

Website Audit and Marketing Strategies for A+ Storage

By Ryan Barbin

If Looks Could Kill:

Upon first glance at the A+ Storage website, there is little to be considered aesthetically pleasing to the eye. Although the site does well by keeping simple, informative, and uniform, in comparison to other competitor websites, the color scheme, resolution, interactivity, and overall user experience is lacking much appeal. The addition of more high-resolution photos and background, videos, or a flash player would be a simple start to adding to the overall attractiveness of the website.

The domain URL (www.aplus-88cents2months.com) is far too complicated and difficult to remember. A simpler, more direct URL address such as (www.aplus.com or www.aplusstorage.com) would make the website look more professional, reliable, and make it easier for Google's bots to crawl the website and index it accurately, leading to better SEO and search engine results.

Consider if a lawyer named Mark had the professional email address; (markboivinwinsthcase@legaloffices.ca.com), vs. if he kept it simpler and more direct by using (markb@me.com). The latter address is sleeker, simpler, more professional and easier to remember, as well as it makes emailing Mark less of a task. People today tend to have a short attention span and demand instant gratification with as little effort as possible. Keeping your web URL short, simple, and easy to type in an address bar or search engine will yield better search results, more traffic, and a higher rate of return on visits.

Content is King:

Often times when people visit a website, they do not spend a great deal of time before they get bored and move on. In fact, in most cases if the home page doesn't entice them to surf around the site, click, interact, or deliver the desired experience that they are looking for, they will simply leave and may never return

or purchase anything from the site. For this reason, content is king, especially on the homepage.

Photos and videos are one of the simplest methods of offering intriguing visual content that will keep the visitor to the site interested in what the company has to offer. This is no different for a storage business as it would be for a clothing company or any other online store. Photos of the business, the units, the packing supplies, and any other features or products sold can be used to advertise the business. Videos can be added to give the potential client a tour of the site, or videos can be made showing friendly customer service interaction, the workers having fun on site, or something creative such as a video of packing tips and tricks for people who are moving.

Photos and videos can be used more interactively with an online shop where the visitors can purchase their packing and moving supplies directly from the website, or even reserve a unit or complete the rental agreement process before they even visit the physical location. A flash player can be used to bring some life to the photos, making the website look more professional and fun. Keep in mind that photos should always be high-resolution. Fuzzy or blurry photos, photos that are too small or too large, or that lack in professionalism, (such as photos where there is a lot of clutter), should be completely removed from the site.

Many of the photos on the A+ Storage site are small, blurry, fuzzy, and probably hurt the website more than they help. The background is also low-resolution and looks less than professional. It is recommended that new content, (photos, video, and/or interactive content), be added to the site and that the current photos be updated or replaced with more professional, high quality photographs.

Delivering the Digital Customer Service Experience:

- Customer service isn't only limited to face to face, phone, or email interaction. The customer service experience can begin online through the website, aiming to leave visitors satisfied with their digital experience with the company and ultimately leading to return visits, purchase, positive feedback and the potential to refer future new clients.

Interactive applications and call to action can assist in the process of making this digital experience easy and pleasant. Such interactive applications can consist of an online store, the ability to reserve or rent a unit through the website,

surveys, customer feedback message boards, contests, or any opportunity for the customer to speak their opinion or voice and be heard.

The A+ Storage website currently has a contact page which is certainly important for opening lines of communication between the business and potential or current customers. The email address box is also set as a required field. This is a good means of maintaining an address book of current and potential clients for future follow up. However, it is recommended that the business consider taking things a step further and adding more interactive applications and call to action.

Many competitors are utilizing many of these interactive features to capture new clientele directly from the website.

A new, fresh and attractive website can easily be designed and created for minimal cost using web design platforms such as WIX (www.wix.com), Intuit (www.intuit.com), or many more. Make sure if designing the website yourself to pay close attention to detail, color, and clarity, avoid clutter, avoid repetition, and make certain that there are no grammatical errors, and that every page within the site is uniquely designed, labeled, and is available from every concurrent page. Do not be afraid to reference other well-designed websites that you find on the Internet, and when in doubt, consider other outside opinions. Keep in mind; it's all about the user experience.

If web site design is not your area of expertise, there are many affordable options out there that can help to build you a well-designed and user friendly site that will help to make your business stand out from the competitors. A simple yet effective option for self-storage companies looking to upscale their website for better performance, user experience, and SEO can be to utilize the web design options available from The Storage Group, (www.storageinternetmarketing.com). Their website offers affordable prices for web design customization specifically for self-storage companies and has a beautiful online portfolio of attractive, efficient, and professional looking designs that help to offer the customer a better online user experience, as well as offering the business a more impressive online presence.

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Don't Be Afraid to Innovate:

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Many businesses are finding new innovative and exciting ways to modernize their web space, attract new business, and create a sense of

uniqueness over their competitors. A self-storage business in Melbourne, Australia called “TaxiBox”, added a video game to their website. The game, titled “TaxiBlox” is similar to the game “Tetris” and tasks players to rotate furniture pieces to stack and fit into a storage unit. The game has helped to increase popularity of the business, increased overall traffic to the website, and increased new business and profits. Aside from being unique and fun, the game provides incentive for its customer players. Customers who manage to reach high scores in the game can redeem their points in order to win coupons for packing/moving supplies or money off of their reservations or monthly storage rent.

Social Media Marketing Strategies

Social media has had a huge impact on the way businesses market their products and services, and storage companies are no exception. In fact, many storage companies are currently utilizing the branding, marketing, and advertising aspects of various social media applications such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and even YouTube. However, as with all social media, simply having an account set up for your company or business is not enough to generate sales and bring benefits. These social media applications must be used creatively, effectively, and with a strategy in mind. Remember that social media is not necessarily a direct marketing/advertising channel, but rather a means of building a network that will eventually develop into multiple new marketing and advertising channels over time.

The 80/20 Rule is an example of a successful social media marketing strategy that helps to explain how this works. The 80/20 Rule states that you should post content 80% of the time that is not intended to increase sales or is directly related to your product or business, and only post content 20% of the time that is. This is because people do not want to only view posts about your business or be sold to all the time, especially in the business of self-storage, since it is not something that people look to purchase very frequently.

So what do you post the rest of the time? Interesting and engaging content is the answer. Post about local events, charity contributions, community activities, or things that would appeal to your local potential customers. Post about sports, theater, music, crafts, or things that your potential customers are passionate about. Post directly from your business, without intent to sell, but rather to show a random fun day at work, an employee get together or volunteer program, or

anything that might show the lighter side of your business and help to add a personal touch to the day to day business.

Like us on Facebook:

These days mostly everyone has a Facebook account. Knowing this is the number one reason why any business, including storage companies, should have a business page on Facebook. What better way could there be to raise awareness of your business and be able to make connections and generate referrals?

Facebook can be used for a multitude of marketing aspects. First and foremost, by generating high quality content, (photos, videos, or blogging about interesting topics), businesses can gain likes and build a large network of potential new clients who no longer have to look any further than their daily news feed in order to decide where to store their belongings or purchase packing supplies.

Within the Facebook realm, there is also a useful business-to-business functionality. By looking up other local business and liking their pages, your business opens doors to the community. Businesses are able to make connections, establish partnerships or make referral deals, or simply roll out the welcoming wagon in the neighborhood in order to build relationships and generate a trust factor that would give an advantage over other competitor businesses.

Facebook also has advertising opportunities for businesses that have the funds to spend on a weekly or monthly campaign. Ad campaigns can be created, edited, targeted, and run all around your own custom budget and strategy. This can be especially useful with local targeting, targeting amongst younger, college students who are looking for places to store their things, or even for commercial clients who may be looking for seasonal storage opportunities. Also, assuming that most self-storage companies have auctions regularly, what better way to advertise an upcoming auction than with the creation of a Facebook ad or Facebook Event that local people can see while browsing their news feed on their mobile devices.

Follow us on Instagram:

Instagram is now considered a useful tool in business marketing. The photo and video-sharing app has evolved past the days of simply being a way for people to share pictures of their pets, home cooked meals, or their most recent selfies. It has now become an effective tool for business to build their brand, establish

relationships, and connect with their current or potential customers. With nearly 300 million monthly active users, Instagram is now the fastest growing social media application, so needless to say there are a lot of potential customers worth targeting through the app.

So, how can a storage business successfully make use of Instagram's photo/video sharing application to increase business? The answer is by deciding what you want to show your potential and current customers, and by understanding what they want or need to see from you. Show your products and services. Post videos of useful packing or moving tips. Show customer interactions or testimonials. Show your personality. Posting videos of employees having fun at work or interacting with customers. Let them see why they should trust you or want to rent from you.

Instagram can also be used to interact with other businesses or to watch what your competitors are doing right or wrong. This can help to keep your business up to date and never outside of the loop.

Tap into the Tweet Spot:

Twitter is an easy way to make big moves in business communication through social media. No photos or videos are necessary with this application. Instead you get 140 characters at a time to say something worth creating a buzz over or retweeting about. So pitch your company to drive brand awareness, advertise your new deals, offers, or promotions, connect with consumers through interactive posts that ask questions or demand a response, show your personality and what makes your company unique by talking about community, charity, or social events that your business is involved with. Engage your audience, and when you do so correctly, they will like, follow you, or even retweet your posts. That's free advertisement!

Use the Tools Already in Hand:

Before spending all your money on paid advertising and AdWords, while your blogging and posting quality content across social media to build recognition and rapport, don't forget to make use of the tools that are already at your disposal. Websites such as Google Places, Craigslist, Yelp, and CitySearch allow businesses to focus their advertising locally, efficiently, and with little to no cost at all. Google Places allows for free business listing that shows up amongst most

organic searches online. In many cases, it can help to better your chances of showing up on the first page results in a Google search with little or no SEO required.

Craigslist allows the business a much more affordable way to specify their ad content, allowing for multiple postings to be created for free, with very little effort. New postings can be created intermittently, and the business can experiment with different ad copy, creative tag lines, and more to see what works best with absolutely no occurring costs. After several trial ad results are gathered, successful ads can then be recreated and used on other sites using paid advertising for a higher chance of success.

Yelp Can Help Too:

No matter what your opinion may be, based on any good or bad news you've heard about Yelp and its system of business reviews and ratings, the truth remains that this platform is ground zero for online business marketing. The website most definitely holds a large influential role on search rankings and has continuously led businesses to further success and failure through the exposure it provides for them.

As opposed to many other social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, sites such as Yelp and Craigslist allow businesses to narrow their efforts and focus their online promotional strategies to the local and surrounding areas of the business itself. The site also allows for easy 2-way messaging between the business and the consumer, allowing customers to share their likes and dislikes, which benefits the business by keeping them in the know and allowing them to directly contact concerned clientele, offer them some resolve, and even connect to find new potential customers. This system of feedback also allows for better relationship building with current customers and can lead to further recommendations. Ask your current customers who you already have a positive business relationship with to leave a positive review on Yelp and offer them a small discount or incentive for doing so.

Similarly, to Facebook and other social media platforms, Yelp also allows for paid advertising on their site. This is another way to successfully customize your own online social media marketing campaign, based on your own budget, allowing you to attract new customers, gain feedback, build awareness, and benefit from the organic exposure and direct links to your business website, thereby increasing traffic and ROI at an affordable price.

SEO Strategies

Search Engine Optimization helps to ensure better organic search results, higher page ranking for the company's website, and ultimately results in higher traffic and more return on investment from marketing/advertising efforts for the business. SEO consists of many different factors from overall website design, quality and content, utilization of links, call to action, and interactivity, correct labeling and organization, keyword planning and optimization, and much more. SEO can be a very confusing ongoing process that can make or break the online marketing and digital sales and promotions aspects of a company. However, if done correctly, it can help to ensure top publications in search engine results, ease of user ability in navigating through the website, and above all, a higher rate of conversion for the business from new and existing customers.

Your Online Reputation:

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Beyond the overall look, interactivity, functionality, and user experience that is required of a good business website striving to compete in the ever demanding, modern-digital business world, there are many more elements of website design, online marketing strategy, search engine and keyword optimization, and digital advertising efforts that are critical in maintaining maximum profitability for a company operating in today's market of millennial business persons.

By creating compelling and helpful content on your website, networking by linking to related, well-known, relevant, or partnering websites, and by building online relationships and status through shares, likes, call to action, and by creating outlets for user interaction and feedback, a business can keep their bounce rate low, (the rate at which visitors bounce or leave your page), conversion rate high, and create an online reputation that will stand out above the competition.

Optimizing Your Website:

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When optimizing a website for better search engine results and page ranking, one must make sure to minimize errors occurring within the site structure. These errors can consist of:

- **Duplicate Page Content** – Multiple pages potentially competing with each other for content, causing your rankings to be split rather than focused.
- **Missing or Duplicate Page Titles**
- **Crawl Attempt Errors** – The website robot.txt files are preventing the website from accurately being crawled.
- **4XX (Client Error)** – Bad or broken links on page
- **5XX (Server Error)** – Server timing out
- **Missing Meta Description Tags** – Does not affect SEO or page ranking but does play a role in grabbing the attention of a potential visitor to your site by giving an accurate short description of what the site offers to them.

- **Meta Refresh and Other Temporary Redirects** – Affects direction of linking pages and speed of the loading pages
- **Overly-Dynamic URL** – Having a longer than optimum URL address, causing difficulty in cataloguing and retrieving website results
- **Page Size, Load Times, and Speed Issues** - Page size and speed should be optimized to enhance the user experience and keep the bounce rate low.

Although this may seem highly technical and complicated, most of these errors can be easily detected and corrected with little expense by an experienced web developer, technician or digital marketing company such as Digisavvy (www.digisavvy.com), or by using a website crawling matrix such as Deep Crawl (www.deepcrawl.com).

Important Attributes of a Successful Website:

There are many necessary components that must exist on a successful, highly ranked website that will improve performance, user experience, speed, and optimization for search engine results. Some of these components include:

- **Favicon** – This is a little icon displayed next to your URL in the browser and adds a personal touch to your brand.

- **Custom 404 Pages** – Similar to the Favicon but has more potential for user experience. This is a fun way to lighten the disappointment of telling your visitor the place they were trying to go does not exist.
- **Gzip** – A method to improve the load time of your website.
- **Spam Block and Safe Browsing** – Determines whether your site has been blacklisted for malware, spam, or viruses that can affect downloads.
- **XML Sitemap** – Helps the search engine to understand the structure of your website and speeds up crawling time.
- **Google Analytics** – Allows for the tracking of a myriad set of metrics and behaviors related to your visitors.
- **Language/Character Encoding** – An often overlooked but very simple aspect of your website which can affect ranking and indexing.]

Negative Components:

There are also many negative components that are often overlooked which can be hindering your website performance, ranking, and indexing. Some of these components may include:

- **Nestled Tables** – These are an archaic way of building websites that are ultimately frowned upon by today's standards.
- **Inline Styles** – Too many inline CSS styles can affect loading time.
- **CSS Files** – Too many CSS files can affect loading time. These should be designed purposefully and with an agile application to your website to allow for both optimal loading time and design versatility.
- **JavaScript** – While JavaScript can greatly improve the overall look, design, and user experience of your website, a website that overuses JavaScript will not be crawled properly by search engine spiders, potentially leaving out vital information about your website.
- **Directory Browsing** – This means that visitors cannot browse your sites files directly. It is recommended that your site does not use directory browsing.
- **Server Signature** – A security feature of your web server. It is recommended that this be disabled.
- **Island Pages** – Every page on your site should be accessible from other pages of your website. This is referred to as an **Anthill Structure**. Island Pages, or standalone pages, may as well not exist as far as search engines are concerned. This can be easily detectable through an XML Sitemap.

As previously stated, these positive and negative website components may seem highly technical and complicated, but most of which can be detected, corrected, or added with minimal effort by an experience web developer or technician at an affordable cost and will greatly improve the website's performance and search engine results.

Deep Crawl Website Audit for A+ Storage

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Deep Crawl (www.deepcrawl.com) is an online tool that can be used to crawl a website and find errors and opportunities for improved website performance and better SEO. The website is user-friendly and the process is both easy and extensive, and is quite affordable in comparison to hiring a web technician to locate and fix similar possible existing errors. The website also contains many detailed tutorial videos that help the user to understand what errors are found, how to correct them, and the benefits of doing so.

After running a trial crawl of the A+ Storage website using Deep Crawl, several errors were found including: 6 duplicate page descriptions, low ration of content to HTML, thin content pages, duplicate page titles, short description or meta tags, and slow loading page times. This was determined through a minimum trial crawl of the website and does not mean that the errors contained within the A+ Storage website are limited to these alone. A full Deep Crawl of the website could result in more errors that can be located and fixed in order to improve performance.

The majority of the errors detected can be easily corrected. The 6 duplicate page descriptions, duplicate page titles and short Meta tags are hindering the index capabilities of the website's individual pages. This makes the pages located within the website less likely to be optimized by Google Search, as Google is unable to distinguish one page from another. This is simply due to inadequate titles and descriptions given to each individual page. The multiple pages located within the A+ Storage website need to be differentiated from each other with individual titles and descriptions for each page.

The rest of the errors located by the Deep Crawl are mostly due to lack of content. Each page located within the A+ Storage website needs to have its own unique content in order for it to be more easily recognized and indexed by Google. Each page with a less than 10 percent minimum content to HTML ratio, or with a less than minimum 3KB content size will require more content to be

considered of value. 7 out of 9 pages crawled within the A+ Storage website contained less than 10 percent minimum content to HTML ratio. 9 out of 9 pages contained less than the minimum required 3KB of content. The website as a whole needs more unique content (photos, videos, text, blogs, JavaScript, call to action buttons or forms, etc.) in order to be considered of value to Google, and to improve the index capabilities, user experience, page load times, and SEO.

Pay Per Click (PPC) and Cost Per Click (CPC) Advertising

Pay Per Click, or PPC Advertising is another useful option to consider either in conjunction with your current search engine optimization strategies. PPC Advertising offers opportunity for the business to completely customize their advertising medium, target market, creative design and copy, timeframe for which the advertisement will be displayed, and budget, based on how much the business is willing to pay for the display. This type of advertising campaign is available through a multitude of Internet mediums, including Google, Yahoo, Clicksor, AdEngage, etc., as well as various social media sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+, and Twitter.

Cost Per Click (CPC) is a method of PPC Advertising that allows businesses to create and run free initial advertising, charging the business instead based on the amount of clicks each ad receives, rather than simply to display the ad. This is a much more popular and affordable method of PPC Advertising that the majority of businesses are utilizing today, since it creates more customization and budgeting options and can generate a much higher conversion rate and ROI. Internet advertising mediums such as Google AdWords are extremely effective for CPC Advertising, allowing businesses to plan their keyword strategy to best fit their companies search criteria, and allows them to bid higher on more effective keywords and less on negative keywords or low performance keywords that would drain their advertising budget with less results. Google AdWords provides extensive data and customization options for the advertising business to manage their campaign in extreme detail.

Choosing the Right Medium

With so many different Internet websites offering PPC/CPC Advertising, It is not uncommon to question which is the best option for your particular business.

The answer may not be an easy one to decide without a vast trial and error strategy, but there are many pros and cons that can aid in making the right decision.

Google AdWords is by far the most popular, widely used, and extensive platform for PPC/CPC Advertising. Other pros exist in the large amount of coverage and volume offered by Google, as well as its strength in first page ad placement, seeing as it is the largest Internet search engine. However, AdWords can also be quite expensive for CPC in comparison to other sites, due to the high competition in keyword bidding. AdWords is also very highly extensive in detail and data breakdown, which can be quite helpful to an experienced user, but can be difficult for many small business owners to learn, understand, and manage.

Other PPC/CPC Platforms such as **Yahoo**, **Facebook**, and **Advertising.com**, often offer less expensive keyword bidding, multiple targeting options, and can be easier to learn and receive clear customer service assistance with your campaign than attempting to contact Google for assistance. However, the average CTR (Click Through Rate), conversion rates, and search volume may be considerably lower in comparison to Google AdWords.

Overview of Digital Marketing Recommendations for A+ Storage

- Consider revamping the A+ Storage website design or starting fresh with a new design that creates a unique and memorable user experience, while remaining clean, fresh, and easy to navigate.
- Develop lots of creative, informative, useful, and interactive content for your website that will keep the user involved and keep the bounce rate low.
- Make sure every page has its own unique titles, Meta description tags, and unique content so that it can easily be differentiated and indexed by the Google Search Algorithm.
- Use Deep Crawl to locate errors and other performance issues within your website in order to maximize speed, performance, SEO, and user experience.
- Develop a unique and creative social media marketing campaign using sites such as Facebook, Instagram, Yelp, and more to deliver creative and innovative content to potential and current customers, in order to build an online reputation and stand out from the competition.

- Utilize PPC/CPC Advertising using Google AdWords, Facebook, and other digital advertising platforms in order to fully customize your ads with specific target market, location, and budget.
- Plan and choose your keywords carefully using Google AdWords keyword planner to maximize your ROI and Click through rate at a minimal cost.
- Build online relationships with current customers, potential customers, and other businesses to increase awareness of your business and create a positive buzz.