

## THE BLOG PROGRAM

### *Podcast Transcript*

Episode 1 – Death Of Sidebar

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This is The Blog Program - Episode 16. And I have a question for you... Are Blog Sidebars Dead?

Well, hello... welcome to the show. And in this one we're going to think a little bit outside the box because I want to talk to you about the blog sidebar.

Chances are; your blog has a sidebar. In this episode, we're going to question whether it should be there.

Now, a lot of us get stuck in this game of copycat when it comes to blogging. You see that "everybody" does it. So you think that you'll do it, it's just the standard thing to do, or you see that some "guru" does it. So, therefore, you think it is the thing to do. And a lot of themes out there for blogs, obviously, have a sidebar because it just kind of happens almost out of a tradition these days, that everybody has a sidebar.

So I'm guessing that pretty much everybody who's listening to this show right now probably have a sidebar on your blog. But I challenge you... because sometimes, it is good to stop and think for yourself, and really in this case; look at whether that sidebar really needs to be there.

So that's what we're going to talk about in this episode. We should be talking all about the blog sidebar and whether you might want to consider getting rid of it.

Now, what actually brought this episode on were some recent design changes that I did myself over at [blogmarketingacademy.com](http://blogmarketingacademy.com). I have actually gone to almost a full width layout over there; meaning, yes I ditched the sidebar. I kind of backtracked just a little bit because what I actually did was I ditched the sidebar and went exclusively to full width content. But then, I have a few things that I want to make sure that are accessible and not buried, so I then brought back a very skinny, little floating sidebar.

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So, if you actually go to my blog right now, and just go to any one of the blog posts, you're going to find that the content is almost full width and there's this little tiny, little floating sidebar there that scrolls down with you as you scroll down the content. But the standard sidebar that most people have you will find is simply not there at [blogmarketingacademy.com](http://blogmarketingacademy.com). And it wasn't because I forgot it. It's because I thought it's through and figured, "I think it's time to get rid of this thing".

That's what we are going to talk about. It was spawned from my own idea. I also have noticed a few other sites have done it but by far, the majority of people still run a blog sidebar.

First, let's talk about "what usually goes in a blog sidebar?" What are we doing with it? Well, you're going to see the obvious characters, here. First of all you're going to typically see an opt-in form (hopefully) at the top of your sidebar if you're going to do it. So, the opt-in form is to get people on your email list. The thing is, typically the opt-in forms in that little location don't convert super well.

On the average, I find that the opt-in rates for a top of sidebar placement is going to run around 2 to maybe 3% conversion rate. You can't get higher than that. Some people run lower than that. But on the average, I have found a 2 to 3% conversion rate which isn't that great.

If you put opt-in forms on other locations on the blog you'll find that it usually converts better than that.

Another thing you will find in sidebars is the banner ads. So, if you are trying to monetize your site through the use of advertising, a lot of times you'll put the ad right there in your sidebar. The thing is you probably have found that if you do that, that the click-through rate is garbage!

Not only people don't click on these things... in fact, if you're trying to monetize by putting banner ads on your site that you only get paid by commission. Basically, it's an affiliate link... Man, are you wasting your time in almost all cases because people are just blind to these banner ads. It's like their eyes had been tuned to ignore them.

Not only that. You then have the whole conversion percentage that people are actually going to buy it and basically the net effect is that it's a pretty much a waste of space.

You also have your social media buttons and maybe your Facebook Fan Boxes and Follow Me on Twitter and stuff like that on your sidebar. And that's fine, but have you ever really looked at it? Maybe done a crazyegg test which is at [crazyegg.com](http://crazyegg.com), really cool tool; but to see if anybody's actually clicking on those things?

Other times you see an "About box" which is basically you just say, "Hey, my name is blah-blah-blah"... and maybe a couple of sentences on what you do and then maybe a link over to your about page. So, that's a good way of doing it because people come to your site; if they're fresh and they don't know who you are, they are going to want to find out who you are and why they should pay any attention. And that is definitely good use of a sidebar; to have that About Box.

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And then in addition to these four things, you're just going to find "miscellaneous", because you find a lot of bloggers who - just because there's a widget available, they stuff it in their sidebar. So they'll have that "monthly drop down" on blog archives or a "tag cloud" and stuff like these. None of which people actually uses in the real world but a lot of people think it just makes their site look cool when those things are there? It doesn't. Just sayin'. So, that is the kind of stuff that usually goes in a sidebar.

But with all these things, you have to ask yourself... Does it really get used all that much? Are people clicking on these things? As I asked... have you ever actually tested it to see if people are actually using those things in your sidebar?

There is a thing what I call the "impulse click". And really, what it comes down to is that the sidebar is only there to get impulse clicks. Not usually a purposeful click. And what I mean by that is it's very similar to the checkout line at the grocery store. They'll usually put the candy bars, magazines and things like that at the checkout line. It isn't usually something that you went to the store with the purpose of buying... it's like, "Ah, it's there, I might as well buy it, it's cheap", whatever. So, it's an impulse buy. You do it because there's not a lot to work on your part to buy that thing. It's sitting there; it's cheap so you buy it.

So it's the same mentality with your sidebar. It's an impulse click. You're basically hoping that they come to your site, there's your content, but then they see this attractive thing in your sidebar and they just randomly click on it. And that's usually from a marketing standpoint; not a very good thing to depend upon is an impulse click because it's fairly purposed list, they're not really targeted in some cases. And in general, that's kind of what the sidebar is about. The only really useful things for a sidebar are going to be the opt-in and maybe your About box. But generally the rest of it is not going to be used a lot.

Maybe if you link to some of your more popular pages; that can be a good use of real estate as well. But most people put some really un-useful things in your sidebar. And you also find that a lot of people just generally go blind to the sidebar. Just like we've tuned our eyeballs to go blind to banner ads; when we go to a lot of blogs we tend to tune out the sidebar because it's there on everybody's website. And we're there for the content, anyway. We're not there for the impulse stuff on the sidebar.

So, that is what usually goes in the sidebar.

Now, I want to make to you the case... Why you might actually think about whether that sidebar should be there or not.

First of all, if you get rid of the sidebar you are obviously going to leave more space for your content. And that is why people came to the site to begin with, right? The content. So you're leaving more space there. Now, that does mean that you want your content to be full width where it's like you have to really scroll your eyeballs from left to right in this really long distance? No. Because the wider you make your content, the harder it is to read. So, you definitely want to think that through and you can actually have "no" sidebar and still have your content be of a width that is readable.

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You can have white space on each side of your content. There's absolutely nothing wrong with that. In fact, it helps the eyeball focus on the content better when you don't have a lot of things around that content. So, that's something to think about.

Also, when you make more space for the content and you put white space around that content, then the content has less distraction overall. So, when you're coming into this from a content marketing standpoint, if you're doing it right, well the content itself should be the marketing. And that the content is the marketing, the content is supposed to contain the message that is going to motivate people to take some form of action that you want; well then you want them to focus on that content. You don't want them to get distracted by the animated monkey on top or the fancy affiliate banners in the sidebar or any of that stuff because it's going to distract from the message in your content.

It's just the same philosophy that goes in to landing pages. A lot of us will have landing pages or squeeze pages on our site for the purposes of gaining email subscribers and things like that. And it's generally known that if you have a landing page you need to remove all distractions. So, you want to even remove the top menu and maybe the footer and everything and just get rid of all distractions so that the page has a singular purpose.

We know this when it comes to standard online marketing. But for some reason when it comes to the blog, we tend to forget about that.

So, that's something that you should definitely be thinking about.

Now, speaking of landing pages, there's actually another interesting thing that you're accomplishing when every single page of site has no sidebar. And that is because it really gets to a point then; where your landing pages and your typical content don't look all that different. So at that point you can actually send your audience, instead of sending them to a standard blog post, you can send them to a landing page where the purpose is to sell something or the purpose is to get them to opt-in to something or what have you and there's really no visual difference.

And that's key because we go to a blog... and, "Oh, this a blog" and our mindset change a little bit. We know that's it's a blog and then we go to a landing page where it's a different mindset because we're just almost tuned to think that when it's got no sidebar, it's a landing page.

So what you're actually doing is making it so that there's no difference between the two. Your landing pages and your content look the same. And basically it's going to "train" your audience (I hate to use that word) to not expect difference, to expect everything that you put out there to be of high quality and not "Oh, when you have no sidebars is because you're trying to sell me something". So that's something that you're going to definitely accomplish if your content is displayed full width.

One thing we need to take into account here is, if you're going to dump your sidebar, you need to think about "Where are those important elements going to go" because you're going to lose some real estate if you get rid of that sidebar.

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So you do want to think about alternative locations for things. A lot of those widgets that people put up are really kind of useless anyway. Like, archives and tag clouds and all that stuff. So, generally just don't worry about putting them anywhere. They are waste of space. But your opt-in form is definitely not a waste of space. So you want to put that thing somewhere. It just so happens that one of the best places to put that is the top of your content and at the bottom of your content. It just kind of works its way into the flow. The reader flow.

People arrive, they start at the top with your headline and they're going to go down the content as they read it. So you're meeting them right where they're at, initially, if you put an opt-in form at the top. And then the idea with the bottom is that, well, hopefully you just wowed them with your awesomeness with your content and then you kind of... "Well, if you like what you just read, maybe you can opt-in for more."

Either of those locations is going to usually perform better than burying an opt-in form over in your sidebar. So, you don't need to go without. The other thing is your About box. If you have an about box in your sidebar you can look at... A. Can you do without it? I personally find that simply having an about option in my top menu is good enough. People will click on that just to find out what I'm all about. You can also have a "get started" page where people want to find out more they'll click on the get started page and then there you can introduce them to everything that you're all about.

Some people would put "Author boxes" underneath their content just basically showing who wrote the content. I don't usually do that because it's pretty much assumed that if it's live on my site; I wrote it. And I just don't think that having an author box when you're the only author makes a lot of sense. It seems a little redundant.

So, in general, if you're a solo author blog, I personally think that you cannot have an about box. Just have an About option on your top menu, that would be more adequate.

When it comes to banner ads, unless you're really making good money with banner ads; just ditch them! They're not a very good form of monetization, anyway. And your social media buttons; there are places you can put those. In fact, everybody puts them at the end of their content to know where to share that content. I think that's perfectly adequate.

You could also do just as on the side a plug-in called social locker that is available over at [codecanyon](#); really cool plug-in because it will allow you to have a little box that you will unlock hidden content by simply sharing. And you could even have them follow you to unlock certain things. And you can put that there and basically just give them a free download or what have you, but they have to share or connect with you on social media to unlock that thing. That's a really cool plug-in, it's called social locker.

But basically, the point that I'm making is... the stuff that goes in your sidebar; you can reposition or get rid of it, altogether.

So, the question you need to ask yourself is, should you dump your sidebar? I certainly don't want you to just listen to this podcast and just blindly go out and do it because I said so or I personally thought it

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was a good idea for my website. It is something where you have to think for yourself. You have to think about what you're trying to do with your blog. You need to evaluate every single thing that you currently have in your sidebar and really ask yourself the question "does it need to be there?" and/or could it go somewhere else on the site. You want to think about the real purpose behind each element that's in that sidebar and just don't do it because you find that everybody else is doing it.

Another thing you could think about is that, if you have a sidebar you can thin it out and you can actually make it float. I can't get into the technical things in a podcast about how to do that but you can actually make it so that your sidebar will scroll down with the user as they scroll down your content. That is going to help the effectiveness of the sidebar because it keeps it in their field of view the entire time they're scrolling down your site.

So, what you'll find that I did at [blogmarketingacademy.com](http://blogmarketingacademy.com) is that I grossly sent out my sidebar to contain only a few things and they're just links. There's really nothing else there except some links. The latest post, like three links that are important pages on the site and I think maybe one affiliate link. But it floats as you go down. It's very thin. It's not the width of a typical sidebar. So, that's what I have done and you might want to consider a floating sidebar on your site as well.

Hopefully what I've done here is given you something to think about. I know that when you're trying to grow your blog a lot of you would go to the "gurus" of the blogging space and you'll see what they do and you're instinct is going to be to mimic it. So, you might want to go to my blog and say, "Oh, it looks awesome" and you'll try to copy certain things. Or you'll go to [Pat Flynn's blog](#) or [ProBlogger](#) or [Copyblogger](#) or any of these other sites that you may read and you'll look at what they do and you're like, "Okay, well... if they do it, it must be because it's the thing to do!"

And you just assume that they tested all these stuff. It's not the case. I'll tell you this from my own perspective is that, I can tell you straight up; that not every single thing that you find on [blogmarketingacademy.com](http://blogmarketingacademy.com); I did a ton of testing on it. Sometimes I'm just trying stuff! So, if you're just sitting there thinking that I am doing some major ninja stuff behind the scenes on every single element on my site and you just blindly copy it, you could be led down a blind alley. So you need to keep that in mind.

Just because somebody else is doing it doesn't mean it is the thing to do. And just because you see the masses or the crowd do it doesn't mean it's automatically the best thing.

Sometimes when other people are zigging, you want to zag! And I think with the blog sidebar, it might be time to rethink it a little bit and at least rethink it. I think that's probably the best word; is to rethink it. Not just ditch it blindly but to actually think about it and why it's there. It could actually mean that you come to the same conclusion that I did, and that is I want people to focus on my content and not be distracted by the other stuff. So, that's what I did at [blogmarketingacademy.com](http://blogmarketingacademy.com) and maybe you will do the same and I definitely encourage you to think about that.

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And once again, I want to thank you for listening to this episode of The Blog Program. As usual, you will find the show notes over at [blogmarketingacademy.com/episode16](http://blogmarketingacademy.com/episode16). And what you're going to find over there are any links that I've mentioned in this particular episode, you'll find a quick summary of what we've talked about in this episode and you will find a full transcript of this episode if you would like to download that and take it with you.

Also, as usual, I would love it to invite you to go over to iTunes, find The Blog Program and post a star rating and/or an honest review of this podcast. Your reviews really help me out and really helps get the word out inside of iTunes for The Blog Program. And if you're getting value from this show I would really appreciate it if you would pay me back a little bit by posting that review because it just helps me bring more people into the fold and get more people get exposed to The Blog Program which is obviously, what I would like to do. And it makes more fun for everybody because we can do some really cool stuff when the audience gets a little bit larger.

So once again, thank you and I will see you next week! 😊