

# The State of Self Storage Security: Ever Improving and Ever Vigilant

By John Dunlap – Editor, SSA Globe

While many aspects of self storage have changed in recent years—notably the use of the Internet and social media for marketing purposes—some things have remained important almost from the moment they arrived on the scene. Good people skills, a clean facility, easy access and climate control are essentials. But topping the list might be security. If you have it and it is effective, you have another marketing tool; but if you have weak security and people are breaking in to your facility, you have a PR nightmare.

With that in mind, and because being well-protected means less of those PR or legal nightmares, we went to three experts in the field of self storage security to get a “state of security,” circa 2011. Bill Rosenthal is the National Sales Manager for Chamberlain Access Solutions. John Fogg is in his 18th year with Sentinel Systems, which has been providing security to the self storage industry for over 35 years. Tony Gardner is the vice president of QuikStor Security & Software, a leading one-stop-shop for

security and software products for the self storage industry since 1987.

**SSA GLOBE:** Obviously, self storage security has come a long way over the past 15–20 years. But do you feel that there is room for improvement? And do you think facilities should be concerned that they aren’t doing enough to make their customers feel confident?

**Rosenthal:** Self storage can be a very non-progressive industry. Weighing ROI for most major purchases is perfectly understandable in any business model, but requiring a return within a specific period of time can be an impediment to maximizing their customers’ peace of mind. Discretionary spending is almost non-existent in our present economy, so while there are customer conveniences available ranging from tying lighting controls to the access control, and limiting access to specific floors or areas, and incorporating emergency call stations and more, I believe self storage facilities, in general, try to meet the minimum standard for security—especially for women—without creating an out-of-ordinary or unbudgeted expense.

**Fogg:** There always can be room for improvement. Those owners who can feel confident that they are providing enough security to make their customers feel comfortable are addressing site security using several aspects of



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John Fogg  
Sentinel Systems

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available technology. To view simply one aspect, such as controlling access to the site, leaves the facility open to other problems. Individual units and their contents need to be protected from theft and the elements. The safety and well-being of customers is a consideration. Lastly, renting to reputable citizens, who are storing household-type goods comes into play. The overall plan should be to create a visibly secure, pleasant environment to reassure renters, attract prospective customers, and discourage wrongdoers.

**Gardner:** Since 9/11, security has been at the forefront of everyone's mind, and it is no secret that many tenants simply will not store their belongings at a site unless they perceive a strong commitment to security. Securing the possessions of your customers is job number one, so I would urge all facilities to contact their local security dealer of choice to conduct a detailed evaluation of the security measures they have in place.

**SSA GLOBE:** No self storage owner/operator wants to have to face legal issues regarding break-ins or other troubles at their facilities. What sort of ways should they protect themselves when it comes to on-site security?

**Gardner:** Be honest! The worst thing you can do is advertise that you offer a specific security feature that doesn't actu-



*"Tenants must get a sense that you take the security of their belongings seriously."*

*Tony Gardner  
QuikStor Security & Software*

ally exist on your property. Typically the biggest culprit that owners try to get away with is video surveillance. Buying a few fake "decoy" cameras doesn't constitute a monitored facility and can get owners in serious legal trouble if there is a crime or accident that occurs in an area that is supposedly being recorded.

**Fogg:** Any legal concerns should always be addressed with an attorney. The best protection is to have a comprehensive security strategy which incorporates different components. Access control, individual unit alarms, cameras, and gates all play a part. Focusing attention on security for the site should minimize legal issues and break-ins.

**Rosenthal:** I cannot speak to the legal means in which self storage companies use documentation to limit their liabilities. What is known is that there are few ways, if any, to prevent break-ins. Nearly every means of deterring unwanted entry is reactive. Break-in deterrence benefits

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from visible security, and often the facility with the most visible and greatest number of security layers will be a site a would-be thief will pass up.

**SSA GLOBE:** Where are we in regard to security in self storage these days? What are the new trends in security?

**Rosenthal:** Wired and wireless door alarms have been in vogue, seemingly, for the better part of 20 years. Chamberlain has broadened the individual unit security spectrum with its Overlock system, which wirelessly and remotely can engage or disengage a hasp from the locked position. There are apps now that give a tenant notification of entry into their unit. Hasps and locks are becoming more dense in material, discouraging burglars from that point of entry. The doors themselves remain the most vulnerable part of a unit but, again, there are only so many dollars budgeted for security for a given unit.

**Fogg:** The trend in security these days is to develop a *security philosophy*. The economy has greatly reduced the number of new sites being constructed. Those that are being built are paying more attention to the details, and this includes security. More components are being used. More keypads are being used to secure sections

on-site, such as hallways. Keypads have become more sophisticated, restricting access to certain areas. On-board cameras, intercoms, and customized displays are available. Nowadays, the keypad houses the customer access codes in case of computer failure. Individual door alarms are being used as an active deterrent. Camera systems have become more advanced, and can be viewed from anywhere there is a computer. The number of cameras being installed at a site has increased: hallways, the office, and in specialty areas such as wine storage. What's most important is how these pieces fit together for a comprehensive security package.

**Gardner:** Security is no longer confined to the physical facility itself. Owners expect to be connected to their facilities 24/7, whether it is via their management software or being able to remotely view the wine storage area in real-time. And that expectation does not end with the owner; tenants, too, are demanding more from site security. For example, a high-end RV storage site may choose to offer tenants the ability to log into their website to view only the camera that monitors their RV or boat; often times for an additional monthly fee. Most tenants will gladly pay a nominal fee for such remote access as it allows them to check on their investment at any time of the day without having to drive to the facility.



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**SSA GLOBE: If you were speaking with a self storage owner/operator about security, what would be your main points of emphasis?**

**Gardner:** Security is as much about perception as it is about reality. Tenants must get a sense that you take the security of their belongings seriously. That message should be conveyed on the facility’s website, signage, and all advertising campaigns. A secure facility is well lit at night, has complete perimeter fencing, a modern access control system, and obvious video surveillance around the site. To really protect both the individual units and the site’s reputation for security, consider adding unit door alarms to monitor each individual unit.

**Fogg:** The most important points I would get across to a self storage owner are design and budgeting. Security needs to be a consideration in the design stage. How buildings are laid out will affect security. The gate location is the most important security consideration, taking into account safety, traffic flow, position of the office, parking, and zoning. Plan sight lines for visibility from the office. Perimeter buildings located on the boundaries of the property eliminate the need for much of the fence. Hallways require added security. Are there separate areas that need to be restricted? How many cameras will be needed in hallways? How many separate keypads? Will there be outdoor

storage parking? Will I be providing individual unit alarms for peace of mind? It is also important to budget time to have the security system installed properly.

**SSA GLOBE: Finally, give us an idea about some of your newest products.**

**Fogg:** The most significant new product that Sentinel Systems has designed and released is the daVinci keypad. This keypad has “smart technology.” It continues to allow entry and exit to authorized user codes when communication with the computer goes down. The “brains” are on-board. The design includes the same durable backlit metal key and look that makes Sentinel stand out from the rest.



**Rosenthal:** Security is typically on the docket at the outset as a requirement, but it’s towards the end for decision-making and installation. It’s common to introduce access control, cameras, lighting, and door alarms when introducing one’s capabilities. For a medium to large operator, standardization is important. For the self storage owner with less than, say, three properties, what security is purchased at one site may look very different from another. Ultimately, at this time, what is affordable takes precedence over what may be wanted.

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**Gardner:** QuikStor has just released QuikStor OnDemand, which allows any site to remotely view real-time facility data, reports, and an all new graphical Dashboard directly from anywhere in the world with a simple web browser. As more facility owners realize the power of the Internet, they are finding increasing value in QuikStor’s eCommerce module that allows prospective tenants to rent and reserve directly through the customer’s website. In addition, existing customers are able to log into their account to make payments, view their account history, and confirm their contact information. ❖