

Should I Advertise on Craig's List?

by steve o'leary & kim sheehan

Have you heard of Craig's List? It is a huge online marketplace where all kinds of people sell goods and services. And it's localized...when you log onto the main Craig's List website (www.craigslist.org), you can click on your city, state, or region. It is further segmented by category, so if a customer is looking for a used kayak or a wedding dress, he or she can quickly zoom in on what's available. It's not an auction site like eBay...at Craig's List, sellers list prices and while individual sellers may negotiate, that isn't necessarily part of the deal. For small business, Craig's List provides a quick, free way to reach members of your local community with information about specific products and services at your store.

What is Craig's List?

Craig's List was founded by Craig Newman in 1995 as an email list designed to help San Franciscans to find out about activities in the Bay Area. It has grown now to the point where over 450 local Craig's Lists are now online.

For retailers, Craig's List is a great way to get an online presence very, very quickly. As you know, people turn to the Internet when they're looking for things to buy or services to use. Craig's List is quickly replacing the local newspaper classifieds as the one-stop shop for locally available goods and services. But while the local newspaper classifieds tend to be only for used goods, Craig's List welcomes all kinds of ads.

Proponents of Craig's List for retailers highlight several benefits, including:

- It's free for most items. Currently, Craig's List only charges for Help Wanted ads (and if you need new employees, it is a place to consider placing recruitment ads).
- There's an awful lot of people who will see your ad. Craig's List has over 275 million registered users and is the 17th most popular online web site, according to the search engine website measurement service Alexa. Craig's List receives about 10 billion visits per day. That's a lot of shoppers.
- You'll even playing field: you have the ability to compete with service providers and sellers of both new and used goods.

Of course, there are some key things to think about before you make the commitment:

- Clutter: a lot of traffic means a lot of ads. You'll need to have a good offer, clear language, and a good picture to stand out from the crowd.
- Turnover: Lots of ads means that your ad can become old news fairly quickly. You should constantly update and refresh your ads to keep them top of mind, and to make sure they come out at the 'top' when someone is surfing.
- Expiration: ads expire after 45 days, which may be longer than you want your offer to be up. Delete olds ads.
- Community: there is a very active user community for Craig's List. Being part of this community takes a bit of time, and you need to decide how much time you'll spend integrating yourself in to the Craig's List world. Specifically:
 - Spend about ten minutes a day reading Craig's List ads.
 - Spend another ten minutes or so a day reading the posts on Craig's List for your local community. See what people are talking about, the tone of voice they use, what types of questions you ask.

- After about a week of tracking Craig's List, start to respond to questions and participate in the discussion. At first, introduce your self in your posts as a new member.
- Check to see if people respond to your comments, and then respond back to them. Think about posting once or twice a day in the community...it should take about ten to fifteen minutes per day. You'll build your credibility and this will help bring attention to your sales messages.

If you do start placing ads on Craig's List, here are some things to consider including:

- Check out the other ads and look at what people are selling and what price they're asking. Check the language and the formatting. Here's an example of an ad for an LMT:

This is the season for Track/Running Events, Weddings, Bachelorette Parties, Birth Days, Anniversaries, Special Events, or just sore from doing those summer activities and every one likes a good massage after all of the stress of planning the perfect celebration. So why not buy a massage for a Wedding/Anniversary gift or hire a massage therapist for Weddings, Bachelorette Parties, Anniversaries, Special Events?

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Hi, I'm <name> and I am a licensed Massage Therapist Specializing in Sports/Injuries massages. Massage is great relief for sore, tight, stress, aches, and pains cause by every day life...It also boost your ammuene system to prevent and help get over being sick along with being relaxing... You only have one body and so take care of it with a massage.. CHECK-OUT my web page to learn more about me and what I offer..Call for an appointment today (same day appointments but please allow 30 minutes because I am not always in my office)...SEE DISCOUNTS BELOW!!

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*****SPECIALS THIS MONTH(August)*****
New Clients & Students always Recieve \$5 off first massage.

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Buy 2 Gift certificates at reg. price receive 3rd for 1/2 off.

- Here's an ad from Craig's List for an antique shop. It included a picture of the shop and basic information about the shop:

Located in downtown Junction City, we specialize in fabrics available by the yard or bolt and an amazing selection of remnants. We carry decor trim including brush, loop, bullion and tassel fringe; cording and loose tassels, as well as pillow forms, notions and much more. Special orders are always welcome.

Our shop is filled with in-house made pillows, bedding and table linens; we also have a unique assortment of vintage collectibles from Depression Glass to gently used furniture.

Stop by and see us at 177 West 6th Avenue -- hours are Monday through Friday from 9am to 4:30pm and Saturday from 10am to 4pm.

- Check the prohibited products list available at the site. You can't sell fireworks, pets, batteries with mercury, or pesticides on Craig's List, among other things.
- Consider geography. Craig's List geographic areas can be fairly big or fairly small. If you're a store in San Francisco, for example, consider posting ads on the Craig's List in San Jose, Oakland, and other close by communities.
- Only post really good price deals on Craig's List. Remember, you are competing with both new and used goods, and people who visit Craig's list are highly concerned with price.
- List clear product attributes, as these may be searched for by prospective shoppers. For example, if you're an electronics store, give the screen size for televisions. If you're an auto repair shop, state what is included in your brake replacement offer.
- Ads with images get increased response, according to Entrepreneur magazine. Use Craig's List easy 'upload' feature.
- Include an email address so the prospective buyer can ask you questions. This may not be your preferred way to do business, but it is the way most people shopping on Craig's List make their first contact.
- When you get an email from someone asking about your ad, reply with an invitation to either call or visit the store. Also ask if you can use their email address to send them information about other products and services that they may be interested in. If they agree, Craig's List provides a quick and easy way to build your mailing list.
- Track results. Like every other marketing effort, you should track your results and see which ads, offers, products or services pull the best.

If you have other ideas on how to be successful on Craig's List, let us know! We'd love to hear how it works for you. And for more small business success building ideas visit: <http://www.GrabbingGreen.com/home/about>.

Learn More: There are more ideas in our book, *Building Buzz to Beat the Big Boys*, available at the www.grabbinggreen.com website.

Discuss with us: We'd love to hear how you've used these suggestions and how successful they were for your business. Come participate in our community forum at www.grabbinggreen.com and share your experiences with other small businesses!

Free Resources: Links identified in this mini guide as well as other resources are available in the Resources section on the www.grabbinggreen.com website.

Additional Mini-Guides: More mini-guides will be added every month to the Resources section. Some may relate to this topic and provide helpful information. Each guide will cross reference other guides you might want to look at as well.