



TC Virtual Garage Sale

USER MANUAL

One person's treasures, looking for a new home.

A self-hosted garage sale website

Built with PHP & MySQL · Version 1.3

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction	4
2. Features	4
2.1 The public storefront	4
2.2 The admin area	4
2.3 Built-in security	5
3. Requirements & Dependencies	5
4. Installation	6
Step 1 — Copy the files	6
Step 2 — Create the database	6
Step 3 — Configure the site	6
Step 4 — Make the uploads folder writable	6
Step 5 — Allow the .htaccess protections	6
Step 6 — Raise PHP's upload limits	7
Step 7 — Create your admin account	7
5. Configuration Reference	7
6. Using the Site	8
6.1 For visitors	8
6.2 Logging in as administrator	8
6.3 The dashboard	8
6.4 Managing categories	8
6.5 Adding and editing items	8
6.6 Working with photos	9
6.7 Featuring an item	9
6.8 Marking an item as sold	9
6.9 Changing your password	9
7. Maintenance & Tips	9
7.1 Backups	9
7.2 Switching on HTTPS	10
7.3 Resetting a forgotten password	10

7.4 Upgrading an older (single-photo) install	10
8. Troubleshooting.....	10
9. File & Folder Reference.....	11

1. Introduction

TC Virtual Garage Sale is a lightweight, self-hosted website that lets a single owner sell their belongings online — think of it as your own private Craigslist for one. You list the items you want to sell, each with a price, a description and up to ten photos, and organize them into categories. Visitors browse your storefront, search by keyword, view photo galleries, and email you about anything that catches their eye.

The site is built with plain PHP and MySQL — no frameworks and no build step — so it runs comfortably on a modest Ubuntu server with Apache. Everything is managed through a private, password-protected admin area; the rest of the world only ever sees your polished, mobile-friendly storefront.

This manual walks you through everything: what the site can do, what you need to run it, how to install and configure it on your own server, and how to use it day to day — both as the administrator listing items and from the perspective of the visitors browsing them.

2. Features

2.1 The public storefront

This is what your visitors see. It requires no login and works on phones, tablets and desktops.

- **Featured front page** — A landing page that showcases your featured items at the top, followed by your most recently added items.
- **Browse by category** — A category bar on every page lets visitors filter items down to a single category with one click. Within a category, items are listed alphabetically by name (A–Z) so they are easy to scan.
- **Paged listings** — Long listings are split into pages of 25 items with Previous and Next buttons, so the page stays quick to load no matter how much you have for sale.
- **Keyword search** — A search box matches keywords against both item names and descriptions and lists every match.
- **Item detail pages** — Each item has its own page with a photo gallery (click a thumbnail to enlarge it), the price, the full description and the date it was posted.
- **One-click contact** — An “I’m interested” button opens the visitor’s email program with a message addressed to you, pre-filled with the item’s name.
- **Sold badges** — Items you mark as sold stay visible with a clear SOLD badge, so visitors can still see what went.

2.2 The admin area

Reached at /admin/ and protected by a single administrator login that only you have. From here you control everything on the site.

- **Dashboard** — See at a glance how many items, featured items, sold items and categories you have, plus a list of what you added most recently.
- **Category management** — Create, rename and delete categories. Deleting a category never deletes its items — they simply become “Uncategorized.”
- **Item management** — Add, edit and delete items, each with a name, category, price and description.
- **Up to 10 photos** — Upload up to ten photos per item, choose which one is the cover photo shown in listings, and remove individual photos at any time.
- **Feature items** — A single checkbox pins any item to the top of the front page.
- **Mark as sold** — A checkbox marks an item sold without removing it from the site.
- **CSV export** — Download a spreadsheet of every item — name, category and price — with one click from the dashboard.
- **Password control** — Change your administrator password at any time from inside the admin area.

2.3 Built-in security

Security is handled for you out of the box:

- **Hashed passwords** — The admin password is never stored in plain text — it is hashed with bcrypt, and there is no default password (you create it on first run).
- **SQL injection protection** — All database access uses prepared statements, so listings and searches cannot be exploited through SQL injection.
- **CSRF & XSS protection** — Every admin form is protected by a CSRF token, and all displayed text is escaped to prevent cross-site scripting.
- **Safe uploads** — Uploaded photos are verified by their real file type, stored under random names, and the server is told never to run scripts from the uploads folder.

3. Requirements & Dependencies

The site is deliberately undemanding. To host it you need:

Component	Requirement
Operating system	Ubuntu (or any Linux). Tested on the owner’s Ubuntu server.
Web server	Apache 2 with mod_php (or PHP-FPM), and AllowOverride enabled so the included .htaccess files are honored.
PHP	Version 7.4 or newer, including the php-mysql and php-fileinfo extensions (both ship in the standard PHP packages).
Database	MySQL 5.7+ or 8.x (MariaDB equivalents work too).
Administrator	Any modern web browser to reach the admin area. Nothing special is needed for visitors.

There is nothing to compile and there are no third-party PHP libraries to install — the entire site is self-contained.

4. Installation

These steps assume a fresh install with the site living at your server's web root (for example `http://yourserver/`). If you are upgrading an older, single-photo version of the site, see section 7.4 instead.

Step 1 — Copy the files

Copy the contents of the project folder into your web root:

```
sudo cp -r tc-virtual-garage-sale/. /var/www/html/
```

Step 2 — Create the database

Import the schema, which creates the database and its tables:

```
mysql -u root -p < /var/www/html/schema.sql
```

Then create a dedicated MySQL user for the site (recommended over using root). Choose your own strong password:

```
mysql -u root -p -e "  
CREATE USER 'garage_user'@'localhost' IDENTIFIED BY 'YOUR_STRONG_PASSWORD';  
GRANT SELECT, INSERT, UPDATE, DELETE ON tc_garage_sale.*  
  TO 'garage_user'@'localhost';  
FLUSH PRIVILEGES;"
```

Step 3 — Configure the site

Open `includes/config.php` and set the values to match your server. The most important ones are the database credentials and your contact email. See section 5 for the full list of options.

Step 4 — Make the uploads folder writable

The web server needs to be able to save uploaded photos:

```
sudo chown -R www-data:www-data /var/www/html/uploads  
sudo chmod 755 /var/www/html/uploads
```

Step 5 — Allow the .htaccess protections

In your Apache site configuration, the directory block for the web root must allow overrides so the bundled security rules take effect:

```
<Directory /var/www/html>  
    AllowOverride All  
    Require all granted  
</Directory>
```

Then reload Apache:

```
sudo systemctl reload apache2
```

Step 6 — Raise PHP's upload limits

Items can have up to ten photos of up to 10 MB each, which is far larger than PHP's default upload limits. Edit your `php.ini` (for example `/etc/php/8.3/apache2/php.ini`, adjusted for your PHP version) and set:

```
upload_max_filesize = 10M
post_max_size = 120M
max_file_uploads = 20
```

Reload Apache again afterwards. If you skip this step, a large multi-photo save will be rejected — the form shows a clear message rather than failing silently, but it is best to set these up front.

Step 7 — Create your admin account

Visit `http://yourserver/admin/` in a browser. Because no administrator account exists yet, you are taken to a one-time setup page where you choose your admin username and password. After that, the setup page locks itself automatically and all future visits go to the normal login. Your site is now ready to use.

5. Configuration Reference

All settings live in `includes/config.php`. Edit them with any text editor; there is no separate settings screen.

Setting	What it controls
<code>DB_HOST</code>	The MySQL host. Usually <code>localhost</code> .
<code>DB_NAME</code>	The database name. Default <code>tc_garage_sale</code> .
<code>DB_USER</code>	The MySQL username the site connects as.
<code>DB_PASS</code>	The password for that MySQL user.
<code>SITE_NAME</code>	The site's name, shown in the header and browser title.
<code>SITE_TAGLINE</code>	The short tagline shown under the title on the home page.
<code>CONTACT_EMAIL</code>	The email address the "I'm interested" button writes to. Leave it blank (") to hide the button entirely.
<code>BASE_URL</code>	Leave blank if the site is at the web root. Set it to e.g. <code> '/garage'</code> if installed in a subfolder.
<code>UPLOAD_DIR</code>	The server path where photos are stored. Defaults to the bundled <code>uploads/</code> folder.
<code>MAX_UPLOAD_BYTES</code>	The maximum size of a single photo. Currently 10 MB. PHP's own limits (Step 6) must be at least this large.
<code>CURRENCY</code>	The currency symbol shown next to prices. Defaults to <code>\$</code> .
<code>MAX_IMAGES_PER_ITEM</code>	The maximum number of photos per item. Currently 10.
<code>ITEMS_PER_PAGE</code>	How many items appear on each page of the home and category listings. Currently 25.

6. Using the Site

6.1 For visitors

Visitors need no account and nothing to install. They can:

- Browse the home page, where your featured items appear first, followed by the latest arrivals. Items are shown 25 at a time; Previous and Next buttons at the bottom move between pages, and the featured section appears on the first page.
- Click any category in the bar across the top to see only the items in it. Category items are listed alphabetically by name and are likewise paged 25 at a time.
- Type a word into the search box to find items whose name or description matches.
- Open an item to see its full photo gallery, price and description — clicking a thumbnail swaps the large photo.
- Click “I’m interested” to email you about an item (this appears only while the item is unsold and you have set a contact email).

6.2 Logging in as administrator

Go to `/admin/` and sign in with the username and password you created during setup. You can reach the admin area at any time from the small “Admin” link in the site footer.

6.3 The dashboard

After logging in you land on the dashboard. It shows totals for your items, featured items, sold items and categories, along with a table of your most recently added items and quick buttons to add a new item or category.

The dashboard also has an Export CSV button. Clicking it downloads a spreadsheet file — named with the current date, for example `garage-sale-items-2026-06-14.csv` — containing every item’s name, category and price. Items are grouped by category and then listed alphabetically, with any uncategorized items at the end. The file opens directly in Excel, LibreOffice Calc, Google Sheets or Numbers, which makes it handy for printing a price list or keeping an offline record of your inventory.

6.4 Managing categories

Open Categories from the admin menu. On the left you add a new category (a name, plus an optional description); on the right you see every existing category with its item count and Edit / Delete buttons.

- Click Edit to rename a category or change its description.
- Click Delete to remove a category. Its items are kept — they simply become “Uncategorized” — so you never lose a listing by tidying up your categories.

6.5 Adding and editing items

Open Items, then click “+ Add item” (or Edit on an existing one). Fill in:

1. **Item name** — the name of the item.
2. **Category** — choose one of your categories, or leave it as Uncategorized.
3. **Price** — the asking price (numbers only, e.g. 12.50).
4. **Description** — condition, size, pickup details — whatever helps it sell.

Click Save when you are done; the item appears on the storefront immediately.

6.6 Working with photos

Each item can have up to ten photos.

- In the item form, use the “Add photos” picker to select one or more images at once (hold Ctrl or Shift while clicking to choose several). Accepted formats are JPG, PNG, GIF and WebP, up to 10 MB each.
- When editing an item, its current photos appear as a grid of tiles. Each tile has a “Cover photo” option and a “Remove” checkbox.
- The cover photo is the one shown on the front page and in category and search listings. Select a different tile’s “Cover photo” to change it.
- Tick “Remove” on any photo and save to delete just that photo; the rest are kept.
- If you try to add more than ten photos, the form warns you before saving.

6.7 Featuring an item

In the item form, tick “★ Feature this item.” Featured items appear in their own highlighted section at the very top of the home page, making them the first thing visitors see. Untick it to return the item to the normal listings.

6.8 Marking an item as sold

Tick “Mark as sold” in the item form. The item stays on the site so visitors can see it sold, but it now carries a SOLD badge, its photo is dimmed in listings, and the “I’m interested” button is hidden. Untick the box if an item becomes available again.

6.9 Changing your password

Open Password from the admin menu, enter your current password and your new one twice, and save. The new password takes effect immediately.

7. Maintenance & Tips

7.1 Backups

A complete backup is two things: a dump of the database and a copy of the uploads folder. For the database:

```
mysqldump tc_garage_sale > backup.sql
```

Then copy the uploads/ folder alongside it. Together these restore the site completely.

7.2 Switching on HTTPS

Once you have a certificate (for example via certbot --apache), serve the site over HTTPS, then set 'secure' => true in the session cookie options in includes/auth.php so the login cookie is only ever sent over a secure connection.

7.3 Resetting a forgotten password

If you ever lose the admin password, delete the administrator row from the database and the setup page unlocks again so you can recreate the account:

```
mysql> DELETE FROM tc_garage_sale.admin_users;
```

Then visit /admin/setup.php and choose a new username and password.

7.4 Upgrading an older (single-photo) install

If you previously ran the version that allowed only one photo per item, upgrade as follows:

5. Copy the new files over your install but keep your existing includes/config.php (it holds your database password).
6. Run the one-time migration, which preserves every existing photo as that item's cover photo:

```
mysql -u root -p < /var/www/html/migration-multi-images.sql
```

7. Apply the php.ini upload settings from Installation Step 6.

Fresh installations skip this entirely — the bundled schema already includes the multi-photo support.

8. Troubleshooting

Symptom	Likely cause & fix
"Database connection failed"	The credentials in includes/config.php are wrong, or schema.sql was never imported. Check both.
Photos won't upload / "upload too large"	PHP's limits are too small. Raise upload_max_filesize and post_max_size in php.ini (Installation Step 6) and reload Apache.
Uploaded photos don't appear	The uploads/ folder is not writable by the web server. Re-run the chown/chmod from Installation Step 4.
Admin pages give errors or .htaccess seems ignored	AllowOverride All is not set for the web root in Apache's config (Installation Step 5).
The setup page says setup is already complete	An admin account already exists. Use the normal login, or reset it via section 7.3.
Prices show the wrong symbol	Change the CURRENCY setting in includes/config.php.

9. File & Folder Reference

For when you need to find your way around the project:

Path	Purpose
<code>index.php</code>	The landing page — featured and latest items, paged 25 at a time.
<code>category.php</code>	Lists the items within one category, alphabetically and paged.
<code>item.php</code>	A single item's page, with its photo gallery.
<code>search.php</code>	Keyword search results.
<code>schema.sql</code>	The database structure; imported once at install.
<code>migration-multi-images.sql</code>	One-time upgrade script for older installs (section 7.4).
<code>assets/style.css</code>	All of the site's styling.
<code>uploads/</code>	Where item photos are stored (writable; scripts blocked).
<code>includes/</code>	Shared code: config, database, login, helpers and page layout.
<code>admin/</code>	The admin area: login, setup, dashboard, categories, items, CSV export and password pages.

That covers everything. Keep this manual alongside your backups, and happy selling!