

How to Automate Collection Efforts Using RSS Feeds from Craigslist

By: Mike Himley

A recent rash of burglaries in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area led to the creation of a collaborative wiki sponsored by the Dagir Company. The wiki is designed to coordinate the efforts of analysts to collect, analyze, and review information related to the crime spree. The burglar(s) have been stealing digital cameras, video cameras, computers, laptops, musical instruments, and other miscellaneous items from more than 85 local area churches.

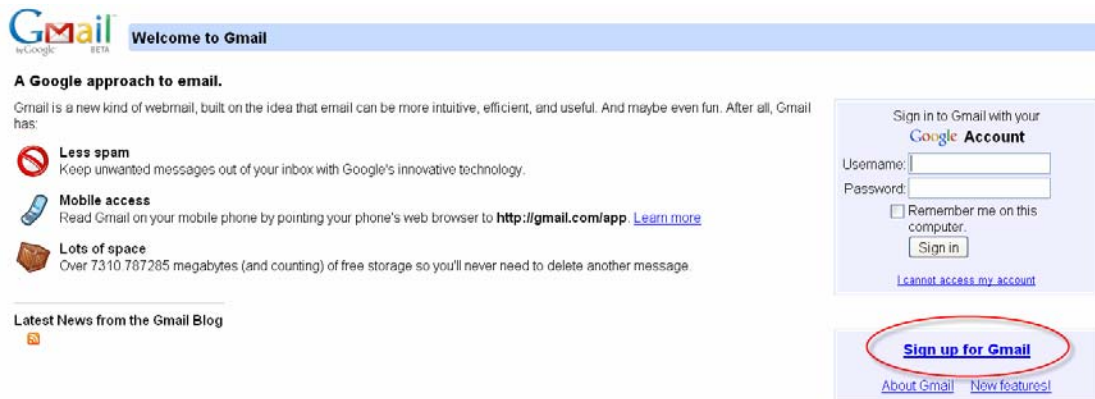
As the number of stolen items continues to grow, the efforts to track and search for the items grows exponentially. A relatively common method for searching stolen goods is to search Craigslist postings for matching descriptions. A number of crimes across the country have been solved using this method. However, performing manual searches is time consuming and strains limited resources.

There is a way to automate a good portion of the collection efforts using RSS feeds from Craigslist. If you're not familiar with RSS (Really Simple Syndication) feeds, they are essentially subscriptions to the content you want to receive. For example, instead of manually performing a Craigslist search for a stolen make and model camera, you could automate that query and have it delivered to your RSS reader automatically. In fact, you could automate thousands of queries and have the results delivered to a specified folder. (I'll address the folder again in the instructions section below.) This saves considerable collection time and allows you to invest in higher value activities. Once the content is inside the folder, you can browse the contents as is or you can perform more detailed searches within those RSS feeds. While there are multiple RSS methods and tools, I like the simplicity of Google and the cost—it's free. In the instructions section below, I have laid out a simple way to gather Craigslist RSS Feeds using Google's tools.

Instructions:

1. Sign up for a new Gmail account--Google's email service. www.gmail.com

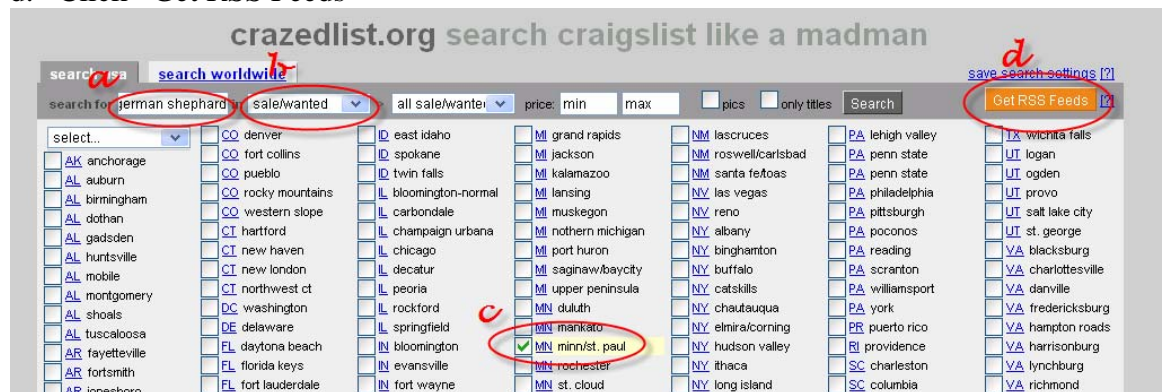
If you already have a Gmail account, you may wish to skip this part; however, if you're working on a new project that you may end up sharing with others, I recommend setting up a new account specifically for this purpose.



2. Click on Reader to activate Google's RSS Reader service.



3. Open a new browser tab and click on the following link to create Craigslist RSS feeds: <http://www.crazedlist.org/#>
 - a. Enter what you're searching for
 - b. Select what category to search
 - c. Choose your geographic region(s)
 - d. Click-"Get RSS Feeds"



4. Right click on “this link” and select Save Link as. Save to a file on your desktop. The saved file will have a .cgi extension.

crazedlist.org search craigslist like a madman

search usa | search worldwide

search for in > price: pics only titles [?](#)

To get the OPML file right-click on [this link](#) to **Save Link As...** when doing this you'll be prompted to save a file called index.cgi or index.xml or something, you can change that and name it something like "mysearch.opml" then import that into your favorite RSS reader that supports importing feed list.

If that's too confusing, just copy the text in the box below and save it to a local file (like mysearch.opml) then use your favorite RSS reader to **Import Subscriptions** and import that file.

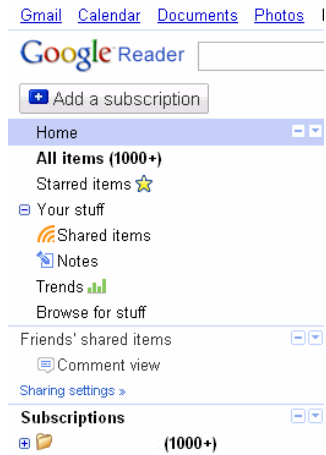
```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="ISO-8859-1"?>
<!-- OPML generated by crazedlist.org -->
<opml version="1.1">
  <head>
    <title> german shephard </title>
  </head>
  <body>
    <outline text="MN minn/st. paul - german shephard" description="Search for german shephard" />
  </body>
</opml>
```

If the download link and the xml file from the box below don't work in your RSS reader, try using this text. It seems some RSS readers don't like it when you escape &s;'s in your URLs where others insist that you do. The download link and text in the -above- box are valid XML so i use those as the default. If you use those and you get no results, even if you know there should be some, try using the data below for your OPML file. As far as i know, Netnewswire is the only one that does this, and i have an older version so that may not be a problem with newer versions.

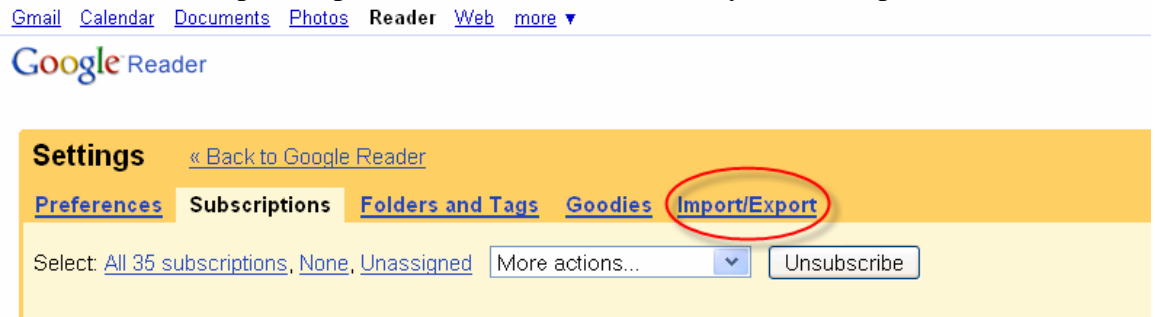
```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="ISO-8859-1"?>
<!-- OPML generated by crazedlist.org -->
<opml version="1.1">
  <head>
    <title> german shephard </title>
  </head>
  <body>
    <outline text="MN minn/st. paul - german shephard" description="Search for german shephard" />
  </body>
</opml>
```

5. Import the file you just saved “filename.cgi” into Google Reader.

a. To do this, click on Manage Subscriptions while in Google Reader

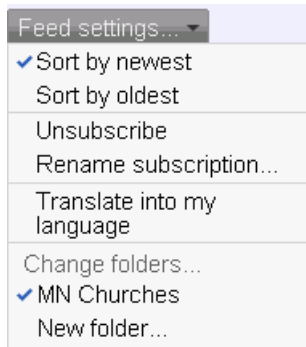


b. Then select Import/Export, and search for the file on your desktop.

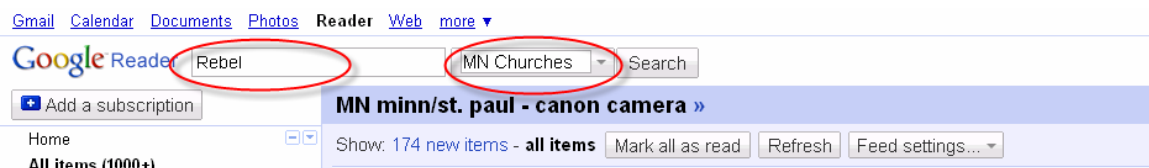


6. Save the Feed to a new folder

The newly created RSS feed will update with the content. You will want to click on Feed Settings while in Google Reader and Select “New Folder.” Choose a folder name and now that feed will be contained within that Folder. You can add subsequent Feeds to the folder the same way or create new folders to organize your content.

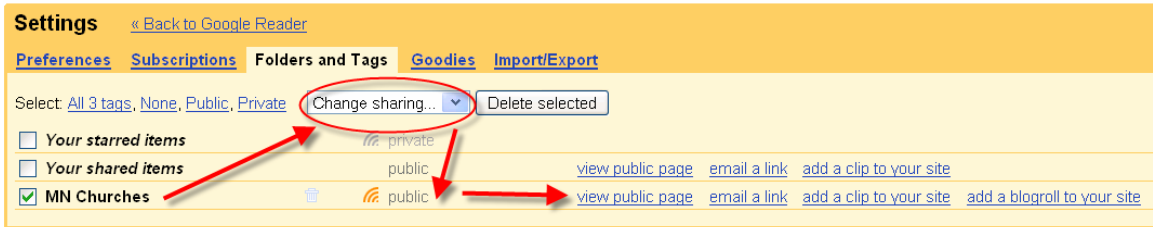


As the number of Feeds grows, you may find it useful to perform searches within your feeds. Google lets you search for items within a folder from inside Google Reader. While in Google Reader, just input your search term and select which Folder or feed to search in.



7. Make the Folder Public (Optional)

If you are sharing your folder with others you may wish to enable the Folder for Public viewing. Your content is private by default.



Once you get the hang of adding Craigslist Feeds, you'll realize that you can add any RSS Feed to your folders to expand your collection efforts.

About the Author:

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¹ The Craigslist method was found at <http://www.mercedeshop.com/shopforum/showthread.php?t=193103> and was posted in 2007 by Alex NL from the Netherlands. The method has been adapted for crime fighting purposes.