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From Page:  
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**Buy, sell and be safe online: Craigslist safety tips**

**Socket Tech Talk**

In the twenty-first century the phrase "never talk to strangers" is good advice even for adults. Although many may feel safe behind their computer screens, mother is still right - strangers cannot always be trusted, even on the Internet. Recent news about the "Craigslist Killer," a medical student who was accused of using Craigslist to rob users upon meeting and ultimately killing one - has left many Missourians skeptical of how safe it is to buy and sell items online. Even though the risk of robbery and murder are extremely low, it is important to protect yourself against scams and understand how to stay safe when transacting with others online.

More than 40 million people use Craigslist each month in the United States alone, according to its Web site. Instead of buying and selling items through the Web or mail, the site is organized by city or region so buyers and sellers have the convenience of conducting business in person. Even with the billions of people meeting throughout its history, Craigslist's crime rate continues to stay very low, but it still exists. For this very reason, it is important for Craigslist users to be cautious when conducting in-person business with strangers.

"In Missouri, we tend to trust everyone we meet both offline and online," said Technical Support Representative Mark Thrasher of Socket, a Missouri-based telephone and Internet provider. "And although the overwhelming majority of Internet users have good intentions, it's those trusting folks who are prone to being taken

advantage of by the few people out there acting illegally."

Thrasher recommends some simple safety tips to decrease the risk of crime.

"When acting as a buyer or seller, be sure to use a cell phone so your number cannot be traced to your home address. When you meet someone in person, insist on meeting in a public location - a local restaurant, a busy parking lot or a gas station," Thrasher said. "Also, let your friends or family know the time, location and nature of the meeting."

Craigslist.org offers more advice for users by suggesting that buyers and sellers should have a friend accompany you. They also urge users to never post a physical address, home phone number or e-mail address on the site.

As a buyer there are particular precautions to take when arranging meetings and paying for items. Avoid making purchases from sellers who are overseas. Wiring money and purchasing goods without seeing items can create a liability for the buyer, because Craigslist does not have a regulating agent to ensure items are delivered. Ultimately a public place is preferred when picking up an item. However, some circumstances make it hard to do so like when purchasing large furniture or looking into subleasing a home. If this is the case, bring a cell phone and a friend, and let instincts be the guide.

To protect against scams or other threats as a seller, never sell to buyers who are not interested in seeing the product in person or who are not local. It is especially

important not to issue money back or refunds to buyers whose checks have not yet cleared. When selling large items from home, do not allow prospective buyers to come inside. If possible, move the items into an open garage, front porch or apartment hallway. Extra steps sellers can take to ensure their own safety is by informing neighbors of the visit and rejecting buyers who give off a strange vibe or do not seem serious.

The Web site [www.craigslist.org](http://www.craigslist.org) was established as a way to rate buyers and sellers on Craigslist. Users update the Web site with feedback based on personal positive or negative experiences with buyers or sellers on Craigslist. It is a good source to decide whether or not to do business with another person.

It is no surprise that millions of people are using Craigslist because it conveniently allows users to make sales without paying fees to a host site that are often required by eBay and Amazon. As long as users remain cautious and aware of potential risks, then the risk of being taken advantage of online decrease dramatically.

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