

# Embrace and Engage...

By Patrick J. Reilly – Chairman, SSA Board of Directors

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I am honored by the trust and confidence placed in me to serve as the 2012 SSA chairman. There are many exciting and important industry initiatives that the SSA has in process for 2012 which will substantially benefit SSA members and the self storage industry as a whole. I am proud to be able to contribute to those initiatives and serve the industry's only non-profit association.

My sincerest expression of gratitude and special acknowledgement goes out to my predecessors and fellow board members, especially the 2011 chairman, Michael Riva. This association, and the industry as a whole, has benefitted greatly from their generous service and prudent leadership.

As we all know, over the last four years or so, virtually every industry and sector of our economy has been stress-tested and challenged in ways that few could have foreseen. Although most of us anticipated that the self storage industry would be impacted by the dramatic economic downturn, it seemed that most of us held on, in varying degrees, to the notion which propagated over the years of growth and prosperity that self storage was "recession resistant," and that, somehow, we would not be substantially impacted.

For many self storage owners and operators across the country, holding on to that notion delayed the critical actions of evaluating and adapting the fundamental operating premises that drive their businesses. The delay in action has exacerbated the erosion of occupancy and revenue experienced by many owners and operators.

Compounding the challenges to the competitive landscape of the self storage industry, there has been a rippling paradigm shift in the way our customers shop for and interact with our self storage businesses. It began with website functionality, search engine optimization and customer online business services such as payments and account info; it now includes the expanding integration of social media, web analytics, drip marketing campaigns, viral videos, reviews and ratings management, and web lead generation services. This fundamental shift in doing business online is no longer an advantage but an absolute requirement in almost every market. The challenge of every self storage owner and operator is to embrace and engage these new tools. Expanding your marketing playbook by engaging these new technologies is where the rubber meets the road—on the frontlines of your businesses.

The SSA has responded to this new business environment by adapting our offerings and member benefits while continuing to be pioneers and the sole leaders in legislative advocacy for the self storage industry.

This year, I challenge all of you to re-evaluate your key operating premises. Accept that we are not quite as "recession resistant" as we once thought and that changing the way we do business is now a necessity, not an advantage.

Make this the year that you embrace and engage new concepts, products, and services. Attend and participate. There are many valuable offerings from the SSA—in person, online and in the *SSA Globe* magazine. You can communicate directly with the people and companies that will help you evaluate, renovate, innovate and improve your businesses so that you can compete on the level required in today's market. I look forward to seeing many of you at SSA events this year and working with you to improve your businesses and our industry. ❖