary and limited, but the trend is to make computing and technology more naturally suited to users.

LiFi instead of WiFi

Visible light communications (in particular light fidelity, or LiFi) are expected to become a low energy and highly secure alternative to WiFi. This technology sends data using light that flickers too fast for the human eye to see. Although it doesn’t require “line of sight” to work, LiFi is stopped by walls, meaning it’s more secure for short-range applications than our current wireless options. The data is transferred through a light emitting diode (LED) light and can be installed overhead, like a light bulb.

LiFi is significantly superior to WiFi in both speed and bandwidth. It’s a lower cost technology, uses fewer components and requires little energy beyond what an LED light consumes. It’s safer for humans and won’t interfere with other electronic devices. Expect to start seeing LiFi applications soon. Learn more at purelifi.co.uk.

Wireless Light Switch

No wires—and no power—are required for the NXP Powerless light switch currently being demonstrated in the tech circles! The action of merely pushing the button creates enough energy to send a signal to turn on a “wireless” light bulb. This means you could have a switch right by your bed without tearing out a wall and rewiring. And if you move the furniture, you can move the switch.
9 Tech Tools to Improve a Senior’s Quality of Life

1. **Audio Books.** Whether the problem is finding time to read—or finding those missing reading glasses (again!)—seniors can enjoy thousands of titles with Audible, Audiobooks.com, and other online sources. Access free and paid books on your smartphone or tablet and listen while cleaning house, driving, exercising or relaxing. Free apps. (Android and iOS)

2. **Local Library.** Most libraries now offer extensive collections of virtual media, including ebooks, movies, music, audio books, and even periodicals. Once set up, borrowers can have full access to available materials from anywhere without a trip to the library. Call your local library to determine which tech products and operating systems are supported.

3. **Text to Speech Tools.** Anyone facing a temporary or permanent speech difficulty can use text to speech (TTS) apps to “talk” to others via the keyboard on their tablet or smartphone. Popular options include Speak It (free for Android) and Speak it! 2 ($1.99 for iOS).

4. **Text to Speech Readers.** Apps like Web Reader HD and Natural Reader let users select text on a web page or in an email message and other documents then listen to a natural-sounding digital voice read the words back to them. Free and paid options. (Android and iOS)

5. **Video Calls.** With Skype or Google Hangouts seniors can see (and be seen by) others and add visual contact to their voice communications. A nice way to “check in” regularly. Free apps. (Android and iOS)

6. **Ringing Flashlight.** A smartphone app that makes the camera’s flash light blink when a call is coming in or an SMS message is received, even if the ringer is turned off. Free. (Android and iOS)

7. **Helpouts by Google.** Get “real help from real people in real time” from your computer, tablet or smartphone. Enjoy personal one-on-one instruction, troubleshooting help, advice, and/or training. From art classes and music lessons to setting up computer networks, plumbing a new sink, or performing the perfect yoga pose. Some classes are free, some paid.

8. **Smartlocks and Doorbells.** The DoorBot doorbell (getdoorbot.com) lets you to see who’s at the door from anywhere (even if you’re not at home). Goji Smart Lock (gojiaccess.com) lets you unlock your door with your phone, give “virtual keys” to others and limit access by time and date. And, as a security measure, it will take a photo of anyone accessing your door.

9. **Household Cleaning.** Vacuums from iRobot (Roomba) and its competitors keep floors swept effortlessly while the Scooba (and similar devices) can scrub floors clean. That’s high tech, but pretty old school and affordable these days. Did you know, however, that newer robots helping around the house now include (also from iRobot) a pool vacuum called Mirra and an automatic gutter cleaner named Looj? From Ecovacs you can buy Winbot, a suction-driven robot that cleans windows!
New (remote-controlled) Home Automation Devices

The world is changing fast! These and other home automation tools will let seniors (and everyone else) customize their home environment for safety, savings and comfort.

**Phillips’ Hue** is a “personal wireless lighting” system that performs simple remote control lighting operations, but can also copy color palettes from favorite photos. It can be expanded up to 50 bulbs on a single controller bridge managed by an Android or Apple app. (The $200 starter pack contains three bulbs and a bridge.)

You can wake up gently with slowly increasing light intensity or use light “recipes” for different moods or tasks (Relax, Concentrate, Energize, Read). Each bulb has its own “web address” so it can be controlled independently or in tandem with the entire system, which can be integrated with motion detectors and other standard home automation devices. MeetHue.com

**Nest Labs** debuted with its Nest learning thermostat, which uses heuristic scheduling and a set of algorithms to learn from users’ behavior, claiming roughly 20 percent savings on monthly heating and cooling bills. You can also change the temperature in your house remotely using an Apple or Android mobile device.

Next came Protect, a smarter smoke and carbon monoxide monitor. Nest Labs recently opened their software to developers and Control4 has already created a system that integrates lights, motorized shades and other devices. More recently, Nest Labs was purchased by Google. Nest.com

**Samsung** is introducing a Smart TV that not only goes online, but also lets you adjust your thermostat and close the blinds without leaving your recliner. Samsung.com

**LG’s HomeChat** is a messaging app that allows you to control “smart” LG appliances from a mobile device. While shopping, for instance, you can send your refrigerator a text message and find out how much milk you have—or the expiration date—so you know what to buy. Instruct your vacuum to run while you are away. Start your washing machine or check the status of the current load. Or, ask your cooking range how to prepare a particular dish and it will provide the recipe! LG.com

**WeMo Home Automation** connects a small group of home automation products, all of which can be controlled from a smartphone, to make homes safer, warmer/cooler and less expensive to operate. A motion detector will light up a room as someone enters, effortlessly improving safety. The WeMo light switch can be controlled from anywhere using WiFi and a smartphone. Plug-in switches let users remotely turn appliances on and off, set schedules and monitor usage and costs. Belkin.com

You can count on an SRES® to guide you through the process of buying or selling your home, making the transaction less stressful and more successful.

The Seniors Real Estate Specialist® (SRES®) designation is awarded by the SRES® Council, a subsidiary of the National Association of REALTORS® (NAR).

To learn more about SRES® and access various consumer resources, please visit SRES.org.
SRES® Member Webinars

Have you taken advantage of this valuable member benefit?

Hear directly from various senior experts when you attend our SRES®-sponsored webinars. Can’t attend a live session? You can still listen to over 40 different recordings stored online. Recent webinar topics have included:

- Building Your Senior Team
- Universal Design
- Recent Reverse Mortgage Changes
- Elder Law & Estate Planning
- Who is the 50+ Population? What Drives their Decisions?
- Elderlife Financial Service

Watch for more topics coming soon.

To view past webinars, log into the members area of seniorsrealestate.com.