

Cornville Country Storage ... Unmanned!

Storage newcomers boldly go with self-serve kiosks

By Elaine Foxwell



Cornville Country Storage has 180 units.

WHEN Isaac Asimov wrote *I Robot* in 1959, he portrayed a future where artificial intelligence relieved humans of the day-to-day drudgery of life. Although not quite a robot, a talking self-serve kiosk is driving the success of two newcomers to the storage industry. Michelle Stadelman and Page Rush chose the leading edge of automation when they boldly opened a site designed to be unmanned. Within five months of opening, they have achieved 50 percent occupancy.

Stadelman is a former middle-school principal and Rush owned a collision repair shop for 23 years. "I was dealing with more than 700 students and 70 employees," Stadelman says. "Page and I wanted to be in an industry with less employees and stress," she says. Storage gave them the answer.

The 24-Hour Employee

In September, following two years of research, Stadelman and Rush opened Cornville (Ariz.) Country Storage, in an expanding community that's retained its rural essence. The 180-unit facility was developed to include the Insomniac 900 self-serve kiosk from OpenTech Alliance Inc. The partners first saw the technology at an Inside Self-Storage Expo in Las Vegas,

Rush says. The kiosk processes the renter's application, scans his I.D., accepts payment and issues a contract and gate code. It also sells locks, which drop into a tray when purchased.

The kiosk is installed in the outside wall of a 10-by-20 unit. The back of the machine can be accessed from inside the unit, which has been set up as a small office. A canopy protects self-serve customers, and bright lights make the machine highly visible at night from the main road.

Kiosk Transactions at Cornville Country Storage

	Aug. (half)	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Total
Rentals	17	23	18	14	13	85
Payments	0	2	11	22	31	66
Locks Purchased	6	8	11	10	6	41

"I've had phone calls from people asking if our machine is an ATM," Stadelman says. She uses these calls to market the facility and the kiosk's convenient features. Customers are pleased they can rent a unit at any time without an appointment, she says. "We have people rent on holidays or weekends because that's their only day off, and the kiosk makes it very convenient for them."

The Insomniac features a talking animated figure called Megan the Mini Storage Ambassador, which directs customers through the rental process. A pager lets them call for assistance. Since Stadelman lives close to the facility, she can meet the client within a few minutes. "Page and I coordinate our schedules so one of us is always available," she says.

About 50 percent of customers prefer to meet before renting. Many senior customers are shy of using the kiosk, Stadelman says. During the appointment, she walks them through the self-serve process. "It usually only takes 10 minutes to show them the system and to make them comfortable with its capabilities," she says. Most of the facility's younger customers are familiar with self-serve technology and use the kiosk to rent without ever meeting her.

Personal Service

Cornville Country Storage's mission is to offer top-notch personal service. The facility is ideally situated in the center



Customers must enter code at the exit gate.

