



SELF STORAGE SALES NETWORK

Using Multiple Channels to Maximize Web Exposure

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by Cliff Long

In today's competitive business environment, maximizing your advertising and marketing budget is an absolute necessity. With Internet penetration at 70% and climbing, the Web is increasingly becoming the advertising vehicle of choice for savvy marketers. This shows in online advertising spending which has doubled from \$6 Billion in 2003 to over \$13 Billion in 2006. But, the Web is diffused medium, and experienced marketers are finding that a website alone does not help build your business or fill your facility. The key to successful marketing on the Internet is to first have your message available to many Internet users, and second, to give them multiple opportunities to convert and become a customer.

Attracting Web Traffic

It is relatively easy to post your business on the web, either through your own site or as part of a larger Web presence. Exposing your business to potential customers, i.e. getting traffic (and the right kind of traffic) is where the rubber meets the road in online marketing.

One way to start is through paid placement or search engine optimization of your site. "Organic" search engine optimization (SEO) was the original web marketer's first stop. A top position in Google or Yahoo! was like money in the bank and companies were willing to spend a lot to get there. Obtaining a top spot today is tougher and takes longer than ever before. There are volumes written on tactics for obtaining top positions, and everyone applies the basics. The problem is that whatever you do to try and jump to the top is also being done by all the people in front of you who are trying to stay there. Progress is unpredictable and slow at best.

Paid placement is one of the fastest growing areas of Internet marketing and it is now powering sites like Yahoo! and Google to new highs. Under this scenario you pay for your placement in search results. Site users run a search for a keyword (e.g., "self storage") and you bid to come up in the results that the site displays. If the user clicks on your ad and goes to your site, you pay your bid amount for every click. While the cost for each click is small, the total clicks and total cost can add up quickly.

While you can drive traffic easily, the success or failure of paid placement is the ability for your site to convert visitors. Your site must be well laid out and have clear channels where users can contact you. Internet users vary greatly in their experience and comfort. Some prefer not to fill out forms, while others prefer to do everything online. Your site should have all contact methods covered: phone, in-person, and online response.

Web Portals Pool Resources

On excellent way to stretch your online advertising dollar is through the participation in online web portals, like our site SelfStorage.com or others like Moving.com.

Portals give you a way to tap the search engine resources for a very affordable monthly cost. For \$10-\$20 per month you can participate in sites that are at or near the top of all search results, thus taking advantage of their Internet marketing expertise. These sites spend considerable time and energy insuring that they are at the top of the search results, and generate a lot of targeted traffic. For instance, SelfStorage.com generates close to 40,000 unique visitors a month to its site and is in the top 5 results on Google for multiple keywords. A featured listing for your storage facility on SelfStorage.com costs only \$10/month.

Use Multiple Channels in your Listings

As we discussed in the section on converting your own web traffic, Internet users vary. Try to choose an online portal, or use multiple portals that convert users multiple ways. Some require users to fill out a form before they see any facility information. That will scare off the security-conscious browser. Others allow you to post limited contact information only.

At SelfStorage.com we designed our site to allow you to capture customers three ways. First, listings include all the contact information for your facility: location, phone, email and a link to your website. The visitor can contact you in seconds using the method they prefer. In addition to the contact information, our site lets you include an online special which site visitors can print and bring to your facility. This gives users a great incentive to come by and gives you a second method to convert them. You can change the terms of your online special and your ad text at any time – instantly.

The third way to win is through “pull” marketing, where prospect information is captured and presented directly to you. SelfStorage.com has the ReadySetStore product which captures requests from prospective renters and presents it to interested facilities. Moving.biz, and USStorageSearch.com have similar programs.

How Does “Pull” Marketing Work?

Driven by the success of LendingTree.com, eLoan.com and ServiceMagic.com, “pull” marketing through Internet lead capture and distribution is one of the fastest growing marketing methods. It gives advertisers more control over ad spending and return on investment because they can choose exactly which leads to pursue and when. They know the absolute cost of every lead and can easily track the return.

SelfStorage.com offers a new lead capture system called ReadySetStore! It instantly delivers qualified prospects to your e-mail so that you can respond to quote requests directed specifically toward your facility. With these systems, you are notified when a request for your facility is received and can view the basics of the request. If you accept it you are charged a nominal fee. If you determine that you can not accommodate the customer, simply return the lead and you are not charged.

Whatever your marketing budget, successful Internet marketing dictates that you spread it around. If you don't have a web site, start with portal listings to broadcast your message to their proven traffic base. If you do have a web site, get maximum traffic and exposure

through links from multiple web portals. Finally, be sure to participate in the newest form of marketing, lead capture. Working all channels will maximize your visibility and give you measurable results that will ultimately contribute to the profitability and overall value of your self storage facility.

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