

---

# Understanding the beast.

**(or How I learned  
to stop worrying  
and love Craigslist)**

a Craigslist guide by **AutoRevo.**

# All the gritty Craigslist details.

“Craigslist” is a dirty word in the automotive industry. “That Which Must Not Be Named” is a constant headache for most dealers. Why do we all put up with it?

According to Craigslist’s Fact Sheet, it gets 50 billion page views per month. That’s roughly 19,278 views per second, which is absolutely ridiculous. Because of that incredible traffic, though, dealers put up with the headache. Dealers don’t like Craigslist, and Craigslist doesn’t like dealers, but the customers are there, and the volatile relationship continues.

On December 3, 2013, Craigslist made a game-changing decision: it started charging \$5 to post passenger vehicles in the “cars/trucks by dealer” section of the site. Now that the dust has settled and everyone’s fallen into the latest Craigslist routine, we want to know: how much did the \$5 fee change things? What was the true impact? That’s what we’re going to talk about in this guide.



## Inside:

Craigslist's Terms and Conditions .....	3
Paying the \$5.00 fee .....	3
Posting rules .....	4
What is flagging? .....	5
How the \$5 Fee Changed Things .....	6
Fewer listings, same number of customers.....	6
Flagging, ghosting, and deleted posts .....	6
No more templates, no more tracking.....	8
"Things Craigslist Does Not Like" .....	8
Contact information in the posting title or body .....	9
Posting too quickly.....	9
Ignoring confirmation emails and calls .....	9
Odd account activity.....	10
What does Craigslist like?.....	10
Help! I'm banned! Or my post isn't showing up!.....	11
How to Post to Craigslist .....	12
Automated Craigslist posting services.....	12
Posting assistance software .....	13
Step-by step instructions for posting manually .....	13
The steps before the posting form.....	13
Finally! The posting form.....	14
Editing the map and uploading photos .....	18
Proofing, approving, and paying.....	19

## ***Craigslist's Terms and Conditions***

Let's go through the legalities first. As of June 2014, here's what auto dealers need to know about Craigslist:

### **Paying the \$5.00 fee**

When you post a vehicle in that category now, it costs \$5.00 per post. That fee is paid directly to Craigslist, and there's no getting around it. Any provider that says they have a partnership with Craigslist is full of it; Craig spits fire at anyone affiliated with a dealership.

The fee is payable by Visa, MasterCard, or American Express. Your post will be live for 30 days, and can be edited, but not renewed. Want to repost? It's \$5.00, and it'll be treated like a brand new post; the only difference is that you won't have to re-enter all the information.

Craigslist is offering bulk posting for "paid account holders" only. Let's say you want to buy more than 400 posts within a three-month period. If you want to plunk down the \$2,000, you can apply for invoicing. There's a process involved, though: to become a "paid account holder", you have to sign up. There's a form on their site, and you have to provide your dealership's Tax ID number. If and when you're approved, up to 7 business days later, you can be invoiced and pay by check.

It's important to note that only dealers in select major cities can sign up for invoicing. You can see the list at [http://www.craigslist.org/about/ctd\\_blocks](http://www.craigslist.org/about/ctd_blocks).

---

With that said, one of our Dealer Consultants called Craigslist, and he was told that dealers could purchase 50 or more postings at once by credit card (a \$250 purchase) if they called and requested it.

You can call Craigslist at 415-399-5200, extension 8283 to find out more about bulk postings.

## Posting rules

In the “cars/trucks by dealer” category on Craigslist, you can only post “specific individual automobiles for sale.” They don’t want posts about specials or sales – just passenger vehicles for sale. Of course, if you post a vehicle, and one of the pictures you upload mentions a deal, that seems to be kosher. The deal just has to accompany a vehicle.

Under the new terms and conditions, Craigslist posting in the “cars/trucks by dealer” section cannot have “clickable hyper links, templates, [or] external images.” On Craigslist, normal text is black, hyperlinked text is blue, and hyperlinked text you’ve already clicked is purple (unless you’ve made changes in your computer settings).

Craigslist did this to make sure that when someone is viewing your Craigslist posting, if they click on a picture or URL written in the text, it isn’t going to lead to another site. All photos are uploaded directly to Craigslist’s site. The only clickable links are provided by Craigslist and are for the maps to the dealership on Google and Yahoo!.

If you include a hyperlink in your post, Craigslist will strip that coding so that it can't be clicked - but the URL will still be visible. People who view your post will just have to copy and paste the link into the address bar.

What if you want to try to avoid the fee and rules and post in the "by owner" section? Bad choice. Craigslist, on [craigslist.org/about/ctd](http://craigslist.org/about/ctd), says that any dealer that does will suffer "ad removal, account closure, other remedial actions." They also add, "Please flag any dealer ads in "by owner." Basically, play by Craigslist's rules, or you'll be kicked out of the playground.

## What is flagging?

Flagging continues to be the bane of most auto dealers' Craigslist experience. Any Craigslist user can click the box next to the hyperlinked word "prohibited" and flag a listing.

[CL](#) > [dallas](#) > [dallas](#) > [all for sale / wanted](#) > [cars & trucks - by dealer](#)

[contact](#)

[prohibited](#) <sup>[?]</sup>

Posted: 14 minutes ago

If you hover your mouse over the word "prohibited" or the box next to it, a message pops up: "flag as prohibited / spam / miscategorized." Craigslist claims that "flagged posts are reviewed by staff before any removals take place."

---

## ***How the \$5 Fee Changed Things***

### **Fewer listings, same number of customers**

Remember the disaster the “cars/trucks by dealer” section used to be? It was spammed mercilessly, and it was incredibly difficult to fish out the legit posts from the sea of spam. Since the introduction of the \$5 posting fee, the spam has been drastically reduced; in some cities, it’s been eliminated.

The \$5 fee has actually helped make Craigslist a better place to post passenger vehicles. The number of posts has decreased because most dealers balked at the fee (so spammers disappeared) - but the number of customers looking for cars hasn’t changed.

Each post is getting more views and has a better ROI, even with the posting fee. So, honestly, we hate to say it... but Craigslist did good with the \$5 fee. We’d thank them, but they’d probably yell at us like they always do when we talk to them.

### **Flagging, ghosting, and deleted posts**

We mentioned flagging on the last page, which is when a user reports an ad as spam. With the fee, flagging isn’t nearly as much of an issue as it used to be, although it’s still a royal pain.

Some dealers will go through and flag every ad by their competitors. A few are brazen enough to admit that they do it. Thanks for perpetuating the “car dealers play dirty” stereotype, guys.

When a post has been flagged, there's no way to know how long it will be before it's removed. Craigslist claims to review posts that are flagged, but it seems that the more one specific dealer is flagged, the faster their posts are removed. If your posts are deleted, you don't get a refund, regardless of whether your post was up to code or not.

The good news is that ghosting has all but disappeared (pun intended). When a post was a ghost, it was supposed to appear on the listings page, but didn't. The dealer didn't get any kind of warning that the posting wasn't online, and while there was a functioning URL and post ID for the listing, no one ever saw it.

Ghosting seems to be a non-issue now in the "cars/trucks by dealer" section. Instead of ghosting, posts are just deleted. If you're curious about the status of your listings, you can check the status of all your postings in your Craigslist account homepage.

( page: <a href="#">1</a> <a href="#">2</a> postings 1 - 50 of 59 total )			
status	manage	posting title	
Active	<a href="#">edit</a> <a href="#">delete</a> <a href="#">repost</a>	<a href="#">Sculpter -</a>	<b>sfo</b>
Deleted	<a href="#">undelete</a>	<a href="#">auto part for car - \$89</a>	<b>van</b>
Active	<a href="#">edit</a> <a href="#">delete</a>	<a href="#">Skilled home interior painter -</a>	<b>sfo</b>
Active	<a href="#">edit</a> <a href="#">delete</a>	<a href="#">Pontoon boat - \$25000</a>	<b>sfo</b>



## No more templates, no more tracking

The biggest drawbacks with the new Craigslist rules are the loss of templates and link tracking.

To help postings stand out from all the noise, providers offered branded templates for Craigslist. These templates allowed dealers to use different fonts, colors, and links in their posts, and they looked more like actual ads. Now they're explicitly disallowed in the new Terms and Conditions, which results in every post looking pretty much the same, like a classifieds section in the newspaper.

When hyperlinks and clickable images or text were allowed in Craigslist postings, savvy dealers could track the links using Google Analytics and other programs. It was easy to see how popular a particular ad was by how many clicks it got. That's no longer the case, and dealers have no way to view stats on their postings on Craigslist.

### ***“Things Craigslist Does Not Like”***

I asked our Craigslist expert, who's also our lead developer on our Craigslist First Class service, for his input on this guide. He sent me an email with four posting errors that Craigslist seems to hate:

*“Accounts that do any of these things will get increased verification calls/emails and are more likely to be flagged or removed. Craigslist appears to be much more aggressive about enforcing these unwritten rules on free listings than on paid listings. Also, in many cases, Craigslist will simply prevent you from submitting your post until you conform to these rules.”*

## Contact information in the posting title or body

If you enter an email address or phone number in the title or body of your Craigslist posting, it might get blocked.

<b>posting title</b>	<b>price</b>	<b>specific location</b>	<b>postal code</b>
<input type="text"/>	\$ <input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
<b>posting body</b>	please enter phone numbers as contact info above, not in posting body below.		
<input type="text"/>			

This is why you'll sometimes see phone numbers written out, like "eight six 7 five three 09." Dealers will also try "hiding" email addresses from Craigslist's system by spelling out the symbols: "example [at] example (dot) com".

## Posting too quickly

If you post too quickly, Craigslist assumes you're spamming the system and will block your posts. After a lot of trial and error, our dev and support teams figured out that 15 minutes between posts is the fastest you can post without being blocked.

## Ignoring confirmation emails and calls

When you create a post in Craigslist, it's not live until you check your email, click the link in the confirmation email, and accept the terms and conditions on Craigslist's page. If you create posts, but don't click the links, that's a red flag in their system. Likewise, if you receive a phone call to verify your account, but you don't answer, that may cause Craigslist to ban your account.

---

## Odd account activity

Your IP address is your network's address online, and it's public information. When someone knows your IP address, they know your general location. All the computers in your dealership are likely on the same network, so they all share the same IP address.

If Craigslist sees that multiple IP addresses (multiple locations) are accessing one account, that account will probably be banned, or the posts will be flagged and removed. This is a tactic spammers and robo-posters like to use, which is why Craigslist is quick to remove them from the system.

Another surefire way to catch Craigslist's attention is to post to multiple regions from the same account or IP address. It's one thing to post to a couple regions that are nearby - it's tempting fate, but you can usually get away with it. It's a whole different ballgame if you're based out of Dallas, but you're also trying to post to Houston.

Craigslist defines itself as "Local classifieds and forums - community moderated, and largely free." If it sees a dealer abusing the system and not posting locally, it will flag their posts, and that dealer is at risk of being banned.

## ***What does Craigslist like?***

Well, we're talking Craigslist here, so "like" is an overly-optimistic word. It would probably be more accurate to say "shows less hatred toward."

According to our development team, "Craigslist seems to be more forgiving to accounts that have been phone verified."

---

Great news, right? So how do you get phone verified?

Unfortunately, you have no say in the matter. “Only Craigslist decides when or if you get the honor of becoming a phone-verified account holder.” Even worse, if you do happen to be lucky enough to be chosen, it’s only for one phone number per account, and it only stays verified for 90 days.

Then, in the ultimate show of despotism, “Craigslist excludes a large range of phone numbers” from eligibility.

Craigslist likes to verify accounts. It helps them keep their iron fist around dealers’ necks and make sure they’re not spammers or robots. When you sign up for Craigslist, make sure you use a valid phone number that you actually use. You want to be sure that if you win the phone-verification lottery, you don’t lose because you didn’t pick up the phone.

To do your best to stay off their radar and get as many listings approved as possible, try to follow their rules to the letter, answer your phone and emails when they contact you, and pray.

## ***Help! I’m banned! Or my post isn’t showing up!***

Let’s say you’ve managed to do everything Craigslist hates most: you posted to too many regions, from multiple IP addresses, too often, and your posts have email addresses and phone numbers in the post title and body. You decided to stick it to the man, and now the man has shut you down.

---

Your only choice at this point may be to create an entirely new account at a new IP address. That means that you'll need to use a new email address and phone number, and if your dealership's IP address has been banned, you'll have to post from another network.

If your post isn't showing up, don't assume the worst right away. It can take anywhere from a few seconds to a few hours for a post to be published on Craigslist. Give it some time, and if your post is still MIA after half a day or so, look into the problem further.

## *How to Post to Craigslist*

### **Automated Craigslist posting services**

A few providers offer tools that automate the Craigslist process. We can't speak to how other posting services work, but with AutoRevo's **Craigslist First Class**, all you have to do is select which vehicles you want posted to your region. The software will take care of uploading photos, approving the postings, and entering the payment details for the \$5 posting fee. It also includes call tracking and recording, and allows you to receive and reply to text messages from potential buyers.

Automated Craigslist posting services are ideal for auto dealers who simply don't have the time or staff to sit around and deal with Craigslist all day. There is an additional cost associated with the services, but if you post to Craigslist often, it's worth it. The service will do everything for you so you can concentrate on selling cars.

## Posting assistance software

For dealers who don't want to post manually or pay for an automated service, posting assistance software will take your inventory and start the posting process. You still have to check your inbox (or spam folder, many times) for the confirmation email from Craigslist, approve the posting, and manually enter in your payment information.

These software solutions are far less powerful than a fully automated solution, and still require some of your time, but you're still not going to be stuck with the tedium of manually posting every passenger vehicle in your inventory.

## Step-by step instructions for posting manually

If you have time to post yourself or have a dedicated staffer who can manage Craigslist postings and leads, manually posting is your third option. Here are the steps for creating a listing in the "cars/trucks by dealer" section of Craigslist, from start to finish:

### ***The steps before the posting form***

Grab your caffeine of choice – this is going to take a few minutes. If you're brand new to Craigslist and have never posted to the site, here's how you manually post passenger vehicles.

Go to [craigslist.org](https://craigslist.org). Once you're there, you need to select your area, so find your city or metro area and click on it. Right below "Craigslist" in the top left corner, you'll see "post to classifieds" in blue hyperlinked text and highlighted in light yellow. Click that link.

About halfway down the list on this page, you'll see "for sale by dealer". Click that bubble and then hit the continue button.

Now you'll see a longer alphabetical list. Click the bubble next to "cars & trucks – by dealer". You'll see the \$5 fee reminder (as if you could forget).

If you're in a large city, you might next be asked for a "location that fits best." Click the appropriate bubble. After this screen, you'll be able to fill out the form to create your listing.

### ***Finally! The posting form***

Now you're ready to fill out the form to post your vehicle. If a box has a green border and green descriptive text, you have to fill in that information.

contact info

**email**

CL mail relay (recommended) [?](#)

no replies to this email

**users can also contact me:**

by phone  by text

**phone number**

**contact name**

You have to fill out your email address. When you select "CL mail relay", the system allows you to communicate with people interested in your ad without your real email address being disclosed. The relay hides both your email address and the potential customer's. If you don't want any emails from interested parties (a bad idea), enter your phone number and select how you'd like people to contact you: by phone or by text.

**posting title** 
**price** \$ 
**specific location** 
**postal code**

**posting body** please enter phone numbers as contact info above, not in posting body below.

posting details

<b>year</b>	<b>make and model</b>	<b>odometer</b>	<b>VIN</b>	<b>title</b>
<input type="text" value="-"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text" value="-"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> manual transmission <input type="checkbox"/> automatic transmission		<b>size / dimensions</b>	<b>condition</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> include "more ads by this user" link		<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	

The posting title is the link that shows up on the page when buyers go Craigslist. Avoid using ALL CAPS, ending with multiple exclamation points!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!, ~~\\random characters////~~, and other DiStrActIng tExT. Make it easy for potential customers to read, and include what they want to see:

- The year, make, and model of the vehicle
- Major selling points, like One-owner, CARFAX included, sunroof, etc.



Here are a few examples of good titles:

- ★ 2004 BMW X5 4.4i Navigation Panoramic Sunroof Leather 4x4 - \$11495 (Lewisville) pic
- ★ 2006 Jeep Grand Cherokee Laredo - \$7995 (Lewisville) pic
- ★ 2007 Infiniti M35 - \$13900 pic map
- ★ 2011 Dodge Charger MOPAR 11 - \$27977 (Lewisville) pic map
- ★ 2007 Lexus ES 350 Premium Package - \$16900 (Plano) pic map
- ★ 2008 Mercury Grand Marquis GS 1 Owner Runs Great! - \$5995 (Near McKinney on 75) pic

And here are a few bad ones:

- ★ 2004 Toyota Sequoia SR5 1 Owner New Timing Belt & .....SSSSSSSS SALE - \$6350 (Dallas /////////////// North Dallas )  
pic map
- ★ 2008 Mercedes-Benz E-Class Luxury 3.5L - (Corinth) pic map
- ★ 2009 Mercedes Benz E 350 Top Condition + WARRANTY + SSSSSSSSSSS Sale - \$21450  
(Dallas >>>>>>>>>>>> Dallas ) pic map
- ★ 99 Lexus RX 300 Good Condition Loaded 1 Owner + 1 Year WARRANTY !!!!! - \$5650 (north dallas) pic map
- ★ ★★ 2012 Toyota Corolla ★★ IN-House Financing! - (EZ APPROVAL) pic map
- ★ 2009 Chevrolet Colorado LT w/1VL - pic map

The price is important, and postings without a price always see fewer leads than postings with a price listed. Whatever price you enter will be displayed in the Craigslist results in a small box next to the posting title.

One price trick dealers play: listing a ridiculously low amount, like \$70. Since people can sort the results based on price, these listings will then show up higher in sorted search results.

The screenshot shows a search interface for cars and trucks. The search bar is empty, and the results are sorted by price. The first listing is a Dodge Caravan for \$70, which is highlighted with a red arrow and the text "sort: cheapest first".

cars+trucks | owner | dealer | all

search [search] price: [min] [max]

year: [min] [max] [make/model] [+ title status]  pic  title [save / view searches]

list thumb gallery map << < prev 1 - 100 of 1982 next > newest \$\$\$ \$s\$

- ★ Jun 16 - 00 dodge caravan - \$70 (buy here pay here) pic
- ★ Jun 10 - 01 Chevrolet Tahoe 3rd Row \$1500 Down - \$80 (Buy Here Pay Here) pic map
- ★ Jun 10 - 03 \*\*Ford F150 King Ranch 4door\*\*\$1500 DOWN - \$80 (Buy Here Pay Here) pic map
- ★ Jun 11 - 96 Chevy Cavalier 4dr auto \$700 Down - \$80 (Buy Here Pay Here) pic map
- ★ Jun 12 - Lexus ES300(buy here pay here) - \$80 (gardendale ) pic
- ★ Jun 13 - BMW 325I - \$80 (buy here pay here) pic
- ★ Jun 13 - 97 Buick Regal \$500 down - \$80 (Buy Here Pay Here) pic map
- ★ Jun 16 - 02\*\*Pontiac Grand Prix\*\* \$400 DOWN - \$80 (buy here pay here) pic map

If you don't list a price at all, you won't be included in the results when people search or sort by price. You aren't required to enter a price, so if you want to waste your \$5 posting fee, go ahead and leave price blank.

"Specific location" is a field that many dealers experiment with. Some enter their address, or city, or phone number, or even their dealership name. This descriptor shows up on the search result in parenthesis next to the price.

The "include 'more ads by this user' link" checkbox needs a bit of explanation. If you check the box, and you have more postings on Craigslist, customers will be able to click a link in your ad to see all your other Craigslist postings.

---

The final part of the posting page includes two checkboxes. If you click “show on maps,” you can enter your dealership’s address, and a map will appear on the top right of your post.

When you click on the small hyperlinked question mark, you’re taken to [http://www.craigslist.org/about/help/show\\_on\\_maps](http://www.craigslist.org/about/help/show_on_maps), which gives you more information about how the map works.

The final checkbox says, “OK for others to contact you about other services, products or commercial interests.” Most people don’t check that box, as it seems to promote spam, but it’s entirely up to you; all it does is put a statement at the bottom of the post that says it’s okay for others to email or call you about unrelated matters, or vice versa.

After you’ve filled out this form, click the “continue” button.

### ***Editing the map and uploading photos***

The next screen lets you make sure the map in your posting shows the correct location for your dealership. If you need to make any changes to your map or location, do so, or else just click the “continue” button.

Now you’re on the screen that allows you to upload your pictures. Craigslist allows you to post up to 24 pictures. You need to be sure to upload your best or most important image first, since it will be the image potential customers will see first when they click on your post. The first picture is also the one customers see when they sort by “thumb” (thumbnail, or a small version of the picture), or “gallery”. When you’re done, click the “done with images” button.

---

## ***Proofing, approving, and paying***

Now you can look at your post and see how it will look once it's published. You can edit the text, images, or map by using buttons on the bottom of the screen. It also shows that the posting is \$5.00 and that it's a draft.

Craigslist will send you an email that will allow you to publish your ad, edit it, verify your email address, or delete your ad. Make sure you check your spam filters or junk folder if you don't get the email within an hour. ***If you don't follow the directions in the email, your post will not be published.***

Click on the first link in the email, and you'll be taken to a page that asks you to accept Craigslist's Terms of Use. Once you've done that, you're taken to the Billing Options page. Here you can either log into your account (if you aren't already) or select to pay with a credit card. You'll enter your credit card information on the next screen.

After your payment has been approved, you'll see confirmation and a message: "Thanks for posting with us." Your post will soon be live. You can edit your post at any time and manage all your postings from your account management page. If you need a receipt, check your email - sometimes Craigslist will email it to you. You can also see your charges on your Craigslist account management page.

## **And there you have it...**

We hope this guide helped you learn to love Craigslist (if only a little) and use it more effectively. Craigslist is a beast, but it can be an incredible source of leads and sales. Good luck, Godspeed, and we're here if you have any questions.

# We hope you enjoyed this guide...

---

Unlike other providers who forget about you until you complain about a technical problem, AutoRevo is dedicated to helping each and every dealer succeed.

This Craigslist posting guide is one of many free guides that we provide for our dealers. We've worked with thousands of dealers through the years, and we want to share our knowledge and experience to help dealers be the best they can be.

Real data, real solutions, and real success. From vehicle acquisition to point of sale, we're with you every step of the way.

