



The Search Goes On – Making the Most of Search Engines

By John Dunlap – Editor, SSA Globe

As self storage continues to grow and evolve in the 21st century, it has become evident that making the most of modern technology has become a must. Whether that means having a snappy website to show off your facility/facilities, or getting into social media like Facebook and Twitter, finding new ways to bring prospective customers to your store is directly proportional to the growth of your business. And the search goes on.



“Factors that highly influence search engine results ranking today are most often tied to high-value content and usability (of your website).”

~ Dan Hobin
G5

One of the newest methods for reaching the public is to make sure that your facility can be found on Internet search engines. You may have already used a search engine when looking for something on the Internet. If you use Google, for instance, and you wanted to find out who was the oldest pitcher to win a major league baseball game, you need only to type in that question in the Google search box and you’ll see that Jack Quinn, at the age of 49 years and two months, won on August 14, 1932. So Tim Wakefield of the Boston Red Sox, at 44, still has a way to go.

Aside from the fact that it is amazing just to be able to have such knowledge at your fingertips, it also suggests the immense power and importance of search engines. Google’s search engine is the most popular, but there are many others and self storage owner/operators should make good use of them. But how does one do so? And are there red flags for the overzealous?

SSA Globe spoke with three experts in the field of search engines: Patrick Reilly of Urban Self Storage, Inc., Nick Bilava of USstoragesearch.com and Dan Hobin of G5. Their knowledge will now become your knowledge, so make good use of it!

The Value of the Search Engine

OK, so search engines exist. What’s the big deal? According to our experts, an entire younger generation of potential self storage customers is making good use of them.

“Since more than 30% of online searchers are 44 years of age or younger, developing other sources of leads is critical,” says Reilly. “Internet search engines are already used heavily by consumers looking for products and services and it is a very economical method of advertising (relative to other advertising). It makes sense to tap it for customer leads—your competitors probably are already doing so.”

“Even if someone drives by your facility every day, they will most likely use a search engine to find your website,” adds Bilava. “Having a good presence on the search engines ensures new and current customers can find you. Outside of customers or potential customers who are already familiar with your facility, building an online marketing campaign is an excellent way to attract new customers. Whether you use the search engines to promote your own website or use an aggregation website to gain search engine visibility, it is a must for every marketing plan.”



“Start with Google and Bing first and you can reach about 84% of all consumers.”

~ Patrick Reilly
Urban Self Storage Inc.

As far as Hobin is concerned, search engines aren’t just a nice possibility, they are a must.

“Search engine optimization (SEO) is an absolute necessity for your business, and essential SEO factors ought to be considered an integral part of producing a ‘good’ website,”

See Search Engines, page 10

Hobin says. “Factors that highly influence search engine results ranking today are most often tied to high-value content and usability—the same factors that website visitors will value.”

So, in short, it all starts with a good website and goes from there.

“Always focus on improving your website through developing/adding better user content and usability, but do not neglect important SEO factors,” adds Hobin. “Start with those identified by authorities like Google (search *SEO Starter Guide* on Google Webmaster Central) and SEOmoz (search for their *Website Developer Cheat Sheet*). To maintain position and/or to improve over time, businesses will have to invest in researching, testing and updating based on search engine updates. It is often more effective to work with a hired expert or outsource for professional website services.”

Where to Start?

So we understand their value, now how does one go about getting his or her self storage business listed on search engines?

“There are many ways, but the simplest way to explain it is to get the word out online about your website,” says Bilava. “Tell people about it in blogs, press releases, public forums, article submissions, directory submissions. But most importantly, whether you have a website or not, an operator should grab every directory or search engine local listing for their facility immediately. This will tell the search engines about your business and how to find it on the web and are also used to provide results for people looking for self storage in your area.

“Google, Bing, Yahoo, AOL and a handful of others are the most important. The easiest way to get started is to go to the search engine and type in the search engine’s name plus ‘local listing’ and you will undoubtedly see multiple links, ads and more for your local listing. Remember

See Search Engines, page 12

A Step-by-Step to Getting on Search Engines

Patrick Reilly of Urban Self Storage, Inc. and a member of the SSA board of directors, is well-acquainted with the DOs and DON'Ts of dealing with search engines. He shares with you his list of the best ways to get on a search engine.

Search engine optimization (SEO) is focused on improving your ranking in the ‘free’ or ‘organic’ listings on the search results page. The search results page (SRP) is what the consumer sees once they enter a search term to a search engine like Google or Bing. Search engine marketing (SEM) is ‘paid’ or ‘sponsored’ section of the search results page. These page sections are highly visible at the top and side of the search results page. In order to be featured in these sections you must set up an advertising program and pay each time you are displayed.

- ▶ Use frequently-used search terms or keywords. Make sure you research which keywords are most used in your respective markets.
- ▶ Incorporate frequently-used keywords into your website design navigation and coding (use topics, categories, and pages built around top keywords).

- ▶ Make sure that your website contains relevant content (useful information about moving, storage, etc.) for consumers—not just full of keywords, listings, and links.
- ▶ Do not change your website domain name as it can take many months for the search engines to index your new website domain.
- ▶ Label all clickable links and text links in your website with descriptive and keyword optimized names so that they will be recognized easily by users and the search engines.
- ▶ Develop compelling content for the main pages of your website based on the keywords that are most popular in your market and with your target market. Simply sticking keywords into your website will not produce higher rankings and look cheap to consumers that visit your website only to find no content—only keywords.
- ▶ Start a paid advertising campaign. There are companies, like G5 Search Marketing, that specialize in managing your search engine presence and ad campaigns.

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the search engines crave this information because user inputted information (when not manipulated) is much better for the results they want to provide than the snippets of information their 'bots' read while crawling the web. If you want to do this (*and you should!*) the set-up process is less than 10 minutes for each search engine for most people."

For Reilly, it definitely starts with knowing who the main search engines are.

"There are five core search engines and hundreds of local search engines," Reilly says. "Get started at www.google.com/adwords since 64% of searches take place on Google. And 32% of searches happen on Bing and Yahoo. Every third search is powered by Microsoft. Sign up at adcenter.microsoft.com. So start with Google and Bing first and you can reach about 84% of all consumers. Once you establish your business on Google and Bing, then you can expand your efforts to more specialized search engines to maintain growth."

For a step-by-step look at how to get started with search engines, check out Reilly's list on page 10.

Red Flags – Don't Do This!

The folks at Google and Bing are no dummies and they are well aware that some folks will try any and everything






to get listed highly with their search engines. It is of the utmost importance that you don't make them mad.

"Never try to improve search results rankings by using techniques that are specifically discouraged by search engines, or those that are commonly identified as 'Black Hat' practices," says Hobin. "Avoid any techniques that require substantially duplicating your website and content on virtual sites, gateway/doorway or other dubious capture and redirect schemes, and avoid trying to inflate link relevance through paid or spam backlinks. Offers that include buying links or increased rankings are not only ineffective, they can actually harm your standing with the search engines."

"Don't pay for links, don't create or participate in 'link farms,' etc.," adds Bilava. "Basically, when it comes to SEO, if it seems too good to be true it probably is. If you see a website climbing to the top of the rankings very quickly you can almost be certain they are engaging in linking strategies that are not consistent with best practices guidelines. If you do things by the book it could take you months or years to get near the top of the rankings for general terms (i.e. *any city self storage*) but you should move up and have good position for more specific terms (i.e. *self storage on 123 street, any city, any state*)"

So let the search begin for the best search engine listings. Do it right and your business could profit in a big way. ❖

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