

Leveraging New Technology to Improve Operations

By Chadwick Macferran

More and more self-storage businesses are automating tasks in their facilities to improve operations, cut costs, and deliver a better experience to tenants. We expect to see this trend increase both in the number of facilities adopting automation, as well as the solutions built to help them achieve it. For some companies, this could mean moving towards unmanned facilities; for others, it could mean freeing up employee's time to focus on higher-value activities (selling units/collecting payments/etc.). The most important aspect is to be sure that you have a clear goal for the technology or processes that you're implementing to ensure that it serves as a benefit and not a distraction.

Creating a positive customer experience is becoming an increasingly important priority for all types of businesses and industries. For self-storage security, it means better protecting the tenant's possessions while reducing pain points. Many inconveniences hindering the customer experience in self-storage can be resolved with technology solutions. For example, providing a tenant-facing mobile access control app gives tenants and facilities better visibility into unit-level activity while creating an easier way for tenants to access a facility or unit with a simple tap on their smartphone.

Self-storage facilities have long relied on perimeter security (gates, fences, exterior cameras) as the primary source of protection for their customers' possessions. With the increased expectation of personalized service in the modern marketplace, facilities are placing added emphasis on individualized security. This can take the form of:

- Upgraded unit level door security like door alarms and electronic smart locks add an additional level of protection and give operators greater insight to unit-level activity
- Tenant-facing mobile apps provide renters the ability to review all site activity associated with their unit and easily share codes as needed

- More security cameras throughout the facility so that each unit is being recorded

Cloud-based solutions access data or software programs over the internet instead of using a server or computer located on your premises. They are becoming commonplace in self-storage as companies look to improve operations while enjoying other benefits like seamless connectivity between platforms, improved disaster recovery, and the ability to access their software from anywhere. Other tools like operator-facing mobile apps and device management platforms only further help boost an operator's ability to visualize onsite activity and uncover new opportunities for improvement.

Tenants want the highest level of protection available without sacrificing convenience. The modern consumer expects personalized service and the current marketplace delivers it. Any additional security measures need to show tenant-value, or else operations run the risk of creating a frustrating customer experience.

The self-storage industry is continuously seeing an increased demand for individualized security. Robust perimeter security is to be expected, but customers see their individual self-storage unit as an extension of their home, so any individualized security measures significantly increase a facility's ability to differentiate itself.

Tenant facing mobile access control apps give tenants the ability to access gates, doors, and elevators with a tap of their smartphone, reducing their reliance on codes or key fobs. It is also particularly useful at recreational storage sites and in areas with harsh weather conditions since the tenant no longer has to open a door or window to access a property.

Unit-level security solutions like electronic smart locks and door alarms create an individualized approach to security. It shows tenants that an operation is not only monitoring site activity at a macro level but are also paying attention to their individual unit. This added layer of security is especially appealing to customers at large facilities or in large metro areas.

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First and foremost, the technology has to work. It can add value for the customer and the owner, but all of that goodwill is lost if it doesn't work or there is a negative experience.