



Non-Reality Television

By Tom Comi

If it is indeed true that there is no such thing as bad publicity, then everybody involved in the storage industry should immediately add A&E to their holiday card list in 2011.

Just when you thought that the network that brought you *Hoarders*, *Intervention*, *Parking Lot Wars* and *The Hassel-hoffs* had run out of material, it found a way to capitalize on our industry with the recent premiere of *Storage Wars*.

And as the title implies, this isn't necessarily some feel-good documentary about the many wonderful things in the world of storage. Nope, instead it casts its spotlight on deadbeat tenants and the auctioning off of their belongings. Here is how A&E spins it on their website:

"[It] follows four professional buyers and their teams as they scour repossessed storage units in search of hidden treasure. Part gamblers, part detectives, these seasoned veterans have found everything from coffins to the world's most valuable comic book collection, paying as little as ten dollars for items valued in the millions."

Not exactly a ringing endorsement for our field, is it? Regretfully, though, the positive sides of storage wouldn't

put many butts on the sofa, and A&E is in the business of making money. If that means catering to the lowest common denominator, so be it.

Listen, I'm not naïve enough to think that there aren't negative elements in this industry as there are with every industry. Repossessions and auctions are an unfortunate part of the trade. But it's misleading when the exceptions are presented as the norm. Seriously, how many more TV shows or movies can be made in which storage units are used to hide weapons, create bombs, harbor terrorists or serve as meth labs?

But unlike those so-called dramas, *Storage Wars* is curiously pegged as "real-life" TV. In each episode, bidders get to use a flashlight to get a quick look inside the repossessed units, and then they bid on what they think the collection is worth. Some end up with much more than the amount they bid; others get stuck with a pile of trash.

Time will tell how this series is presented by A&E and perceived by the general public, but at first glance it sounds like the viewers of this program are getting stuck with the latter option as well. ❖