



# Container Criteria

## Choosing Containers to Match Your Customers' Needs

*by E. George Johnson*

**T**he portable storage and moving industry is still relatively young. Since its inception, roughly seven years ago (at least for the portable storage segment), containers have changed rapidly due to combined education from the marketplace and manufacturers as well as a competitive landscape on the supply side.

I would argue that the storage container is the most important physical asset on the operator's balance sheet. It probably represents his largest single capital investment, but, more importantly, it is the direct interface with the end user. Even though it is utilitarian in scope, it is a point of differentiation from competition via aesthetic attributes, specifications which enhance convenience, user

friendliness, and protection of the goods stored.

From the consumers' viewpoint and analysis, the physical container is probably not the driver in making a decision between storage companies offering portable storage. Typically, the end user bases their decision on price and convenience of service. However, the container could have played a role in driving the consumer to inquire with certain companies because of "banner" advertising on storage units in and around their territory and seeing them in neighborhoods or being hauled around town. Even though it's a secondary role that the container plays, it is still an important one. What is conveyed to the consumer is important in their decision making. The customer has

to feel comfortable and confident that their stored goods are safe and secure and will not get wet or damaged in any way. The representative from the company offering the service has to ensure the prospect that their container meets these requirements, and, in turn, the supplier must design and manufacture containers that meet these criteria: safe, secure, and dry from theft and natural elements, as well as other attributes which I will refer to as "convenience" enhancements. Examples of convenience enhancements include low step up for packing the goods, tie down rings or e-track to secure packed goods, translucent roof, venting, and aesthetic compliance that repels neighborhood or local authority complaints.





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### Meeting Consumers' Demands

Over the years, there have been various designs and materials utilized to meet customers' demands. Moving companies used wooden crate-type boxes (vaults) to store and transport goods for years. These are relatively inexpensive to acquire. Likewise, their useful life is limited and defense against the elements is probably inferior to today's storage containers.

A precursor to today's container was the modification of shipping containers for on-site storage, such as at construction sites. These portable containers of 14-gauge steel served a purpose and found a niche primarily in the commercial market, although today some companies offer this container for residential portable storage as well.

As in the evolution of materials, the containers evolved from basic wooden frames and canvas or plywood panels, to steel frames and steel or aluminum panels, to aluminum frames and composite panels. Whatever the design and construction, however, the end result is always the same: satisfying the end user and meeting their requirements of safe and secure storage, plus protection from the elements.

If one views Web sites, print advertisements, or even television ads, the message being highlighted from the provider of storage services is basically the same, especially in reference to the container: "water resistant and double locked for security;" "optimal protection of your stuff with packing ergonomics for you;" "provides maximum security and breathable space-age materials prevent mold or moisture build-up;" "100 percent steel which provides you with added security for your belongings and weather-proof storage."

There is no problem interpreting the message being conveyed by various providers. And, if there is a breach of performance on the security or weather resistance side, the

provider will hear about it quickly, which means the supplier will hear about it almost as quickly. Therefore, it's safe to say that if any supplier of containers slips up and does not meet the basic criteria as demanded by the customer (and hence, the operator), then their ability to serve the portable storage market is jeopardized tremendously. Ergo, in today's environment, the ultimate consumer can be confident and assured that their stored goods will be safe, secure, and protected from moisture.

### Size Specifications

Obviously, container size plays a role in the consumer's selection process. The industry is not standardized, but it seems that the preferred sizes are 16 feet or 12 feet in length, with the height and width being roughly eight feet each. Cost could effect the user's decision, but the real driver in economics is cubic feet of storage relative to the amount that is going to be stored. Most providers indicate that a 12-foot box holds one to two rooms, while a 16-foot box holds three to four rooms; if less is to be stored, than an eight-foot box could be a possible solution. What's important is that the operator has the right sizes available to meet the consumers' needs. This is indeed the case for all the major operators.

A very real option that will be in the market soon is a lightweight hybrid composite storage container that will not only meet the specifications of the market as is required today, but will also be easier to maneuver both inside the warehouse and on the road. The weight of these new containers will be roughly half the weight of today's conventional container; the cost savings inherent to this innovative design should be significant. 🚚

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E. George Johnson is a Principal of New Canaan, Connecticut-based Universal Storage Containers, LLC.