

Standing Out From the Competition in the Digital Age

By Cheli Rosa, Legacy Auction Services

Why in the world would a self storage operator need to be worried about things like social media and search engine optimization? I am going to give you two very honest answers. First, social media is not going away. It is only going to grow larger and larger, and it is not just a fad for teenagers. It is very real and it is being embraced by the largest companies in the world. Second, you have no choice because your competition is already doing it. If your competition “out markets” you, they will get the customers. The only thing for you to do is; jump in with both feet and find the best social strategy for your business.

Most self storage operators do not have the marketing budgets that the REITs have. Pay Per Click ads and costly internet banner ads are often out of the realm of possibility. Most operators have to get more creative. Creatively marketing self storage is hard. I once had a professional marketer tell me that the only thing harder to creatively market than self storage might be funeral homes. Customers only come to us when they are in need and often in unfortunate or stressful situations. Your goal is to be the one they find in their time of need. How do you do that? We no longer live in a world where phone books are dropped at the front door, but we do have a wealth of information at our fingertips at all times. We have search engines. Google reports that there are 3.5 billion searches made every day on www.google.com. This is, without a doubt, the world’s primary means of finding any place, product, or service that we are looking for.

While Google will often produce thousands, if not millions of results, most people readily admit that they never go past the first page of results in their search. They almost always find what they need in that first page of search results. How do you make sure your storage facility is coming up on that first page of search results? Enter, the now omnipresent term, SEO. SEO, or Search Engine Optimization, is the steps that you take to ensure that people find and click on your website when they do a search on the internet.

While there is no exact answer or formula for how to improve your SEO, there is evidence that some things produce results.

Engaging with your community using social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Google+ have led to higher search engine results. The key to effective SEO, is the word “engagement.” It is not enough just to create a Facebook profile. It is not even enough to get many “likes.” You need to have real, genuine engagement with your audience. You need people to like, share, or comment on your posts. Just like the “word of mouth” approach of days gone by, you need to get people talking. In order to do this, you need to have compelling and interesting content on your profiles. You must always remember that content is KING.

We all know that you are not likely to rent storage units directly from Facebook. People do not go to Facebook to look for a nearby storage facility. I am not suggesting a direct link. I am suggesting that using social media will increase your exposure to the world and the billions of people on the internet, and it will also give you the “digital fingerprints” that you need to get your website to show up on the first page of search engine results. You might even find that you retain a few customers or gain a few referrals simply by engaging with your community.

The storage industry is rapidly changing. With the explosion of the REITs in the commercial real estate market, the “build it and they will come” mentality no longer applies. The competition has moved in next door. The bottom line is that storage operators must do something to set themselves apart from the competition in order to survive. The world is in a digital age that is not likely to end any time soon. These are the confines in which you must now operate in order to succeed.

Cheli Rosa is the Social Media Manager for Sentry Self Storage Management and a part-time auctioneer, administrator, and trainer for Legacy Auction Services. She oversees the development and implementation of social media platforms for over 30 self storage facilities. Sentry Self Storage Management owns and manages storage facilities across the Southeastern United States. To contact Cheli, call (404) 643-4528 or visit www.sentry-selfstorage.com.

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for link to registration.

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a member but isn't, forward their contact information
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5 Good Reasons to Add Mobile Site

Self-Storage Internet Marketing For Customers On The Go

By Norman Schulman, Rick Yonis & Izzat A. Dajani

According to Luke Wroblewski, the internationally recognized digital product leader, “Ignoring a Mobile site is like a record company clinging to CDs while digital passes them by.”, following are five good reasons to add a mobile site to your self-storage Internet marketing repertoire:

1. Mobile Screen Size. Smart phones are designed to be held in your hand.

Common sense tells us that what fits on a 15” monitor will not fit on 3.56” screen. Trying to make it work takes time and lots of scrolling and zooming. So there is no question that if your website is not optimized for mobile devices or isn’t mobile compatible, viewers will take much longer to find the information they are looking for. While the Mobile website should be a smaller version of the standard website, it is essential that it be designed differently to accommodate the mobile user. Text needs to be large, buttons need to be thumb friendly, phone numbers need to be auto-dial-able, and navigation should be easy with just the touch of a finger.

2. Faster Load Time.

“Time is of the essence” for younger and affluent people on the go. The Canadian company StrangeLoop, specialists in Web Performance Optimization, tell us “74% of Mobile users say they’ll bounce after waiting 5 seconds or even less for a Mobile website to load.”

3. Mobile Search is Different.

Fact, not fiction! Mobile websites get indexed separately by search engine companies. Your regular website may have good organic rankings but if you don’t have a Mobile site, you probably will not come up in a mobile user’s search results. On the positive side, if you have a mobile site, chances are pretty good that you will be found by local mobile users.

Fifty percent of all local searches are made on Mobile devices and this figure is growing. Without a mobile site, how can you possibly capture any new prospects?

4. Mobile Sites Drive Traffic to Location.

Isn’t your website’s purpose to drive traffic to your location? Consumers do research on the go by using their smart phones to search for information. For example, a potential customer has just moved to town. Their only connection to the Web is through a smart phone and they have a bunch of extra furniture they need to store. They want to know where the closest self storage property is located and they would like directions to get there. For you, the self storage operator, to capture this prospect means that your Mobile Website needs to show available storage, rates, promotions, directions with a map, and a telephone number that can be automatically dialed.

5. Provide a Place for eCommerce Transactions.

A Mobile website should provide the medium to reserve storage space, obtain a quote, or pay a month’s rent. Consider this scenario for example, a prospective customer needs a 5’ X 10’ climate controlled unit on the first or second floor and she is ready to reserve a unit on the spot. On her smart phone, she does a self storage local search and ends up on a site that isn’t mobile compatible. After trying to navigate with lots of scrolling and pinching, she gives up and goes back to search to find another. The next site is a Mobile site and she quickly finds what she is looking for, ends up reserving the space, and is on her way.

Lesson learned, Mobile site are indeed mobile user friendly.

Norman Schulman, Rick Yonis & Izzat A. Dajani have over 35 years combined experience in Self Storage Management and Computer related industries. They jointly manage Crucialclicks.com which is a Web Design & SEO company that specializes in the Self Storage sector. To reach them call (888) 894-0422, e-mail thepoweroftheclick@crucialclicks.com or visit Crucialclicks.com.

Attention Members!

As the legislative session progresses, MASSA will need your help. Please be prepared to call or e-mail your elected officials when asked. If your home or company addresses are located in Senator Moore’s, Representative Wagner’s, or Representative Basile’s districts, please let the association know at massa@maselfstorage.org.

Likewise, please let MASSA know if you know any other elected officials at the State House. If you are unsure of who represents your district, please visit www.malegislature.gov/People/Search and type in your city and zip code.

BIG Deductions for Self Storage

By Mike Sawyer, Director of Marketing, OpenTech Alliance, Inc.



What is the Section 179 Deduction?

Most people think the Section 179 deduction is some mysterious or complicated tax act when it really is quite common. Basically Section 179 of the IRS tax code allows businesses to deduct the full purchase price of qualifying technology, and/or software (purchased, financed or leased) during the tax year. That means that if you buy a piece of qualifying equipment, you can deduct the FULL PURCHASE PRICE from your gross income.

Essentially a cost reduction of approximately 35%, onsite payment and rental stations (kiosks) and automated security and access systems have become common appliances that have been applied under the tax act.

What's the point of section 179?

Today, Section 179 is one of the few incentives included in any of the recent Stimulus Bills that actually helps small businesses. Although large businesses also benefit from Section 179 or Bonus Depreciation, the original target of this legislation was much needed tax relief for small businesses - and millions of small businesses are continually taking note and getting real benefits. In all, the government is continuing to stimulate economy by encouraging business spending and Section 179 is your portion of the government bail-out.

Emphasizing the growth of automation at self-storage facilities...

Recently, a self-storage technology white paper was co-authored and published by a number of industry professionals to reveal how self-storage owners can evaluate efficiencies and returns on investing in technology and automation. The study reveals ongoing statistics and industry trends related to the use of technology throughout self-storage and shows firsthand how facilities are benefiting from self-service automation.

There is a catch!

To qualify for the deduction, technologies purchased must be in operation by the end of the 2014 calendar year. Taking advantage of this tax savings may just be the best financial decision you make in 2014. Only 106 Working Days until Section 179 Deadline... to learn more about Section 179, visit www.section179.org or contact your personal accountant.

Mike Sawyer is Director of Marketing at OpenTech Alliance, Inc. You can reach him at (602) 324-8655 or msawyer@opentechalliance.com

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2014 Northeast Self Storage Tradeshow

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Be sure to book your overnight guest room early. The accommodations are very nice and there is a lot to do at the Casino. Don't miss out. The room rate is \$169. You may book online at <https://resweb.passkey.com/go/STORE14> or call reservations at 888-777-7922 and use code: STORE14

OCTOBER 1, 2014

6:00 - 7:30 p.m. Opening Reception, Margaritaville Lounge, Mohegan Sun

OCTOBER 2, 2014

Wake up with our continental breakfast and start conversations with the suppliers. Don't be late! Be sure to stay for the day.

8:00 a.m. Attendee Registration, Continental, Exhibits Open
9:00 a.m. Welcome, Opening Remarks
9:15 a.m. Marketing: Status Quo to Status Grow - The 4 Elements of Explosive Business Growth with Kordell Norton, CSP

In this humorous, highly interactive and entertaining presentation you will get insights on how to grow your business. Laugh and learn as you discover the secrets used by giant corporations to connect, and motivate their customers to take action... now. Come and get the cure for being a "best kept secret". In this session you will get:

- Ways to stand out & be noticed with easy methods of communicating your value.
- How to sell and market with no budget and win against the "big guys".
- Learn how to shorten your sales cycle and land bigger customers.

10:15 a.m. State of the Industry with Mike Scanlon, CEO/President Self Storage Association
10:45 a.m. Exhibits, Break
12:30 p.m. Lunch and Associations Annual Business Meetings
1:30 p.m. Legal: The 10 Most Common Legal Mistakes You Can Make with Jeffrey Greenberger, J.D.

In Jeff's practice he discovers that there are certain common misunderstandings or mistakes operators make in their day to day operations. Examples include: accidentally creating a bailment over stored property, improperly handling an occupants bankruptcy, understanding the Americans with Disabilities Act, and renting to people in military service and complying with the requirements of the SCRA. Jeff has put together a list of his top 10 misunderstandings or mistakes made by operators and discusses the relevant requirements and solutions to avoid making mistakes in the future. You will be treated to a lively session, while the topic is completely serious Jeff tends to be accidentally funny making the presentation eye-opening and enjoyable to listen to. You are sure to take away examples of mistakes you should correct in your business.

2:45 p.m. Exhibits, Break
3:15 p.m. Technology and Operations - How Changing Technology Can Improve Your Day-to-Day Business with Tom Garden, Syrasoft
4:00 p.m. Technology: Common Practices to Reconsider - Always Count The Cost with Chris Baird, Automatit

In the world of self storage today, the internet is playing a big role in driving rentals. There has been explosive growth in companies who help storage owners succeed in that area, or has there been? Most, even well-meaning companies, may be causing long term losses when it comes to your internet equity. So, be careful to first count the cost of anything you may be doing online. Also, be aware that as you deal with more and more companies, all may be for good reasons, you need to keep track of all you do to ensure you are still maintaining the integrity of your company's website. You will learn:

- Claim your own third party listings. Why this is important?
- Is your free feature, with a link back to the provider, really free?
- Link to other websites with a strategy.
- Offer your best rates on your own website, it is the best way to go.
- Keyword stuffing and duplicate content will drop your rank. Do it right the first time!

4:45 p.m. Closing Remarks, Door Prizes, Adjourn

REGISTRATION RATES

- \$129 Members: MASSA, CTSSA, MeSSA, NHSSA
- \$149 Nonmembers

Registration link is online at www.maselfstorage.org and is open until September 26, 2014.

How Google Crawling Works: The Steps You Can Take to Improve Your SEO

By Amy Daniels, StorageAhead

When you conduct a Google search, have you noticed how quickly your results load? A typical search engine results page (SERP) takes less than one second to load. That's a pretty amazing statistic. It's even more amazing when you take into account that there are more than 60 trillion webpages out there.

So, how does Google read all those pages, and how does it determine which order to display them? The key pieces are crawling, indexing, and ranking.

In order for Google to display its index of websites, it must first develop that index. It does this with a software program, a web crawling bot known as Googlebot. The software starts by searching a few websites. From there, it visits the pages that those sites link to. This process continues until Google has accumulated hundreds of thousands of webpages. This process is called crawling.

From there, Google must decide how it wants to display these

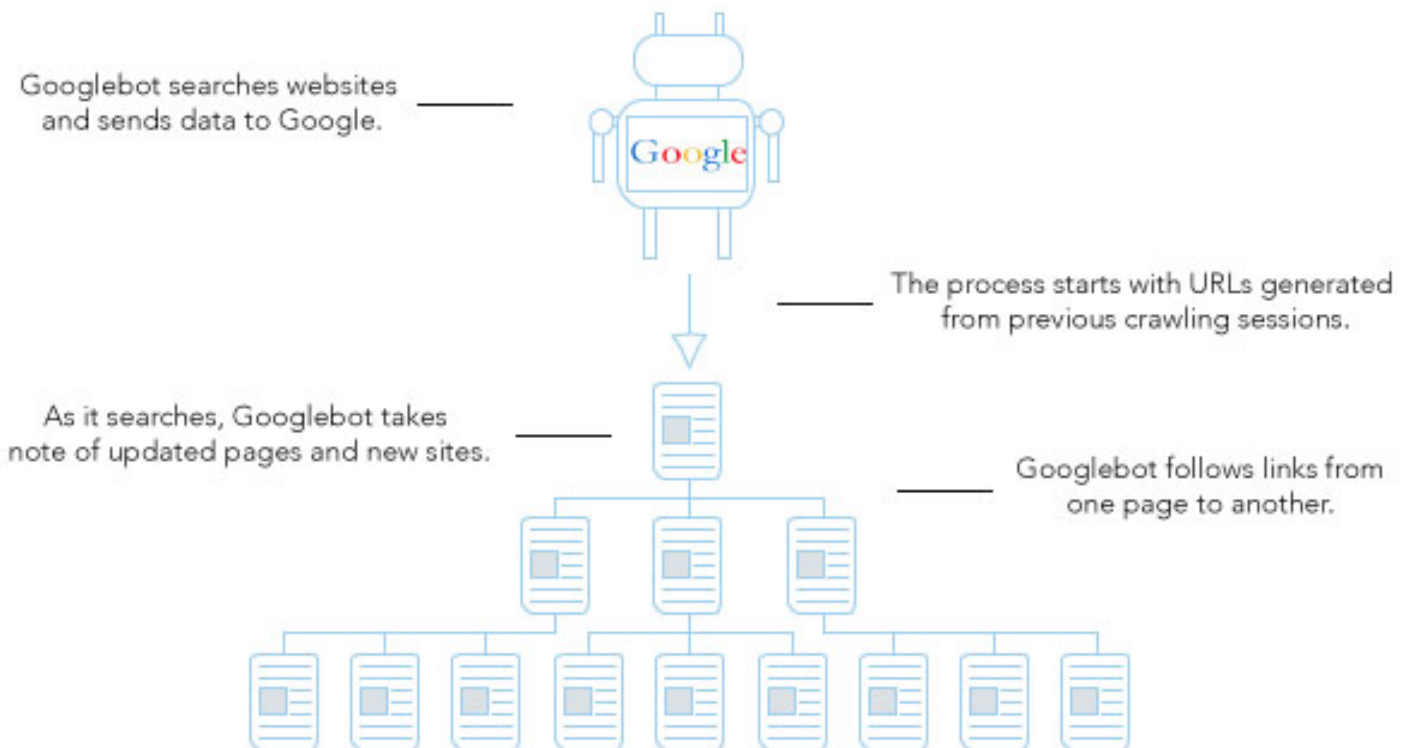
hundreds of thousands of webpages. You likely know that you can impact the order of your website in SERP by working on your site's SEO. With more than 200 factors making up a rather complicated algorithm, Google sorts these pages by relevance according to the user's search.

And that's it. While the specifics get (much) more complicated from there, this basic process is Google's purpose. They don't accept payments to crawl your site more often or rank your page higher in SERP. Meanwhile, the success of your business is intensely affected by your website's ranking on Google.

Practical applications for your storage facility

In light of this process, how often should you be optimizing and otherwise changing your content? Jennifer Van Iderstynne, Sales & Marketing Manager at Internet Marketing Ninjas, wrote an article for Search Engine Watch with a smart reply. To summarize,

How crawling works



she remarked that the two most appropriate times to make large changes to your site's content are when you're undergoing a redesign and when you're switching providers.

One thing is clear, however. The time to make changes to your website is not when you're afraid because your rankings have changed. Many facility owners assume that a drop means they need to start gushing their pages with keywords, locations, and over optimized title tags. If their rankings don't change the next day, they rush out another series of changes. They'll usually repeat this process until they get too frustrated to continue. In the end, it doesn't get them the results they were looking for. That's because their approach was based on feelings rather than data.

Use data to make your decisions

If you suddenly see a dip in your rankings, it's time to analyze your data. You can do this in Google Analytics or with the help of your account manager. The key is to identify what caused those drops – because if it isn't keywords, overpopulating your page with more keywords won't help.

As you do this, think about trends in your community, trends in self storage, any changes you've made to your facility, your offline efforts, new marketing campaigns, and more. Make sure every decision you make is backed with research, or work with a professional to experiment a bit.

Justifying decisions with data will help you in the short-term, but it will reap benefits tenfold in the long-term. It certainly takes more time, but when you understand every change you've made and why, SEO becomes less of a guessing game – it becomes a challenge that you're able to conquer.

Round out your SEO efforts

Tell me if this sounds like you: You want to earn more customers for your storage facility. You'll do what it takes to make that happen, but you already have plenty of responsibilities that need to occur to make that happen. Buzzwords like SEO and social media certainly sound important, but you're focusing on your customers and your product. You honestly don't have the energy, knowledge, or resources to tackle these new projects.

That's not a bad place to be. If you forsake your current tenants and stop your offline marketing efforts just so you can learn some new technology tricks, your business will surely suffer. So is there a solution?

There are some elements of SEO that you can easily control. But there are many technical factors, as well, as demonstrated in this pie chart. If you're feeling frustrated that your online presence isn't what you want it to be, it's time to partner with professionals who focus exclusively on web marketing and technology.

Instead of frantic site tweaks, what can you focus on?

While you can't do everything on your own, there certainly are

some steps you can take to improve your online presence. Here are a few thoughts to consider:

Capitalize on what you're doing well. Remember that your website should be showing up for a few different Google searches. Perhaps you're a storage facility that offers RV parking in Tallahassee, Florida. You've dropped for the term "self storage Tallahassee" – but you've started receiving more hits to your site from the phrase "Tallahassee RV storage." Now is the perfect time to add more information about your RV storage or launch a marketing campaign focused on vehicle parking.

Earn PageRank for your site. PageRank is a number between 1 and 10 that Google assigns to your website. Its main influencing factor is links: the number of links to your site and the quality of those sites linking to you. You can add all the content you want to your webpages, but a link from your Self Storage Association, a nearby university, your city's website, Inside Self-Storage, or any other authority related to your industry will greatly influence your PageRank. While the process for earning such a link is a large enough topic to warrant an entire article, the short version is that you need to convince these websites that your site provides some sort of value to them – whether that's with news about your facility or resources for renters.

Add content in new ways. A blog isn't the only way to add content to your site. Ever since the release of Google's release of Hummingbird in 2013, this fact is becoming more evident. Start asking yourself questions like: What do my customers usually ask about on the phone? What's my facility's best feature? If I were a lead and I visited my site, what would I feel is missing? Then add that information to pages like "Storage Tips," "FAQ," or "About."

SEO is ongoing and never ending

Above all, what I'm trying to help you understand is the large magnitude of SEO. A change you make to your website today won't be reflected on Google today (or even for a few weeks, most likely). If your rankings start to drop, you're going to have to do some hunting to find out why, exactly, this occurred.

Make active changes to your website, and do it alongside a team of designers, SEO experts, writers, account managers, and engineers. Once you've made any content tweaks that you need, it's time to move down your list of ever expanding SEO tasks. And then, when you've done everything you think you can, it's time to check data on the content you added a few months ago. There will never really be a time when you're done making your website better. There will just be a time when you have applicable data to help you determine where to go next.

Amy Daniels is the content writing manager at StorageAhead, the leader in self storage web technology. She combines self storage industry research, powerful web marketing strategies, and small business experience to cultivate the growth of facilities nationwide.



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