21 Secrets I've Learned from Posting 1,424 Craigslist Real Estate Ads

Craigslist is a great way to generate leads for both buyers and sellers, but it can be a minefield if you don't know what you're doing. Here are 21 secrets I've learned (some the hard way) from posting 1,424 Craigslist ads over the past year to generate hundreds of leads.

1.) Nothing beats an image and a link
After split-testing a lot of ads for click-thru-rate, nothing beats a single image and a single text link.

2.) Use special characters in the title
Using stars, hearts and other special characters in the title improves the open-rate for an ad up to 100%.

3.) ...Or use all lowercase
When all the other ads are using special characters, ALL-CAPS or other craziness, you can use a short title in all lower-case to stand-out and look like the legitimate ad on the page.

4.) Make each ad unique – even if only slightly
If you're posting a lot of ads, makes sure each one is unique – even if only slightly different than the rest. This will help prevent your ads from being ghosted by Craigslist.

5.) Never repeat titles
Similar to ads, you also want to use a different title for each ad – even if it is a different special character at the beginning.

6.) Boost your account's reputation
Craigslist will let you bend the rules on posting multiple similar ads if you are posting from an account that has paid Craigslist for something. I found this out after paying $75 to post a help wanted ad. It's not ghosting-proof, but it's pretty close.

7.) No listings to promote? No problem.
Variations of "Search the Pacific Heights MLS like an agent" works like a champ if you don't a listing to promote, but do have a website that allows searching the MLS.

8.) No website? No problem.
Offering a list of "handyman specials" or "bank-owned" properties works if you don't even have a website.

9.) Keep your ad ugly
We all want to look professional, but sometimes it pays (a lot) to be ugly. Fancy property flyer ads just can't compete with ugly ads on click-thru-rate.

10.) Craigslist is not just for buyer leads
Find seller-focused leads "Get a complimentary home evaluation" will find some seller leads.

11.) You will get flagged. A lot.
Prepare to be flagged often if you post everyday – and that's ok. It just means some competitor is trying to discourage you. Keep posting.

12.) Don't use the word "free" ever.

Much like using “free” gets your emails filtered to the spam folder, using “free” in Craigslist ads is the short-cut to getting your ads ghosted.

13.) Don’t “give away the farm”
Listing the price, square footage, bed and bath count just gives the viewer a reason to filter out your ad. Give them enough info to click-thru to your site to get the property details.

14.) Send traffic to a dedicated squeeze page
The best conversion from Craigslist traffic comes from having a dedicated “mini-site” with a single form where users enter a name, email and phone number to get a complimentary list of best buys in their area. You’ll cut your opt-in rate in half by asking for a phone number, but the quality is much better and your chances of getting an appointment are greatly increased if you can call immediately.

15.) Avoid Copy/Paste
Don’t copy and paste exact versions of the same ad – even if it’s after Craigslist’s recommended 48-hour window. There’s no reason why each ad can’t be unique – even if only slightly different than previous ads.

16.) Link and Attach Images
Include a link to an image and also attach an image if you have one. More than anything else, people want to see if the ad has an image before clicking the title, so including both gives the viewer another reason to click your ad in the search results.

17.) Make hundreds of “unique” images
Make copies of an image and rename each one – craigslist thinks these are all unique. If you’re feeling frisky, you can also resize them before renaming each copy. Strive for a rotation of about 300 images. Using the same image over and over will get you ghosted quickly.

18.) Post between 9am-12pm or after 8pm.
After analyzing my data, I’ve found that posting between 9am-noon, and then again after 8pm are the best times to post. This seems tobe the time most people are on Craigslist. Since new ads appear at the top, if you’re posting too far outside of these times then you’ll appear much further down the list of results.

19.) Wait 15-minutes before posting in the same category
New ads every 15 minutes, so wait at least 15 minutes before posting again in the same category. So, if you’re posting a “Pacific Heights Best Buys List” ad and a “Russian Hill Best Buys List” and these are both in the same category on Craigslist, you’ll get better coverage if you wait 15 minutes between posting so that other peoples’ ads will come in between.

20.) Don’t get too greedy or you’ll get ghosted
The easiest way to get ghosted by Craigslist is to get greed and post a ton of ads in the first few days of setting up your account. Be steady and post ads every day, and just stay consistent. It’s a marathon, not a sprint!

21.) Lead quality isn’t great
Craigslist leads tend to be bottom feeders, and they are clicking on lots of ads, so don’t expect to use Craigslist as your only lead generation source. But hey, the the leads are free so get a system in place to work them and stay consistent and you’ll have great results in the long term.

If you haven’t tried Craigslist, or if you have tried them but with limited success, give these 21 tips a shot and I’m confident you’ll be happy with the results.

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