

June 2011

Dear Friend,

Had I been writing this article a couple of decades ago, it would have been easy to explain "sidebars" to you. That's because no matter what type of print media you looked at - newspapers, magazines, newsletters - you would have seen sidebars scattered everywhere.

But while doing the research for this month's issue, I realized something. Most magazines and newspapers don't even bother with these any more! Instead, they break up their information into bite-sized pieces, interspersed with colorful headlines and a variety of font styles and sizes.

Despite this fact, I still think it's important to know what sidebars are, for several reasons:

- They can add more value to the information you share with customers, either through your website or your newsletter.
- They make your newsletters more visually appealing.
- They grab readers' attention, improving the chances of your article being read.
- They provide you with lots of ready-to-go short pieces that can easily be placed on your website, in your e-zine (if you have one), or in your print newsletter.
- You can submit them as articles to online sites such as EzineArticles.com, GoArticles.com, and Articlesbase.com.

This issue will explain what sidebars are, how they can boost the number of people who actually read your material, and give you some topic ideas for your own marketing - whether print or online.

Offer Your Readers More . . . with Sidebars

by Chris Wilson

A sidebar is basically a short piece of information related in some way to the subject matter of your main article.

In print, the information is usually set apart in a square or rectangular format, often in a contrasting color. Online, you might also see sidebars set apart this way - easy to do if your website allows a three-column format (especially if your navigation links are vertically placed in the left-hand column).

I did find sidebars with an article I was reading recently (in the current issue of *Sunset*). Each sidebar was in a frame with a light blue background (for better visibility), but with different types of information. Two were lists and one was a timeline - all relevant to the article's topic.

Other types of information you might see in a sidebar include:

- Resources for more information
- True-life story related to the article's topic
- Testimonial
- Quiz
- Interesting bits of trivia related to your article's topic
- How-to information, also related to the article

Why Bother?

So what's the point of writing a sidebar in the first place, especially if magazines hardly use them anymore? Well, as I mentioned in the first section above, sidebars serve a lot of purposes:

- Visual appeal
- More likely to be read than a longer article
- Give you someplace to put the "left-over" information you gathered while researching the main article
- Provide an easy way to add variety (and sometimes humor) to your message

Plus, if you ever *DO* decide to submit your article to a magazine, you'll have a better chance of selling it if you can include a sidebar with it. I've heard that some large-circulation magazines prefer articles about the size of a sidebar anyway - to use as fillers when they need them.

RESOURCES

"[All About Website Sidebars: Content, Design, and Examples](#)" by [Kayla Knight](#). This is a great article I found on a site called [Oneextrapixel](#) - a website that offers helpful information to Web developers and designers. It shows how relevant sidebars still are to written communication.

"[Business Blogs: Use Your Sidebars Effectively](#)" by [Mark White](#). This is an article from [Better Business Blogging](#), a website devoted to helping you "stand out from the crowd" through blogs and new media.

"[The Case of the Disappearing Sidebars](#)" is a funny post on a blog called [Confident Writing](#), written by [Joanna Paterson](#). Anyone with a WordPress site - who's trying to maintain it themselves - will appreciate this one!

[How to Publish Your Newsletter](#) (pages 98 and 221), by Carol Luers Eyman. These pages have sections devoted entirely to sidebars for newsletters, whether print or digital.

If you're looking for ideas on how to boost your marketing efforts through innovative content that's relevant to your customers (both current and potential), please contact me at **916/801-0480** or at cwilson@worddesign.biz.

To your success,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chris". The letters are cursive and fluid.

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