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Sidebar Customization in Sitellite

Sitellite Content Management System

Introduction

Sidebars are a content type in Sitellite that can be used in a number of ways, but the basic way is to display content related to the current page or content that should be shown on multiple pages, such as site navigation.

Sidebars share many of the same properties as web pages do, including Sitellite's permissions, scheduled publish/archive dates, change history, and visual editing (including support for the Box Chooser).

Sidebar positions

Sidebar positions or locations are included during the design phase of a site. They're included in the templates themselves using the following template tag:

```
<xt:box name="sitellite/sidebar" position="left" />
```

A position doesn't have to just be `left` or `right`; they're completely up to the designer. And you can define as many positions as you want. So you can have a sidebar position for the page header and footer, making the header and footer of the site editable by the site editors too.

Using multiple templates in your set, you can also define custom positions that only appear in a single template and not in the others. In this way, you can define custom sidebar positions for the different sections of the site, or for the homepage. For example, if you have a template named `html.index.tpl` that you're using on the homepage of your site, you could define a custom position named `index-promo` and use that as a promo spot on the page to display promotional announcements. The steps to doing this are as follows:

1. Edit your `html.index.tpl` file in your template set (e.g., `inc/html/your_site/html.index.tpl`) and add this tag:

   ```
   <xt:box name="sitellite/sidebar" position="index-promo"/>
   ```

2. Log into Sitellite and you'll see a new "Add Sidebar" icon where that tag was placed. Click on it to create a sidebar for that position.

3. In the Adding Sidebar form, click on the Properties tab and look for the Position field.

4. Click the Add button next to this field and enter `index-promo` into the add dialog. Make sure the new value is selected in the Position select box once it's been added.

5. Now under the Edit tab, enter a unique sidebar ID as well as a title and body, then click Create. This will create the sidebar and return you to the page where it's displayed.

6. To edit the sidebar and approve it so public visitors to your site can see it, click the "Edit Sidebar" icon next to your new sidebar then go to the State tab and set the Status value to Approved.

You've now completed the steps necessary to add custom sidebars to your website. Next, we'll look at using section indexes to limit where sidebars appear. We'll also look at ways of making this promo sidebar more dynamic a bit later.

The sidebar form options

Here is the full list of Sidebar options in the add/edit forms:

1. Sidebar ID – This is a unique identifier for the sidebar used internally by Sitellite and in the sidebar HTML output for adding custom CSS styles to individual sidebars. It is an alphanumeric value similar to page IDs.

2. Sidebar Title – The title will appear in an `<h2>` tag in the sidebar. This is an optional value, so you can have sidebars with and without titles.

3. Sidebar Body – This is the standard visual editor in Sitellite. Sidebars can include any HTML content or dynamic content using the editor's Box Chooser menu. This is a powerful way of including things like dynamic navigation, upcoming events, news, or a newsletter subscription box in your sidebars.

4. Position – This defines the sidebar position the current sidebar box is shown in. Each sidebar position can have any number of boxes, or individual sidebar items, assigned to it.

5. Sorting Order – This is used in each sidebar position to determine the order the sidebar items should appear in. This value can be edited directly, but it's usually easier to simply use the up and down arrows in the Web View instead.

6. Show in Sections – This includes a list of all pages that are labelled as section indexes. When a sidebar is assigned to only certain sections, it will only be shown when the visitor is viewing a child page of that section index or the section index itself.

7. Alias of (a box name) – This allows you to choose a box from the Box Chooser that this sidebar is a direct alias of, so that the output of that box call becomes the body of the sidebar. This is similar to using the

Box Chooser from the visual editor, but if you only want the output from the box itself and nothing else, then this is a bit faster performance-wise.

8. Status – The status of the sidebar in Sitellite's permission and workflow system.

9. Access Level – The access level of the sidebar in Sitellite's permission system.

10. Publish On (if status is "queued") – This sets a future date and time for the sidebar to be published (e.g., approved) via the Sitellite Task Scheduler, if the status of the sidebar is also set to Queued. Note that the Sitellite Task Scheduler is not configured on all websites, so you will need to make sure that it is running for this to work on your site.

11. Archive On (if status is "approved") – This sets a future date and time to automatically archive the sidebar similar to the Publish On action, thereby removing it from the public site. This also requires the Sitellite Task Scheduler to be running in order to have an effect.

12. Created By – This tells you which user created the sidebar.

13. Owned by Team – This is the team that owns the sidebar in Sitellite's permission system. The default is the team that the creator belongs to, but can be changed to any team that the creator has access to (or any team, by a master-level site admin).

14. Change Summary – This saves a description of the changes made to the sidebar for reference in Sitellite's Change History feature.

Sidebar sorting

The best way to sort sidebar boxes or items is in the Web View using the up and down arrows next to the sidebar items. Simply click on the arrow next to the item you want to move and it will reload the page with the item saved in its new position.

Sidebars and the Box Chooser

Using the Box Chooser with sidebars, you can embed many types of dynamic content into the sidebar areas of your website. For example, to add a dynamic navigation menu, click on the Box Chooser, then choose Utilities and select from the list of available Navigation boxes. Or to add a list of upcoming events, select SiteEvent from the list and choose the upcoming events box.

Most Sitellite modules publish dynamic boxes that you can include into pages or sidebars through the Box Chooser, which makes it the best way for non-technical site editors to integrate dynamic site elements into their content authoring.

Working with section indexes

To assign a sidebar to a specific section of the website, use the following steps:

1. Edit the page in your site that will serve as the root page of that section. Sitellite calls this page a Section Index.

2. Under the Properties tab of the edit form, set the "Is this a section index?" field to Yes then save the page.

3. Now find or create the sidebar item you want to assign to that section. Under the Properties tab, select that section index page which will now appear in the "Show in Sections" list.

4. Save the changes to your sidebar and the sidebar should only appear in that section now.

Single and randomized sidebars

In addition to sidebar positions, Sitellite lets you include a single sidebar item as well via the following tag:

```
<xt:box name="sitellite/sidebar/single" sidebar="sidebar-id" />
```

Simply change the `sidebar-id` to the actual ID of one of your sidebars.

Sitellite also offers a sidebar "randomizer" box that you can include which shows a random sidebar item from the specified position each time the page is loaded. This can be used to display rotating promotions on your homepage for example simply by modifying the sidebar tag from earlier to this:

```
<xt:box name="sitellite/sidebar/randomizer" position="index-promo" />
```

Now you can define as many promotional sidebar items as you want and Sitellite will display one of them randomly each time you load your website homepage.

Sidebar customization via CSS

All output from Sitellite's sidebars can be easily customized using a little CSS, since each sidebar has the necessary HTML tags, IDs and classes defined automatically upon rendering. To customize a sidebar position, simply define your CSS as follows:

```
div.scm-sidebar {
    /* styles for sidebars go here */
}
```

You can also define CSS for a particular sidebar like this:

```
div#scm-sidebar-index-promo {
    /* styles for the sidebar with ID 'index_promo' or
'index-promo' */
}
```

If you want separate styles for each sidebar position, simply wrap them in a `<div>` with its own ID then style that `<div>`, for example:

```
<div id="left">
<xt:box name="sitellite/sidebar" position="left" />
</div>
```

Now in your CSS:

```
div#left div.scm-sidebar {
    /* styles for the left sidebar */
}
```

This is typically how modern standards-compliant sites are built, so Sitellite works well with modern site design techniques.

Calling sidebars in other ways

Using the Box Chooser, you can include a sidebar position in the contents of page of your site. Using the single or randomized sidebars, or with CSS to float the sidebar within your page content, this can be a powerful tool for site editors to create dynamic site elements.

As a developer, you can also include sidebars anywhere in your PHP code or application templates dynamically via the following commands:

```
<?php

echo loader_box (
    'sitellite/sidebar',
    array ('position' => 'custom-position')
);
```

```
?>
```

And in a .spt template file it's as simple as this:

```
{box sitellite/sidebar?position=custom-position}
```

As you can see, sidebars are an easy-to-use and flexible tool in the Sitellite site owner's arsenal for creating dynamic and engaging websites with little or no custom coding required.