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Storage Units: the good, the bad, the costly

By Jennifer Raftis



Professional Organizer, Jennifer Raftis, CPOR founded Efficiency Matters, LLC to help you with all of your organizing needs for your home and business. She is a Certified Professional Organizer and an active board member with NAPO, National Association of Productivity and Organizing Professionals. She is also an independent representative for The Container Store and has expertise in designing closets, garages, pantries, playrooms and more. In addition, she is a Corporate Organizing and Productivity Consultant and has worked with Fortune 500 companies across the U.S. Another large part of her business is move management especially working with seniors who are downsizing. She and her husband have lived in Moraga for 30 years, raising 3 kids and working countless volunteer hours with many local non-profit organizations and schools. Jennifer@efficiencymattersllc.com, 925-698-3756 www.efficiencymattersllc.com are paying for the monthly storage.

Longer-term Storage - If you find yourself needing a longer-term storage unit, be very mindful of how you arrange your items inside the unit. The labels on your boxes should have details about what is inside and absolutely must face outward so you can read them. It can be very helpful to set up storage racks inside the unit for easy retrieval.

The Bad - Situations that might not need storage

I find that many of my clients rent a storage unit with the best intentions, often thinking it's just a temporary fix, but then end up paying for years and years of storage. Often, my clients have limited room in their home to store all of their possessions and they move items to storage because they are not ready to let go.

Here is what I frequently find inside a client's storage unit: Books, even paperback novels (Instead, keep a

The first modern self-storage facilities began to appear in the 1960s. The original purpose for these units was for temporary storage needs such as moving, marrying or divorcing, death in the family/passed down heirlooms, or kids transitioning to their own homes.

As a professional organizer, I have insight into both the good reasons to rent a storage unit, as well as the pitfalls of delayed decisions and storing items indefinitely, and have some strategies for maximizing the use and efficiency of your space.

The Good: Situations that absolutely need temporary storage

There are several good reasons to rent a storage unit.

In Transition - A client who had lived in her 3-bedroom home in Orinda for 40 years wanted to downsize, but she had not had time to find a new home. We packed up the items she wanted to keep and moved them into storage. I carefully arranged the storage unit so she could have easy access in the front of the unit to the items she might need during the transition and put the rest in the back. She moved into a temporary residence and three months later found a home to purchase.

Remodeling - Another reason to use storage is when you are remodeling your home. As a bonus, when you are packing up for the storage unit, it gives you a chance to carefully pare down your belongings and decide what you really want to keep. You will be more mindful about what comes back into your home.

Inherited - When you inherit items from your parents, there are raw emotions to consider and you might not be ready to go through all of the items right away. You may also have several siblings that you need to coordinate with so everyone can decide together. Remember, there are probably boxes and boxes of physical photos that need to be sorted. Storing inherited items for a short period of time can help ease the stress.

Valuable Collections - Another example of a good storage need would be to hold onto a valuable collection that you don't have room to keep at home but are in the process of selling or would like to sell. Collections need to be cataloged, researched and sold (often piece by piece). You might want to consider selling the collection as quickly as possible as the value could decrease as you

spreadsheet of "books you have read or want to read"); clothes, clothes, clothes, and more clothes (Do these even fit?); old broken furniture (Can you purchase new furniture for less?); items too expensive to donate (Delaying decision on donating can be costly); record albums; old childhood toys; artwork; memorabilia; trophies, bikes (It's hard to ride a bike when it's in storage.); and musical instruments on the off chance they might be played one day.

If you decide to rent a storage unit, there are several types of units to consider: traditional self-storage units that are located in a storage facility that are either a drive-up unit or ones you need an elevator to reach; mobile storage containers that can be parked on your driveway or shipped to another location; pickup and return storage where companies offer to come pack and load the unit and will deliver it back to your home when you are ready.

The Cost - Most people will keep their units longer than they intended. Except for a few situations, the reason is often delayed decisions, which can be costly. The cost of the storage units depend on size, location within the building and of course, your zip code. A 7-foot by 7-foot unit in an upstairs location will cost about \$224 per month or \$2,688 per year. Multiply that by 5 years and you have spent \$13,440.

I urge you to do the math and I dare you to list all of the items you have in your storage unit. Do you even know what's in there?

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