Dot Coms Are Finding You

By John Dunlap – Editor, SSA Globe

In this computer age, the idea of helping customers find your self storage facility has taken on even greater importance. If you can help customers find you, life is sugar and spice; but if the opposite is the case you might feel like a certain wicked old witch who has just had water tossed on her.

Enter the new heroes of the modern age in self storage—businesses dedicated to helping prospective customers find you via the Internet. With search engines that can pinpoint the nearest facilities, as well as a wealth of information about each of those facilities, these companies are helping self storage keep up with the times. And they have a title to describe themselves: aggregators.

Companies like USSelfStorageLocator.com, USstoragesearch.com, upickstorage.com and Storitz.com have changed—and are constantly finding new ways to change—the landscape of doing business in self storage. They are joined by a host of other aggregators (see sidebar), all dedicated to finding ways to bring customers to your door. In fact, in many cases they will have the customers signed, sealed and virtually delivered before they even show up to see their unit.

This is the computer world that we live in today. But, for those who have been in self storage since the primary tool used by customers to find a storage facility was the Yellow Pages, this new way of finding customers (or helping them find you) may be new territory.

With help from Victor Dante of USSelfStorageLocator.com, Mike Jones at USstoragesearch.com, Brandon Baud of upickstorage.com and Adrian Comstock of Storitz.com, we will learn more about the brave, new world of self storage aggregators.

How It Came About

If it seems so obvious now that having a search system for potential customers that is custom-tailored to the customer’s needs and interests, what took so long?

“We feel that the time to create and launch a good, fundamentally sound and comprehensive aggregator could
not be more ripe,” says Dante. “The Internet and search engines such as Google, Bing and Yahoo have been prevalent for several years and have basically eliminated all other ways to locate businesses. The self storage industry has recently started to realize the necessity of web exposure and customers are becoming more Internet dependent, savvy, and looking online first when shopping for storage.”

“More and more customers are looking for a comparison experience without having to dial multiple facilities or bounce from website to website.”

~ Adrian Comstock
Storitz.com

“Just like anything else it’s all about timing and need,” says Jones. “We saw a need for our services over seven years ago and for that reason we started up USstoragesearch.com. The self storage industry is still in its infancy when it comes to the Internet. I remember when we first started, we had trouble explaining to people that their facilities needed to be found on the Internet. People now take being found on the Internet as a given—the difference is where and to what extent?”

“Not only can you find the exact unit to suit your needs, but you know exactly how close or how far it is from your home or office.”

~ Brandon Baud
upickstorage.com

Baud adds, “The self storage industry has generally been a cottage industry until recently. Our industry is so wonderfully simplistic but incredibly necessary. Many facility owners never saw a need to maintain their inventory online because of how well the Yellow Pages and drive-by traffic worked. With increased competition due to market saturation, many owners started to look for new ways to stand out. Companies like upickstorage.com saw an opportunity to help facility owners find that voice online. It took some time for occupancies to dip enough to compel owners in the industry to seek out other advertising mediums. I guess that is a testament to what a solid and noble industry we’re in.”

And Comstock feels the recent economy has been a factor. “The economic downturn and the slow recovery from it has forced storage operators to refine their marketing practices,” he says. “This has led them to the Internet long after

Finding the Aggregators

One company (USstoragesearch.com) was created in 2004 by a man who had been in commercial real estate for 30 years. Another (upickstorage.com) was born in Louisiana by a person seeking to find new ways to promote his own facility. And yet another (Storitz) just showed up in 2010 and is already renting and reserving self storage units for more than 2,000 properties nationwide.

They all represent the growing trend of self storage aggregators helping potential self storage customers find locations easier and in a far more applicable way than ever before. What follows is a listing of some of the key self storage aggregators and their contacts.

USstoragesearch.com
Mike Jones
mjones@usstoragesearch.com
866-880-0742

upickstorage.com
Brandon Braud
brandon@upickstorage.com
888-678-6730

Storitz
Eric Morse
emorse@storitz.com
310-444-5550

USSelfStorageLocators.com
Victor Dante
victor@usselfstoragelocator.com
305-945-7561

SpareFoot
John Durrett
john@sparefoot.com
512-705-6208

Self Storage Finders
Brian Barwig
marketing@selfstoragefinders.com
816-506-5019

StorageFront
Richard Cray
rich.cray@storagefront.com
913-469-0997

iStorageusa.com
Scott Yamano
310-524-9400, x300
dhathaway@extraspace.com
Beyond the Yellow Pages

The Yellow Pages and drive-by shopping are clearly still factors in the way people look for self storage, but the aggregators provide some advantages and alternatives.

“Searches for storage will still occur with Yellow Pages and via drive-by,” adds Comstock. “The Internet is just another source where more and more customers are looking for storage, and not just on their home/work PCs, but on their smartphones and tablets. Mobile device traffic accounts for nearly 20% of our visits. More and more customers are looking for a comparison experience without having to dial multiple facilities or bounce from website to website. Internet aggregators enable consumers to do this.”

“Our aggregator is like being at the facility, without having to leave your computer and the comfort of your home or place of business,” adds Dante. “It’s an extremely easy, efficient, and effective experience. No more driving around from place to place, in various weather elements, wasting gas and jotting down endless prices and specials. We offer a side-by-side comparison feature. So once you finish checking out the pictures and reviews, you could compare distance, features, specials and prices of multiple facili-

best part of upickstorage.com is that the person in search of storage gets to suggest what they want to pay for their unit. The facility owner can either take that rate to get the renter, or counteroffer with their standard rate in real time.”

And Jones concludes, “In today’s age people want immediate answers—more and more people are using the Internet/smartphones to receive those answers. Our website allows consumers to compare and contact multiple self storage facilities in one place. The facility listings that any aggregator displays has so much more information than the Yellow Pages can offer, which allows for more educated buyers to be contacting our member facilities. To that extent we are seeing a dramatic increase in the number of consumers who contact our members via our mobile website on their smartphones.”

Fair Play

One obvious question that arises with aggregators is that of playing favorites with self storage companies who are willing to pay more to be part of the searches. In almost every case the priority is helping prospective customers find the facilities closest to them.

“All storage facilities are given equal billing,” says Dante. “We do not promote any one facility more than the other. Once activated, they are listed in accordance to distance from the center of the city. Customers can search via zip code, city, state or street address. The customer could search by other means if they wish. We offer a free advertisement banner to all facilities. It rotates every time the results page is refreshed. This further proves our mission to promote self storage facilities.

“We offer a premium free listing to all facilities that claim and activate their facility. This listing is not a basic directory listing that some sites offer. It gives the facility an opportunity to showcase their facility. They could input the company logo, address, hours of operation, access hours, unit types/sizes, features, unlimited pictures, specials and prices—a full profile page for free.”

“USstoragesearch.com is setup as a flat fee for our clients and we drive unlimited traffic for this monthly fee,” says Jones. “Our member placements within the search criteria are determined by three different metrics: city/state searches are ordered by first-come, first-serve; zip code searches are ordered by distance from the center of the

See Aggregators, p. 20
"The Quickest and Easiest Way to Locate and Rent Self Storage Online"

Get a FREE Premium Facility Listing

Your self storage facility is already listed in our database. Join now for FREE. Input all your data (prices, sizes, pictures, amenities, etc) and they will appear prominently and permanently on our website.

Limited Time Offer

For a limited time, we are offering the Premium Plus listing membership option for FREE, which includes Call Tracking/Recording, Online Rentals and all the features listed.

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zip code; and address searches are ordered by distance from the facility. These three search algorithms allow us to change the order in which our members are displayed fairly and not by who has the deepest pockets. In addition, every quarter we also offer the ability for our members to purchase a featured listing for every city/state within the U.S. through our online auction.”

“Our site is not exactly like other sites,” adds Baud. “Because of the nature of the reverse auction model, there is no preferential treatment. The site closest to the search criteria gets top billing. If a customer wants to filter their search results by price, proximity or amenities, they may.”

“We adapt to storage companies’ individual requests, such as some don’t want their lease agreement on the Internet, some want to do reservations only,” concludes Comstock. “Some want specials specific to our site. But, in the end we serve the consumer first, with a non-partisan comparison shopping experience. So, we don’t offer preferential or paid listings to storage companies, and we list properties strictly based on the consumer’s chosen search criteria, which by default is distance, but can be by rent rate or move-in cost.”

Finders keepers. The times certainly are changing for customers in search of self storage—all for the better.