

Craigslist Musicians:

Using Craigslist to Find More Musicians

If you've never heard of Craigslist, you either live near my parents in Iowa, or you're living under a rock. It's a place where anyone can post any ad to buy, sell, barter, trade, giveaway, meet, greet, scheme, scam, and so on. Good, bad and ugly all come with Craigslist. But if you can maneuver through the bad and around the ugly, Craigslist can be a useful tool in recruiting musicians. In two different ministries, in two



different areas, I've found several instrumentalists using Craigslist. (yes, including drummers.)

There are several things to consider when using Craigslist to recruit musicians.

Two Big Questions:

First, is your leadership OK with non-attendees playing on your

team? Some churches ask people to attend a certain amount of time before they can serve in certain ministries. If there are policies like that at your church, you and your leadership will need to wrestle through the implications of allowing outside players in.

Another related issue to wrestle with is the idea that you might be "sheep stealing" from another church. Two of the musicians

that I've recruited from Craigslist were from other churches. I asked a lot of questions to make sure I wasn't hindering another ministry. In one case, the musician was involved in a church that had a closed worship team. They didn't rotate in other musicians other than to sub for their regular players. [Their loss: he plays drums, keys,

guitar and bass AND prepares before rehearsals!]

If you work through the first issue, the second is this:

Is your leadership open to unsaved people on your team?

In the ministries I've been involved with, the conclusion was this:

1. *We don't want non Christ-followers serving as worship team singers.* Their primary role is to model worship.

2. *While the band members can also model worship, theirs is more of a supporting role.* So we adopted a mindset of what Bill Hybels calls "radical inclusion." We don't get too many opportunities to build relationships with lost people inside our church buildings. So if there's a chance, let's take it.

Please understand that this decision isn't right for every church and every ministry. If your leadership is opposed to an unsaved person on your team, you need to submit to that decision. And just so you know, the majority of the musicians I've recruited from Craigslist are believers, just in church situations that didn't have worship bands.

Writing the Ad

Once approval is in place, it's time to write the post. Use these questions guide you.

What do you want?

A drummer? Bassist? Lincoln Brewster? (yeah, me too.) When you post, *be specific*. If you're like most smaller and mid-side churches, you probably need multiple musicians to round out a solid rotation. So you could post...*"NEEDED: Acoustic Guitarists, Electric Guitarists, Keyboard*

Players, Drummers and Percussionists needed for church worship band."

This shotgun approach could likely communicate two things. At best, it says you are working with very little. At worst, you and your church look desperate. A solid musician likely does NOT want to walk into that situation.

So post for a specific instrument. *Wanted: An electric guitar player...*

What do you want from the musician?

There's no need to go into every detail, but give the Craigslist-perusing musician some idea of the gig.

Where your church is located?

Craigslist is centered around cities/areas. It helps keep things local, but it can still cover a large chunk of geography. 35 miles to the other side of the county could be a deal-breaker. It's better to note your location upfront and save everyone the hassle.

How often will they play?

Is this a one-time "fill-in" gig, or are you looking someone to play every-week?

What kind of skill is required?

Give an idea of what your minimum need is.

When are rehearsals?

Are they expected to be at rehearsals? I usually mention in the ad what night rehearsals are scheduled. To most musicians, that insinuates the requirement to be there. By the way, I've found it way easier to get my "outside"

musicians to come to rehearsals than I do my own church volunteers. They're itching to play and aren't bogged down with small groups on Wednesday, nursery duty on Sunday, and board meeting on Tuesday.

Is there pay?

This is important. I say up front in my posts that this is an **unpaid** gig. Here's the good news: a majority of musicians have never gotten paid. Again, most are just happy to play music.

How should they contact you?

While I like being open and accessible as possible, Craigslist gets tons of scammers. I usually opt to use Craigslist's built-in anonymous reply system rather than showing my e-mail address. You'll still get the scam replies, but they stop once the post is gone. Usually.

Another related point. Let the person know how soon they should expect a reply. Believe it or not, they're looking forward to hearing back from you. Otherwise, they wouldn't have bothered to reply.

So let's spell this all out:

Wanted: An electric guitar player to play in two services a month at Trendy Metaphor Community Church just outside Ourtown. You'll need to be able to read chord charts, play some by ear, and be able to play simple leads. Rehearsals are Thursdays at 7pm. This isn't a paid gig, but it is a chance to connect with a group of musicians and play music. If you're interested or have questions, please reply to this post. We should be able to get back to you

within 24 hours.

Going Public

The ad is written. Now it's time to post. You've got a few options:

1. There's a section called COMMUNITY. Under that you'll find MUSICIANS. This is where the local Whitesnake tribute band looks for a new drummer. This is a decent place to post.

2. Another section is GIGS. The logical place here is TALENT GIGS. Even though you're looking for adult musicians, the ADULT GIGS is NOT the place to post.

3. The best place I've found is actually in the MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS in the FOR SALE section. I'm sure Craig and his List people in San Francisco might frown upon me posting an ad like that in a section intended to sell instruments, but that seems to be where a lot of musicians look. Most are just perusing for a good deal on a used guitar.

And note, my postings have been removed because they weren't technically a "for sale" item. But I'm always clear with my heading – I don't try to trick people into opening the ad with something like: '69 Les Paul, must sell. \$100 obo. (It is tempting, but "bait and switch" isn't a great way to introduce people to your church, or Jesus.)

4. You could post in all three (I've tried), but Craigslist is set up to catch duplicate or similar postings in multiple categories (and it did). The good news, it will allow duplicate postings after 48 hours.

"Craigslist Musician, Meet the Team."

When you've posted the ad, you'll want to have a game plan in place for connecting with musicians.

Since neither of you know each other, it's good to build in a little time to get acquainted. Before I invite them into the interview process that we use, I like to e-mail or talk on the phone a time or two. If they seem like their interested, I send out a packet of information to them. Here's what it contains:

- Interview Process Explanation. (This explains the..., well, the interview process. I know... that title's a little vague.) And by the way, I use 'interview' because some church people tend to freak out at the idea of auditioning for a ministry. That's another article.
- The Values and Expectations of Our Worship Ministry.
- Non-Attending Musician Expectations. This is a list of expectations I have for our "outside" musicians. I've landed on the term "non-attending" in order to stay

away from the connotations of "outside."

- Non-Attending Musician Application. Most of the info is similar to our regular application. We ask about spiritual beliefs in a way that doesn't assume any Christian background.

At Heartland, we've adopted a 3-step interview process. 1) Informal interview with worship pastor. 2) play/sing for worship pastor and a few other musicians 3) invitation to sit in on a rehearsal. By the 2nd step, I usually know if the person is right for the team. But the third step allows them to get to know the band and vice-versa. I go one step further with non-attending musicians. I let them know that they're welcome to play for at least one or two services without committing to being on the schedule.

One last important point. I feel it's important to clarify to the musician that this arrangement is *temporary*. I spell out clearly that I hope one of the following things happen: The musician...

...connects within his own

church and uses his talents and gifts there.

...uses his experience here at Heartland to help him commit and serve in a different church

...finds that our church is a good fit for him, and he commits to being a part of the ministry here.

I can tell you not to expect a high percentage of success for every posting. I've posted at times and had zero bites. After one round of posting, I was talking with four different musicians and only one worked out. But that's still not bad odds. So instead of clicking on Craigslist to find a used Bowflex or minivan, you might just try to find that bass player your team needs.

by Jon Nicol

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