



What Role Do Ancillary Products Play In

By Mark Wright

When people ask you what you do for a living, you probably say something like, “I’m in the self storage business.”

Does your answer ever include a mention of ancillary products? As in, “I run a facility that offers storage units, packing materials, and related products and services.”

Deciding whether ancillary products should have a role in your business depends entirely on what works best for you and your tenants. If you do decide to offer them, figuring out the

right mix of products and services can be even more of a challenge.

“Your location and the businesses around you dictate openings for ancillary products,” observes Ron Harris, owner of Humboldt County, California-based Rainbow Self Storage.

Harris recalls testing out a variety of opportunities over the 36 years he has been in the industry. He has also watched colleagues and competitors give their own experiments a whirl—everything from mail boxes to flower shops inside their stores.

“We tried to become a UPS shipping center once,” he says. “We put in a work table for people to pack their own boxes. The trouble was, it took a lot of time. If you charge someone a buck and a half and end up spending 20 minutes with them on shipping, you’re working for a buck and a half.”

Harris’s eight facilities are out of the shipping business. They still offer plenty of packing-related supplies, though—especially boxes.

“It’s a perfect fit,” he notes. “Our tenants tend to be people in motion—getting divorced, moving. They’re in transition. So, they need boxes and packing materials and things like that. We have a 50 percent mark-up on all products. It only takes a few minutes



A Supply Side display shown above. “We focus on developing with our customers the best strategy to maximize their retail opportunities,” says Mark Petro, national account manager, Supply Side USA.



Your Storage Facility?

to sell boxes, and it goes along with the storage.”

No Need to Push

Soft-selling usually works best, says Virginia Blass, regional manager of Rensselaer, New York-based Mabey’s Self Storage.

“Sometimes, customers are overwhelmed and don’t even think about (products) with everything they’re going through,” she says. “We take the time to talk with them and find out what their needs are. Whenever we give recommendations about how to store their items, we certainly also recommend how they can take care of their goods.”

Blass says the products and services Mabey’s offers are moneymakers, but they’re obviously there for customer convenience as well. Mabey’s offers full-service packing at its main store, but sells a variety of products—from mattress bags and covers to the usual packing supplies—at all six of its Albany-area locations.

SSA Vendor Resources

The SSA has vendor members who specialize in providing a robust range of ancillary products and services for facilities that want to include a retail component. Companies like Florida-based Chateau Products, Inc. (www.CHATEAUPRODUCTS.COM) and Ohio-based Supply Side USA, Inc. (www.SUPPLYSIDEUSA.COM)

have served the storage industry for decades.

“The self storage industry has evolved over the last 20 years, from just renting storage space to becoming packing and moving centers,” says Nancy Martin Wagner, vice president of marketing for Chateau. “When it comes to selling storage and moving supplies, self storage operators have a great advantage. When customers shop with you, they have the convenience of pulling right up to the door and loading their vehicle without having to walk through a big store or wait in a checkout line.”

Wagner says Chateau’s most popular items include high-security locks and door-latching hardware, packing and

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moving supplies, and site maintenance items.

“We are constantly adding new products and improving on current products based on the fantastic customer feedback we get,” she adds. “We offer an extensive variety of promotional posters for our customers to use to enhance their retail areas. Customer service is our number one priority—and we stand behind our products!”

Supply Side USA takes a holistic approach, says Mark Petro, national account manager, focusing less on

“Just don’t forget the business you’re really in.”

*Ron Harris
Rainbow Self Storage*

providing particular products and more on working with a facility owner/operator to develop a customized retail strategy.

“We’re a retail and merchandising organization along with distribution,” explains Petro. “So, we focus on developing with our customers the best retail strategy we can put together to maximize their retail



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Mabay's Self Storage*

opportunities, improve their retail condition, and then plug in the right products to accomplish that.”

A better product display helps build customer buzz, observes Petro. “We work with facilities to help them on the design aesthetics and floor planning of their retail display, looking closely at traffic flow, where the counter is in relation to points of ingress and egress. We also have a structured retail training program for our customers, so we can do online or in-person training presentations to help improve the overall techniques and fundamentals of facility staff.”

Making it Easy for Customers

Larry Goldberg, president of Kensington, Maryland-based Storage Village Self Storage, notes that his own motivation has changed over the years since he started selling

products at his five facilities back in the mid-1990s.

“Back then it was to get an edge with customer service,” he says. “People ask for it now. Everybody needs a lock. Our boxes are very attractively priced compared to the rest of the market.”

Goldberg says ancillary products are not great profit centers, generating between \$100 and \$400 per month, depending on the location.

Offering them is “really to help the customer get a complete positive experience,” he adds. “We’re just trying to make it easy for them.”

Doing What Makes Sense

Harris agrees that products don’t usually bring in a ton of money. He says such sales account for somewhere in the neighborhood of one percent of his business.

On the other hand, that’s one percent that he and his employees don’t have to work hard to get.

“It doesn’t cost us anything to do this, because we have the staff and the office space,” he notes. “It helps offset other costs and takes no time. It’s easy.”

On the other hand, picking a product that’s too far outside your core business can lead to heartburn.

Harris says if you have the office staffed and open all the time, selling what customers really need is a no-brainer. “But if you branch out from there, you have to look at (a new product or service) pretty closely. Each situation is different. Just don’t forget the business you’re really in.” ❖



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