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## 5 Craigslist tips to generate free real estate leads

***Time of day, content can make all the difference***

BY BERNICE ROSS

Are you using Craigslist as a part of your lead generation and conversion system? If not, there's no better time to start than now.

Recently, I hosted a webinar with Josh Schoenly of ReTechulous.com. Schoenly also manages a real estate brokerage office in Mechanicsville, Pa., and is a self-proclaimed "lead generation junkie." One of the best lead generation tools for his business is Craigslist.

Many agents use Craigslist, yet very few systematically generate and convert leads from this highly visited site. Schoenly says most agents fail in this attempt because they don't understand the dynamics of online lead generation. Also, they don't know how to make their ads stand out from the competition.

If you want to generate more leads from working with Craigslist, the first step is to avoid these five most common mistakes:

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### **1. Posting at the wrong time of day**

Have you ever given any thought to the best time of day to post on Craigslist? Schoenly cites research that shows people visit Craigslist in the morning between 8:30 a.m. and 9 a.m., just before they begin work. They also visit Craigslist around lunchtime.

Nighttime visits to Craigslist peak at different times depending upon the season. In the wintertime, it's usually after dinner, from 7 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. In the summertime, it's more likely to be later, usually between 9 p.m. and 10 p.m.

Rather than flooding Craigslist with a lot of ads, Schoenly recommends posting one or two strategic ads at the peak times of day.

## **2. Writing boring headlines and boring ads**

A major challenge on Craigslist is how to make your ad stand out. In order to "cut through the clutter," Schoenly recommends making your ads intriguing.

For example, most agents write ads like this: "123 Lakeview Terrace \$605,000: 4 bedroom, 3 bath, with breathtaking lake view. Updated kitchen with granite countertops, new appliances, two offices, master suite with double walk-in closets."

The ad above is completely feature based. To have more people click to view your ads, write an ad with an attention-grabbing headline and intriguing text. Here's an example that cuts through the clutter to capture the reader's attention: "\$206,900. LAKE it? You'll LOVE it! (Can you believe the price on this gem?) Click here to see other JUICY deals like this one in the Houston area. INCLUDES FORECLOSURES."

## **3. No call to action**

The boring ad in the example above also has another major mistake. There is no call to action.

In contrast, the "LAKE it" ad has a clear call to action for the reader to "see other JUICY deals." Everyone wants a great deal. This ad taps into that emotion, especially because the list includes foreclosure properties.

## **4. No lead capture trap**

There is little point in spending money on Web advertising unless you have a lead capture strategy. A major mistake most advertisers make is driving consumers to a branded website. A branded website is your primary website that has all of your normal listing information and other resources.

What works best is a simple unbranded website devoted exclusively to the property you are marketing. (Please note you must still follow your state, local

and MLS rules in terms of what you post on these sites regarding the fact that you are an agent.)

Schoenly's unbranded website normally converts 15 percent to 35 percent of the people who visit it into actual leads. This type of page is often called a "squeeze page." In contrast, when he used a branded website, the conversion rate was only a pitiful 1 percent.

Here's what Schoenly uses for one of his most effective squeeze pages: The headline, "Free weekly list of foreclosure and bank-owned properties."

Beneath the headline is a picture of a house with a foreclosure sign in front of it. Next to the picture, there is a bright green arrow pointing to the box where the reader can enter their email address. Directly below there is another box that states, "Phone number: We'll Call You and Tell You about the Hot Buys We Know about Right Now." The final box says, "Get the Weekly List and See Local Foreclosures Now."

For this to work in your business, you must be willing to compile and maintain an up-to-date foreclosure list. You must also be willing to respond quickly with a return phone call when someone decides to use the telephone option. Finally, you will also need an "autoresponder" system that automatically sends out the list to anyone who clicks on the link.

## **5. No consistency**

The biggest mistake that agents make when using Craigslist is a lack of consistency. Schoenly suggests setting up a recurring appointment with yourself so that you always remember to do your posts three times per day.

## **Avoid being "flagged"**

Craigslist and its community are very vigilant about ads that don't meet the site's criteria. Triggers that can cause your ads to be "flagged" (i.e., that will cause your ads to be removed), include being overly "sales-y," overhyping, using all caps, posting ads in the wrong categories or posting the same ads multiple times in a short period of time, and using the word "free."

You can be flagged if two or more people report your ads. It could be market competitors seek to remove your ads from the site. If this does happen,

Schoenly's recommendation is to post your ads at night. Most ad "snipers" hang out at the office during the day, and that's when they're most likely to be online.

Consequently, to succeed on Craigslist, post at the busiest times of days, write intriguing headlines and ad copy, include a call to action, use a lead capture or squeeze page, and be consistent. These five simple steps work for Schoenly and they can work for you as well.

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