



Current Remodeling Trends in Self-Storage Facilities

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Safety, accessibility and price are all key factors customers look at when renting self-storage space. To meet the demand, owners must make sure they've equipped their buildings to offer reliable climate control, effective surveillance and easy access. When new facilities are being built with every convenience in mind, how can older units compete? It's not as difficult – or costly – as it may seem.

Behind the Scenes

There are new alternatives to necessary components which can actually pay for themselves in lower monthly usage fees or fewer replacement costs.

Dry sprinkler systems. For areas of the country that experience below freezing temperatures, dry systems may make sense. The dry system maintains pressurized air throughout the system, which is not affected by freezing temperatures. In the event of a fire, water is released into the system to the activated sprinkler heads. This allows facility owners the flexibility shut down their heating systems during closed hours, which in turn lowers their heating costs dramatically.

Motion-controlled lighting. These lighting systems are strictly triggered by motion, which means when there's no movement, there's no light; hence lower utility costs! Installing the sensors is a fraction of the savings you'll reap in decreased utility costs.

Radiant heating systems. Radiant heat eliminates cold floors and the energy loss from forced hot air wasted in the ceilings. While the initial cost of a radiant heating system may exceed forced air heating, it's offset by reduced insulation requirements. More importantly, radiant systems are up to 40 percent more efficient than conventional heating systems, according to the Radiant Panel Association. Lower temperatures can be set which means lower fuel costs. In addition, there are no external heating units, which can take up valuable wall space in your facility.

Need more proof? A Cleveland, OH, facility's records show that to heat an 80,000 sqft facility in 2005 with 2 million BTUs cost \$16,000. By installing a radiant heating system, this same facility saved 33% the first year. Each heater is capable of supplying 200,000 BTUs with a cost of \$12,000.00 for 10 units. This means that in less than three years the system will have paid for itself, and with almost no maintenance costs they deem this system a must.

3rd Generation self-storage doors. Older doors have outdated operational designs, which cause them to grow more difficult to use and suffer costly maintenance upkeep as they've aged. There are superior door options today that are easier to operate and are virtually maintenance free.

Light bulbs. Simply changing the type of light bulbs you use can save you money. T-8 fluorescent bulbs last longer than standard T-12s and use less energy.

Surveillance systems. Older facilities typically have cameras that run all day, again resulting in costly electricity bills and unneeded wear and tear on your system. Motion-triggered cameras can be installed which will only incur utility usage when set off. Considering you may only have 10 visitors a day, imagine the cost savings you'll enjoy and the extended life you're adding to your equipment.

Multi-storage buildings. Consider building up rather than building out. Many owners are adding stories in order to realize greater coverage without spending dearly on additional land.

Expand your interior space. Mezzanine systems, or decks, offer two levels of rentable storage space within a single level. Mezzanine systems can fill an entire floor or just a portion, depending on your requirements, and are becoming increasingly desirable in conversion projects. On a per unit basis, shelving maximizes space by building up, and the initial cost is a fraction of the additional revenue realized in a short amount of time.

Keyless Entry. Keypads are no longer the only option in entry access systems. More and more owners are installing keyless units where the tenant is given a key fob which can be used at any reader at a point of entry. No more worries about entry codes getting into the wrong hands or being forgotten.

Stackable Storage Lockers. These units offer a low-cost storage alternative to tenants. And because they can fit in odd-sized spaces, they can turn otherwise unrentable space into profit centers.

Meet the Needs of Your Audience

Designing with the customer in mind will yield maximum occupancy. Eagle Rock Self Storage of Roseland, NJ, knows what their customers want... a facility that's clean, bright, convenient and secure. When updating a conversion project they were implementing, they used medium grey epoxy to seal the existing concrete floors as well as flush, gloss white hallway panels for a clean aesthetic appeal. In addition, they added T-8 Fluorescent lighting fixtures with built-in motion sensors and a "½ on" feature; individual alarm units; an intercom system with music; and a digital camera system. In addition, they allowed for several large loading/unloading areas and hallways wider than five feet where possible. Storage Associates in Cherry Hill, NJ, also utilizes liner panels when updating their facilities. While you may lose some square footage, the customer appeal of the clean, new walls compensates for the difference.

In addition to basic customer needs, niche markets offer opportunities for some unique value-adds. Going for the baby boomers? Boat/RV storage and wine storage are becoming increasingly popular for those with greater disposable income.

More Service Means More Profits

How user friendly is your facility? Have you made business dealings easy for your tenants? A growing trend is kiosks, or auto-attendants. Kiosks can accept payments and allow potential customers to tour the facility, select a unit, purchase locks and even buy insurance. Because the kiosks are open 24/7 and require no staff assistance, your profitability increases in tandem with your customer service.

A strong retail area is also a win-win scenario. In your remodeling process, the retail area should be a focal point where an array of packing and shipping supplies can be sold. The display area should be well lit, accessible and have clear, professional signage.

Best Foot Forward

When considering remodeling, don't forget the overall aesthetics of your façade. A well-kept older facility can compete with the new if you have the right curb appeal. Storage doors should be damage-free and well kept. For an external facelift, a simple paint job may do the trick. But depending on your construction, many owners are opting for panels and stuccos. These products require minimal maintenance, are long lasting, and can even add exterior protection.

Finally, little things do count in putting your best foot forward. How your facility looks greatly impacts your ability to attract business. If your building screams 1995, they may look elsewhere. Old signage can date a facility, so make sure yours is current and well situated. Many facilities are also translating their signage to meet the needs of their customer base. A well-maintained property says a lot, as does the image of the business office. If your image says "quality", you've tackled one of the hardest hurdles... getting customers in the door.

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