



A GROWING OPPORTUNITY

Adding The Portable Storage Solution In Canada

by Rod Bolls

The portable storage industry—sometimes referred to as the mobile self-storage industry—is an industry that is barely 15 years old with estimated gross revenues of \$3 billion worldwide. There are over 1,500 operators in the U.S. and Canada that include franchise operations, dealerships, and independent operators providing portable storage solutions to the marketplace. The industry is growing rapidly as convenience becomes more of a factor in the consumer's choice for storage and moving. This article will explain several factors involved in adding the portable storage component to a new or existing business in Canada.

Portable storage is still a relatively young concept in Canada. It was created primarily to add absolute convenience for the storage customer, therefore differentiating mobile from traditional self-storage with the convenience factor. The portable storage container is brought to the consumer's home or business to pack at their convenience. Once the consumer has packed the container, it can stay at the current location or can be picked up and stored at the portable storage facility warehouse or outside in a secure area. What is eliminated are the multiple trips to the traditional self-storage facility to pack the goods, which may include hiring a moving company or renting a truck to move the goods.

Storage containers can be divided into two types: ISO shipping containers and portable storage containers. The first type is the ISO shipping container, which is widely available as either new or used in the Canadian marketplace. The most common sizes are 20 or 40 feet long, eight feet

wide, and eight feet high. The ISO shipping container is primarily used in the shipping industry; however, it is commonly utilized in self-storage and portable storage businesses. The empty weight of a 20-foot ISO shipping container is 4,850 pounds; a 40-foot ISO container is 8,380 pounds.

The second type are the portable storage containers, which are primarily new containers in the marketplace. The portable storage container is lighter weight, easier to handle, and considered more aesthetically pleasing than are ISO shipping containers. The most common sizes are eight, 12, 16 or 20 feet long with eight-foot widths and eight-foot heights.

This type of portable storage container is primarily used in the residential and commercial portable storage markets. The empty weight of portable storage containers vary depending on materials used in its construction, type of wall panels, and other features. The average weight of the 16-foot container is 2,500 pounds and the 20-foot unit is 3,000 pounds.

There are advantages to using the portable storage container for a new or existing business. Portable storage containers can be visually appealing and very low maintenance. Almost all portable storage containers come with options for different wall panels, colors, and signage. This allows the operator to match the finish, color, or signage to a new or existing business.

Depending on the container and make, there can be little to almost no maintenance of the portable container. This is

primarily due to the stringent quality control measures used by many storage container manufacturers. It is important as an operator to review the quality control measures used by each container manufacturer and view a demo of the product before purchasing to ensure you're getting a product of the highest quality.

Features To Look For

One of the most important features to consider is to ensure the container is 100 percent waterproof, secure, and built of sturdy construction. There are a few companies offering a pitched roof for snow melt and water runoff, which is an important consideration with the extreme weather conditions in Canada. Vents come standard in some containers to allow for air circulation to prevent condensation inside. If possible, an operator should insist on a portable storage container that is capable of carrying up to 10,000 pounds and that it can be stacked three-high.

It is an added benefit if the container can withstand winds up to 120 miles per hour and meet fire standards for disastrous circumstances. There are few portable storage containers with the ability to be quickly assembled and disassembled to allow for significant relocation cost savings for operators. These features are important for the operator whether they are being stored locally or being moved across the country.

Also, it is advantageous that portable storage containers have forklift sleeves for repositioning and relocation. A number of self-storage operators in Canada add the

mobile storage component to their fixed self-storages with portable containers and a truck for container transport. Options are available (removable wheels, tie down rings, pull rings, etc.) that can be added to portable storage containers for easy transition into portable storage.

Portable Benefits

The portable storage container can be a valuable resource for advertising. By adding signage to the sides of the container, the equipment becomes a cost-effective, mobile advertisement. The operator needs only to ensure strategic placement either on the property facing a busy road or repositioning in a high-traffic or highly visible area. The container then doubles as a marketing vehicle with the operator's contact information and branding.

When getting into the portable storage industry is that major multi-location operators have been advertising more recently on television throughout the U.S. and Canada, including prime time spots. This creates awareness for the entire industry; not only an introduction to the product offered but also the inherent benefits of portable storage. It's interesting that a major portion of these ads is dedicated to the ease, flexibility and convenience offered in moving across town, state or country.

Another significant benefit is considerably less construction cost and capital investment in portable storage containers versus traditional methods of self-storage. With the right containers, construction or assembly time can be as little as a single day. Depending on the storage container company, assembly times vary from 15 to 20 minutes to a couple of days, which is substantially less time than traditional self-storage construction.


The equipment required to assemble the storage containers is easily purchased or rented. Normally, the assembly of storage containers only requires two or three people; there is no need for a general contractor, varying levels of government bureaucracy, or armies of laborers. Because of the reduced investment, immediate rental income, and quick construction time,

the return on investment is quickly realized using portable storage containers.

For those operators already providing self-storage, and especially those operators renting parking space for boats, campers, RVs, and similar equipment, placing portable containers in either covered or open space can immediately create a greater revenue stream. Depending on demand for self-storage versus storage for boats and vehicles, without any major build out an operator can make the transition quickly in utilizing portable storage containers.

If the self-storage operator does not have empty space at the existing or additional facilities there are other alternatives for the revenue generating asset. One possible use of the portable storage container would be in adjacent properties or open fields with available space. Most storage containers are easily utilized in grassy fields, dirt or gravel surfaces. With the simple addition of a fence or other security features, the operator can create a new,

low maintenance storage facility from just a few containers.

The bottom line is that there are many valuable ways that operators in Canada can utilize portable storage containers. The operator may purchase a 16-foot or 20-foot-long portable storage container to get into the portable storage industry, or prefer to use the portable storage container to generate revenue in a previously vacant space on their property or an adjacent parking lot. The low capital requirements, low maintenance, and quick construction time compared with traditional self-storage is also a great advantage. Regardless of the reason, there exists a great opportunity for self-storage operators in Canada to utilize the portable storage container. 

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Rod Bolls is Vice President at Universal Storage Containers, headquartered in New Canaan, Connecticut. USC specializes in manufacturing portable, foldable, quick-assembly storage containers for various industries worldwide.

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