

Liking the List

Hereford breeders across the country have discovered craigslist.org as a powerful tool to market their cattle.

by **Christy Couch Lee**

Who would have known? *Craigslist.org* — a Web site established as an online classified service — could prove to be a successful marketing tool for Hereford breeders to promote and sell their genetics.

Craigslist was established 15 years ago. Today, it experiences more than 20 billion page views per month with more than 50 million new classified ads posted each month, according to the *craigslist.org* FAQ page.

Listings are categorized based on location and classification. More than 700 local sites are available in 70 countries.

The majority of listings are free. However, certain job postings in 18 cities and brokered New York City apartments require a fee for listing.

Hereford breeder Scott Woolfolk has taken advantage of the free listing. Scott and his wife, Cher, along with his parents, John and Pat, and brother, Matt, run 150 Hereford and commercial cows on their Jackson, Tenn., farm.

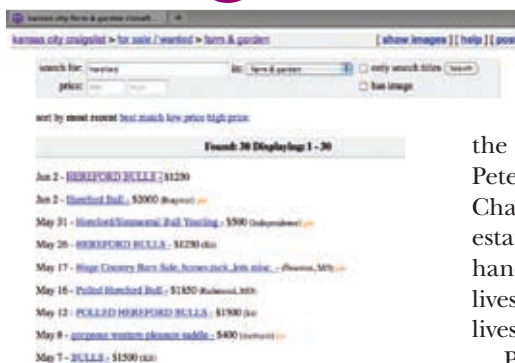
Woolfolk says he had conducted many hay sales through *craigslist.org*. So, when they had 21 commercial cow-calf pairs to market in January, he thought he'd see what the site could do.



“It’s the same as with print advertising: more information and quality photos are key.”

— *Chisum Peterson*

craigslist



“The thought of using craigslist was attractive, because it works, and there are no fees,” Woolfolk says. “The day after I posted the listing, I didn’t do anything but talk on the phone. The phone rang all day long.”

Potential customers called from Tennessee, as well as Mississippi and Missouri.

“We never anticipated the amount of contacts and calls we’d get from it,” Woolfolk says. “It’s exciting to have that much interest in a set of commercial cows. We’ve used classified ads in newspapers and magazines for a long time, but we’ve never gotten the attention that this listing did.”

Other Hereford breeders are taking advantage of craigslist as well. Lou Ellen Harr, along with husband, Jeff, and daughter, Keayla, own and operate J&L Cattle Service, Jeromesville, Ohio. In addition to

raising 60 Hereford cows, the Harrs also board heifers, feed out cattle, sell hay and mineral, and fit cattle for other breeders.

The Harrs had been buyers on craigslist for some time. Last fall, when they had a few steers left after most had sold, Harr decided to give craigslist a shot.

“My husband just laughed,” she says. “He asked why I was wasting my time. But, within 15 minutes of listing the steers, we had two hits. When it was all said and done, we could have sold more.”

Chisum Peterson is the broker for and owner of Peterson Land & Auction LLC, Chamberlain, S.D., which is a real estate and auction brokerage, handling real estate, machinery, livestock equipment and purebred livestock auctions.

Peterson began using craigslist for two reasons: research for his business and purchases for himself and his family’s purebred Limousin ranch in Pukwana, S.D.

“I’m personally not involved in the day-to-day operations of the family business,” Peterson says. “But, my dad is not computer savvy. If I see something he’s searching for, I print out the listing for him or give him the phone number. Dad makes the final decision.”

Peterson says listings for farm equipment vary according to season. Spring and summer bring lawn mower and tractor listings. And, in the winter, chains, snow blowers and blades are common, he says.

By following a few simple guidelines, Woolfolk, Harr and Peterson say you, too, can discover success using craigslist.

① — Broaden your scope

When listing an item on craigslist, a seller must determine the town or city to list that item under. Within each city and town are numerous categories. Potential customers will only locate an item by searching within the listed region — no full-site searches are available.

Because a potential buyer can only search one location at a time, Woolfolk recommends listing your offering in several local towns and cities.

Harr agrees. Had they not had immediate success by listing only in Mansfield, Ohio, she was prepared to extend her listing to other local towns.

“If we hadn’t gotten a response, we would have probably listed with others,” she says. “We were just testing the water.”

②— Post now, post often

As a new item is added to a category, it appears first within that category listing. For this reason, Woolfolk and Peterson recommend deleting and reposting your listing every few days to keep it fresh and near the top of the list.

Woolfolk says in order to gather the most contacts for his hay business, he re-enters his listings at least every other day.

“With the cattle — both the cow-calf pairs and with a later listing of yearling bulls — we only had to list them one time,” he says.

Peterson says, as a buyer, he only scrolls through the first page of listings.

“If you’re not on the first page when I scroll through, I’m gone,” he says. “There gets to be many things posted in the ‘farm+garden’ section — especially on a weekend. If you’ve posted something, get on the site to ensure you’re still on the first page. If not, maybe you should delete and repost so that you’re always toward the front.”

Craigslist rules state a user can post to one category and in one city no more often than every 48 hours. Postings expire after 45 days for most locations outside of major metropolitan areas.

③— It’s all in the details

In order to attract attention to your listing, Peterson says detailed information and photos are critical, from a buyer standpoint.

“As a buyer, the more information a person gives, the better,” he says. “If I see a listing for a 4020 John Deere tractor and I don’t see the icon for a

photo being included, I don’t click on it.

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The Woolfolks had listed their cow-calf pair offering on *BuyHereford.com*, as well. So, from their craigslist posting, they provided a link to *BuyHereford.com*, where potential customers could view photos, videos and in-depth descriptions of the cattle.

Harr says they did not include photos on their first craigslist postings of a group of steers and they had numerous requests for photos from potential customers as a result.

“A picture is worth a thousand words,” she says. “Our thought was they were just steers. But, as always, a picture sells.”

And, she says, should they ever choose to list purebred breeding stock on the site, they will include photos with their listings.

④— Prepare for the Q&A

When listing on an open classified Web site such as craigslist, Harr recommends preparing for a variety of questions from people with a variety of backgrounds and knowledge levels.

“Be prepared to answer a lot of questions,” Harr says. “You’ll get questions from the very experienced



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to the person who wants to feed one steer in their backyard.”

Harr says they’ve been asked if their products are natural and how they manage their cattle, to name a few.

⑤— Secure that security

Craigslist features millions of listings from millions of sellers. And, the buyers are just as numerous. Unfortunately, scams can come with the territory. Just as with any business transaction, using business sense will serve a seller or buyer well.

Woolfolk says combining a listing on craigslist with a *BuyHereford.com* listing worked well for their operation.

In addition to the capabilities of showing video on *BuyHereford.com* — an option not available on craigslist — Woolfolk says *BuyHereford.com* also provided seller security.

“Our cattle sold through *BuyHereford.com*, and we used that as our seller protection,” Woolfolk says. “By utilizing *BuyHereford.com*, we got a check that we knew was good. We didn’t have that risk.”

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How to get started: Posting a listing

- Visit www.craigslist.org
- Click “post to classifieds” on the left-hand side of the home page, in the shaded area.
- Select the appropriate action for your offering. (i.e. “for sale”)
- Select the appropriate category for your offering. (i.e. “farm+garden” for livestock and agricultural equipment)
- Complete information boxes, including listing title, price, location, detailed description and photo.
- Preview and approve your listing.
- Read and accept the “Terms of Use.”
- You will receive an e-mail to confirm your listing. Click on the e-mail’s link to confirm, edit or delete your listing before it is published.
- Once you click “publish,” your posting will appear on the site within 15 minutes.
- Keep the confirmation e-mail, as you can use this link to later edit or delete your posting. **HW**

However, Harr and Peterson say a seller or buyer can seek protection when dealing only with craigslist, too.

When listing the group of steers on craigslist, Harr chose the option of an anonymous listing. With this option, no phone number or e-mail address is shown. Rather, potential customers can e-mail an anonymous craigslist e-mail address, which is forwarded to the seller's e-mail account.

"We chose the anonymous listing because we wanted to be able to screen potential customers," Harr explains.

"You could tell their level of true interest from the questions they asked, and that helped us screen the e-mails. If we had been selling breeding stock, however, we most likely would have listed a phone number in the listing."

Peterson recommends when making a purchase, research the farm address of equipment or cattle if it is unknown to you. By searching the address through Google to view a map of the location and by performing some online research, a buyer can gain some knowledge of the seller.

"Ultimately, buying something from craigslist is really no different than buying from a classified ad," Peterson says. "They are as-is purchases. There is no warranty or guarantee. You buy something, and then it's 'good luck.' Trust, but verify."

Using a little business sense and marketing savvy can help your listing rise to the top on craigslist. And, on this site, topping the list is the name of the game — leading to quick sales exceeding your expectations. **HW**