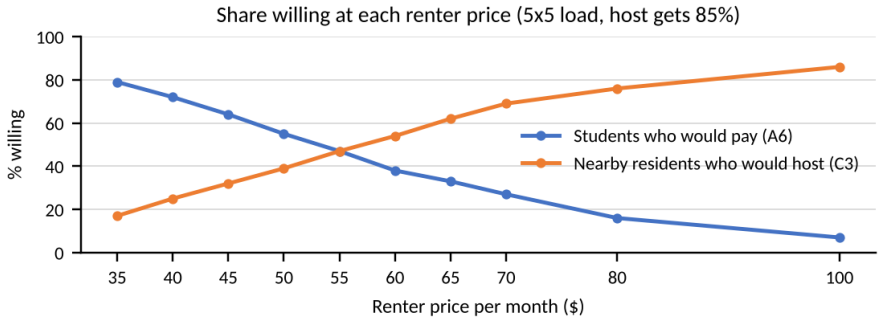
Storage Buddy: USC case

Pratyush Singh, 16 October 2026

1. Is there a market? Yes, but a narrow one, at around $55 a month

I lined up the most students would pay (A6) against the least hosts would accept after Storage Buddy's 15% (B3, C3). Assuming people are spread evenly within each price band, the two sides meet at about $55 for a 5x5 load: roughly 47% of interested students would pay that, and the host's $47 works for about 47% of nearby residents (43% of student hosts).



Why I think it is real: 24% of the students surveyed already paid for storage last summer, and the international student was paying $110 a month for a unit they only half used. USC itself offers no storage, most housing contracts end on the same day in May, and anything left behind gets thrown out.

Why I would be careful:

- $100 isn't really the competition. Two facilities on Broadway list a 5x5 (Sparefoot, 14 Oct) at $57–73 a month plus a $29 fee, so at $55 we are only about 15–30% cheaper. Price alone won't win; price plus a vetted host close to campus might. Those were the top three things students asked for in A5 (55, 45 and 33 of 76).
- These are stated prices. People usually pay less than they say in surveys, so I'd treat $55 as the middle of a $45–60 range to test, not a final number.
- Margins are thin. After card and payout fees Storage Buddy keeps roughly $22–24 per four-month booking, so this first summer is about proving a playbook, not making money.

2. How I would proceed

Start with students who have to empty their room in May (64 of the 100), especially international and out-of-state students, and build supply within about two miles of the dorms before marketing to renters. This follows what you learned in the pilot: hosts first, and the platform sets the price.

- **Now to February: sign ~50 hosts and test the host price ($300).** That is roughly what 150 bookings needs at 4 loads per garage. Most homes around campus are rented, so I'd target owners and property managers with several garages. Half get offered $38 a load and half $47, to see where sign-ups drop off. The first 20 get $10 once their listing is photo-checked ($200, plus ~$100 of flyers), and every host gets $15 from the fee at their first booking, so they have a reason to stay listed while they wait.
- **January to March: pre-sell with $10 refundable deposits instead of ads ($400).** The pitch: a vetted host minutes from campus at about half the price of a unit. Push it through international and out-of-state student groups, RAs, housing group chats and one table in March. Referrals earn booking credit rather than cash, to keep Stripe payouts simple. If we don't have ~75 deposits by mid-March, I'd revisit price or segment before spending more.
- **December: dry-run the whole thing with 5–10 students leaving at semester end ($300).** Charge upfront, include an abandonment clause, and do one van day with a $15–20 pickup add-on. It is the cheapest way to find out what breaks before May.

3. What is wrong with the research

- **The samples are skewed.** Two WhatsApp groups gave us 52% in university housing, far above USC overall (under 7,000 undergraduate beds for 20,000+ undergraduates). All 20 hosts came from one Facebook group and all said yes, which tells us nothing about how many would actually sign up.
- **Several questions push toward yes.** A3 basically asks “would you like something cheaper and easier?” Price was only asked of the 76 yes/maybes (just 31 were a firm yes), the bands are wide, and a “5x5 load” is hard to picture.
- **What we didn't ask:** where students are from, what they actually stored and paid last year, how many boxes, whether they have a car, move-out and return dates, and who pays (student or parents). For hosts: landlord permission, whether their insurance covers it, whether they'd accept a set price, and whether they'd stay listed for 3+ months with no bookings. And who covers damage: 15 of 20 hosts want cover, but only 7 of 76 renters asked for it.
- **Next round:** ~300 students with quotas by housing, year and residency; ~50 hosts, including people who say no; and interviews with past storage customers and a few local landlords. I'd show fixed prices ($45 / $55 / $65) instead of open bands, and count deposits rather than opinions.