

VideoCare brings video conferencing to seniors

May 27 2013, by Dana Hull

Redwood City, Calif., resident Kelly Ilnicki is very close to her 89-year-old grandmother, who until recently lived alone in her home in Oceanside, near San Diego. Three or four times a day, Ilnicki talks to her grandmother via VideoCare, a video conferencing system for seniors and their extended families and caregivers that was developed by a Menlo Park, Calif.-based startup of the same name.

"In February, we were talking on VideoCare and Grandma was sitting on the couch. I watched her fall over and, to be honest, I thought she'd had a mini-stroke," said Ilnicki. "I was able to yell at her. We called the paramedics in Oceanside and they came to her house. I could hear the paramedics beating on the door."

When the paramedics arrived, Ilnicki was able to explain via VideoCare what had happened, as well as discuss what medication her grandmother was on.

"The [paramedics](#) were thrilled," said Ilnicki. "VideoCare has been the most amazing thing for our family. To be able to see each other versus just having a phone call makes a huge difference."

VideoCare's premise is a simple one. Today's 80- and 90-year-olds retired from the workforce before the Internet and smartphones were a staple of daily living, and they are the generation least able to navigate the onslaught of new technology.

"If you are a middle-aged person, the biggest problem you have is worrying about your parents," said Dave Trescot, 48, the co-founder and CEO of VideoCare.

"My parents live in Florida, and their biggest problem isn't using a computer. It's setting up the computer."

VideoCare's technology basically strips down the operating system to make it as simple as possible for the senior. All of the management of the device happens remotely, by the [caregiver](#) or family member. Many seniors use it to have [video chats](#) with relatives or see family photos. But there are other applications as well, like alerts to take medication or a reminder that it's bingo night.

"The senior doesn't see an operating system, files, folders, browsers or applications," said Trescot. "They touch the call button to make a call or the photo button to see a photo. We've reduced everything to one touch. We have users in Alzheimer's wards who can use our system."

VideoCare launched in November. Trescot is the former CEO of Rhozet, a video compression company that was sold to Harmonic. VideoCare, which has just six employees, recently raised \$1.25 million in venture funding from Aphelion Capital and California Technology Ventures.

The system is marketed to seniors who either "age in place" in their own homes or live in assisted living facilities. The company has not yet sold any units, but is partnering with elder-care agencies to get feedback on how well the system works. Eventually, the hope is to sell the service with a monthly subscription fee, much like a cable TV bill.

Among the early adopters of VideoCare are 10 of the 107 seniors who live at Vintage Silver Creek, an independent and assisted living facility

in San Jose, Calif., who are currently getting the service free of charge under a pilot program.

"The people who are in senior housing now are not really tech savvy," said Steve Mattingly, executive director of Vintage Senior, the facility's parent corporation, which oversees 31 facilities. "The beauty of this program is there is no keyboard involved. Seniors and keyboards is an automatic disaster."

As people age, their world often becomes smaller. They move from houses to small apartments, which often make them feel more secure. They give up driving. Their social worlds shrink as friends pass away. Many suffer from isolation, particularly if [family members](#) live far away.

"Senior living has been looking for this type of assistance for a number of years," said Mattingly. "It's the new telephone in some sense."

The U.S. market for "advanced remote patient monitoring," which includes not just videoconferencing but also the ability to remotely monitor patient care and link to electronic medical records, grew from \$8.9 billion in 2011 to \$10.6 billion in 2012, according to a March report by Kalorama Information. The report found that the aging of the population, increasing health care costs, dwindling health care resources, advancing technologies and the proven cost effectiveness of patient monitoring all fuel the market's growth.

VideoCare sees enormous potential for elder care facilities themselves to use the technology.

"Some of our facilities use the VideoCare system to remind seniors that there's an ice cream social, or to ask if they want fish or chicken for dinner," said Trescot. "We can manage a wide range of scenarios for

caregivers, families and professionals. We're combining automation and remote care with personal interaction."

While some seniors move into residential facilities, others "age in place," or stay in their own home. Greg Hartwell, founder and CEO of Homecare California, a Los Altos, Calif.-based in-home caregiving agency, says the biggest benefit of technology like VideoCare is giving seniors the ability to connect with family members and bridging the social isolation gap. His agency has several clients who live in Silicon Valley but who have adult children who live elsewhere.

"I thought iPads would be a big hit for seniors, but a lot of people say they are gathering dust," said Hartwell. "You still have to teach the elders to use the product. My average client is 84 years old. That's the generation that didn't really have a lot of technology in their life. A 65-year-old would be much different."

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