

Phuket's First Self Storage



It was not the downturn within the property sector that caused the managers of real estate brokers Home2Thailand Exclusive Real Estate, Mr Robert Akerblom and his partner in life and business Miss Sukanda Chiaranussati, to diversify their business. The idea for their new venture rather came up based on an expressed need from their client base on Phuket – a need for proper storage.

By Joakim Persson

“About two years ago it dawned on us that there was commercial need for quality storage on Phuket, which had developed to the stage where additional infrastructure and services were demanded. With a growing number of local businesses, visitors and a residential real estate market that has been booming our initial findings told us that self storage as a service should be successful in a location as Phuket.” says Managing Director Sukanda.

“Among many of our real estate customers that where either buying, selling, letting out, renting within any property transaction - there was an expressed demand for this type of service,” says General Manager of StoreGuard, Robert Åkerblom.

With that they started research and sowing the seeds which recently resulted in that the island's first self storage facility saw the light in August of 2010, MY STORAGE - Secure, Clean & Cost Effective Self Storage.

They were both accustomed to the concept of self storage from back west, having used it extensively themselves when living in the USA, England and Sweden.

The concept is widely spread within the Sun Belt region of the USA, resort areas, urban areas in Europe and anywhere else where

the market fluctuates and the population for various reasons is transient – just like on Phuket.

“In Phuket people come and go with an increasing number of proper snow birds. It's exactly like in the southern parts of the USA and that's where the need for storage comes in,” Robert explains. “A typical client buys consumer goods and move quite frequently. For instance, a tenant might rent a place that is furnished but have brought their own inventory, so they'll need some place to store, at first part of what was in the dwelling and later their own belongings for next season when they are returning to the island. Or they may have invested in a property that's not yet complete but already have belongings. Some are up or downsizing while others are letting out their property short or long term.”

Their research also showed that communities in warmer climate zones require a larger number of storages space as more time is spent outdoors and one tend to own more recreational equipment. Villas or apartments with little or no storage area also impacts how much storage space the market will demand.

Clearly the business community is a core sector for My Storage since their first facility is strategically located in an annex to the Jungceylon Shopping Center in Patong.

Retail businesses within and in the surroundings of this shopping centre are current customers (storing inventory and equipment) as well as companies in the process of moving, up- or downsizing.

Many firms also want to avoid long-term commitments and have flexibility.

They can for instance store archived company files in order to free up precious office space or use it for storage and distribution of products, marketing etc.

My Storage also offers self storage for businesses looking for larger bespoke storage units of up to 25 square metres with 24 hours drive up access.

“We selected Jungceylon as the location for our flag ship facility in order to be in the most sought after mixed-use development in Phuket where a broad range of services are offered attracting large numbers of visitors,” says Robert.

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"One of the factors is that there are many local sales representatives for clothing, furniture and cosmetics companies etc. that bring goods to the island that is being sold or promoted in and around Jungceylon. Which other storage alternatives were previously offered? The rental of shop houses, which meant long-term commitment, questionable security and higher costs. These days companies strive for a more streamlined, just-in-time approach and only keep stock for imminent distribution. Our rental terms are very flexible and clients can at any time increase or decrease their unit sizes."

"Business today fluctuates rapidly and need flexibility in how to move stock and in controlling costs especially in Phuket being so seasonal. So what we offer is seen as a very cost-effective storage solution" adds Sukanda.

"Location-wise we looked for an urban retail environment as in Patong where businesses and individuals conveniently could rely on our type of storage. We also wanted to service densely populated surrounding areas in need of storage space."

In Asia self storage is a relatively recent service industry where Thais may not be all that familiar with the concept of self storage.

"There's a difference between managed storage and self storage when you manage the space yourself. In self storage you don't share an open space with everyone else. You have your own individual unit, own lock and own access code."

"The Thailand population is familiar with the concept of storing goods even if they haven't been exposed to our version. Given time the broader market will also catch on to self storage," says Robert. "Our research tells us that it is feasible but will require a more informative and educational marketing approach being a green field market. The beauty of self storage is that once you have become accustomed to this kind of service it will become a lifestyle choice."

After the opening of My Storage on Phuket their expansion plans aims at urban areas such as Bangkok, Hua Hin and Pattaya.

The mother company, Store-Guard Co. Ltd., will in parallel act as a turnkey developer and management company of self storage facilities for parties interested in entering the Thai self storage market.

And they will continue working at their real estate brokerage firm under the somewhat unfortunate Thai real estate market conditions.





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