



# Making Your Site Their 'Home for the Holidays'

By Gary Camp

It's that time of year! Sleigh bells ring—are you listening?

A majority of self storage facilities don't jump on the sleigh when it comes to holiday promotions. It can be hard to quantify whether or not a holiday-themed effort is helpful with generating new tenants, or if the view is worth the climb. A variety of factors, like the facility manager's passion for the initiative, or the location of your facility, can affect your results.

"Holiday promotions are difficult to measure," said Kenneth Nitzberg, chairman and CEO of Devon Self Storage, based in Emeryville, California. Devon Self Storage manages 30 facilities in 11 states.

"People come to us when *they* feel they need us, and it's our job to make them happy once they arrive. I'm not sure holiday promotions drive people to rent, but it certainly doesn't hurt.

"Most of the time, it doesn't bring any more people in than would have come in anyway," he said. "But if they are on-site, and it makes them feel good, it's worthwhile. But I'm not sure how to measure how much it truly helps. Does it mean we rented two more units that we otherwise wouldn't have?"

That's a question that might not have an answer. But a holiday promotion can provide the often unquantifiable "warm and fuzzy" touchpoint that might just push someone over the edge if they were wavering on their facility choice, or decision to rent, in general.

Many factors influence a property manager's decision to participate in holiday promotions. A low occupancy rate, your location, or the receptiveness of the community surrounding your site, might all play a role when deciding the best way to maximize limited resources.

Nevertheless, it's a good time of year to discuss some possible ideas that might work well for your situation. A holiday event may result in additional visits from existing tenants, who will bring along prospects who might have never otherwise visited your location.

## Non-Profit Partnerships, Food and Toy Drives, and More

The holiday season may provide a great opportunity to examine your business and determine if your current occupancy rates might allow you to work with one, or more, non-profit organizations. Can you



become a home base for canned good donations, coats, toys or more? The more space you have, the more foot traffic you can potentially generate to your facility. This might even be something that you can afford to do on a year-round basis; it doesn't just have to be a holiday initiative if you have the space.

Think about what organizations are near and dear to your heart—from the Make-A-Wish Foundation or Red Cross, to the Salvation Army or United Way—and think about ways to make a difference that is meaningful to you personally. Usually, if your heart is into it, the end result will show it.

You can select families in need, and ask tenants to help you fulfill their holiday wishlists. Partner with a local service organization, like the Elks Club, Moose Lodge, Kiwanis Club or Knights of Columbus, for help with distributing items into the community to those in need.

A popular, nationwide self storage facility partner is Toys for Tots, a well-known organization run by the U.S. Marine Corps. They collect new, unwrapped toys during October, November and December and distribute the toys as Christmas gifts to underprivileged children in the community.

*Above: Simply Self Storage in Virginia Beach, Virginia, decked out for the holidays. Inset: Santa pays a visit to Riverdale Road Self Storage in Riverdale, Georgia.*

*See Holiday Marketing , page 22*

# Many Reasons to Join!



## One Result

**Greater Revenue, Exposure & Community Involvement with Your Store**



## Holiday Marketing, from page 20

Ruthann Herman, a manager at Advantage Storage in Anna, Texas, started a toy and food drive in 2010 and is continuing it in 2011. She went to her local police and fire departments, along with the local chamber of commerce, and asked for their support with a drive to help those in the community that needed it most.

"We are in a small community, and a lot of people are losing their homes and struggling. We wanted to help," Herman said. "People let us know about those in our area that could use some help around the holidays, and some of them were too proud to ask for help."

They identified 95 families, and she contacted the local Brookshires Grocery Co., who graciously donated a hen and \$25 gift card to each family. Brookshires also sold \$5 and \$10 pre-packaged bags of food to customers in their Anna, Texas location, and delivered the food to Advantage Storage for distribution. Local organizations helped distribute the collected items, and police and fire personnel donated the items to the families that were anonymously nominated.

It's an event that will become an annual one, and Herman hopes to help even more people in 2011 and beyond.



*Access Self Store in Kernersville, NC, provides a Santa's Workshop where tenants can come wrap their Christmas gifts for free.*

Herman's example is one that reminds us of the value of holiday initiatives. Using your facility in this way is certainly an opportunity to increase awareness of your facility, but maybe most importantly, it's your chance to do good in the community that you serve.

### Decorate Your Site

Never underestimate the value of decoration for the holidays. Customers have said that they drove past a self storage facility 100 times but the moment a huge snowman appeared outside, they noticed it.

A festive office, with lights, trees, poinsettias or more can help create a more inviting atmosphere for everyone, including your staff.

### Elf Storage, Santas Workshops

Some sites have more 5' x 10' units than they'd like to admit, and this time of year might be the perfect time to try to make good use of that space. A 5' x 10' is large enough to store holiday gifts, and also large enough to provide room for wrapping, or assembling gifts, too.

Drop the "S" in Self Storage, and Elf Storage becomes a clever way to leverage your space for parents who might have an overly curious son or daughter at home. Consider free gift wrapping stations, hot chocolate, holiday music and cookies to lighten the sometimes sterile environment.

Add some fun signage outside that entices them to stop in: "\$1 a day until Christmas! One month rentals available!" "Hide your Christmas gifts here!" "Reduce the clutter before the in-laws arrive!" "Store your Christmas decorations here!" Located near a shopping mall? How about "Hide your gifts with us... Stop off here before heading home!" "Store your larger-than-life holiday decorations with us!"



*Even in Jacksonville, Florida, a snowy front porch brings the holidays to life at Blue Water Storage Center.*

## Holiday Parades and Community Events

If you look for opportunities in your community, you might be surprised to learn what annual events are already on the calendar. Organizers are always anxious to find local business partners. From annual holiday parades, to concert series, these events can provide a nice platform for expanding your reach. Consider sponsorship of an event, or use a facility delivery truck in a parade, to get your name out.

Many times, if you go to where the people are, as opposed to asking the people to come to you, your chances of engaging them will increase.

## Giveaways

Inexpensive tchotchkes are a nice gesture around the holidays, either as a simple “thank you” for their business, or an incentive to extend, or sign, a new lease. Some ideas might include a box of Christmas lights,

small ornaments, a box of holiday cards, a raffle for a month of free storage, a ham or turkey giveaway, a Christmas tree with a new rental, hot chocolate giveaways, candy canes, and more.

## Photos with Santa

Each Saturday in December, create and promote a photo opportunity with Santa (and maybe even Mrs. Claus). Encourage parents to bring their children for a free photo with Santa—allowing pets will increase your audience! Provide refreshments, holiday music and giveaways, and consider encouraging donations of food/toys to connect your event to a good cause.

## Holiday Direct Mail and Email

Holiday cards show your tenants you are more than just a brick-and-mortar building—you have a heart. It lets them know you are thankful for their business, even though you may not see them on a regular basis.

Holiday cards to previous tenants remind them you are still in business should they need you again.

An email is also a cost-effective way to spread holiday cheer if you have a solid database of customers compiled.

These additional touches are also ideal for stimulating referrals. Cards, with an introductory offer, can easily be passed along to friends and family, and emails are easily forwarded. Encouragement, in the form of a \$20 credit, might be just the incentive they need to share your message with others.

You don't have to be completely altruistic around the holidays, either. You would be missing a huge opportunity, along with exposure in local media outlets, if you didn't effectively spread the word about your plans. A simple press release, shared with local newspapers and radio stations, can go a long way in getting your facility free exposure. ❖

*Photos provided by Universal Management Company, Smyrna, Georgia*

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