

Craigslist Crash Course for Real Estate Agents



...an overview to the world's biggest, free classified ad network and how to use it for real estate marketing.

Provided by:
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Craigslist Crash Course for Real Estate Agents

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Dear Real Estate Professional,

If someone told you there was an easy, free way to put your listings on a website which received literally millions of visitors each month, wouldn't you at least consider it? You'd be crazy *not* to! What would be the downside?

Well, there is such a site, and it's called Craigslist. (<http://www.craigslist.org>).

We were surprised to find out how many real estate agents have heard about Craigslist, but didn't know anything about how to use it (or how it can even be effective in driving traffic to their own website!). That's why we put together this free guide.

While individual experiences vary for agents using Craigslist (you can hear them sing its praises as well as bemoan its shortcomings), we think you should test it out for yourself.

This helpful guide will give you a “crash course” in how to use Craigslist to market your listings and help drive traffic to your website.

I hope this valuable information furthers your real estate business, allowing you to prosper.

Sincerely cheering you toward real estate success,

Scott Levitt
Oakley Signs & Graphics
<http://www.oakleysign.com>



What is Craigslist?

Craig Newmark began the service in 1995 as an email distribution list of friends, featuring local events in the San Francisco Bay Area, before becoming a web-based service in 1996. After incorporation as a private for-profit company in 1999, Craigslist expanded into nine more U.S. cities in 2000, four each in 2001 and 2002, and 14 in 2003.

As of April 2009, Craigslist has established itself in approximately 570 cities in 50 countries. It has since become the largest online classifieds website in the world. It boasts over 50 million unique monthly visitors in the United States.

Craigslist's enormous popularity stems from its ability to connect buyers and sellers (as well as employers and job seekers) directly with one another for zero or very low cost. The no-frills design, fast loading pages, and well-organized categories makes using Craigslist exceedingly simple.

What Can Craigslist Do for Me?

Many of the "50 million unique monthly visitors" are on Craigslist looking to buy, sell, and rent property.

Advertising real estate properties is *free* on Craigslist... for agents as well as for clients themselves. It is free to posting and/or respond to these ads. (Please note: The one market that recently began charging a fee for posting ads is New York City, which charges \$10 for rental listings.)

Depending on the market, you can often generate a fair amount of leads for your listings or open houses by posting on the site. It's important to remember that Craigslist is searchable by anyone, anywhere—meaning out-of-towners looking to relocate may see your ads on Craigslist versus localized publications in your market.

How You Can Use Craigslist to Sell Real Estate

Choose your market

To get started, you first must decide which cities or markets to post in. It's a good idea to go to that city's listings, both to see which areas need property listings as well as to check out the competition.

Choose the type of listing

The real estate section of Craigslist is already divided into specific sections for:

- apartments/housing
- rooms/shared
- sublets/temporary
- housing wanted
- housing swaps
- vacation rentals
- parking/storage
- office/commercial
- **real estate for sale**

Decide on individual ads or a single ad with multiple listings

Once you've determined where you want to place your ad, you can create separate ads for each of your listings, or simply blend them into 1 single combination ad, listing all of the properties you have available in the area.

Most people would prefer to have individual listings, simply because it allows them to have a larger selection of ads on Craigslist. One strategy is to post one ad per day for a week or so, which makes sure that you have a listing on the front page of the correct section for most days of the week. Be aware, however, that this means you'll have to keep track of multiple ads. One good way to do this is to keep an Excel spreadsheet with your listings and the links to their corresponding Craigslist ads.

Regardless of the type of ad you decide to create (don't worry—it's very easy to do), you should make sure you include links to your own website... you *do* have a website dedicated solely to your real estate business, don't you? (And we don't mean a page on your office's site... we mean your own!) If you don't, you might want to check out some of the other free guides on FreeHelpForRealEstateAgents.com.

Screenshot example of Craigslist's Real Estate - San Francisco:

SF bay area craigslist > city of san francisco > real estate - all [[help](#)] [[post](#)]

all SF bay area **san francisco** south bay east bay peninsula north bay santa cruz

search for: in: real estate - all Search only search titles

price: min max 0+ BR all neighborhoods has image

[Fri, 22 May 14:58:54] [[stating a discriminatory preference in a housing post is illegal](#)] [[housing forum](#)]
 [[PERSONAL SAFETY TIPS](#)] [[AVOIDING SCAMS & FRAUD](#)]
 [[success story?](#)]

Fri May 22

[\\$499000 / 1br - Glassworks Gem! Top Floor Mission Bay Condo! 1Br/1Ba/1Prk~ A Must See!](#) - (SOMA / south beach) [img](#) <<[real estate - by broker](#)

[\\$2795000 / 3br - Open House at The Ritz Carlton Sunday May 24th 2 to 4 PM](#) - (financial district) [img](#)
 <<[real estate - by broker](#)

[\\$181 pleasing Study, Bonus Room.](#) - (bayview) <<[real estate - by owner](#)

[\\$2749000 / 5br - Knock your socks off view home! Remodeled 5Br/5.5Ba/2Prk](#) - (castro / upper market) [img](#)
 <<[real estate - by broker](#)

[\\$768000 / 3br - Large Remodeled Home - Open SUN 5/24 from 2-4pm](#) - (excelsior / outer mission) [pic](#)
 <<[real estate - by broker](#)

[\\$450000 \\$16,000 Rental Income/Month Huge Profit Potential 40 Units](#) - <<[real estate - by owner](#)

[\\$719 / 2br - Inner Mission Edwardian Condo~2br/1ba/1prk~Near Everything!](#) - (mission district) [img](#)
 <<[real estate - by broker](#)

[2br - Simple Search Feature\(s\) / building - neighborhood - MAP](#) - (San Francisco-SOMA-South Beach)
 <<[real estate - by broker](#)

[\\$799000 / 3br - Top Floor Remodeled Edwardian Condo in the Inner Mission! 3br/1ba/1prk](#) - (mission district) [img](#)
 <<[real estate - by broker](#)

How to Create the Best Craigslist Ad

These ads are straightforward, mostly simple text. They don't require any special web designing experience, and are easy to create. Your ad should:

- Start with a good title, to grab people's attention. **Avoid ALL CAPS and !!!!!**, as these generally detract from the level of sophistication in the ad (translation: it can make you sound stupid... a bad "first impression").
- Be descriptive and use colorful language to describe the property. Being specific is a plus. "Really charming kitchen" is not a specific description. Try: "Freshly refinished art deco kitchen with granite countertops" instead.
- Don't forget to include square footage, upgrades, yard accessibility, any special amenities or unique features.
- **Be sure to avoid discriminatory language**... you are prohibited from referring to the ethnic makeup of an area (i.e., "mostly Russian neighborhood), or from using exclusionary language (i.e., "no inquiries from homosexuals")... such practices can result in hefty fines!

Be certain to read about the Fair Housing Act, as posted on Craigslist:

<http://www.craigslist.org/about/FHA>



- Feature a good, clear photograph(s) of the property; you can either include these in the ad, or link to them on another website (hint: link them to your *own* website!)

Power Tip: Images that show the property off and highlight its strongest features can increase the response rate by up to 200%, and photographs can be effortlessly uploaded during the posting process.

- Include all of the applicable contact information—meaning all of the ways you are going to respond *almost immediately* to an inquiry. If you have an automated “call capture” hotline, you might consider advertising it in the ad as well.
- Lastly, make sure to include keywords (i.e., the property type, some of its key features, its location, etc.) that people might search for when looking for your property’s region or style. Search results are listed by the date first, then by the keywords. Some ideas include the “local” name of the neighborhood as well as any prominent local features within a reasonable distance of the property.
- It is worth noting that if you have a webmaster or computer person who helps you update your website, that Craigslist ads can include well-designed, HTML ads that go beyond “basic text.” You might consider having your webmaster handle these for you, if you are too busy to do it yourself.

Sample screenshot of an “ad posting” form:

SF bay area craigslist > san francisco > real estate - by broker

Price: \$ # BR: Posting Title: - (cole valley / ashbury hts)

Reply to: Your email address Type email address again
 show hide anonymize (will show as: hous-xxxxxxx@craigslist.org)^[2]

Posting Description:

Street:(number not necessary): Nearest Cross Street: City: State:

How to Post an Ad: Five Easy Steps

With some minor variations, here's how to post an ad to craigslist:

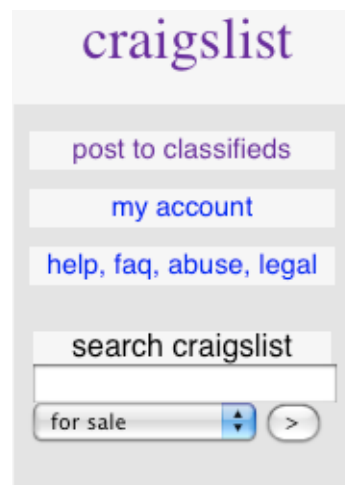
Step 1:

Go to Craigslist.org and select the market you'd like to post your ad in. (Sometimes it will automatically select a market for you, based on your internet connection.)

craigslist	us cities	united states	canada	asia	europa	int'l cities	
help pages	atlanta	alabama	missouri	alberta	bangladesh	austria	amsterdam
login	austin	alaska	montana	brit columbia	china	belgium	athens
factsheet	boston	arizona	nebraska	manitoba	india	czech repub	bangalore
avoid scams	chicago	arkansas	nevada	n brunswick	indonesia	denmark	bangkok
your safety	dallas	california	n hampshire	new & lab	israel	finland	beijing
best-ofs	denver	colorado	new jersey	nova scotia	japan	france	barcelona
blog	detroit	connecticut	new mexico	ontario	korea	germany	berlin
job boards	houston	delaware	new york	pei	lebanon	great britain	buenos aires
movie	las vegas	dc	n carolina	quebec	malaysia	greece	delhi
t-shirts	los angeles	florida	north dakota	saskatchwn	pakistan	hungary	dublin
foundation	miami	georgia	ohio	ca cities	philippines	ireland	hong kong
terms of use	minneapolis	guam	oklahoma	calgary	singapore	italy	london
privacy	new york	hawaii	oregon	edmonton	taiwan	netherlands	madrid
about us	orange co	illinois	pennsylvania	halifax	thailand	norway	manila
	philadelphia	indiana	puerto rico	montreal	UAE	poland	mexico
	phoenix	iowa	rhode island	ottawa	vietnam	portugal	moscow
	portland	kansas	s carolina	quebec	americas	russia	paris
	raleigh	kentucky	south dakota	toronto	argentina	spain	rio de janeiro
	sacramento	louisiana	tennessee	vancouver	brazil	sweden	rome
	san diego	maine	utah	victoria	caribbean	switzerland	seoul
	seattle	maryland	vermont	winnipeg	chile	turkey	shanghai
	sf bayarea	mass	virginia	more ..	colombia	UK	singapore
	st louis	michigan	washington	au/nz	costa rica	africa	sydney
	wash dc	minnesota	west virginia	australia	mexico	egypt	tel aviv
	more ..	mississippi	wisconsin	micronesia	panama	south africa	tokyo
			wyoming	new zealand	peru		zurich
					venezuela		

Step 2:

Click “Post to Classifieds.” This is in the top left corner of the screen. Note that you may also easily setup your own account, which makes managing your posts easier.

**Step 3:**

Select “Housing Offered”:

What type of posting is this:

- [job offered](#)
- [resume / job wanted](#)
- [housing offered](#)
- [housing wanted](#)
- [for sale](#) (please review this partial list of [prohibited items](#))
- [item wanted](#)
- [gig offered](#) (I'm hiring for a for a short-term, small, or odd job)
- [service offered](#)
- [personal / romance](#)
- [community](#)
- [event](#)

Step 4:

Click the “Real Estate by Broker” link:

Please choose a category:

- [rooms and shares](#)
- [apts/housing for rent](#) (no shares, roommates, or sublets please!)
- [housing swap](#)
- [office & commercial](#)
- [parking & storage](#)
- [real estate - by broker](#)
- [real estate - by owner](#)
- [sublets & temporary](#)
- [vacation rentals](#)

Step 5:

Fill out the required green fields for your ad, including your ad’s title, your description, and email address.

SF bay area craigslist > san francisco > real estate - by broker

Price: \$ # BR: Posting Title: - (cole valley / ashbury hts)

Reply to: Your email address Type email address again

show hide anonymize (will show as: hous-xxxxxxx@craigslist.org) ^[2]

Posting Description:

Street:(number not necessary):Nearest Cross Street:City: State:

What happens next:

Once you've filled out the information, you'll be sent email by Craigslist which will ask you to confirm your post and approve it for publication on the site. Follow any instructions you receive carefully, or your post will not appear on the site.

If you do not receive email from Craigslist, check your "Spam" and/or "Junk Mail" folders to make sure it didn't get automatically removed from your Inbox.

Once you've published the ad, according to the instructions you will receive from Craigslist, you will be able to see your ad on the site. Next, get ready to respond to inquiries!

Additional ideas:

When posting on Craigslist, it's often a great idea to make sure that you have links *directly to your own website*. This means driving traffic from your ads to your larger blog/home page, so you can start building a relationship with prospective buyers in your market.

Another way you can consider using Craigslist ads is to make sure you include any information about the open houses you're conducting for the properties listed on the site.



Follow the Rules

Bear in mind, Craigslist is a community. Its users prefer to buy and sell to other people in that community, people they can trust.

Therefore it is very important that before you post an ad there, you familiarize yourself with, and then of course *follow*, the Craigslist guidelines.

The site's forums are very active, as well; forums are a great place to become a member of the Craigslist community, to build credibility, trust, and to interact with potential clients.

Craigslist is very protective of its users, so the rules and guidelines are set up to prohibit spamming and over-posting. But you can still manage to get outstanding exposure. (In the section below you'll find some helpful hints on how).

- You can't post the same ad within 48 hours
- You must be certain to delete your old ad if it has not expired already
- Do not try to "spam" multiple cities with the same advertisement

Again, Craigslist is a community... its savvy users can be quick to flag someone who has not followed the guidelines. The community is *very* good at recognizing spam or frequent re-posts, and you will hurt your business if you disregard the community's rules. Once their trust has been violated and your credibility has been tarnished, it's tough to get back in the community's good graces.

How to Re-post Your Ad: A Few Hints

When you post your ad, it will remain on Craigslist for either 7 or 45 days (depending on the city). You want to stay on the first page if possible -- many viewers don't scroll past the first page, so you'll lose traffic if you get bumped to the subsequent pages.

This isn't as big of an issue with real estate as it is with other types of classified ads, however. Since real estate is a major investment, many times visitors will dig deeper than the average visitor. However, many Craigslist visitors consider old postings to be out of date or inaccurate, so it's a good idea not to "post and abandon" your ads.

That said, the problem is you're only allowed to post the same ad in more than 1 city every 48 hours. One way around this is to design several ads for the same property but each with variations on the text and possibly the links to images. You can also opt to use a different (but valid!) email address for each ad.

You should repost at least every 48 hours, to make sure the new people who come to Craigslist all the time see your ad first. Try concentrating on specific listings and revolving them on a semi-weekly promotional schedule. If you have a registered account with Craigslist, it is very easy to repost your ads.

Some people automate the re-posting process, by using underground reposting services or purchasing a script. However, Craigslist does not sanction these methods.

Again: Remember, people hate spam – buyers can make judgments or decisions about you as an agent, a seller, or even about the property in question if you post more than once a day, per city and category. **With this active community, you don't want to come across as overly eager, desperate, pushy, or too assertive.**

How to Use Craigslist Safely

The anonymous nature of Craigslist is also the reason buyers have to be wary, and should take measures to protect themselves against fraud.

Because it has no seller or member rating system, it can be a haven for scam artists. A few general guidelines include:

- speak with each prospect via phone
- schedule first meetings in public places, where other people will be
- trust your instincts when communicating, and don't give away any sensitive information without verifying the prospect's identity

In terms of real estate, the rise of rental fraud is yet another result of the troubled housing market. There are many "accidental" landlords at the moment, as well as properties being rented by third parties. So smart renters are now doing their due diligence, to be sure they are not victims of fraud.

If you are involved in rentals as well, you can expect potential renters (and buyers, for that matter) to ask themselves the following:

- *Is the agent real?* Potential renters/buyers may contact you and ask for your state license number. Let them know they can confirm that number at ARELLO.org, the site of licensing officials. They may ask to meet you at you office, before meeting them at the property. Don't be offended by this; the customers are simply guarding their safety, and against fraud.
- *Is the landlord real?* If renting from a homeowner, they can check property records to make sure the landlord and owner's names match. They should visit the property and ask neighbors for information about the home and its landlord. They can contact law enforcement and community sites to see if there have been any complaints about the landlord.

- *Is the property real?* Potential buyers should look for your listing on other local and national real estate sites. They may ask you for comps, so they'll know that they are paying fair market prices.

Additionally, please be aware of the following safety excerpt, taken directly from Craigslist.org:

The overwhelming majority of craigslist users are trustworthy and well intentioned. With billions of human interactions facilitated through craigslist, the incidence of violent crime has been extremely low.

Nevertheless, it's very important to take the same common sense precautions online as you would offline.

When meeting someone for the first time, please remember to:

- Insist on a public meeting place like a cafe
- Tell a friend or family member where you're going
- Take your cell phone along if you have one
- Consider having a friend accompany you
- Trust your instincts

Taking these straightforward and simple precautions helps make Craigslist safer for everyone.

A Tool Beyond Craigslist? Postlets.com

After the initial publication of this book, we received additional useful feedback from agents who were pros at using Craigslist. Terry Driscoll of Bath, ME pointed us to a relatively new service which offers to syndicate your ads across multiple free sites: Postlets.com (shown below, 7/2009):

POSTLETS Real Estate Marketing for Web 2.0

USERNAME: PASSWORD: **LOGIN**

Not a member? [Set up a FREE account.](#) | [Forgot your password?](#)

[Features](#) [Sign Up](#) [Help](#)

Create your listing here.
Post, share, and syndicate
it everywhere.
FREE.

Sign Up Now!

Want to turn your
property listing into a
showcase website?
Introducing
Postlets PRO.

**FIVE SIMPLE STEPS TO
POST YOUR LISTING**

- 1 Set up a FREE account
- 2 Create your listing using easy-to-use forms
- 3 Post your listing on classifieds sites using our HTML code
- 4 Share your listing on social media sites with a couple of clicks
- 5 We automatically syndicate your listing to several search sites

Learn More

**GET YOUR LISTING ON
THESE SITES AND MORE**

- craigslist**
- Facebook**
- FrontDoor**
- Google Base**
- HotPads**
- MySpace**
- Oodle**
- Trulia**
- Twitter**
- Vast**
- Zillow**

plus more...

**RECENTLY CREATED
POSTLETS**

- 17 Sandy Ridge Road**
Sterling, MA
\$1,995,000
- Fountain Hills Ct Ne**
Prior Lake, MN
\$140,000
- 222 West St #f**
Annapolis, MD
\$409,500
- 56 Pelican Place**
West Deptford, NJ
\$205,000

While we haven't personally used Postlets.com, many agents seem to swear by it!

Now You Know...

Hopefully this guide has encouraged you to at least experiment with Craigslist for your listings, and taught you the fundamentals you need to know to give it a go. In a down market, it's vital you take advantage of every possible lead-generating opportunity you encounter.

As an aside, it would be GREAT if you would consider choosing Oakley Signs & Graphics as the sign supplier for your listings! We have a low price match guarantee, the fastest shipping time in the industry, and monthly specials to save you money. We understand you may have a good relationship with someone else at the moment, but we feel confident that Oakley can exceed your expectations every time.

Sincerely cheering you toward real estate success,

Scott Levitt
Oakley Signs & Graphics
<http://www.oakleysign.com>



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