Lovejoy: how to clear a house on Marketplace

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01 Why this exists

In July 2026 I started selling the contents of a basement on Facebook Marketplace. A metal sculpture, a Lego Ferrari, a keyboard, then a drone, a tripod, three casserole dishes, a set of golf clubs, a phone. Dozens of listings over three months, hundreds of buyer messages, and an AI dealer I called Lovejoy reading the inbox and replying in my name while I did something else.

Most of what follows was learned by getting it wrong. Lovejoy told three buyers that four golf clubs were adult length because they looked it in a photo; they were kids' clubs, and a buyer who had doubted the photo walked. A buyer's throwaway line about scratched pots became, within twenty minutes, the official description sent to two other people. A message meant for one buyer went to another because a reply landed and stole the cursor. And a man called Richard offered to pay for a $19 towel rail at once if "one of the guys from Amazon" could collect it, then asked whether I lived in a house or an apartment.

Every one of those became a rule. The rules are the gift. They work whether a human or a machine is typing, and most of them are behavioural science you already know, applied to the most ordinary negotiation there is: a stranger, a sideboard, and a price.

If you are clearing a house (your own, or a parent's), this will get you more money, fewer time-wasters and no scams. If you want the machine that does it for you, section 06 tells you how to get Lovejoy.

02 The rules

Thirteen of them. Each one cost money or a sale before it became a rule.

1. Read the whole thread before you reply. Never answer off the inbox preview. If you already answered from your phone an hour ago, the next reply has to build on that, not contradict it.
2. Hold the price until a buyer makes an offer. Never go back to someone who went quiet and tell them the price has softened. Silence is a position; a discount nobody asked for is a confession.
3. Label, then stop typing. "Sounds like you're thinking a bit under $90." Then nothing. People cannot leave a label alone. If you got it wrong they correct you, and now you know the real number without having asked for it.

4. Never ask a yes question to close. "Want to sort a pickup time?" invites a no. Ask "How does Saturday look?" or "Would it be mad to grab it this week?" A no feels safe to say, so people say it, and "no, Saturday's fine" is a yes.
5. One job per message. Price in one. Pickup time in the next, after they have committed to something. A message that asks three things gets answers to none.
6. Neediness is the cardinal sin. Do not send a second message to soften the first. Do not chase a buyer who went quiet after an offer. The buyer who comes back three days later pays more than the one you chased.
7. A buyer's words are that buyer's opinion, never the description. One fussy person says the pots are scratched; that does not go into your next reply to anyone else. Disclose accurately, never pessimistically. Gloom costs money and buys no protection.
8. A photo is not a measurement. If a buyer asks how long, how heavy, does it work, the only honest answers are what the listing already says, what you have checked with your own hands, or "I'll measure it tonight". An inference dressed as a fact is the fastest way to lose a sale at the door.
9. Offer proof only once it is earned. Do not volunteer a video to a buyer whose only message is "is this available?" They have raised no doubt; answering an objection nobody made hints the item needs defending. When someone does hesitate, the video is the answer, and it buys a pickup time.
10. Restate the price and the payment method in the same message as the pickup time. "Saturday at 10 it is. $120 cash or PayID on the day." Nothing gets renegotiated on the driveway.
11. No viewings. Agree the price and the time in the chat, offer extra photos instead, and send the address last. The exception is a one-of-a-kind piece where a buyer reasonably wants to see it first; even then, the price settles in the chat.
12. Trade, never donate. A lower price buys something every time: a locked pickup, a buyer taking two items, a collection today. "I could do $110 if you can come this weekend." If a concession buys nothing, it was a gift, and gifts to strangers are expensive.
13. The privacy floor does not bend for a friendly buyer. Suburb only. No address until a time is locked, no phone, no email, nothing about the property, no photo of the house. The warmest buyer in the thread is still a stranger.

03 The scams

Five patterns cover nearly everything. The tell is almost always in the phrasing, so when something smells off, read the exact words again.

Pattern	What it looks like	Why it works	What to do
The third-party collector	"I'll pay now, one of the guys from Amazon will pick it up", "my driver", "my agent", "a mate with a van"	Nobody organises a courier for a $19 towel rail. On a cheap item the prize is your address, confirmation it is a standalone house, and a window when goods sit outside. The borrowed brand name is there to make you relax	One warm decline: "I don't do third party pickups and I won't leave anything out. It's yours at $X if you can come yourself." If they push, block
Pay now, ship later	Overpayment "by mistake", a deposit to "hold it", a courier they will book, a screenshot of a transfer	Gets the goods moving before the money is real. Faked receipts and reversed transfers both need you to hand over first	Cash at the door, or PayID that has landed in your account. A screenshot is not a payment. Never refund an "overpayment"
The property questions	"House or apartment?", "Is anyone home during the day?", "Is there a side gate?", "Just leave it out and send me a photo of where"	A genuine pickup needs an address and a time. Everything else is reconnaissance	Answer with the pickup terms and nothing about where you live. Never a photo of the porch, driveway or gate
The move off platform	"Text me on 04..", "What's your email, I'll send the payment link", a WhatsApp number, any link	Facebook's inbox is watched and logged; your phone is not. A link is a phishing page or a fake payment portal	Stay in Marketplace messages. Never click a link a buyer sends. Never give a number or an email
The code request	"Facebook sent you a code to verify you're real, what is it?"	The code is a password reset for your account. Handing it over hands them the account	Never. No exceptions, no matter how plausible the story

Two habits that catch the rest. First, run the screen on every message, including the friendly ones; a buyer who has been warm for six messages can turn at the close, and the screen runs on the newest message, not on your impression of the person. Second, when a shape is ambiguous, step back and read the thread again rather than working it. Three false alarms are cheaper than one miss.

And the economics give the game away every time. When the effort a buyer is spending exceeds what the item is worth, the item is not what they are buying.

04 What to say

Ten moments, one line each. Warm, plain, short, like a person typing on a phone. No exclamation marks, no "amazing", no essays. Swap in your suburb and your number.

The moment	What to send
"Is this available?"	"Yes it is. $120, pickup from [your suburb], cash or PayID on the day. What day suits you?"
A lowball	"You're probably expecting me to say no outright. Sounds like $40 is where you'd be comfortable. I'm at $89 and I'd move a little for a pickup this week. How does Saturday look?"
"Will you take $X?" (near your floor, no time offered)	"I could do $X if you can collect this weekend. What time works?"
"Can you hold it for me?"	"Happy to hold it for a locked time. What day and roughly what time?"
"Can you deliver?"	"Pickup only, sorry. It's in [your suburb], easy parking. What day suits?"
"What's your address?"	"I'll send the address once we've got a time locked in. $X cash or PayID on the day. What time works?"
"Is it in good condition?" (and the listing already says)	Restate the listing's wording, nothing gloomier, nothing rosier. Then: "Happy to send a short video of it, and then what day suits you?"
A courier or collector	"I don't do third party pickups and I won't leave anything out unattended. It's yours at $X if you can come yourself."
A buyer who went quiet after an offer	Nothing. Silence is a position. They come back or they don't
A buyer who names a time	"Great, Saturday at 10 it is. $X cash or PayID on the day. I'll send the address now."

The method underneath is tactical empathy, from the public Black Swan approach: label what the other person is feeling, mirror their last few words, ask how and what questions instead of why, and say the awkward thing about yourself before they can ("you're probably thinking I'll say no to any offer"). It reads as kindness. It is also the most effective way to find out what someone will actually pay.

05 Pricing a house full of stuff

Three numbers per item, in this order, before you write a word of the listing.

1. What it is worth. Search eBay with the "sold" filter on; those are prices someone actually paid, and they outrank every asking price on the internet. Then look at what the same thing is asking on Marketplace and Gumtree in your city right now; that is your competition. If it is still made, note the new price; secondhand usually lands at 30 to 60 percent of it.
2. What it will realistically fetch in two to three weeks. Lower than the first number for anything bulky, because the buyer pool shrinks to driving distance.
3. The ask. Ten to fifteen percent above the second number, because buyers expect to haggle and a small win makes them commit. Not more; a silly ask kills clicks and the listing goes stale. $45 beats $50 in search filters; $350 is fine as a round anchor for a statement piece.

Then the floor. For a house clearance, 70 percent of the ask. Anything at or above it is a yes, and nothing below it is, ever. Decide the floor before the listing goes up, when you are calm, not at 9pm with a buyer in the chat. The ladder between ask and floor: first counter gives away a quarter of the gap, second counter half, and the floor itself only to a buyer who has named a pickup time.

Two honesty clauses. If something is worth $15, say so, price it at $20 and let it go; a $60 fantasy sits unloved for a month and costs you a room. And a true story adds dollars: "from my mum's house, bought in the 70s and looked after" outsells "vintage sideboard", and it costs nothing. Invented stories cost everything.

Listings themselves: a title a buyer would search for (what it is, the brand or material, the one detail that makes it desirable), then 60 to 150 words. One line that sells the dream, the facts, any flaws stated plainly, and the logistics. Suburb only. Flaws disclosed in the listing never get renegotiated at the door; flaws discovered at the door always do.

06 Get Lovejoy

Everything above works with a human typing. Lovejoy is the machine version, and it comes in three sizes. The first two are free. The third needs a paid chatbot plan, about US$20 a month, because it has to drive a browser for you.

	What you get	What you need	Setup
Just the rules	This guide. Read it once, keep it on your phone	Nothing	None

	What you get	What you need	Setup
Lovejoy in any chatbot	Lovejoy values your items from photos, writes the listings, keeps a ledger in the chat and drafts every buyer reply. You post, you paste buyer messages in, you send the replies	ChatGPT, Gemini or Claude, free plan is fine	Five minutes: paste one prompt into a GPT, a Gem or a Project. Steps in the pack: Lovejoy in any chatbot.pdf
Lovejoy on autopilot	Lovejoy checks your Marketplace inbox every three hours and replies in your name: never below your floor, never your address, hard scam screen, a short report to you after each check. On Claude he posts the listings too; on ChatGPT you post them yourself	Either Claude Pro (the Claude desktop app, Chrome with the Claude in Chrome extension, a laptop that stays awake during the day; three months proven) or ChatGPT Plus (runs in ChatGPT's own browser; tested for a week). About US$20 a month either way	45 minutes, once. Steps in the pack: Lovejoy on Claude autopilot.pdf, or page two of Lovejoy in any chatbot.pdf for ChatGPT

The pack with all the files is lovejoy-pack.zip, free at pathos.com.au/lovejoy. Open START HERE.txt first; it says which file to open for your size.

What Lovejoy will never do, in any size: send your address, your phone or your email; answer a question about your property; accept a courier, a deposit, a gift card or a screenshot as payment; click a link; go below your floor; invent a fact about an item; or mark anything sold without you. The autopilot version flags anything that smells off and quotes the buyer word for word; blocking is your call.

If it makes you money, I would happily hear what sold. Tim Wilkes, Founder, CEO & Chief Storysmith, Pathos Services. tim.wilkes@pathos.com.au, pathos.com.au.

07 How Lovejoy was built

People ask whether I really built this, and how long it took. Four years, two hours and three months. Four years of using, learning and pushing generative AI, most of it on things that did not work. Two hours to build Lovejoy, because Nash, my negotiation coach, already existed and the method with him. Three months of fixing what it got wrong, one dated rule

at a time. The tools were Claude's desktop app, its Chrome extension and its scheduled tasks, and those will be different in six months. The method will not, so here is the method.

1. A named colleague, not a chatbot. Lovejoy has a job (value, list, sell), a voice (warm, plain, never needy) and a boundary (never below the floor, never the address). Naming it changed how I delegated to it. People give clearer instructions to a role than to a tool, and they notice faster when the role steps outside its lane.
2. Memory on paper, not inside the model. Everything Lovejoy knows about my stuff lives in one text file, the ledger: every item, every floor, every buyer, every decision I made. Lovejoy reads it first and writes it last, every time. Anyone can open it. Nothing important lives in a black box, and when a run starts cold it has the whole history in front of it.
3. Rules written after failures. There are thirteen standing rules and each one is dated, with the mistake that caused it. The golf clubs became "a photo is not a measurement". The casserole pots became "a buyer's words are that buyer's opinion, never the description". Richard and his Amazon guys became "a third-party collector is an automatic decline". That is the entire improvement loop: the machine errs, I write the rule, the machine stops erring. Most people correct the output and never write the rule, so they correct the same output forever.
4. Specialists that call each other. Lovejoy prices and sells. Nash, my negotiation coach, holds the method: labels, mirrors, calibrated questions, the accusation audit. Lovejoy calls Nash before every buyer conversation and neither pretends to do the other's job. Smaller, named roles beat one all-purpose assistant, because you can tell which one got it wrong.
5. Eyes and hands, with gates. The browser extension reads the inbox and types the replies. The scheduled task wakes it every three hours. But nothing posts, nothing discounts past the ladder, nothing shares an address, and nothing gets marked sold without a human saying yes. Autonomy where a mistake is cheap, sign-off where it is not. Deciding which is which was most of the design work.

If you run a team, you will recognise all five. They are how you would onboard a good junior: a clear role, a shared file, lessons written down, colleagues to call, and a short list of things they must bring to you. The difference is that this junior reads the file every time and never gets bored of the rules.

Most people are using AI too small. A sideboard is a fine place to start using it bigger.