

Design Blog Conference Takeaways & My Actionable Items For 2017

Last year I posted [this piece](#) about my biggest takeaways from the Design Bloggers Conference. That conference was all about Instagram, and since I really needed some help in that department, those presentations came in so handy. It helped me focus and gave me some parameters about posting that I hadn't considered before. In my post, I literally took some of those recommendations and applied them to my account. You can read [all about that here](#).

This year, I'd like to do the same. While last year, most of my inspiration came from one presenter, the savvy Justina Blakeney of [The Jungalow](#), this year my inspiration to make changes to my blog and overall web presence, came from multiple presenters and just some conversations with friends.

While I've been working [my Instagram](#) with parameters like I described in my post from last year, I get lazy and post stuff I *know* I shouldn't, like not-so-great images. I get excited to share something and post too often at events, etc. Then, I'll lay off awhile till I get some new good images.....also, not a good idea.

Oh well, I'm not perfect. I have, however, managed to double my following over there in the year, even though 6000 followers is *nothing* compared to many designers and influencers, some of which attended this conference.

One mantra they all preached this time:

“Don't compare your beginning to someone else's middle!!!!”

It's hard not to do the compare game. Many of these successful bloggers and speakers were less than half my age, started Instagram around the time I did, and have been designing interiors for only a few years. You just look at the sheer numbers of Instagram followers on some of these bloggers' profiles and their reach is staggering. Like....how did that happen? Was I asleep? Their numbers are just incredible.

I loved being recognized and nominated for two awards, one being the Best Overall Blog. I've been blogging for *8 years and designing interiors for.....lots more*. This was my first year to be nominated. I didn't win and I didn't expect to, but it was really nice to see my blog pic flashed up on the screen.



My friend Linda Holt took this pic for me. :-)

I am trying to not worry about the compare game that much and just focus on making my blog and social profiles more interesting and more in tune with my audience so I can attract clients that fit better and find opportunities for securing passive income.

But well, I did just mention it, didn't I? So, I guess I'm still comparing..... just a little. :-)

Nevertheless, as I sit here and review some of my notes and my overall thoughts that I can apply to my work ahead, **here's what stuck.**

I hope it helps YOU.

1. Do a giveaway with your email sign up.

Omg, yes, I *know* this!!!! Everyone does this! I have lots to give away! I've been wanting to do it *forever!* I have asked two tech oriented consultants to do it for me in the last year and basically....they didn't. Ugh!!!

[Laurel Bern](#), the first speaker of the conference who really brought some good info, stated this advice. Yes, we all know the importance of building your list and offering a giveaway is the best way to do it.

Well, I'm happy to say that when I got home, I googled around and found [this tutorial](#) of how to offer a free ebook on Squarespace, my platform. Voila! It worked! Yep, that's how you got this piece of content. Pretty slick, huh? :-))))))

It took a few hours of ADD brain focus, but it's so easy and now, I know *so much more* about the navigation and the loading of content on my site. I'm really loving Squarespace now too, the more I use it. It makes me feel powerful to know I can do this myself!!!

2. Build a product to sell.

This tip, again from Laurel Bern, is something I've known and put on the back burner. You need to build an ebook, webinar, or downloadable pdf that you can sell to your audience.

I finally have my idea, and after mentioning it to a few of my fellow design bloggers, I felt it cementing into my brain and becoming a real tangible goal. I'm one of those people who needs to talk things out sometimes to get focused. My designer friends, [Linda Holt](#) and [Amanda Gates](#) are perfect for bouncing these ideas off of and giving me perspective. They both agreed my idea was the perfect fit for me. ;-)

3. Develop your brand and stay in that lane.

I really enjoyed hearing [Timothy Corrigan](#). He stressed knowing your brand, what you do, what you stand for, and really not deviating. Brand sponsorships, images you post, it all needs to filter through your brand identity. He also showed us the importance of the very short “elevator speech” and then your tagline. I need to work on all of those! And by the way, did you know that before he became an internationally known and published designer, he had a big advertising agency??? Look at his clients below! This guy really knows what he's talking about.



I've been zig zagging all over the place for so long, trying to find my groove. [I didn't want to specialize really.](#) Well, lately, I've been looking at what seems to resonate with my audience. Since I've gone to emailing every post, I can tell by the end of that day what content my audience likes or doesn't, just by looking at the open and click through rate. That seems to be reflected on social media as well. Those stats are telling me who my audience is and what they want to read/see on my blog.

Basically, they like it when I answer their questions. I finally figured out that the reason I have a high bounce rate is NOT because people are put off here or people aren't finding what they need. Nor is it even because most of my traffic comes from Pinterest, which has a notoriously high bounce rate. It's because people only have this design/decorating problem at one point in their lives, when they are in the middle of a reno and they're in a panic and need a short, quick answer right now!!!

They google it and find it. Right here.

These are some of my top posts...these are telling me why people come to my blog and what they are looking for. Some of my project reveals are also highly ranked because I show how I solve the problems of the project.....I'm a *problem solver* when it comes to my blog. I'm not an entertainer, I'm not shopper, I'm not just all about beautiful images. I'm here to help and that's *why people find me*.

[How to make ugly cabinets look great!](#)

[How to go gray when your whole house is beige](#)

[Where do you end a kitchen backsplash?](#)

[Which direction should you run your wood flooring?](#)

[What's the best paint for your trim: high gloss, semi-gloss, or satin enamel?](#)

These and so many more posts, were written because these have come up in my work. Like...all the time. I deal with these questions every day. Why not stand in what I know, share it, and own it?

4. Rewrite the "About" Page.

I know I've been needing to do this for some time. I really need a branding overhaul, developing the succinct and to-the-point "About" page that follows the elevator speech and the tagline. All the social channel profiles then need to reflect that too. [Ferd Berns of Business of Design](#) spoke about this key element of your blog and business.

Key word here....."ONLY".

"The only designer in this area who....." You get it. He's written some good ones and yes, they made perfect sense.

5. Affiliate marketing can be plugged in as an extra income stream.

Okay, I know this, I'm a RewardStyle member and love their tools and the brands they represent. They have big, notable brands that end users recognize, which helps give people the confidence to click and buy. I'm not exactly known as the "shopping" designer though.

[Holly Hollingsworth Phillips](#) did this presentation. She rocks affiliate marketing and RewardStyle in this home decor space better than anyone I know. People go to her for shopping ideas, so it's a perfect moneymaker for her. Not me, so much, but it was a good reminder to work it in when I can. I've been experimenting with giving links to clients who love to online shop and are willing to accept the risks. I'll let you in on that process and success/unsuccess of it more later.

5. Partnering with brands.

I did a little of this last year with At Home stores. I was part of their Inspiration Team from June to Jan. [This was one of my most successful posts](#), I believe, that I did with them. I really enjoyed getting to do that mini-project. They dropped their program though, and I've heard other brands are doing the same. I'm wondering if really, end users are all loading up their images on Instagram to share with brands now *so much*, that brands don't really have to pay bloggers to have beautiful images of their products used in spaces. ??? I did notice that none of the sponsors of the DBC were looking to build a team of bloggers this year.

I think, after hearing this talk by Linda Weinstein of [Calling It Home](#) blog who does the popular and heavily sponsored [One Room Challenge](#), and [Alex Byer](#) of Wayfair, that the best way to partner up in a way that serves all parties involved, is to have a project in mind and **then** approach a brand. Linda shared her methods of gaining contact....it really blew my mind.

I've often sat there wondering, "How do you know WHO to contact? I mean, I am friends with editors on Facebook, follow them on Insta, but really, the unwritten rule is DON'T bother the Editor In Chief. Right? So, how are you supposed to get noticed? And who, *the heck*, do you contact with a potential project you think they might want to publish? Who is the person, the individual, who will open that email at the BRAND, and really read it?"

Linda provided a succinct path to the brands, the editors, the hierarchy.....that although we all think we NOW live in the millennial's internet world of equality and ACCESS....well, we don't. You have to pave the path before you can really ride down that road.

I am NOT going to give away her secrets here, she is a new friend (we shared an Uber to our airport hotels after the conference) but I have to say, *follow her blog!* She's done an amazing job of connecting brands, designers, and bloggers, and paved a path that none of us dared to try. She is super accessible and nice, you will learn lots from following her example. She is a real player in this field.

I will relate one thing that she noted...[Linked In](#). It's the tool she uses because people in the design space just aren't using it that much. And you know what, she's right! I haven't used it in years, but I do notice when I get an email saying someone wants to connect with me there. (Now if I can figure out how to update my photo on there.)

Here is a great list of to-dos that Alex Byer, from Wayfair, says work with her and other brand managers. Note that "Mind your manners" one. So often I hear bloggers complain about being contacted for free promotion, but you never know where a connection will end up and it always pays to be polite. She also noted that if you write some kind of negative post on a brand, other brands will stay away from you, for fear of you doing to the same to them. ;-)



With all these takeaways in mind, here's my to do list for 2017.

Carla's To Do List

- 1. Figure out how to do the free giveaway item with your email sign up. CHECK!!!! DONE!**
- 2. Work on that product to sell and get it out there!**

- 3. Work on some concise branding statements and live them all over the internet.**
- 4. Continue to use RewardStyle on the blog, social media, and with clients when applicable.**
- 5. When ideas for projects come up, approach brands or publishers with partnership opportunities. (They can only say no! At least now, I know how to ask!)**

Leslie Carothers published her list of takeaways in Facebook Notes, and you might want to check that out. Similar to mine, but a few that I didn't cover here. It's a good one.

<https://www.facebook.com/notes/the-kaleidoscope-partnershipsocial-media-marketinghouston/how-to-become-filthy-rich-from-design-blogging/10154966842725309>

Thanks for reading! Good luck on *your* journey and I appreciate so much you following mine. :-)

Carla