

With virtually any type of information imaginable online, it makes sense to do regular internet searches for your home's address. There are at least six compelling reasons it makes sense to do so, especially if it's an address you're thinking of renting, buying or selling. Smart homeowners would do well to search for their addresses, too, and here's why:

1. To See If Megan's Law Registrants Live Nearby

There is plenty of information available to the public regarding registered sex offenders in their neighborhoods. Nearly every state that has a Megan's law-type sex offender registry has an online version that serves up the names, addresses, sex-offense history, and even photos in many cases, of convicted sex offenders. Googling your address and "Megan's law"-- or even your city or ZIP code and "Megan's law" -- will turn up a quick list of nearby registrants.

2. To Find Crime Reports and Data For Your Home and Environs

City, county and state law enforcement agencies all post crime data online, but a Google search for your address or city and "crime reports" is most likely to turn up your local police office's crime map. Or, you can check out Trulia Crime Maps for a crime map of recent incident reports for the whole city, ZIP code or neighborhood. The map is color-coded to represent the intensity of crimes in each area.



3. To Detect Scammers Trying to Rent or Sell Your House

Internet scammers have taken to ripping off home information and putting together fake listings offering other people's homes for rent or lease-to-own. They often list the home on extremely cheap and easy terms, then ask the would-be-buyer or tenant to please wire or send the deposit money overseas. These scams often come to light only after the homeowner or current resident notices bargain-hunters checking out the place. If you start getting an inordinate amount of foot traffic to your home, or someone knocking on your door asking if they can see the place, you may want to Google your address. If you find a fraudulent listing, identify yourself as the home's rightful owner and ask the offending site to take the scam posting down - stat!

4. To See What Your Neighbor's Place Sold For and Possibly Lower Your Property Taxes

In real estate, the value of your home is largely driven by what is similar or how much nearby homes have sold for. If you search your address, Trulia will first surface some sort of image of your home, a map, the basic property details from the public records (see No. 5, below), and recent sales data for your own home before listing out the comps - homes with similar numbers of beds, baths and square feet near yours, and what they recently sold for. If you see a pattern of homes selling for lower than your home's assessed value, you can use those comps to petition your county to lower your own property taxes!



5. To See Your Home's Property Records

Your home's records online are populated from the public records about your home, which are either so old they don't include upgrades and additions, or they're just flat out wrong. If you Google your address, or search for it on Trulia, and find that your home's description is riddled with errors, contact your county public record agency to correct them and edit your home facts on Trulia. This is particularly important if you're planning to sell your home anytime soon.

A yellow sticky note is pinned to the page with a red pushpin. The note contains three quick tips.

QUICK TIPS:

1. Google your address and "Megan's Law".
2. Check out Trulia Crime Maps around your area.
3. Detect scammers trying to rent or sell your home.

6. To See Your Home's Google Street View

When you're selling your home, it's especially critical to see everything that prospective home buyers will see. That means checking out how your home's listing looks on all the online real estate sites (yes, even on Trulia), checking out the flyer - even stopping by to check out any staging your broker or agent did if you've already moved out. One thing even the most savvy sellers don't check out is the way Google Street View depicts your home. If you're about to sell your home, and you notice that the street view is outdated, mention it to your agent, and ask them to make a note of that fact in the listing information.