

Weaving Through the Tangled Web

Storage owners should avoid going through the motions on the Internet.

By Tom Comi

Andy Laskody, president of Storage Solutions, Inc., in West Virginia, admits his facility's website was more of a formality when he launched it eight years ago.

"When we originally did it, I just wanted to have a presence on the Internet, because I found myself using it more than using the phone book," he said. "We really didn't do any business on it; you couldn't rent a unit or pay your bill."

Fast forward to 2011, and the site for 235-unit facility on the outskirts of Morgantown is much more representative of the business Laskody runs.

"The new site has updated photos, much more information about our security and climate-controlled units, and links

to Facebook, Twitter and all the cool things kids are using these days," he said. "Our old site was so antiquated and ugly. My goal was to have something new and improved, crisp and clean, and to get us up to the top of the search engines locally."

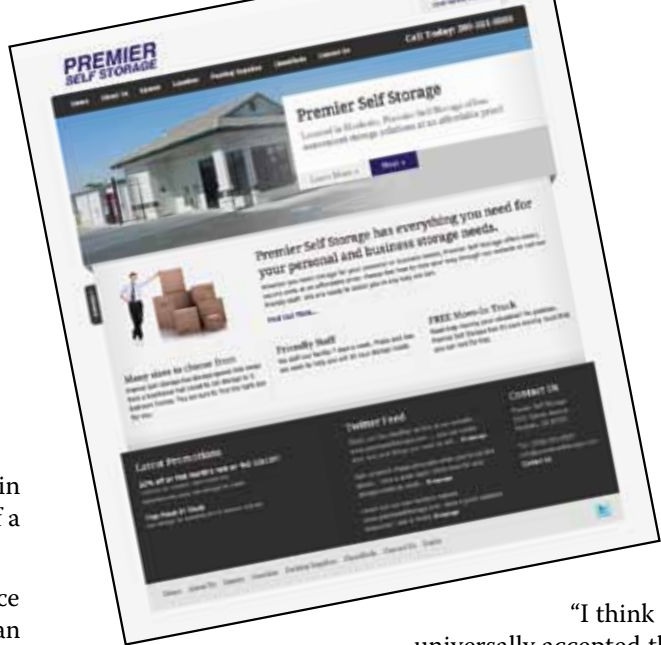
Laskody's epiphany of sorts appears to be contagious in the storage industry. More and more owners are finally

realizing that they can't simply go through the motions with their websites. Once considered an afterthought, facility sites are more than ever a major revenue generator.

"I think we'll get more leads now that the new site is up and running," he said. "My plan, as business increases on the website, is to decrease my spending on the Yellow Pages."

Matthew Kindness, CEO of Digital Works Web Development in Indiana, said it's crucial for operators to embrace the web.

Images in this article are websites designed by Matthew Kindness of Digital Works Web Development.



"I think it's universally accepted that the Internet is going to be vital to the success of self storage in the years to come," he said. "Many facilities are reducing their Yellow Pages commitment and utilizing those advertising funds online. I always say, 'find out what your competitors are doing and then do it better.' If everyone is on the Internet, then you should, too."

An Expert Opinion

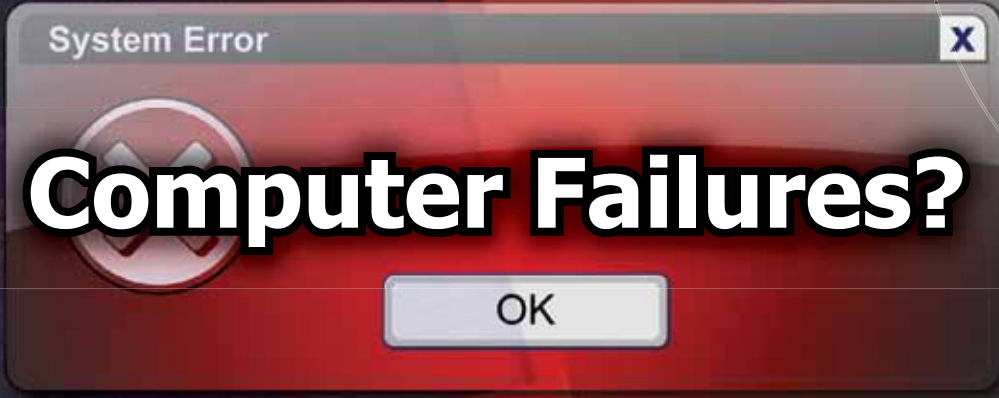
Not only is Kindness an expert on web design, but he has worked in the storage industry for eight years as the manager of a facility. He said knowing how things work make him better qualified to design sites for operators across the country.

"The primary goal of a self storage website is to create leads, and secondary to inform people that you are out there," he explained. "More and more people (over half at my location) are now using the Internet to find local businesses and services rather than the phone book, and self storage is a very, very location-specific type of business."

Kindness said there many elements a storage owner should consider when having a site designed, including the general look, the message and the functionality. Here is his top five:

- **Call-to-action:** Whether it is a digital pamphlet on moving, packing, and storing tips, a coupon off some rent or even your telephone number big and bright at the top where it can't be missed. As they say, you have to give a little to receive a little.
- **Layout:** When people visit your website, they want to find what they are looking for very quickly, namely the sizes and prices. If your website is confusing and not easy to navigate, they will leave in a hurry. If your website has too much information crammed in a small area, that is also uninviting.

See Websites, page 16



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Websites, from page 14

- **Colors:** Try to stick to a three-color scheme. Reds tend to bleed on the screen and are hard to see. Looking at red on a computer screen for long periods of time will give you a headache. Blues, grays, cool tones tend to be easiest on the eyes.
- **Pricing:** Some people argue over putting their prices on their website because of the fact that their competitors can see what they are offering. This is something that I always let the owner decide, because of its pros and cons, but I typically think it's valuable to have on the website especially in low-competition markets.
- **Sizes:** The price debate aside, you should at least include your unit sizes on the website. Some developers have made calculators for their websites where the user inputs what they have and it calculates an approximate of how much space they need.

Looks and Names Are Important

Part of having a professional site is making sure professionals design it. While there are less-expensive options out there such as godaddy.com, the adage “you get what you pay for” rings very true in this case.

See Websites, page 18



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Websites, from page 16

Laskody of Storage Solutions hired a local designer in West Virginia to create his revamped site after researching other storage websites to see what they were doing.

He said he also makes sure to include the Self Storage Association logo on his homepage, so his customers know “we are members of a professional trade organization and hold ourselves to a higher standard.”

Although a great design is important, Kindness warned that generating leads on the Internet is easier said than done.

“This is the biggest frustration for web developers,” he said. “Owners want to see their newly-developed website on the first page of Google right away. It is a difficult task to get them to accept that it just doesn’t work that way. When you create a new website, it takes time and a lot of work to achieve first-page ranking. Much of the work can’t be done by the average person, because they are code-structure related and knowledge of HTML is necessary.”

David Federico, vice president of Georgia-based AdVenturesInc.net, said search engines like Google, Bing and

Yahoo look for key words through a website’s copy, photographs and even links.

“There is an art to crafting the copy and designing multiple landing pages that speaks to the many ways people search for self storage,” he said. “When done properly, your site will appear closer to the top without you having to pay for it. If you run a search engine marketing campaign, your listing will be placed closer to the top for less cost than someone else’s site that is less optimized.”

Finally, Kindness said many operators make the mistake of choosing their domain name based on their company name rather than the product they are selling.

“If your business is Joe Schmo Self Storage and you are in Sacramento, try to register a domain like sacramentoselfstorage.com or selfstoragesacramento.com rather than joeschmoestorage.com,”

he explained. “When people search on Google for you, they will most likely use ‘self storage’ and ‘Sacramento’ in their keywords and not ‘Joe Schmo’ unless they have stored with you and want to come back again.”

For more information on businesses mentioned here, go to ministoragewebsites.com and adventuresinc.net.





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