

Case Study: Portable On Demand Storage

Portable On Demand Storage (PODS®) is revolutionizing the moving and storage industry through the power of mobility!

Storage has always been fixed. You go to a storage location and you put your stuff into the storage container or building. When you want your stuff again, you go back to where you stored it and you get it out.

That sounds simple enough – and we've been willing to put up with that model forever because we couldn't imagine any other approach. The founders of PODS were able to see well beyond the assumption that storage is always fixed.

In 1998, by taking something that had always been fixed, and making it mobile, the company created tremendous new value for people needing to store or move their stuff:

- Saving customers time and money.
- Making both on-site and dry storage more convenient and accessible for the customer.
- Eliminating many of the complexities and stress associated with moving and storage.
- Putting customers in control of how they moved and stored their belongings, with as much or as little help packing as they wanted.
- Making moving and storage safer and more secure.
- Creating a totally different relationship between the customer and her moving/storage company – one based on superior service and trust.

(http://www.pods.com/subpages/about_pods.asp)

Today, PODS offers service to over 200 million people in more than 20,000 cities in 53 states, provinces, and territories throughout the United States, Canada, and Australia. In 2006, the company rolled out its 100,000th PODS brand storage container and served its 500,000th customer reservation. (PODS press release "PODS® Inc. – Announces Over 500,000 Customer Reservations and 100,000 Containers in Service – Expands National Service Market" May 17, 2006, http://www.pods.com/press.asp?rls_id=8)

This phenomenal growth has come from taking a service that has always been assumed to be fixed and making it mobile.

PODS introduced the concept of portable storage containers that are delivered to the customer. With PODS, the customer packs the storage container at their leisure and doesn't have to worry about finding a friend with a pickup truck or making lots of trips back and forth to the storage location. When the container is fully loaded, PODS comes and picks it up again, taking it to the PODS warehouse. When the customer is ready to unpack, at the original or their new location, PODS delivers the container and once again, the customer has complete control over unloading at their convenience and with minimal effort. (http://www.pods.com/subpages/PODS_Innovations_Page.asp?navid=&id=8)

Of course, there's a reason that storage has always been non-mobile.

For one thing, storage buildings are designed to withstand the weather. Part of PODS' innovation has been to create a portable container that is as weather-resistant as a fixed-location storage building. PODS containers come in two sizes: 8 feet by 8 feet by 12 feet and 8 feet by 8 feet by 16 feet. They are made with steel frame construction, a marine grade wood interior and aluminum skin exterior. They are designed to

withstand winds up to 110 miles per hour.
(http://www.pods.com/subpages/PODS_Innovations_Page.asp?navid=&id=8)

For another thing, once I pile my boxes of eight-track cartridges on top of my old dorm room sofa and lay my ten speed bike on top of all of that, I'm not sure jerking that big box around is such a wise idea. Packing a PODS container may require a bit more care and wisdom than throwing stuff into a fixed storage building, but to minimize the challenges, PODS invented the Podzilla lift and transport system – a hydraulic system that picks up the storage container and keeps it as steady as possible during transportation to and from the warehouse. (http://www.pods.com/subpages/PODS_Innovations_Page.asp?navid=&id=8)

Finally, when I take my stuff to a storage building, I know exactly where it is. When the PODS truck drives off with all my stuff, how do I know where it's going?

"By definition, we are a business on the move," notes Peter S. Warhurst, president and CEO of PODS. "Keeping track of the containers holding our customers' precious belongings and our drivers could only be met with an innovative wireless solution."

PODS has implemented a solution that increases customer peace of mind. The company's 700 drivers and 200 warehouse staff use a mobile device from Motorola, wireless services and Advanced Wireless Solutions from Sprint Nextel, and software custom designed by PODS to keep a constant eye on each customer's container throughout the entire process. The solution incorporates bar code scanning, customer signature capture, and GPS technologies to tie together containers to customers to precise location information. At any point in time, the company knows exactly where every container is. Since most of the time, those containers are either at the customer's location or in the PODS limited-access warehouse, customers can feel more comfortable that their precious belongings are safe and secure than in traditional storage facilities. (Sprint press release "Sprint Extends Advanced Wireless Solutions to PODS to Enhance Its Delivery Capability" draft February 2007)

"We know our business and have developed the systems that create our sustainable business advantage," observes Tammy Carr VP of Corporate Training & Development for PODS and executive lead of the project. "But we wanted a partner who knows wireless and knew how to combine the right communications technologies to deliver a solution that meets our business needs. Sprint brought that value to our partnership."

PODS is also leveraging these technologies to be as responsive as possible to customer requests. When a customer requests their container out of the warehouse, the company can instantly locate the container and, as quickly as possible, load it onto a truck. On every trip to customer locations, drivers are guided by GPS-enabled voice navigation to ensure the most efficient route and to eliminate wasted time searching for an address. Drivers are also provided with precise customer information to ensure authorized transfer of the containers to each customer. (Sprint press release "Sprint Extends Advanced Wireless Solutions to PODS to Enhance Its Delivery Capability" draft February 2007)

"Our technology platform ensures that deliveries and pick-ups are on-time," said Peter. "This provides control and visibility into the customer experience from start to finish: from quoting and booking to final delivery, resulting in a worry-free experience for the customer."

PODS introduced the wireless solution to nearly 1000 personnel in over 150 company-owned and franchise locations. This user population had very diverse levels of technology skills, technical support staff, and buy-in to the program.

"Training was essential to meet the needs of teaching a typically computer illiterate delivery driver team on the use of the handheld device," Tammy recalls. "We met that need by using a variety of technology-based training tools such as simulation training, webinars, and our on-line University of PODS Virtual Classroom. Location management teams were supported by a "T-minus-21-day" Countdown to Success Calendar of Events and CD based 'Managers Toolkit.' The Corporate Training team prepared warehouse and delivery teams before the handhelds arrived to ensure success and an expedient launch."

The wireless solution has resulted in measurable improvements in efficiency and has been well received by most employees and locations.

"We are a company not unfamiliar with using technology as a solution to improvement," concludes Tammy. "Obviously we believe in the power of mobility and we look forward to continued improvement in our process efficiencies and asset management while pushing the wireless technology envelope wide open!"

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