

# In Store

2014 Self-Storage Expo special

# Welcome to the future of self storage in Asia

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**Rennie Schafer has been CEO of industry associations from the UK to Australia. In Store taps him for insight.**



**The association can set industry standards and best practice and develop legal standards that suit the industry**

*Q: You've been the CEO of Self Storage associations in Australia and UK. Why do people join these organisations?*

A: The simple answer is that a well run Association can always do things collectively, more efficiently than the individual businesses. That and, of course, the benefits of networking with other like-minded professionals. Legal agreements, marketing tips, group purchasing, and HR advice are all benefits of being part of a Self Storage Association.

*Q: Many people and companies have been members for many years - even since the founding. Tell me about how it is different being a first year versus a long-standing member, from a benefits perspective.*

A: In the beginning it is all about start up, legal agreements, advice on their first sell up, feasibility information, and marketing tips. Once people have some experience in the business, they look for slightly different benefits. They want to benchmark their business, they want to know about demand and what the market is doing. They want to sell more ancillary products and make their business more efficient. But they always benefit from the networking.

*Q: You helped to grow the Australian Association. What's the most exciting part about being part of a growing association?*

A: It's not just about being part of a growing association, its also that the industry is self regulated. This means individual operators and the industry generally have more freedom to innovate, to adapt to different market conditions, and to explore niche markets. It means the association can set industry standards and best practice and develop legal standards that suit the industry, rather than be driven by the bureaucrats. It can really work with the industry and its members to advance the interests of all operators.

*Q: Having worked with associations on two continents, what advice would you give to the new Association in Asia?*

Self storage really is essentially the same the world over. There are local peculiarities but the fundamentals of flexible storage space under a licence agreement are the same. So look at what some of the associations and operators have done overseas and see how you can replicate and improve on that. I would also say be inclusive to all operators and expose them to best practice to raise the industry standard, rather than excluding the budget operators.



**In Store**

A pilot for display at Self Storage Expo Asia. Look for a new magazine in 2014

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If you are a self storage operator in Asia, there is only good news when it comes to online marketing--if you move fast. Asia lags behind the US in development of the self storage industry and in online marketing, and this creates an opportunity for early movers to get almost instant results from online marketing efforts, rather than making the 12 to 24 month investment a new company in the US would have to make. Add to this the widespread adoption of mobile technology in Asia and easy access to the Internet and online marketing becomes the closest thing to free advertising a self storage operator can find.

While the technical details of online marketing can change from one country to another in Asia, there are three key areas where all self storage operators need to invest.

### The wave of the future is neither apps nor separate mobile websites

1. Responsive design. Over the past few years many self storage companies have invested in mobile apps or mobile websites. The wave of the future is neither apps nor separate mobile websites (often hosted on a separate URL like "m.mystoragecompany.com") but a single website that adjusts to fit any screen size, whether it's the desktop, a tablet, or smartphone. The kind of web design that changes its layout to fit any screen size is referred to as "responsive design" because it responds to the website visitor's screen size needs. This type of website

generally provides more functionality than the typical mobile self storage website, and is much more affordable to create than an app.

2. Optimized website. A self storage website should be optimized for the keyword search terms people use to find self storage in the geographical area where a storage company's facilities are located. In Hong Kong, that means focusing on keywords like "hong kong self storage" or "hong kong storage" and their equivalents in Chinese. While the details can get a bit technical, some general rules are to make sure title tags contain keywords that are both relevant to the business and helpful for site visitors, and to use HTML text where possible instead of text in graphics or images. It is also important to not over-optimize or engage in behavior considered "spammy" by the search engines like crowding your website with keywords or trying to hide keywords in your code. If your website is built on the popular content management framework WordPress, you can use the WordPress SEO Plugin from Yoast to help you do most of the initial optimization of your site. The most important advice I can give you is to focus on people first, and search engines second.

### People first, search engines second

3. Ongoing optimization. While some optimization of your website happens once, with updates here and there as needed, most of the work of getting business from search engines depends on ongoing optimization of your site.

Ongoing optimization is necessary in part because search engines are constantly changing, but mostly because your competitors are trying to get ahead of you. To stay ahead of your competitors you need to focus on two areas; 1) building inbound links to your website from high quality, relevant websites, and 2) creating new content on your website on a regular basis. A storage company in Hong Kong would want to get links from other Hong Kong websites, such as business partner websites and local publications, as well as from regional or global websites that have to do with self storage. The easiest way to create new content on your website is to have a company blog where news, tips, and other updates are posted.

There are also opportunities for self storage companies to invest in paid search, video optimization, and social media, but the type of search engines optimization I've summarized above will provide the best long term return on investment.

*Joshua Steimle is Founder and CEO of MWI.com and self-storage online marketing specialist firm, Full Occupancy. A Hong Kong resident, he is a return speaker at Self Storage Expo Asia and has a regular column with Forbes (<http://www.forbes.com/sites/joshsteimle/>).*



### Digital Self Storage

SSAA Magazine speaks to Joshua Steimle, Founder and CEO of MWI.com and self-storage online marketing specialist firm, Full Occupancy.

# Online marketing in Asia

Self storage in Asia has the growth potential of a new industry with the established best practices of a mature industry. Look to the Association to ensure the best of both worlds.

### Membership Form

Membership with the Self Storage Association Asia ensures that you belong to the most knowledgeable, influential, and up to date professional working group in the fast growing self storage industry to help your operations succeed in your local market and beyond.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Company: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

Email for subscription admin: \_\_\_\_\_

Email for bulletins: \_\_\_\_\_

Business address (for billing): \_\_\_\_\_

Postal address (for delivery if different than above): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature and/or company chop: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Payment information:

- Full membership over 10,000sq ft HK\$7,400/US\$950
- Full membership under 10,000sq ft HK\$4,300/US\$550
- (Associate) Provisional Membership HK\$11,700/US\$1,500
- Supplier Membership HK\$7,400/US\$950
- Overseas Membership HK\$1,550/US\$200
- Legacy Membership HK\$1,550/US\$200
- Additional Membership HK\$1,550/US\$200

Please fax the deposit slip to +852 2153 8010 or email a scanned image to [luigilatona@selfstorageasia.org](mailto:luigilatona@selfstorageasia.org)

#### Transfer/Direct Deposit:

To: Bank of East Asia Main Branch: 10 Des Voeux Road Central, Hong Kong  
 For: New Work Media Limited. Account No. : 015-514-68-00751-7  
 SWIFT Code: BEASHKHH. All bank transfer fees and charges are to be paid by the remitter.

#### Cheque by Post:

Payable to: New Work Media Limited  
 Postal address: 17/F Guardian House, 32 Oi Kwan Road, Wan Chai, Hong Kong

Yes, I require an invoice. Please reference Purchase Order #:

### Andrew Work

The last time Asia saw a new industry growing this quickly, it was the froth of the dotcom bubble. Billionaires were made and industries, even societies, were transformed. However, the novelty of the whole sector meant many who rushed into uncharted waters failed. Self storage in Asia has the growth potential of a new industry, but the track record and established practices that show a clear path to new operators and old professionals alike.

The potential in Asia is shown by the high level of penetration in more mature markets. While Asian economic development has leapfrogged the West in areas like mobile technology penetration, it has lagged in self-storage - but is moving quickly to catch up.

#### Growth

Benchmark: The world's biggest developed economy, the USA, has more than 50,000 facilities serving a population of 300 million people, or one facility for every 5,714 people.

Asia is different. Americans have cars, don't mind driving to their facilities and enjoys loads of cheap real estate. Every country in Asia is special in its own way. Hong Kong's population, for example, wants its self storage closer to home than most Westerners. The humid environment means climate controlled facilities are in much higher demand. Its growth as a wine and art trading hub creates demand for niche players. It has expanded from 11 self storage facilities in 2002 to over 150 today. It could grow another 500%, benchmarked against US numbers.

In Singapore, rising incomes aren't keeping up with real estate costs. Homes are shrinking while people acquire more goods, driving demand for self-storage. China's industry is taking off with new players opening all the time. China's development may be more similar to the American experience, with more drivers

and a suburban and city core model. But China never fails to surprise for its market innovation and unique demands.

#### Challenges

With this growth will come challenges. New operators will need to learn from those that came before them. Industry standards, and its guarantors, will be needed to educate and reassure a new self-storage consumer class. Industry standards will also guide inevitable regulation that will follow industry development. If the industry doesn't regulate, someone else will. That will likely mean politicians and bureaucrats struggling to understand the industry and prioritise it among their hundreds of other demands. A strong association can take the lead to ensure the public and operators like are protected through sound self-regulation.

Savvy operators will want access to market data, the latest on best practice and knowledge of the newest technical innovations. Networking with industry peers will be vital to keep up with the exciting and challenging industry developments, regulatory and commercial.

Ideally, the consuming public will become sophisticated, demanding, and enthusiastic self-storage aficionados. Government officials will be comfortable with a largely self-regulated industry. Operators and their suppliers will have a good understanding of their commercial and legal environment, allowing them to plan for moderately predictable business environment with a solid customer base. The new Self Storage Association Asia will play a vital role in making all this happen.

Industry growth in Asia will proceed apace with the region's economic rise. A well supported industry Association will ensure operators can learn from each other and the global best while creating a positive operating environment for its members in the decades to come.

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