

# Craigslist CEO: Crooks who use site will be caught

April 22 2009, By STEVE KARNOWSKI , Associated Press Writer

---

(AP) -- The chief executive of Craigslist has a message for people who try to use the popular Internet advertising site to commit crimes: You're going to get caught.

Violent crimes linked to Craigslist ads in Minnesota and Boston have made headlines, but CEO Jim Buckmaster said Wednesday the site is an "extremely unsafe venue for criminal activity because you're virtually guaranteeing that you're going to get caught."

"That's been the case with nearly every serious violent crime that's been connected with the site," Buckmaster said in a telephone interview from San Francisco, where Craigslist is based. "There's an electronic trail leading to yourself. So don't use Craigslist for crime unless you want to go to jail."

A Minnesota man was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole this month for the 2007 slaying of Katherine Ann Olson, who answered a phony ad he posted for a baby sitter. This week, a 23-year-old Boston University medical student was charged with robbing women who advertised erotic services on Craigslist and killing one of them, Julissa Brisman.

"We were shocked and saddened to learn that a horrific crime like this had any connection to the use of Craigslist, and our hearts went out to the family and friends of Julissa Brisman," Buckmaster said.

Buckmaster said the attention Craigslist has received because of crimes linked to it is partly a function of how heavily the site is used and the relative newness of the Internet.

"There are 50 million people using the site every month, and the site has facilitated billions of human interactions over its history. Compared to human society as a whole the risks of Craigslist are low, but they're not zero," he said.

Buckmaster declined to say much about how Craigslist is cooperating with authorities investigating the Boston case but said, "We make ourselves 100 percent available to them and provide them with any and all information we have that they may request."

Law enforcement officials generally ask that Craigslist not comment on what it's doing in specific cases, he said.

Buckmaster defended Craigslist's inclusion of the "erotic services" classification on its sites. He said users requested it so those ads would be posted there, where users can avoid them, instead of being scattered among other ad categories. He also insisted that illegal activity is "absolutely not welcome there."

He said Craigslist will donate 100 percent of its net revenues from those ads to charities, under an agreement announced last November with 40 state attorneys general, though he said figures aren't available yet.

Craigslist's city sites include tips on personal safety and avoiding scams and fraud. Buckmaster said the Minnesota and Boston cases provide an opportunity to remind people that it makes sense when meeting someone found through an online ad to take the same kinds of precautions they should take offline.

"Anytime you're going to meet for the first time choose a public place where there are other people around. ... Consider bringing a friend along. Let someone know where you're going to be and when you'll be returning. Take your cell phone along. Trust your instincts and report suspicious activities to authorities," he said.

Craigslist founder Craig Newmark will attend a benefit concert in Minnesota on May 3 for a scholarship fund at St. Olaf College in memory of Olson. The 24-year-old was slain by Michael John Anderson, 20, who used a Craigslist ad to lure her to his home in the Minneapolis suburb of Savage.

Buckmaster said Craigslist officials were inspired by the Olson family's efforts to keep the focus of the case on Katherine Olson's life and what she meant to her family and friends.

"When there was an opportunity for Craigslist to participate in some way, that was something we were excited about doing," he said.

---

On the Net:

Jim Buckmaster's blog with entries on Boston and Minnesota cases:

<http://blog.craigslist.org>

Katherine Olson memorial concert site:

<http://www.concertforkatherine.com>

*©2009 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.*

Citation: Craigslist CEO: Crooks who use site will be caught (2009, April 22) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-04-craigslist-ceo-crooks-site-caught.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.