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From the Boston Globe Business Team

Craigslist CEO: Our site is not sex-related

April 22, 2009 04:45 PM

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Craigslist chief executive Jim Buckmaster denied offering sex-related services on his company's website today, even as Connecticut Attorney General Richard Blumenthal called on the online advertising service to take stronger actions to combat pornography, prostitution, and child trafficking on its site.

"I would not describe any section of our site as 'sex related,'" Buckmaster wrote in response to a series of e-mailed questions from the Globe, while acknowledging that Craigslist offers an "erotic services" section.

"Roughly one percent of ads posted on CL are in the 'erotic services' section," he wrote, adding that most Craigslist customers go to the section where the site offers job listings.

Craigslist has increasingly come under fire as one of the nation's largest sex-for-sale advertising generators. Earlier in the day, Buckmaster told a CNN cable TV news program that the company feels "terribly" that an accused killer in Boston allegedly used the online service to target his victims.

On Monday, Boston police arrested Philip Markoff, a second-year medical student accused of violently attacking two women he met on the site and fatally shooting one, 26-year-old Julissa Brisman. Investigators said he trolled Craigslist looking for women he could rob, possibly to fuel a gambling problem.

Connecticut AG Blumenthal held a press conference today to demand that Craigslist take additional steps to control sex-advertising on the site. He asked the company to end its policy allowing users to post erotic and often pornographic photographs on its site, and hire staffers who would scan for advertisements that promote blatantly illegal activity, like prostitution and child sex trafficking.

"Craigslist has the means - and moral obligation - to stop the pimping and prostituting in plain sight," Blumenthal said in a press release. "Like any bricks-and-mortar establishment, Craigslist has the responsibility and power to prohibit prostitution, pornography, and inappropriate behavior on its premises."

Blumenthal's demands came just hours after Craigslist's Buckmaster appeared on cable TV news channel CNN in one of his first live interviews since the Markoff arrest.

"We feel terribly, and it's quite sad that anyone would lose their life," Buckmaster told CNN. "And we're horrified that use of Craigslist could in any way be connected with a violent crime of this nature. It just causes us to redouble our efforts to try to get across to users to take a few common sense precautions that eliminate most of the risks."

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INSIDE BOSTON.COM

A story in this morning's Globe noted that Craigslist, an online bulletin board where many classified ads are posted, pursues a dual role of promoting sex trade advertising and assisting police working to solve crimes linked to erotic ads on the site.

To read that Globe story, please click here.

A second Globe story noted that Boston University medical student Philip Markoff (right) was arraigned yesterday on charges of murder, kidnapping, and armed robbery.

To read that story, please click here. Watch the video of Buckmaster's CNN appearance below.

(By Megan Woolhouse, Globe staff)

more CNN video



0:00/0:00

Craigslist feels 'terrible' 4:19

Craigslist CEO Jim Buckmaster responds to the Web site's connection to a recent murder.

Source: CNN | Added April 22, 2009

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56 COMMENTS SO FAR...

1. Craigslist bears no responsibility for any of this. They just bring people together for various purposes.

Posted by Mike Scott April 22, 09 11:02 AM

2. This is a well-said statement, Mr. Buckmaster. That's all that's needed to be said. Coakley is trying to paint her liberal ideals on the public that Craigslist is somehow at fault. The sex trade is the oldest profession in the world. If not Craigslist, these women and men can ply their trade on tangible message boards. Should a lamppost or bathroom stall with a sex trade ad be at fault too, Ms. Coakley? Cell phones were used to set the appointment up, too. Should AT&T, T-Mobile or Verizon be at fault too and labeled a "enabler," Ms. Coakley?

This is a sad tale, and this creep should be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. He was the one responsible, not a website, cell phone or message board.

Posted by Mike Gibbons April 22, 09 11:02 AM

3. I use Craigslist a lot to purchase items locally and I've sold a few items on it as well. It was great when it first began but I believe they should take responsibility and remove the dating & erotic part from the site. This is not the

MOST E-MAILED

1. A drug's unintended use restores the gift of hearing
2. In health bill, billions for parks, paths
3. At the tone, please don't leave a message
4. Mass. is 1st to fight US marriage law
5. Changes urged in special ed instruction
6. Invasive mussel found in Bay State lake
7. Aging in place

RECOMMENDED SEARCHES

first incident and it won't be the last until Jim Buckmaster removes this part of the site. Of course it won't end there are other sites but it can help.

Posted by SisterV April 22, 09 11:05 AM

4. I hope that people don't confuse the issue here. This is NOT Craigslist fault.

Posted by JimT389 April 22, 09 11:12 AM

5. People need to stop making Craiglist the scapegoat. its just like anything else. it is a tool that can be used for bad things.

if you are going to attack Craigslist then you can attack the following

- The subway - they allow easy transportation for these people to meet up
- the hotel - for renting out rooms to prostitutes
- the internet - promotes communication

i guess the point is, Craigslist doesnt kill pepole, people kill people.

Posted by shawn April 22, 09 11:14 AM

6. You feel terrible - not terribly. If you felt terribly you would be having trouble feeling. It smells bad - not badly. I believe sense verbs do not use adverbs.

Does this bother anybody else?

People need to stop overcompensating on adverbs.

Hasn't this ever happened in the classifieds? Oxford Shirts sounds kind of stupid.

Posted by Jorge Newbery April 22, 09 11:14 AM

7. It is not Craiglits fault some people choose to us it as a means to find vulnerable people, mostly women. With all the patrons that frequent this site, I really cannot see how this site can "foretell" who these criminals are. It would be a good thing if the "shadowy" careers were not advertised in ANY of the internet sites. Of course, this applies to the personal ads as well, you don't know just who you will meet. It is very sad we cannot trust others....rule of thumb, if you notice/see ANY red flags, by all means change direction. Life is too precious to run unnecessary risks.

Posted by NinaK April 22, 09 11:16 AM

8. It's not CL's fault, this freak killer could have used eHarmony or Match.com to perform the same sick actions! This guy is a GREAT reason to keep capitol punishment on the books, and he deserves capitol punishment!

Posted by luwwknd April 22, 09 11:26 AM

9. CraigsList offers a very valuable service. In my eyes, this does not reflect on this company.

People need to take responsibility for their actions and use good judgement no matter what they are doing.

Posted by Lisa Berghaus April 22, 09 11:27 AM

10. I agree. This story makes me so feel so sadly.

Posted by Jonathon Sanchez April 22, 09 11:30 AM

11. If your gonna meet somebody make sure you have someone with you like your friends, relatives, siblings, and tell them you will meet them in a public place.

Posted by Chris April 22, 09 11:38 AM

12. Feels "terribly"? Does that mean Buckmaster is an incompetent feeler? Maybe he means feel "terrible." I guess English just isn't his thing.

Posted by Antonius April 22, 09 11:39 AM

13. oh please. Craigslist should not be held accountable for this tragedy. Anyone who has used Craigslist to purchase or sell items knows the risks. You meet the individuals and you keep yourself protected. I am sorry for her death, but it is quite evident that this woman was a prostitute. It is a risky business.

Posted by not impressed April 22, 09 11:39 AM

- Fashion
- Weather
- Obituaries

- Names
- Fresh pasta
- Dog breeders

ABOUT THIS LIST

14. I'm sure you meant that they feel terrible.

Posted by inkfingers April 22, 09 11:50 AM

15. Jim Buckmaster

"If anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a large millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea.

Something you should ponder....

Posted by RichMad April 22, 09 11:59 AM

16. ... "feels terribly" what?

Posted by Doofus April 22, 09 12:09 PM

17. "promoting sex trade advertising"

Whaaaaa???

I see the Globe is on a crusade. That should say "promoting sex trade advertising ONLINE", which is the real issue the Globe has. Take a look at the Phoenix classifieds for the last 30 years or so.

Posted by Nick Name April 22, 09 12:14 PM

18. Be responsible in your reporting and journalism!

No one blames the irresponsible parents who raise these girls with no common sense or brain.

Does anyone blame the horrible people who raised the murderer?

God forbid we blame all the responsible parties.

But, let us blame the Craigslist inventor who has helped millions and millions of us with sources, resources and information!

He would have killed one way or another. At least Craigslist helped find him!

Get your facts straight and blame the criminal and irresponsible parents.

Posted by holly April 22, 09 12:14 PM

19. We also see right through your statement in which you compare yourself to telephone book ads and newspaper ads which print these 'kinds of ads' but differ yourself by saying that 100% of the net revenues goes to charity.

Well Jim, what is BLATANTLY obvious here - 100% of the newspaper ads and telephone book ads are reviewed by a human, do not allow sexually explicit photos, and are edited to be appropriate for public viewing. 0% of craigslist ads are.

What is also painfully obvious - you did come CLOSE to giving an answer to the question "Why not just refuse any ads of this nature?"

Your answer: "That's actually the great thing about Craigslist in that when there is criminal activity, which of course we don't condone, it is easier for law enforcement.... to spot the bad apples and root them out and prosecute them and get them off the site, which you really appreciate."

Come on Jim. Does ANYONE see an answer to the question here????

This is a canned statement which completely does not answer the question. When your answer diverts to something 'positive' that has nothing to do with the original question, it usually means you have an answer which you cannot say because it is simply not right. For most of us, the real answer (being that you don't provide one) would probably go something like this:

"Well, erotic services generates most of the traffic to our website and generates a lot of revenue for the charities we donate to. Without erotic services, we would lose thousands of hits a month and possibly lose out on thousands of dollars of revenue generated from the other sections of the site while our visitors are there. Therefore we just welcome these ads with open arms, do not have the resources to review them before putting them up, but tell you directly that you cannot post them. I mean, how are WE suppose to know what people are putting in those ads. We verified their phone number and credit card and that is good enough!"

I wonder how many of those charities know where this money comes from? IE. How many of them would actually take the money if they knew it came from

ads for "erotic services". Sounds like 'dirty money' that I would imagine most charities would not want to be associated with. Can you imagine an honest answer when asked where one of these supposed charities got their donation money from? "Oh that, yea that came from craigslist, you know the section where call girls and prostitutes post ads soliciting sex for money and post up sexually explicit nude photos of their junk close up..... umm, wait, no wait, I mean, um - we just got it from craigslist."

It goes without saying you co-operate with law enforcement. You have to. It's not something craigslist does out of the kindness of their heart. You feel bad? Prove it. Stop allowing ads for prostitution on your site plain and simple.

Posted by odoylerules April 22, 09 12:28 PM

20. hm. in the recent ruling of the pirate bay creators, the court held those accountable for what occurs across their infrastructures. guess that makes craig newmark a wanted man.

Posted by Jeff April 22, 09 12:43 PM

21. "We feel terribly, and it's quite sad that anyone would lose their life."
 1. People "lose their life" every day. Our cemeteries give quiet testimony to this fact.
 2. "We feel terribly":
 A. take off your gloves
 B. see a neurologist
 C. lose the royal "we"

Posted by detmokers April 22, 09 12:55 PM

22. He's crying all the way to the bank...If they are making 81 million and have only 25 employees, it must be one of the most lucrative businesses in the world.

Posted by delliah April 22, 09 01:08 PM

23. Why does Craigslist even need the "personals" ads? Why can't they just get rid of them? Clearly, the "massage" deal is a scam cover, yet Craigslist allows it.

Posted by smarten up April 22, 09 01:07 PM

24. This is not Craigslist fault or responsibility.

Posted by Tami Twarog April 22, 09 01:13 PM

25. Globe wrote: "[Craigslist] has its critics as the service pursues a dual role of promoting sex trade advertising and assisting police helps solve crimes linked to erotic ads on the site."

Craigslist does not pursue a role of promoting sex trade advertising. Craigslist operates from a principle of free speech and community, and its services range from social to economic, with a considerable and important role in the employment sector.

A prostitute walking down a city street and posting are craigslist are the same in this ONE way:

Walking is perfectly legal.

Posting is perfectly legal.

Soliciting sex in exchange for money is not ~in either case~ legal.

Craigslist is not serving a role "promoting sex trade advertising" any more than a city street provides a sidewalk for prostitutes to walk and seek customers.

Craigslist is committed to community, and strongly advises posters and post responders to use judgement in their behavioral decisions on the service. On the street or on the web, prostitutes are equally vulnerable to victimization as long as they participate in illegal/unregulated sex trades.

Posted by Resident and Protector, Digital Commons April 22, 09 01:39 PM

26. Craigslist is doing nothing wrong.

If it's not Craigslist, it will be some other website. There will always be a demand for dating and "erotic services" websites.

Richard Blumenthal is just grandstanding. He's obviously not that intelligent.

Posted by Mikey "Insane" Monkeypants April 22, 09 02:59 PM

27. I said this in response to an earlier article: for those of us looking to barter craigslist represents the internet at its finest. It brings together people with complementary needs who otherwise may not have met. Why they had to include 'adult services' is beyond me. There are plenty of escort sites that perform this service already. Leave craigslist for people looking for hybrid bikes, vintage vinyl 45s etc.

Posted by PaulQ April 22, 09 03:00 PM

28. How ironic that a liberal flip flopper like Blumenthal is calling for censorship. He has proven that he truly is a moron if he thinks that Craig's List is at fault here whatsoever. How about he go after Foxwoods in his own state for contributing to gambling problems and try to draw a weak case that this increases crime in surrounding neighborhoods and states. Please, get off your high horse and stop grandstanding for future political and personal gain.

Posted by Dan April 22, 09 03:03 PM

29. let's face it, there's going to be prostitution in our society no matter what. It's better for us all if the prostitutes are finding their johns on craigslist than by walking up and down our streets. This moves a nuisance crime largely out of public sight. When I was a kid (1970s) we had hookers all over the streets and red-light districts. The internet has moved most of that (which is always going to exist) behind closed doors.

Posted by James April 22, 09 03:06 PM

30. Definately NO FAULT of Craiglist. You want them to remove these listings? Then the Phoenix Newspaper should remove their Adult pull out section of their newspaper and all other newspapers/magazines that publish these as well. Also, while you're at it, block all of American from being able to access the Russian and South American Mail Order Bride websites. People are responsible for thier own actions & decisions, not other people or institutions.

Posted by Gino Corleone April 22, 09 03:13 PM

31. It is RIDICULOUS to blame craigslist. This just makes Blumenthal seem clueless and out of touch. What about the hotel? It was used by the perpetrator. Should the hotel be shut down?

Craigslist makes it EASIER to catch criminals, it doesn't CAUSE these criminal acts. People committing these crimes, sex trafficking or what have you, would commit these crimes regardless.

Posted by JC April 22, 09 03:41 PM

32. "It just causes us to redouble our efforts to try to get across to users to take a few common sense precautions that eliminate most of the risks."

Exactly what "common sense precautions" could Ms. Brisman have taken to avoid doing business with Philip Markoff?

Posted by EAB April 22, 09 03:54 PM

33. Doesn't anyone remember the successful lawsuit brought against Soldier of Fortune Magazine for \$4.37 million (and the two lawsuits that were settled out of court), from the families of victims who had been murdered by guns-for-hire contacted through ads in the magazine?

The US 11th Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the verdict against the magazine saying "the publisher could recognize the offer of criminal activity as readily as its readers obviously did."

Why doesn't Craigslist simply cancel the Erotic Services Category and save itself the inevitable loss of face, hassle, and legal fees?

Never mind saving another unfortunate woman's life...

Posted by SaveWomen April 22, 09 04:14 PM

34. If prostitution was legalized and regulated (it is the world's oldest profession and will forever be with us), then women could be protected and would not be

meeting guys online or in back alleys. Men could be more assured that the women have been tested for diseases.
 Clients would have to come to places of businesses where their IDs would be checked.

Posted by n.a. April 22, 09 04:49 PM

- 35. Hey Conn. AG, you want to stop the robbing and killing of prostitutes? Maybe you shouldn't talk trash about craigslist making your job harder by allowing people to communicate about whatever they feel like, and maybe you should go ahead and legalize the prostitution that is already present in every city, and every state in the US, and every country in the world for that matter. You already overlook the common prostitution areas except for yearly spring sweeps in order to create an appearance of caring, or you crack down once property values become higher in the general area and people begin to complain. You overlook most craigslist ads, and escort companies. Just legalize it already and allow these women to have safe and clean working conditions.

Posted by Shaggydog April 22, 09 04:52 PM

- 36. Please, simply compel them and every other publication to eliminate the "services" section and call it what it is. It's about time someone did unless we intend to legalize prostitution and protect people doing it. You can't have it both ways and NOT expect people to get hurt or worse such as what has happened. I'm neither for or against it but I am for protection so if we're going to say it's ok to publicly solicit we had better accompany that statement with logic and put in laws that protect the people providing the services. CL is as responsible as bartenders or parents who serve too much alcohol to people and those people hurt someone. People - ALL PEOPLE - have to stand up and be responsible and not just make money off of other peoples weaknesses.

Posted by liz April 22, 09 04:53 PM

- 37. odoylerules,

how does it feel to be pretty much the only person trying to bame Craigslist?
 Are you a shill for the papers?

The reason why Craigslist does not review its ads is because as long as they do not review them, they are not held accountable for their content. When they start reviewing them, they will have to pretty much shut down due to legal liability.

You want to get people back to your paper, provide VALUE and stop your desperate campaign against the online sites that are putting you out of business.

For the record, I like the Globe and I will miss it if it goes away, but that does not mean I'm willing to follow your tortured logic and blame Craigslist for any of this.

Craigslist is only requiring people to PAY for those ads because it was part of an agreement with prosecutors (to ensure that people can be found by their credit card accounts) and that's why they donate all that revenue to charities which, by the way, will gladly take money from any source.

P. S. You might want to stay away from more obvious lies and exagerations like this:

"100% of the newspaper ads and telephone book ads are reviewed by a human, do not allow sexually explicit photos, and are edited to be appropriate for public viewing. 0% of craigslist ads are."

Posted by HBX April 22, 09 04:58 PM

- 38. I can't believe the lack of intelligence in most of these post. CL provides a service, plain an simple. GM better hope I never kill somebody with my truck because most of you will hold them responsible!!!!!!

Posted by Tom April 22, 09 05:06 PM

- 39. what do you expect from a society that blames guns for killing people? stupid people are just stupid people

Posted by richard April 22, 09 05:43 PM

40. If the masseuse had advertised in a newspaper, would he be called 'the Boston Globe killer'?

Certainly newspaper ads aren't as traceable as people who go on-line with IP addresses that can be backtracked.

If the guy did what is alleged, he's psycho. He'd do something, sometime. He'd prey on prostitutes, or erotic masseuses, or a girl walking down the street. Call him the 'erotic masseuse killer'.

Posted by Lia April 22, 09 06:00 PM

41. The bad guys want to kill Craigslist.

Posted by Rocky April 22, 09 06:07 PM

42. What a crock of you know what. People sell sex on Craigslist everyday of the week and anyone with half a brain can figure that out what is happening on their site. Please!

Posted by BobW April 22, 09 07:18 PM

43. Craigslist is exactly the same as the classifieds in every newspaper. 98% of people using Craigslist are using the site for honorable reasons like shopping for cars, boats, houses, electronics, and legitimate job searches!

There are so many very nice old grannies shopping on the site every day!

Ceo of Craigslist: Please post this article in every State not just in Boston. People have to know the truth about the great qualities of Craigslist.....Thanks!

Posted by Ms. Common Sense April 22, 09 07:29 PM

44. I hope not to be prosecuted for copyright infringement, but it seems to me that the title of the first Boston craigslist posting I randomly selected from the "erotic" section suggests its CEO may have a significant problem with the "c" word. Credibility, that is:

"Im young Im Hot and im worth every Penny"

Posted by sommls April 22, 09 08:34 PM

45. A lot of this is about the newspaper industry's anger at CL for taking away all its classified advertising revenue. If that wasn't the case, this wouldn't be such a big issue.

Posted by wickedwritah April 22, 09 09:08 PM

46. I mean I am the biggest libertarian out there but they have a sex advertisement service. Until we decriminalize the sex services, they should show some discretion...

Posted by Liberal Joe April 22, 09 09:10 PM

47. It seems to me as if Blumenthal is grandstanding for the purpose of furthering his career. If this was really such an important issue for him then he would have pursued it previously. Instead, he waited for this incident to happen, sensed what he thinks the tide of public sentiment will be, and hopes to ride it. In some sense I think that because of his position he is forced to take this position or else make himself an easy target for criticism as not being hawkish enough on crime. However, it is my sincere hope that people see through this and paint a giant "fail" on Blumenthal's endeavor.

Posted by steve in Western MA April 22, 09 10:14 PM

48. Craigslist blatantly supports sex-related ads. It's so hypocritical --- not to mention a big fat lie --- of the CEO to say it doesn't. There's no good reason for Craigslist to provide a forum for pervers, johns, and prostitutes. That's one community we can do without.

Posted by baroque April 22, 09 10:16 PM

49. Unfortunately prostitutes have always been an easy target for serial killers. Gary Ridgeway picked up at least fifty off the streets near the Seattle airport and killed them. It took the cops twenty years to nail him for it, largely because picking a hooker up off the street leaves little trace. OTOH, it didn't take the Boston cops a week to trace this guy back through the Internet (assuming they

have the right guy of course).

We're never going to wipe out prostitution. I would rather see it set up through Craigslist than have streetwalkers all over the place. There seems to be a lot less of that than there used to be before they went to electronic "dating".

Posted by Thucydides April 23, 09 05:20 PM

50. Sure, it's lame that he tried to deny there were ads for sexual services under the "erotic services" section. However I found his explanation for *why* there's an erotic services section completely understandable. I once ran a small website with a public bulletin board. You wouldn't believe how much spam and in particular sexually-explicit spam was posted; far too much to delete manually. I can understand Craigslist staff deciding to give that stuff it's own area to keep it from polluting the rest of the site. Eliminating it is not an option; it's only a question of where those ads go -- in their own area, or mixed in with personals, housecleaning, etc.?

And of course prostitution itself should be legal. That would be safer for the women providing it, safer for the men who need it, and easier to keep "in its own area".

Posted by Bill April 24, 09 01:22 AM

51. The woman was a prostitute. Unfortunately, murder is an employment risk. Blaming Craigslist for her death is like blaming Boeing for the September 11th attacks.

Posted by Liz April 24, 09 03:55 AM

52. Sex Related:

personals
 women seek women
 women seeking men
 men seeking women
 men seeking men
 misc romance
 casual encounters
 missed connections
 rants and raves

Posted by Doug April 24, 09 10:24 PM

53. So now instead of erotic services, it's casual encounters with totally naked people. Doesn't craigslist do enough business to get rid of this category? I see that they are being flagged and removed but since this can just lead to no good, why keep this category at all? I can't believe that women are so stupid as to keep posting this kind of stuff and nude pictures after the murder last week. Don't tell me "they'll go somewhere else"...if every other "else" got rid of this trash, there would be a lot less crime and disease.

Posted by alan April 24, 09 10:52 PM

54. Craigslist is certainly not at fault for this. I've used the service myself and It's easy enough to protect yourself if you follow some common sense. First - ALWAYS meet in a public place. Second - let someone know where you're going and who you're meeting. Third - if anything doesn't feel right - get out of there. It's no different than using any of the other "dating" sites out there (ie. eHarmony, Match.com, etc.)

And for those who think Craigslist should do away with the "erotic services" ads. Stay out of that part of the site if it doesn't interest you.

Posted by Lisa April 25, 09 04:21 AM

55. Craigslist should be held responsible for what has happened. Now you have a guy using the site to infect people with HIV!!! Come on. They just need to do away with the personal adds completely. Since they dont have a system set up where your able to track people if they are doing crimes just like this.

Posted by Jeremiah May 30, 09 04:02 PM

56. Jim Buckmaster is a hypocrite and a phoney. But at least he's PROUD of it. Of course, CL is not at fault...and the subway isnt at fault, and the newspapers

arent at fault, and the people who make cellphones, or created email servers, or parents, or CL, or anyone.

YOU KNOW WHY? Because we now live in a society where NOONE WANTS TO TAKE ANY RESPONSIBILITY FOR ANYTHING AT ALL. ITS NOONES FAULT all of these things happen. With noone to blame, noone is responsible.and thats why the world is in the shape its in today..

AND THATS W

Posted by John Q Public June 4, 09 11:32 AM

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