



# What's in Your Customer Care Toolkit?

*Mine the trade show booths in Orlando to improve your customer retention.*

By Mark Wright

Maybe it starts as an innocent-sounding comment. A tenant who's been storing with you for nearly two years stops by your office, buys a box or two, and says something like: "Things are getting tight. I've got to figure out how to trim my expenses soon."

Or, it might be more direct. An email pops up in your inbox from a tenant asking: "Hey, if I sell off all the stuff in my storage unit via eBay, could you guys help me with the shipping?"

Such situations could mean "Uh oh!" or "Aha, an opportunity!" for your facility. Either way, you know you're facing a customer retention challenge.

Luckily, you've got friends in the right places who can help. In fact, those friends will soon be gathering at the

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*Above: The SSA's April convention offers a great opportunity to talk with exhibitors that offer customer care insights and resources. Pictured above (left to right): Jodi Shenoy and Kat Shenoy of E-SoftSys welcome a visitor to their booth.*

Gaylord Palms Resort and Convention Center in Orlando, Florida, for the 2012 SSA Spring Conference & Trade Show—particularly in the booths on the trade show floor.

That's right—we're talking about SSA vendor members and exhibitors. When you're on the show floor trying to decide how to best use your time, here's a suggestion: Run straight to exhibitors offering customer care tools and strategies. Then engage them in a conversation.

## Time to Talk

Not a "How's the weather?" conversation, but rather a talk that focuses on two key questions: "What can you tell me about my customers that I don't already know?" and "What can I tell you about my customers that will help you to help me serve them better?"

For example, let's say you stop by the booth of Salt Lake City, Utah-based Centershift, and chat with John Bilton, the company's vice president of business development and

*See Toolkit, page 14*

marketing. He and his colleagues will be as curious about you and your facility as you are about Centershift's software—very possibly even more so.

"A software provider should always design a system with the owner/operator/manager in mind and provide a tool to improve the care and relationship they have with the tenant," Bilton says.

Similarly, representatives from Blue Bell, Pennsylvania-based E-SoftSys can not only tell you the ins and outs of their Self Storage Manager system, they can also hear how you'd like such platforms to evolve to boost your capacity for customer care.

Or, maybe you'll visit with Izzat Dajani, partner/director of sales at StorageClicks.com. His firm develops websites for self storage companies—which makes him an interesting fellow to talk with about Internet user trends.

One of those trends happens to affect your business: More people are using smartphones and tablets to search for services—including self storage. In response, StorageClicks.com is launching a mobile site service.



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Centershift

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"Our platform will recognize what kind of device the customer is on and adjust to it automatically," explains Dajani. This aids both prospective and current tenants—but from a customer care perspective, the result is instant gratification.

## Exhibitors Offer Tools

In fact, that "getting what I want when I want it" effect is a big part of satisfying customers in any industry today—but is especially significant in a business as competitive as self storage.

SSA trade show exhibitors are savvy to that new reality. Solutions providers know that people hate getting stuck on hold during a phone call, tend to avoid waiting in lines whenever possible, and value personalized service.



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Exactly how each vendor's products and services help you keep tenants happy varies, of course. So, knowing your preferences and needs—and your tenants' preferences and needs—equips you to use the trade show to identify the tools and strategies that best suit your operation.

Not sure what your customers want? Ask them.

"We have a very robust survey tool," notes Centershift's Bilton. "This gives the site managers and owners real time data on the experience their tenants are having, customized to the questions they feel are important to ask."

What are your tenants' key frustrations? (Michael E. Gerber has some interesting things to say on this topic in his book, *The E-Myth Revisited*—if you want to do some reading during your flight to Orlando.) Solving those frustrations is vital to effective retention. Thankfully, a robust array of facility management software platforms strive to help you do exactly that—and you'll see them in Orlando.

"Make it easy for customers," advises Kat Shenoy, E-SoftSys president and CEO. Make it easy for them to pay, to remember to pay, to reserve or change their storage space, to communicate inquires or complaints. If you make it easy for customers to get what they need, you have a greater chance of retaining them for a longer period.

"A good CRM application integrated with the management software will make it easier for storage facilities to do prompt follow ups and increase conversion ratios of inquiries to rentals, reservations to rentals, etc.," adds Shenoy. "Customers will also be happy with the prompt attention they are getting."

Think of the entire trade show as your customer care toolkit. As Bilton points out, "All of these tools create an opportunity to improve the customer experience."

By connecting with potential solutions providers, you'll not only have friends in the right places, you will be well positioned—and well equipped—to turn tenants' problems and requests into customer care successes. ❖

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**For those wanting to map out a plan before getting to Orlando, check out an updated list of exhibitors and booth numbers at [www.selfstorage.org](http://www.selfstorage.org)**