

What to Include in your Website Sidebars

The sidebar is the most important part of your website after your home page. Sidebars are where potential customers will head to find out more, subscribe to your list, follow you on social media or buy your products.

There are some important things to keep in mind when designing your sidebar.

- Have the essentials visible. Where do you want people to go first?
- Make it clear. Catch your reader's eye but don't make your sidebar distracting. It's a path into your website, not the main event!
- Give visitors a purpose for clicking into your website. Give your reader something to do, such as look your products, subscribe to your list or download a freebie.

So, what should you put in your sidebar? First of all, consider what you want your reader to do right now. Do you want them to sign up for a course, hire you for a project, subscribe to your newsletter? Many experts recommend you have no more than five widgets in your sidebar, including:

1. *A profile or bio widget.* Put a face to the business and make a personal connection with your customers.
2. *An opt-in form.* Make it easy for people to sign up to your list. Keep your opt-in up near the top of the sidebar and consider an incentive, a freebie or bonus for subscribers.

3. *Social media links.* A social media platform is a vital part of your marketing strategy. Make it easy for people to follow you.
4. *A call to action.* Direct your reader to your online shop, newsletter sign-up, or course material.
5. *A search function.* Make it easy for people to find what they're looking for on your website.

Try to keep your sidebar looking clean and uncluttered. Before you install another widget, think if there are better alternatives to putting that information in the sidebar. Could it go in a pop-up, in the footer, or as an in-post ad? Would your call to action be more effective at the bottom of the page?

You can also consider having a different sidebar on different pages and posts on your website. For example, if you have a blog or news page, you might configure that sidebar differently to have more of a regular blog look, by including a popular or recommended posts widget or an archive widget. And you'll be pleased to know that there is a plug-in for that – Custom Sidebars Pro – that will allow you to hide or add widgets on different pages of your website.

Design your sidebar carefully so it will work for you, not against you.