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COLUMN | Craigslist not a killer

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As a college student and a fan of newspapers, the advertising website Craigslist has me torn.

On the one hand, I've nabbed some pretty great cheap furniture, gotten concert tickets and sublet my apartment on Craigslist. However, since many classified ads have migrated to the Web, the site is one of several reasons to blame for the decline of print newspapers.

What Craigslist is not to blame for is the recent death of 26-year-old Julia Brisman.

On Monday, Quincy, Mass., resident Philip Markoff, a 23-year-old Boston University medical student, was arrested for allegedly shooting and killing Brisman at the Marriott Copley Place Hotel in Boston on April 14.

Brisman, a masseuse, advertised her services on Craigslist, which is how the pair met up.

Since the incident gained national attention it has spurred a debate of whether or not Craigslist is somewhat responsible for allowing the Brisman and Markoff to connect in the first place.

According to an article in yesterday's Boston Globe, Connecticut Attorney General Richard Blumenthal said during a press conference that the online company should take more control over illegal activity posted on its site.

If Craigslist had blocked Brisman's ad because it somehow was illegal or violated the site's policy, would she and her alleged killer have ever met up?

Probably not. But if it wasn't her, it likely would have been someone else.

It's sad to say but if someone really has a motivation to kill someone, they're likely going to find a way to do so. Murders came long before the Internet and long before Craigslist.

When you arrange to meet up with some person you discovered from an online advertisement you never know who exactly will show up. Often, it's just some guy who bought a new couch and wants you to take his old, beat-up one the hell out of his living room.

However, there's always a risk, and that risk is something the two parties who are arranging to meet – not the medium allowing them to connect – should be wary of and responsible for.

Whether it's a newspaper ad, a phone call, a text message, instant message or any other form of communication, you should have some idea of who is on the other end before you decide to meet up with them in a hotel room. If you don't, bring a friend or at least have an exit plan.

Craigslist provides a valuable service by allowing millions of people to conveniently connect and find jobs, places to live and opportunities to trade a bunch of useless junk.

The site's CEO Jim Buckmaster told CNN on Wednesday that the company feels "terribly" that Craigslist was the method allegedly used for Markoff to find his victim.

And the site should feel bad because Brisman's death is certainly a sad circumstance, but they shouldn't feel responsible – they did not kill her.

Similarly, they should not feel at fault for newspapers shutting down across the country because Craigslist is not killing newspapers, it is merely a creative business idea that happens to be out-competing print publications for classified advertising – but they should feel "terribly."

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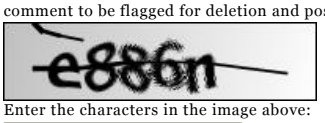

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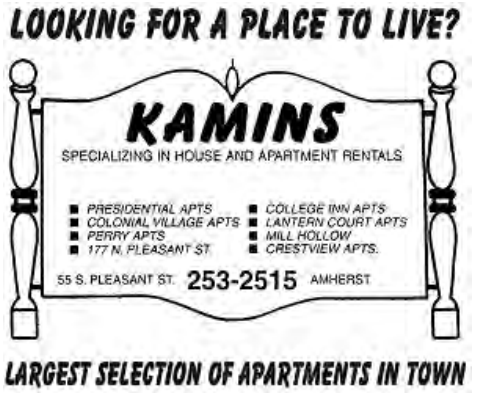

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