

Lucas

Welcome to Bridge the Gap podcast, the senior living podcast with Josh and Lucas. We've got a BTG ambassador, a great friend of ours, Matt Reiners. He is a new girl dad, Argentum Senior Living Leader, Forbes 30 Under 30, BTG voice ambassador, the co-founder of Eversound, and an all around fantastic guy. Welcome to the show.

Matt

Thanks for having me, Lucas and Josh. It's a pleasure to be here.

Lucas

Well, we love hanging out with you as so many people do. You're a senior living, LinkedIn famous, everybody follows your stuff. You've got a new series of interviews out where you're kind of having some chats with different influencers in the business. I'm loving the content you're putting out. You're obviously passionate about senior living like we are, which so resonates with us and everybody else. You've mixed passion with work. How is it? What does a day in your life like right now?

Matt

Yeah, so it really depends on the day. I mean, it's all about coming back to this, this mission of just trying to improve the quality of life for older adults all across the country, right? So when I'm looking at my day to day and kind of what I'm doing and how I'm operating, I always say, is it helping with that? Yes or no. And if it's a yes, I try and continue to keep doing it. But if it's a no, I try to either delegate or stop doing it all in time all the entire day.

Lucas

Josh, we have talked about this so much recently over the last months and couple of years, actually; senior isolation. Older adults being in isolation and this is kind of one of those tension points in senior living, right? Congregate care should be the answer to isolation. But a lot of times there's a bunch of other things that influence that. And I think Matt, , your passions in technology and other areas have now created a solution there at Eversound. Talk to us about your personal story around the genesis of all of that.

Matt

Yeah, absolutely. Before Eversound, my co-founder Jake and I started another company while he was still in college. I wasn't even a year out yet working at a call center, and was pretty much a glorified telemarketer. But we had started a company that was helping people around the country do silent disco events. On the very different side of the whole senior living, more of the rave and music festival scene, but we started doing that company and grew it successfully year over year. And then about like year four, year five, two things kind of happened simultaneously where we started receiving phone calls from senior living communities, basically asking for help. I think what the issue that they were experiencing was this whole isolation piece. But I think if you look at the root cause a lot of it stemmed from hearing loss, people with the inability to hear, right?

Matt

If you've ever been in a restaurant and are unable to hear the person across the table from you, you kind of back out and back out so you're no longer part of the conversation. But we started receiving these

calls from senior living communities asking for help. And what they were looking for was a headphone system designed for groups with individual volume control so everyone could listen to the bingo numbers, the television, the resident council. Being heard at a level comfortable to them. And then it was right around the same time where I saw what my grandmother was going through. She lived to be 93 in a senior living community in New Jersey and honestly her quality of life wasn't great. She would just sit in her room, blast her television, listen to her romantic fantasy novels on her own headphone system.

Matt

And it was right around this time where Jake and I are probably gosh, 24 or 25. We didn't really know any better. We were in upstate New York at the time, just started walking into senior living communities and were kind of framing it as a school project, which wasn't a lie. I mean, Jake was still in college. He was doing some class projects around that. And some of these early demos would just leave you with your jaw on the ground. You would see staff crying, you would have residents coming up to you and thanking you, saying that they hadn't been able to participate in years. And this was the first time they were able to do that. And I think that was where we kind of took a step back and was like, "holy crap, we could create a business, do some good, and really improve the quality of life, for some of these senior living communities and their residents." And it was right around that time that I got bit by the senior living bug and we haven't looked back.

Josh

Well, it's really cool. For me, it's been cool to see the progression of, I guess you would call it your entry into the industry. And I can still remember a couple of the first times I would say I was exposed to Matt at the events and I remember walking by, I forget what conference or event it was, but I saw this relatively young compared to most of the crowd dude with headphones on and flashing shoes, neon, dancing, not interested in inviting me in like the other I would say expo sharks to typically do, and I kind of avoid. But you were actually just kinda like dancing and I couldn't hear the music, but apparently you could. And I'm like, "this guy is having the best time of anybody here. I don't know what he's doing, but this is different."

Josh

And then I think my next exposure to Matt was you were dressed like Richard Simmons at an event and I'm still thinking, my first two times I'm like, "I don't know what this guy does, but I've got to figure it out." So once I did, I thought it was the coolest thing in the world, what you guys had figured out. So I'm getting to my question here. My question is you guys have launched, a ton of communities are using the product that you developed to help seniors out. What kind of data experiences stories, like what kind of impact is this making and, and specifically, what is it doing for people that were lacking in engagement? How's it helping them participate now?

Matt

Absolutely. And I think it was Danny Zuko. I was dressed up just for the record, had a nice little wig, short shorts on, I was rocking it pretty hard. I did want a nice, substantial gift card, I must say, so definitely doing that. But yeah, I mean it's almost every day we hear a new story of someone's life just being changed for the better. I mean, we've heard stories that people thought to be nonverbals having conversations with their loved ones again because they can actually hear what's being said. We hear stories of people who wouldn't come out to events actually coming out and participating and engaging

cause they can actually hear. We call these our “Ever moments” and we have a whole website that's dedicated to them, but it's just basically pulling them off when other communities are mentioning us in their social media.

Matt

And it's really amazing to hear some of these stories. I mean, I look at Ms. Josie behind me, behind my left shoulder who celebrated her hundredth birthday during the pandemic. Her family wanted to visit her, couldn't go inside, and you can actually see them through the window. They were able to use Ever sound to sing and have a conversation with Ms. Josie. And if I can ever think of a hundredth birthday party, it's going to be a heck of a good time. But the inability to see my family is sad, it's depressing. And I'm just so grateful and humbled to be able to help with moments like that. So we hear of all of these anecdotal stories of people's lives being changed for the better. We usually have groups that will try and collect some data when they're trying to test the efficacy of technology, which I would definitely suggest and recommend.

Matt

I think a lot of people come out and over promise under deliver of what the technology can do. But we had a group, one of our partners Front Porch Center for Innovation and Wellbeing out in California who I think have done the most substantial data collection with other innovation and technology products. They did a 12 month study with over 600 residents and found that Eversound improved engagement by 77%, improved understanding of the event by 77%, and also improved mood in those living with dementia by 64%. So we've had other groups do other studies to collect some data and have also shown it improves attendance. The staff has said that it has helped from what they can observe. And I think when you kind of get to the simple concept, right, or the simple problem, the inability to hear. If you aren't living with that and you're not experiencing it, you don't really encounter how that can really define your day-to-day because of course hearing loss, isn't a person, but hearing loss can define a person.

Matt

And it's with these other groups that we're finding these stories that are starting to come out and, again I always just think back to my grandmother and try to help people like her. And that's why as an entire team, we feel very fortunate and grateful to help support some of these heroes in the front lines.

Josh

Oh, that's awesome. So I want to take a little bit of a different pathway here with you specifically and, and ask you a couple of questions and to speak to a particular part or segment of our audience, which is pretty diverse. A lot of our audiences are obviously the folks that are using Eversound products because they're caring for older adults and it's a great tool for them. But, talk to the people, there's so many technology groups that are bombarding, I guess you would say, and I don't mean that in a negative way. I mean just coming into the industry a lot of them never get traction for probably a million different reasons. But you have really gotten traction and your product has done really well. Not only because it's a great product, but I feel like you've made some strategic efforts that helped to get your foot in the door. So maybe talk to the growing group of listeners that we have, or that are kind of B2B that feel like they've got a solution or a product that's helping to bridge some gap in our industry and they're just not really sure the best way to connect in our industry. And I would like maybe you would be a great young entrepreneur to kind of give some guidance on how to get connected in our space.

Matt

Yeah, absolutely. And this is something I've thought about a lot. I guess what I've observed and what I see, especially in the B2B space, I would say 90 to 95% of the providers are in it for the right reasons, right? They're, they're good people, amazing souls, have some sort of personal experience of a parent, or a loved one, or a grandparent that they grew up with, who they experienced probably not something so good. And that's really driven them to this industry to help improve that quality of life. And I find when some of these B2B companies and technology companies come in, they almost miss the soul side of it. I remember I was at the Thrive Center in Louisville, which I know you guys have been to.

Matt

And I was talking to one of our partners and they were looking at some of the marketing collateral from one of the other technology companies that were showcasing there. And they were basically calling themselves an asset tracking company. Referring to the residence as assets, where she read those first three lines I'm like, "I'll never talk to them." These are people like these are experiences. These are someone's mom, someone's dad, someone's brother. Like these are, these are people. And I think where I find a lot of technology companies, they hear about this "silver tsunami," or they're seeing these demographics and how they're changing and everyone is sniffing around and really trying to break into senior living. But it's such a relationship driven industry. And if you're not in it for the right reasons, you'll get called out pretty quickly. And that's where I find that you're not getting traction.

Matt

I also find a lot of companies are building things behind closed doors. They're building it, building it, not seeking customer input. They release it to the world. Say, "here you go, it's amazing." And everyone's like, "well, we don't need that. That's not solving any problems that we have." So I think what we've done too very early on is try and incorporate the feedback that we're hearing from the communities, really doing a lot of discovery meetings and discovery calls in terms of just understanding what the pain points are now. And I think one of the best compliments we received last week was one of our partners, Presbyterian Senior Living, our friend Alicia there, who said, "I love Eversound because you're normal people," right? And she's like, "I can have a real conversation with you if something's not going right. We talk about it.

Matt

It's not BS." And I find too these are a lot of real people. In B2B, it's all the marketing lingo and language. Where you really need to be a person first and really try to incorporate that in all that you do. And also find a third point, just ease of use, right? There's a million things going on in these communities today to expect that people will add an hour to their day to help figure out what software that you're using. People just don't have that time. So you need to strive for simplicity in order for any of it to get, because once you have an issue, or once there is a problem, they're not going to go back to it. They'll just put it on the shelf and it collects dust and then never sees the light of day again.

Josh

Well, Lucas, so we just got a little senior tech launch 101, our listeners that was free by Matt Reiners.

Lucas

Well, there's so much technology and innovation opportunities in this space. So go high level with us. What do you think is on the horizon?

Matt

Yeah. So on the horizon, I do think there's going to be more collaboration or just having different technologies talk together. I think one of the biggest issues we run into in the last five or so years is all of these companies building technology in a silo. But you're starting to see some of these larger VC funds coming in and starting to absorb these companies. I believe you'll have a platform that can pretty much do everything that you can need in a community. I think you'll see more and more of these people. Rather than going and building their own, they'll just start absorbing these companies and bringing them together and I think over the last, 12 to 18 months, we've really seen that heightened with some of these really notable companies starting to happen, too. But I do think you'll start to see more of this internet of things, things talking to one another. I wouldn't call it asset tracking of course, but really there's really cool technology that can really help to digitize. The big buzzword is 'big data', right? And the more data you can get around some of this stuff, and then you can make predictions or analyses off of that data is just kind of where the future is heading.

Josh

Yeah. I would tend to agree with that. Where we almost have to go next because we're tracking like everything, right? And we have a million different dashboards, but I think one of the struggles in our space, in these communities, which you touched on the point, they're so busy, they're being hit by so many different things; what do I do with the data? Like what data is important? So it almost has to be a little bit intuitive. Maybe that it's that AI that is intuitively helping to tell and guide the caregiver or the professional, or nurse, or whoever on what of this data is important that I need and what do I need to do with the data that I'm getting? And it seems like that's maybe the next big step for our industry.

Matt

Yeah, I would agree. I mean, you can track everything in anything, but if you're not analyzing it and making conclusions and then making adjustments off that there's no sense in collecting it. And I mean, we even struggled with this in our own company. What should we actually track? What's important? What are the KPIs we should be looking at weekly, daily, monthly, quarterly, and what are some important ones? But you can pretty much get it down to a few key ones. It's a great point to ask.

Josh

One of the brilliant things that you've done with your product deliveries is you've made it to where it's a tool for the resident and obviously the community that's providing, but it doesn't feel like it's an anchor that's dragging them down. I mean, so many of the really cool technologies require they're very labor intensive for the community who's already overworked. I think that's one of the beauties of what you guys have done with your product. I mean, would you agree with that?

Matt

I would agree. We've learned a lot over the last five or six years since we launched it. I mean, we wanted to strive for simplicity, a plug and play system that can really be used all across the community. So I think a lot of people at first were like, "this is just a solution for bingo," which it is. I know we can never take bingo away. But we're finding more and more care staff, executive directors, sales and marketing people using this and it's literally pressing a button, turning it on, and away you go. And I think what's nice about

the technology too. I think we could have a whole podcast on wifi in these communities. And the nice thing about it is you don't need wifi in order for it to be successful.

Lucas

Yes. I'm constantly amazed that when I walk into communities on the weekly basis that there are still a number, there's a contingency out there that does not have wifi in the building. Interesting. So many opportunities in this space, especially when it comes to innovation and technology. Matt, you've done a great job, you and your team there at Eversound. And we are also following along with your interviews on LinkedIn. What have you learned from doing this? I don't know you've probably done a couple of dozen already. What have you learned so far?

Matt

I've learned a lot. I love it so much because as I go to these conferences, as I interact with people, there's so many amazing, bright, just tremendous people. And the whole goal of it is to help put a spotlight on some of those people. So, Lucas and Josh we'll have to get you on here because I definitely feel that way about you and Sara, of course. But I've learned that there's a new style of leadership coming. I think we're kind of all, we think of the old leadership model as it was more based on fear, right? And now we're all kind of getting to this view of leadership, Simon Sinek, understanding your "why." I do think there's more empathetic leaders that are coming up. And I also think there's a lot of interesting ideas that are coming out that are all from passionate people that want the best for this industry. Even though when you think about senior living, you see all the dreaded headlines, right? But that's how people are driving those clicks. But I continue to be inspired by the people that I'm talking to and just hope that the people that are watching it are going away with some golden nuggets that they can incorporate into their own lives and work lives.

Lucas

Yes, absolutely. That resonates with us so much. It was part of the genesis of even starting Bridge the Gap, the senior living podcast. And, we've said it so many times, Josh, really it's the people in this business that really makes it so special. And I think that that is the bond that keeps us all together. It's our common bond in realizing. Especially Matt, you and I on the vendor side, are supporting guys like Josh and other providers and operators. It's such a huge responsibility because they need help. They need great services and they need vendors and partners that really understand senior living. It's not just a piece of their business, but it's the core of their business. And you're a great example of that. So we really appreciate it. Great talk today, Matt. Thank you for your time.

Matt

Thank you for having me on. It's been on the bucket list since I've gotten to senior living and I've seen the Bridge to Gap podcasts come to fruition.

Lucas

I'm shocked it's taken this long, but we finally did it. We're finally here. Make sure that you connect with Matt on LinkedIn. Follow along on his chats and his content that he's putting out. We'll connect in the show notes and you can go to BTGvoice.com, catch all of our content. You can download the transcript to this one. Make sure you connect with BTG on social media, right? We're on LinkedIn. We're on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, everything, YouTube. Go to BTGvoice.com to find out all the information. And thanks for listening to another great episode of Bridge the Gap.