



Talking Software with Some of the Leaders in the Industry

By John Dunlap

These days in the self storage industry not only having—but effectively using—software is critical to all areas of operations and finance. Even the smallest operators can realize previously unattainable efficiencies by integrating the latest programs throughout their properties. Why reinvent the wheel? The experts have honed the details into workable platforms through years of trial and error, and yes, healthy industry competition.

There are a lot of smart people in software development, many focusing entirely on storage business management. Who better to tell us about this, and the next, generation of solutions than Terry Bagley of Centershift, Tom Smith of Empower Software Technologies, Inc. (developers of Storage Commander), Markus Hecker of SiteLink Software, Glenn Hunter of Domico, Tom Garden of SyraSoft, Kat Shenoy of E-SoftSys (developers of Self Storage Manager), Chuck Sowers of DHS Worldwide Software Solutions and Sam Celaya of eMove.

What follows is a brief look at what is happening in software—from the people competing for the self storage customer.

What is the hardest part of predicting what your customers' next needs will be?

Terry Bagley (Centershift) – The challenge in predicting what our customers' next needs is threefold: (1) Understanding what the customers' opportunities, issues or problems are that created the need; (2) Determining the different

ways customers might choose to implement or utilize the feature or solution based on their unique business dynamics and operations; and (3) Meeting or predicting the timeframe the customer needs the feature or solution. The opportunity in correctly predicting what our customer's next need is obvious; we are able to satisfy our customers' needs and potentially differentiate ourselves from our competitors.

Tom Smith (Empower) – The integration of leading edge technology solutions. The technological advancements in computer hardware and software that become available on a yearly basis is astounding. Granted, not all of the innovations are of practical use in the self storage industry but many of them are—for instance, the ability to scan the driver license information into the management software program was a great time and accuracy improvement. Graphical site maps, ACH check processing, auto credit card billing and emailing of notices and other documents represent a small fraction of how technology has impacted our industry. As new advancements in computer systems, hardware and software devices are released, sifting

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through these new advancements and integrating them into our products is a constant challenge.

Markus Hecker (SiteLink) – Since day one, SiteLink has been a customer-driven company. We add changes based on customer feedback and innovations in other industries, such as zip code pricing and promotions. Customers like the seamless improvements we deliver via our monthly automatic live updates. However, we meet the real challenge of training users on new features with our educational newsletter, webinars and online training videos. They have been tremendously popular since the November 2010 inception. Over 10,000 monthly visitors on our website prove the success, and need, of web-based, on-demand training to get the most out of SiteLink.



“Many ways exist to design a web system. Our approach lowers the cost of ownership and delivers the most user-friendly interface, speed and reliability.”

~ Marcus Hecker
SiteLink

Glenn Hunter (Domico) – The real challenge for a software company in this industry is to achieve a level of understanding of the business such that customers respect your technology expertise. With the enormous number of business details for a self storage owner or management company to attend to, technology can only be given a very limited amount of time. As a result needs are often inappropriately translated into the latest glittering object seen at a trade show. An experienced software company will define customer needs—not just respond. By thoroughly understanding the business as well as the technology, a software company in fact leads, not follows.

Tom Garden (Syrasoft) – The most difficult part in determining customer’s next needs is in anticipating the development of new devices, such as the kiosk from Insomniac. The integration of technology, such as bar code scanners for point of sale (POS) systems, mobile scanners for our mobile storage module, and new access control vendors and devices requires a constant stream of new development. Hardware interfaces often change with changes in operating systems so Microsoft has ensured us of having plenty to do in the future.

Kat Shenoy (Self Storage Manager) – Self storage industry usually follows other industries when it comes to adopting new technology. For example: self storage operators started using revenue management a few years after other industries, such as hotels and airlines, started using it. Same is true for implementing kiosks, CRM, PDAs etc. In order to predict what our customers’ next needs

will be, we constantly evaluate what other industries are doing related to technology, which makes the prediction somewhat easier. We also take valuable feedback from our customers through annual surveys and meet regularly with our product user committee, which consists of large operators as well as mid-size operators.

Chuck Sowers (DHS) – DHS Worldwide prides itself on being a customer-centric organization and adaptive in nature when it comes to developing self storage management software. We have found that what is needed in our business is an honest feedback mechanism which can accurately tell us what our customers’ needs are now, and in the future. To meet this need, we have developed an enhancement suggestions portal for all of our current customers in order to continually meet our customers’ needs. We have found that providing on-site training and attending association trade shows brings our organization a clear direction on what direction the industry is heading.

Sam Celaya (eMove) – We try not to predict, but rather understand what our network of affiliates demand. We like to call it, “scientific predicting.” Your client’s demands will determine your next steps and help you stay ahead of the game.

What is the most important aspect of your product that simplifies life for self storage owner/operators and managers?

Bagley (Centershift) – The most important aspect of our product that simplifies life from the owner/operator perspective is the capability to access relevant information and data on their organization or facilities anytime and from anywhere. This gives the owner/operator the best opportunity to measure, manage and control their organization or facilities better, providing the potential to increase their bottom line, make the operator more competitive and provide better services to the customer. The most important aspect of our product that simplifies life from a site manager perspective is our product’s ability to help site managers better understand, track and communicate with their potential customers and tenants. This would include our customer relationship management capabilities for lead tracking and follow up and communication options—including centralized automated mailing (standard and certified) and emailing options.

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“The most important aspect of our product is the capability to access relevant information and data on their organization or facilities anytime and from anywhere.”

~ Terry Bagley
Centershift

Smith (Empower) – Without question the biggest compliment we receive from our customers is how easy it is to use *Storage Commander* through our point and click user interface. Our technical support: although more than half of the requests we receive for technical support have nothing to do with our product, our support staff will take the time to walk our customers through their questions to find the solution they need. The breadth and accuracy of our reports: *Storage Commander's* reports are easy to read and can be setup for auto generation and emailing at predefined intervals or viewed online through the internet. Full internet management functionality: through our exclusive data replication technology, *Storage Commander V5* allows the facility to function at 100% even if the internet connection is lost.



“The technological advancements in computer hardware and software that become available on a yearly basis is astounding.”

~ Tom Smith
Empower Software Technologies, Inc.

Hecker (SiteLink) – Many ways exist to design a web system. Our approach lowers the cost of ownership and delivers the most user-friendly interface, speed and reliability. *Web Edition* runs on powerful servers, but it also keeps all data on each user's computer(s) allowing access even when internet service is temporarily out. *Web Edition* saves clients the cost and headache of backing up and restoring data after system crashes. Built-in e-commerce modules tie to customers' web site for online reservations and payments. Automatic live updates eliminate cumbersome manual upgrades via CD ROM. Almost 4,000 *Web Edition* users prove our architecture and service are the most popular and reliable in the industry.

Hunter (Domico) – Software handles routine tasks. The more routine, the better software can simplify and speed up the task. Self storage has a great number of routine tasks both for store managers as well as for management. Thus the excellent match. One challenge that comes immediately to mind: Report numbers that can be trusted. It takes a tremendous amount of ongoing oversight on the part of a software company to ensure that report numbers make sense. If the numbers cannot be trusted, the time and frustration can be enormous. Dealing successfully with this challenge makes for a product that truly simplifies.

Garden (Syrasoft) – Using the best features of the web without giving up control of data and sensitive information is the strength of our model. We offer online payments, emailing of reports, invoices, letters and receipts, inter-

faces to kiosks, access control, certified mail printing and delivery all via the world wide web. Processing power is kept in-house with secure data, private from your competitors, and managers and customers are not at the mercy of an overloaded server somewhere out in cyberspace when waiting for a receipt for a payment on the first of the month.

Shenoy (Self Storage Manager) – Our CRM module, which is fully integrated with our Self Storage Manager software, truly streamlines processes for the multi-site operators and managers. Unlike the popular CRM products on the market today, our CRM module is the only CRM product truly geared for the storage industry and shares the same database as Self Storage Manager. CRM module allows call center agents to log inquiries, enter payments and reservations, make collection calls and have access to tenant history data as well. In addition, CRM has e-mail campaign and online-chat capabilities.

Sowers (DHS) – The most important aspect of our *Total Recall Self-Storage Management* software is that it is an Enterprise Solution based on a centralized model. Our customers find the centralized model much more efficient and that it provides more control over processes across multiple facilities, stronger reporting capabilities and easy to use yield management tools. In addition to these foundational benefits, we have found that our online payment and reservation system has greatly simplified lives for the self storage owner/operators.

Celaya (eMove) – The convenience and savings our web-based business model offers through our pioneering web-based management software, *WebSelfStorage*, has simplified the lives for many self storage operators. This was something we saw as an extreme convenience many years ago and still feel the same today. Storage owners are frequently away from their facility but with our web-based software, they can manage their business from anywhere. And that goes beyond a computer. With the recent addition of our popular mobile enhancement, a storage owner has access to their operational information via their Blackberry, iPhone or any other mobile device by simply visiting www.webselfstorage.com/mobile. Our web-based platform also provides the freedom of behind-the-scenes upgrades at no cost to our affiliates. This also provides peace-of-mind for our affiliates that the system will not be obsolete or require costly upgrades one or two years down the road.



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~ Sam Celaya
eMove

What is unique about the implementation of your product with customers and continued support?

Bagley (Centershift) – We are unique in regards to implementation of our product by providing a focused and dedicated implementation team and process. This team provides a consultative and supportive approach to our customers in helping them plan and convert from their legacy software. This approach includes project management, training, configuration, conversion, and verification of the converted data. We are unique in regards to our support of our application and solutions by providing live access to sizable and dedicated group of helpdesk agents via phone, chat, or online tools during extended business hours, seven days a week.

Smith (Empower) – From the onsite manager's perspective, the point-and-click graphical site map gives the manager an unparalleled ease of use while providing them with instantaneous information on customer and facility status. From the owners and management companies perspective, it's the reliability of our Internet management service utilizing data replication, and our low cost operating costs which saves our customers as much as 75% when compared to other web-based facility management solutions.

Hecker (SiteLink) – To lower operating cost and deliver the same, consistently fast speed, we put a copy of all data on each user's computer. Printing, look-up, and saving

transactions is super fast. Live updates deploy automatically, keep all users on the same version and eliminate the expense of manual upgrades. Our web architecture keeps data secure on servers, as evidenced by our PCI and SAS 70 certification. To speed up learning and cut owner's training cost, *Web Edition* users access webinars, built-in help files and manuals, video training and phone support 7 days a week. Users train on their time on the features they want using over 50 focused videos.

Hunter (Domico) – DOMICO established software customer support in this industry. It took years for our competition to figure out how important service is for a technology product to be successful. Every company pays lip service to support. But few, even currently, actually charge appropriately for it and bet that the customer is willing to pay for it. For 25-plus years we have made that a successful bet.

Garden (Syrasoft) – The labor pool in upstate New York, (Syracuse) is the most educated and affordable in the country. This allows us to provide service at an unprecedented level and at the lowest price in the industry. We have been fortunate to have the vision (or lucky guesses) to have architected a product that was able to grow with the success of our clients. Even our DOS product was multi-user out of the box in early 1990s. We have always been aware of the constant demand for better and more powerful tools and did not accept the limited features available to this industry in the early days of Windows development.

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Shenoy (Self Storage Manager) – For larger multi-site implementations we take the dedicated team approach where we assign a project manager and a dedicated team. Based on the size of the implementation, the dedicated team will include programmers, QA analysts and support analysts. The team will handle all implementation-related tasks such as onsite meetings with client, remote installation, training, data conversion, implementation support, any customizations required to meet customer's unique needs etc. The dedicated team takes part in weekly progress review meetings with the customer until all sites are up and running on the *Self Storage Manager* software and turned over to support. Our software support is available 24/7, something that truly sets us apart from our competitors. Our response time is less than two minutes and all minor issues reported by customers are addressed immediately and other issues that take more time are also addressed in a timely manner.



"For larger multi-site implementations we take the dedicated team approach where we assign a project manager and a dedicated team."

~ Kat Shenoy
E-SoftSys.

Sowers (DHS) – *Total Recall* products are the most flexible, easy to implement solution in the industry. DHS offers many options for implementation, from same day installation to customized training programs. We strive in assisting our customers with implementing management software to make it an easy and enjoyable experience. With over 25 technical professionals, customers always get a live person to answer the phone. We excel in providing prompt and accurate technical support each and every time.

Celaya (eMove) – We provide an unmatched package of services for self storage operators that allows them to make more, pay less and truly compete at a level that is on par with the larger operators. *WebSelfStorage* stands alone with its fully integrated business model that includes services such as management software, payment processing, confirmed storage reservations, call center service, centralized mailing, tenant insurance, free online tech support and much more. Plus, all of this is available to our affiliates on a month-to-month basis and they can cancel at anytime. Having a fully integrated package of products and services and the flexibility of a monthly agreement provides a great convenience for our affiliates because they do not have to deal with numerous third party companies, pay outrageous fees, or get tied into any long-term contracts. Our program is a one-stop-shop with a price-point that continues to be unmatched in terms of affordability and return on their investment.

What are you working on in the future to help make life better for your customers?

Bagley (Centershift) – Centershift is working on, or has recently released, the following new or improved features or solutions in our self storage rental management and point-of-sale software: (1) Third generation revenue management modules to improve the automation and capabilities of rental yields and promotion management; (2) Improved rental rate change tools to make quick and easy pricing changes; (3) Smart phone applications for self storage that allow owners and regional management a real-time view of facility performance and operational tools; (4) Listing and reservation aggregation integration for better reservation management; (5) Customer relationship management (CRM) component and integration to help clients better understand customers, demand and marketing feedback; (6) Phone system integration for call center use. Also, a flexible promotion and discounts component with governors to better control the appropriate use of promotions and discounts.

Smith (Empower) – Empower Software Technologies, Inc. will unveil its newest product: *Storage Commander V5* at the upcoming SSA trade show in Las Vegas, September 1–3. *Storage Commander V5* will incorporate the most advanced suite of Internet facility management functionality, an industry first hardware device we've called the *Customer Access Terminal*, advanced processing of checks incorporating front and back imaging and endorsing of checks, ability to process merchandise transactions using barcode technology, just to name a few of its features. A complete information packet covering all of *Storage Commander V5* advanced features will be available at the SSA trade show.

Hecker (SiteLink) – *Web Edition's* architecture lets us adapt to changes in technology quickly. I can share some features as part of our long development road map extending far into the future. We continue to grow online management. Our powerful e-commerce module gives our clients a competitive advantage. *Web Edition* continues to push the rent change and advertising envelope: revenue management uses demographics, zip codes and other factors to maximize rental income. Our Google interface plots customers and competitors for a powerful visual analysis. Marketing tracking helps users to craft proper advertising messages and deliver them to different customer groups.



"The real challenge for a software company in this industry is to achieve a level of understanding of the business such that customers respect your technology expertise."

~ Glenn Hunter
Domico

Hunter (Domico) – DOMICO invests an enormous (to this owner’s way of thinking) percentage of profits in future technology development. We are currently engaged in two major long term development projects. Each makes use of technology that is currently unavailable in the industry. We believe that by the end of this year we will be making major product introductions that will continue DOMICO technology leadership for years to come.

Garden (Syrasoft) – Our work on the automation of payments, from credit cards to ACH (automated clearing house), to check conversion (open the mail and scan the checks electronically), to online payments has been pushing the envelope for years. The integration of add-on modules, such as mobile storage, classic car storage (also now used for RV parks), certified mail automation, utility metering and a host of others has made our suite of software tools adaptable a host of unique situations. While tools for yield management and demographics are widely available, our implementation of a flexible model where business rules are not dictated but allow you to run your business by your rules will always set us apart. The marketing analysis reporting both on our desktop and enterprise hub products give unprecedented power to analyze data for a competitive advantage.



“We have been fortunate to have the vision to have architected a product that was able to grow with the success of our clients.”

~ Tom Garden
Syrasoft

Shenoy (Self Storage Manager) – We continue to monitor changing market trends and technological advances and continuously enhance our products to meet the changing demands of the self storage industry. We release at least one major version a year and our product plans include tighter integration of modern technology such as kiosks, iPhones, iPads, Internet, etc. into our product, allowing our customers and their tenants to perform more functions on their cell phones and the Internet. As a key differentiator, we will continue to set the industry standard for providing outstanding support to *Self Storage Manager* customers.

Sowers (DHS) – At DHS we have built a strong client relations department that we feel goes a long way towards building trust and a comfort level necessary to deepen business relationships and make life easier on our customers. We have scheduled a *Total Recall* user conference on July 2010 that will give our customers an opportunity to learn and collaborate with their industry peers who are also using *Total Recall*. In the near future, our plan is to provide a more streamlined support method



“Our plan is to provide a more streamlined support method such as online video tutorials for our customers who may have high turnover so that there is always access to instant training on the web.”

~ Chuck Sowers
DHS Worldwide Software Solutions

such as online video tutorials for our customers who may have high turnover so that there is always access to instant training on the web.

Celaya (eMove) – VOIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) telephone system for our affiliates with call center and web presence through our existing software. This is yet another way we will reduce costs for our affiliates, while offering them the most advanced technology to manage their business. While we try not to look past today because we know that tomorrow will always bring a new set of demands, technology continues to evolve at such a rapid pace and so shall our product and services. As our network continues to grow, our offerings will continue to evolve and expand based on the needs of our entire network. You could say that we are in the business of making life better for our affiliates. ❖

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