Navigating the New Rules of Craigslist

November 2013

As expected, Craigslist changed the rules on how you can post your real estate ads. If you've become dependent on Craigslist in generating new opportunities for your business, then you'll need to make some immediate changes. This guide will help you understand the recent changes to Craigslist and a few things you can do to make sure your business continues to thrive.

What's changed with Craigslist?

Craigslist has removed all embedded images and all links. You can – and should! – still upload images to your ads from within Craigslist, but all image tags have been removed and hyperlinks are turned into non-active text links. When a consumer tries to click on a URL, it doesn't go anywhere. They remain on Craigslist.

Don't panic! Although the rules have changed, the overall strategy hasn't. You have two primary goals in all of your marketing and lead generation efforts: get consumers to (1) call you directly, or (2) visit your website.

General Craigslist best practices (note: these have not changed)

- Have a consumer-focused website that you direct consumers to visit
- Post during peak hours, typically between 6:30pm and 8:30pm...varies per market
- Your call-to-action must match your posting title (headline)
- Must have an image – 80% of ads viewed on Craigslist have images
- Stand out with service-focused content, not a sales pitch

Tips for posting ads within the new rules of Craigslist

1. **Posting Title (Headline)**
   Consumers are in browsing mode on Craigslist. Keep your ad headline short and attention grabbing. For example:
   - Perfect single family home for the first time buyer! (Seattle)
   - Dallas Home Values Are Up 6% - Time to sell!

2. **Posting Description (Content)**
   Keep your content short and specific. Don't provide details in the ad, instead make them go to your website to get them.
   - Make sure the content you're driving consumers to in your ad matches the headline of the ad. Don't mislead or bait and switch consumers.
   - All ads should have two calls-to-action:
     1. **A link back to content on your website** – live links won't work, but you'll still want to ask the consumer to copy and paste the link to your website into their

browser. Be specific about what benefits the consumer will receive by following the link. For example, "Copy and paste the link below to View the Full Details and Photos."

2. **Your contact Information** - Most consumers will want to browse your website, but you don't want to miss out on buyers and sellers who are ready to speak with an agent directly. Be sure to include the following:
    - Name
    - Brand (i.e. Johnson Realty)
    - Cell phone number to call or text
    - DO NOT post your email address!

- Know what buyers are looking for – They want market information and listings specific to their area.
- Know what sellers are looking for – The value of their home and how it stacks up against the market.

3. **Image**

Although the ability to post images via image tags has been removed, you can and should post images using Craigslist's image posting tool. The image will appear at the top of your ad.

- Use clever and non-offensive images to drive consumers back to your site.
- Keep it simple – use one image.
- Use an image to drive consumers back to your site. For example, post an image of your city's skyline with a call-to-action to view listings in your area.
- Never use a picture of a real home. You don't want consumers to disqualify the ad if they don't like the look of the home you posted.

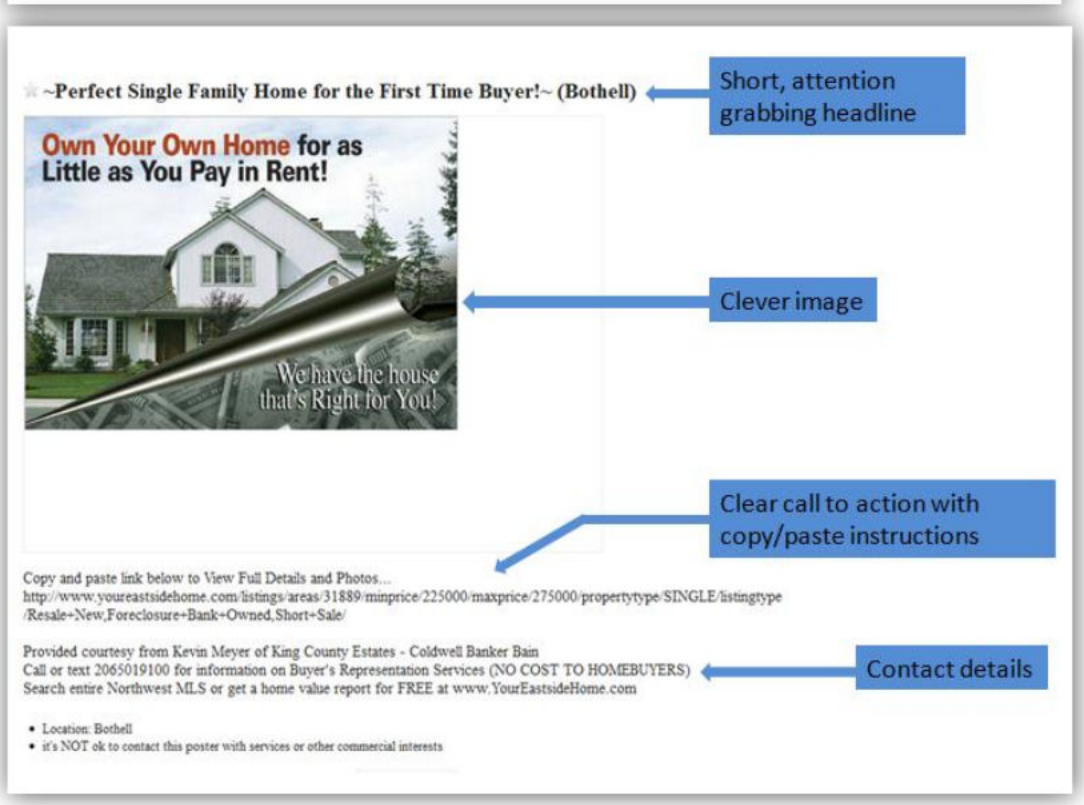
4. **Special considerations for posting your listings**

If you want to post specific listings, bear in mind the following:

- Headline should target a particular demographic, for example:
  Millennials (Gen X and Y) – Spacious 2 Bedroom Close to Bellevue's Nightlife
- Headline is specific to the content. If you promote a listing, make sure your content shows that specific listing and not something different.
- You can show more content, but make sure you direct them to your website for specific details.
- Use an actual photo of your listing. Pick the best photo and try to use an exterior shot.

Examples of Craigslist ads you can emulate





How to protect yourself against change

Nothing stays the same, especially in real estate. So the first thing you need to do is plan on and accept change. Then, you need a strategy that will change-proof your business.

"We have stood on a soap box more than once and yelled 'Do other things besides Craigslist, it will change'. When you work the web strategically through great website content, blogging, video, press releases, other ad sites, and social media, you have cast a wide net. And when one thing changes, you don't feel "damaged". *Lori Ballen - The Ballen Group*

Lori Ballen is a Mega Agent with an award winning real estate team in Las Vegas called The Ballen Group at Keller Williams Realty Las Vegas. Lori and her husband Richard Ballen have owned multiple successful businesses based on her marketing strategy which is now called "The Ballen Group."

Diversify your lead sources

Let's be honest, the volume of leads you're used to getting from your Craigslist ads will likely decrease. That extra step of copying a URL and pasting it into another browser versus a simple click will dissuade some consumers from getting back to your website. To counter this, you will have to supplement your leads with additional sources.

In this quick video, guest contributor Chad Hyams walks through different internet traffic sources for real estate agents - reiterating the importance of diversifying lead generation portfolios.

Watch Chad's video here.

Chad's Bio: A key trailblazer in real estate tech instruction, Chad's history in the field of real estate is interwoven with change, growth and experience. As the voice of reason for the Internet Marketing Specialist Designation and Ember Seminars he has built a science of communicating overwhelming topics in a simple understandable way and educating a field of ready willing and able agents on social media and internet marketing strategy.

How do you get your consumers to your powerful website? There are multiple ways to keep in mind - don't focus on any one specific area.

Portals – Portals provide a fast and free way to generate traffic to agent web sites, promote listings on your web site and syndicate it to others such as Trulia, Zillow, Realtor.com and other websites the public is looking on to find properties.

Referring sites – Sites that refer traffic to agent web sites. Craigslist is a great example of a referring site.

Organic Traffic – SEO success, make sure you show up in the natural area of Google, Yahoo!, Bing. What type of things should be showing up? Similar things as for referring traffic -are you creating blog posts, white papers, creating sources of content that would generate organic results by following SEO tactics

Paid Traffic – Paid search engine traffic is the opposite of Organic traffic. Consumers still click on paid advertising, and you want to make sure you are showing up on all the search engines with paid traffic. Doing this efficiently and effectively is hard, so you can have companies like Market Leader run a pay-per-click campaign for you to help you generate even more leads without having to learn the ins and outs of paid search yourself.

Social – Most social network sites are relationship-building platforms, not lead generation platforms. Don't post listings on them, but instead develop relationships with people and use strategic postings to get your web site out there: Facebook business pages, twitter to engage with people, etc. You can get great leads from social media, just remember they are coming from your sphere – don't hurt them by posting the wrong stuff all day long.

Offline Marketing – Make sure your business cards, property flyers and newsletters have your web site address. Also make sure your signs, print and radio advertising lists your web site – as a place to get more content and property information – everywhere you go that is not online make sure they go to your web site.

Things constantly change so please don't panic – whether it is Craigslist, Facebook, or Google, things will keep changing. If you have diversification you will have the opportunity to adjust and not find yourself in a precarious position.

Change-proof your business today

Visit http://www.marketleader.com or **call us at 1-888-820-4778** and learn how Market Leader can help you generate more leads from all kinds of sources.