

## Episode 26: Kate Ahl

Lauren 0:01

Welcome to the Launch Your Blog Biz podcast, I'm your host, Lauren McManus. I used to be a full time tax accountant and CPA with a whole lot of limiting beliefs and "I can't's" whenever I thought about starting my own business. Fast forward a few months, and I quit my job after starting and growing my first blog to six figures in just a year. This is my space to share and yours to listen and grow, about how to build and scale your own blogging business and design a life on your terms. Let's get started.

Lauren 0:35

Hey, y'all, welcome back to the podcast. I hope that you're having an awesome day. In today's episode, I want to talk about the big elephant in the room, and that big red elephant is Pinterest. So we've been getting a lot of questions, and even more grumblings from our students about Pinterest this year more than ever. And y'all get it, they've changed a lot. It's not what it used to be and all of this stuff leaves us all wondering, "why, why why did you do this?" We're all saying that every time Pinterest changes anything from the smallest the biggest changes.

Lauren 1:12

But y'all all these changes don't mean that this platform is totally irrelevant. Even if you've seen a drop in traffic, even if it's not what it used to be. I've seen so many generalizations about Pinterest, and this is generally where a lot of my beef lies within these complaints. Because with changes or not, Pinterest is still absolutely working for many people and I think that everyone really needs to evaluate the relevancy of Pinterest for themselves and their own business.

Lauren 1:43

Today, that's exactly what I want to chat about some of these changes and that relevancy that I'm talking about. I have a really great guest on the show today to discuss all of this with. I'd like to welcome Kate Ahl, of *Simple Pin Media*. Welcome, Kate.

Kate 1:58

Hey, thanks so much for having me. I'm really excited to dive in with this.

Lauren 2:03

When I first had the idea for this episode of my podcast notes, I knew that I needed to invite Kate as a guest on the show, especially because she was kind enough to have me on her podcast a while back, when this was just an inkling of an idea in my own head, to start my own podcast. Mostly, y'all though, just because when I think about people that are super immersed in the Pinterest world and know what's going on, it's definitely Kate. So Kate, can you tell us a little bit more about how you founded your business, what you do and what kind of Pinterest services you offer and all that jazz?

Kate 2:37

Yeah, definitely. So I actually started in Pinterest, probably nine years ago, and then started my business eight years ago actually, which is crazy. I started because I wanted to help business owners understand it because I knew how much they had on their plate. So I dove in headfirst

## Episode 26: Kate Ahl

to really become kind of this practitioner of Pinterest. And as a result, over these last eight years, we've built an agency serving over 100 clients, and then a community where we teach on the other side as well.

Kate 3:11

We've taken all that data and change in history, in fact, the other day, I was like, "I feel like I could be a Pinterest historian at this point, with all that I've seen them do and all these changes, to really help business owners make sense and evaluate, how is this going to work for my business." Some business owners want to do that themselves and some want to hand it off. So we get a lot of these different perspectives from brands and business owners who basically handed over to us and we look at their data and how they're doing.

Kate 3:42

Then we get to walk alongside other people who want to make it work and want to figure out the strategy themselves. So it's kind of this great vantage point that I have. Plus we run education reports all the time as well, to bring all of it together to say, "Okay, how do you decide if Pinterest is the place for your business? And then how long are you going to invest in it as well? And then how much money?" And that's really what I do all day and every day is, look at where's Pinterest going? Where's it been? You know, what are the indicators of how this affects people's businesses in all niches, bloggers, you know, ecommerce sellers, both digital and physical.

Lauren 4:21

That's awesome. You have such an incredible perspective, because you have been on this platform, so long, I mean, twice as long as I have. I can only compare where things were when I started and where things are now in my own experience and some of my students but you've been on doubly that time. You also have clients in so many different niches that you have this awesome higher level view of strategies and what's working, what's not working on Pinterest, and I guess you've just seen so much you've probably heard even so much more than I have about all of this stuff.

Kate 4:57

Yeah, definitely. And I've seen the waves, I think that's another thing, like people who experienced the wave of change on Pinterest for the very first time, they're really scared about it, and I get it. Whereas I've gone through like seven of them, and I can see what happens each time and what decisions you have to make and really, it comes down to our world with online businesses is dependent on all these different channels.

Kate 5:27

And so you really have to make the hard decision about where your people are, and where you're going to invest even when it's hard. Those who have been on Pinterest for a long time, there were really easy days and it's easy to want to go back to that or kind of wish it was there. But no platform these days is easy anymore. And I think that's just the way that the digital world has been changing.

## Episode 26: Kate Ahl

Lauren 5:51

Yeah, I guess that's why you can jump on platforms in the beginning when there's all this traffic to be had, because they haven't quite figured the algorithms out yet. But it all levels out, every single platform does and everyone gets more competitive. So unless you want to be a platform hopper, you just kind of have to evolve.

Lauren 6:10

Well, so I was looking over your website today before this recording, and I was looking at one of your latest posts related to your latest podcast episode. And it was on, Is Pinterest Still a Search Engine? And this was really, really great, I'm going to link that in the show notes. Because everyone listening right now that is wondering about Pinterest needs to give that a thorough listen. But you said pinner's aren't interested in you, pinner's the ultimate repository of life hacks, which I absolutely love that thought about Pinterest. But it's so true.

Lauren 6:45

I do feel like Pinterest is pushing certain types of content these days and it does make me sometimes feel though that they are wanting to see more of us. Things like story pins. So I'm wondering, can you tell me in your own words, what you think makes a great story pin? A lot of people are stressing because it doesn't translate into direct traffic and what do you think should be the goal here with these story pins? Is it exposure? Is it relationships? Is it social? Does it have to be like a TikTok video with your face and a lot more of you?

Kate 7:19

Hmm, great question. So Pinterest rebranded the "story" into "idea pins", which I actually think fits it even better calling it that instead of story because when we think of story, we think of Instagram or think of Snapchat. So thinking of it as it's an idea that you can give to the audience on Pinterest, that helps them have that aha moment. When Pinterest burst on the scene, you know, in 2010, in that first couple years of growth, that was all the rage of Pinterest was this like, "Oh my gosh, did you see this tip on Pinterest? Did you see this?" And it became kind of this, you know, we just learned to use Pinterest. And that's what we came to expect.

Kate 8:03

Well, now idea pins have kind of taken on that secondary life of "Ooh, here's this quick hack, or here's this quick tip, or here's the dimensions of a product, or maybe the features of a product." So when you think of idea pins, they don't link which is frustrating, however, there are two new developments with product tagging.

Kate 8:23

However, you have to have your catalog, like if you have a shop, you have to have your catalog attached to do that. So that's kind of like the workaround with a link but I don't have a shop or a catalog, so I can't link it. But you can also do affiliate links. So there are two new developments right there. But really what it is, is I'll go back just a little bit into Pinterest and why they created them was really to keep people on the platform longer, because Pinterest users are primed to move off.

## Episode 26: Kate Ahl

Kate 8:50

So Pinterest was looking for this way to keep people on longer, and to camp on the TikTok and the reel, the short form video. But to be very clear to say we are more media than we are social. So we want you to think of idea pins as, again, talking about how to serve your person, because they are not here to be entertained. So taking a TikTok where you're dancing doesn't still doesn't translate onto Pinterest. But taking a TikTok or a reel where you're showing how to do a messy bun or braid, people on Pinterest are interested in that all day long, because they've already gone there to look for hair tutorials, or they're going there for, you know, ways to make quick meals.

Kate 9:34

It's just like Pinterest has added this element of diversification for marketers. So now you don't just have a static pin but you also now have an idea pin. And we're in this weird stage where we're waiting to see how the pinner adopts to them. So when Pinterest adds a new feature, of course all of us marketers know right away and we're like oh my gosh, it's the end of the world. But Pinterest, they serve the pinner first, not the creator.

Kate 10:05

So they're waiting to see how they respond to them and it's this weird push pull of like, Pinterest wants to keep people on the platform longer, but they also don't want to alienate their pinners. So I would say, that's where we're at right now with them, I think they're a good idea to use. But always think about how you serve your person in a very short form way.

Lauren 10:31

Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. And I can see the immediate connection for things like you described, like a recipe that you can very visually show very quickly. The same with, you know, hairstyles and stuff but I'm also wondering, what does this mean for the people who market different kinds of content that maybe can't be illustrated quite so visually? I know, there's always been a very visual platform and so when, you know, we got to create these big images and have text on them that really stood out, this really helped, you know, but now all the content looks like that.

Lauren 11:07

But what about people? I guess, I mean, I'm trying to think now of a niche where maybe something more technical, or, you know, the people who were just trying to drive traffic to a blog post that has a lot of content maybe just can't be communicated in that way. Have you seen other content working well, that isn't someone's face, or the actual thing being done?

Kate 11:32

Yes, definitely. In fact, I would say less face is better, to be truthful and it's more showing the "it" being done. So let me come up with a few examples. I write a lot of long form blog posts. So if I'm talking about even the example of, "Is Pinterest a search engine?" What I would normally put on a static image would be that, but now I might break it up into a little bit of a teaser and say,

## Episode 26: Kate Ahl

the beginning slide is, "Is Pinterest still a search engine?" Then say the next slide is, "Here's why, yes." On the third slide is another one. And maybe I leave off the last couple tips as a teaser to say, "There's more reasons why Pinterest is a search engine, visit my profile, and then check out my latest blog post."

Kate 12:18

Because they do have the call to action that Pinterest puts there to go to your Pinterest profile and then they have to go to your website. The way that you want to cater it is to think, "How can I give a teaser to get them to read more to where they're interested?" Whereas we did that kind of in just one static image before. Now we're kind of taking it and stretching it out. And it doesn't have to be, you can do between like eight and 20 slides in an idea pin, it certainly does not have to be 20. But to be thinking about how you can just do something that's valuable to where they go, "Oh, this is really good. I want to learn more."

Kate 13:00

And even the older ones, that had like camping hacks, and there were like 100 camping hacks in a blog post, which sounds horrible to write, but you could do five, and then let them know there's more. There's a lot of different ways that you can spin it just thinking about it in more of a micro content that leads to the macro content.

Lauren 13:24

Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. Well, I'm also curious to see where all this is headed. Of course, you just immediately think of TikTok and the explosion of that platform. You also said in that post something about, you know, when video content was first introduced, it was 2017. I didn't even realize it had been that long because you had also said, it feels like we've been complaining about video content on Pinterest for years now. And I guess it really has been, but it'll just be really interesting to see the way that the platform develops.

Lauren 13:57

Also in this really great post that you just had, you went really in depth in this content about what Pinterest once was, where it is now, and where you think that it's headed. It also talks about being intentional about what you're trying to accomplish on this platform, aside from just traffic, which I think is so ingrained in our brains with this platform is just traffic traffic traffic. But towards the end of it, you did mention a continued emphasis that you believe going on, you know now but also in the future, a continued emphasis on shopping short form video and idea pins.

Lauren 14:36

And, of course, I feel like none of these are really the types of content that the marketers on Pinterest have traditionally created or liked to create. And I understand that Pinterest is a visual platform and always has been. But I guess what I'm wondering and what I know some of my students that have been on this platform for a while are wondering is, can the average blogger still get enough organic traffic without an e-commerce business or without a good amount of video content? Is it still going to be worth it for people like that? Or do you think that we have to

## Episode 26: Kate Ahl

adapt in order to get shown in the algorithms and to really be relevant on this platform, we have to adapt to this new type of content?

Kate 15:22

Yeah, that is such a good question. So I think I look to what I've seen on other platforms to give me an indication of where we're going and I think, you know, Instagram used to just be like, images only and there weren't even a lot of captions underneath. Then all of a sudden, there was a lot more caption, and then there were multiple posts in or multiple images in an Instagram post. Then it went to video, and then it went to live, then it went to these reels in August of 2020.

Kate 15:05

I think there's a lot more grace and patience I see for adopting to things on Instagram then I see we give Pinterest and a lot of what I hear in the industry is like, "Hey, Pinterest, you're supposed to stay this way and you're supposed to stay this way forever."

Kate 16:06

"Instagram, I'll jump through 1 million hoops to do whatever you want me to do, because I get a like." So I think it's really important that you evaluate first and foremost, what you're doing on other platforms, and why you won't do it on Pinterest. So yeah, I think Pinterest is going to continue to iterate into something that closely matches their previous ecosystem, with the current trends of what the consumer demands, which as we've seen with TikTok and reels, the consumer is demanding short form and short attention span pieces.

Kate 16:41

But I think the uniqueness about Pinterest is their longtime users, still, and even some of their new users still want to go to get more information. It still has that same feeling of Google, where they're like, "Oh, man, I want to read the post, or I wish I could go deeper." And I'm hearing this from a lot of people who use Pinterest, not for business, to say, "Yeah, I am kind of frustrated with this." And so I think that feedback, that's why I say like, we're in that tension of feedback from pinners, and what the marketer is doing.

Kate 17:13

But I do think that you do have to evolve and that's a really hard answer to give. But it's really the truth of if you're willing to do it on other platforms, why aren't you willing to do it here? And yes, I do think it will still bring traffic and it will still function as a search engine, less for sure, I'm not going to paint a rosy picture that it's going to be the same. But I still think there's the ability to use static pins, video pins, and then the idea pins.

Kate 17:42

And I don't have a lot of videos at all, so I don't do much, but I can take what we're doing on Instagram and repurpose it slightly for Pinterest. So there is an ability to do that. But I think like I said in the beginning, I kind of always question people when they push back at Pinterest, and I see them spending 15 hours a week on Instagram. But they're really upset that their one hour week isn't working anymore on Pinterest.

## Episode 26: Kate Ahl

Lauren 18:07

Yeah, that's a great way to put it. I think that Pinterest was such a goldmine of traffic back in the heyday, you could say, when many of these complainers first got on, you know, and I get it. I mean, we've seen a massive drop from the organic traffic that we used to have. And you said it perfectly when you said it just isn't that anymore and it's not going to be and we have to adapt. On that note, I get some of the frustration too, with the evolution because I get that these platforms are all working towards keeping users on the platform and remaining relevant and competitive.

Lauren 18:43

But you know, I have to say as both a business user and a consumer, I feel like I'm growing very weary of every platform, trying to do all the things. I can't help but feel a bit frustrated when I see these idea pins and stuff and these videos because it makes me feel like I'm on TikTok and there's a reason why I'm on Pinterest and not on TikTok, you know, and I guess that's just where you have to start evaluating your own individual needs and desires. Because if you are going to have to start creating this type of content, you need to start thinking about okay, is Pinterest my place? Or is it going to be YouTube? Or is it going to be TikTok? You know, and I guess if everyone starts dipping out of Pinterest, then maybe it will turn back into a gold mine again. Maybe that's the silver lining here.

Kate 19:29

Right? Well, I think to your point, here's what I did the other day, I looked at the last year of all my social analytics, actually all my analytics. So I wanted to get this picture because I was actually teaching on it like, Okay, how do we stop and review the year? I went to my Google Analytics and I looked at where I was at everywhere then it looked at my social and we've invested in Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest, like those have been our three. I looked and I was like, "Okay, well, Pinterest had, like 32,000 sessions for the year, Facebook had eight and Instagram had two, if I'm just going based on my desire for traffic, because I believe that once people get to my site, I can convert them."

Kate 20:18

Why would I give up on Pinterest if it has 32,000 compared to Instagram having 2000. Now the ecosystems are totally different, right? So I'm not going to dismiss that, where Instagrams more of a people builder, relational builder, and awareness builder, but Pinterest is still my traffic driver here. I'm not going to look at those numbers in front of me and go, "Well, this sucks. I give up." Right? No, I'm going to go, "Okay, how do I strategically look at this platform, who is giving me traffic, and what is my plan for the year?"

Kate 20:51

And your comment about fatigue was spot on, because I think that's what you have to do to combat fatigue is to say, "I'm only going to master one thing at a time." And that, you know, for us, we haven't leaned into YouTube yet, because we aren't ready to do it with great intention. I can listen to all the people tell me how amazing YouTube is and get referrals for clients and all



## Episode 26: Kate Ahl

these great things, but I'm not set up for success to do it, yet. And so when I look at my systems for where I'm investing, I make sure I feel like something's great. And I know that something's gonna shift, like, you know, we are investing in Instagram, and then all of a sudden, we got the link.

Kate 21:34

So this push to get to 10,000 is no longer a drive anymore, right? It's like, Oh, that sucks. I've just been investing all this time. But at the same time, it's great. So I think it's just sitting down with your numbers, and really making a data driven decision instead of an emotional decision. And that's kind of the only response that I would give someone when you are fatigued by all these platforms, is you can't do it all. Like, I can't do LinkedIn. I know also, my people are on LinkedIn, and people tell me all the time, you should go there. I hate LinkedIn, I can't figure it out and it drives me absolutely crazy. So I'm not, I'm just not going to do it right now. But I will eventually. But that's just the decision I have to make and then be totally okay with that. So that's just a little bit of how I process it.

Lauren 22:24

Yeah, honestly, I feel the exact same way. That is what we teach our students to, is to really be intentional and focus on one, maybe two, you know, with a secondary emphasis, but generally one at a time, because you have to be intentional, and you have to really think about what this platform is going to do for you and how it's going to serve your business. And I feel the same way, I just don't have the capacity to be able to do other things.

Lauren 22:54

For me, that's TikTok, the very idea just makes me just cringe. I just don't have the capacity for it, you know, so I have to allow myself to say, you know, it's just not right for me, and maybe I'm missing this massive wave of getting a ton of followers and stuff. But I also like you said with YouTube, I'm just not ready for it yet and I'll figure out when there is a better time for that, you know?

Kate 23:17

Yeah. And another, as you said, that I thought of this idea to follow up just to encourage your students and your listeners is sometimes we get so caught up in the metrics that we do become heavily driven on like, how can I get more clicks? How can I get more sessions? How can I get more traffic, and we really forget our person, and we really forget who we're serving. And if we were in a brick and mortar, and we had our doors open, we wouldn't have this clicker that's like get him and get him and get him in. We're like, No, we actually want the right people in here, who are going to buy our stuff and become a repeat customer.

Kate 23:55

I think it's really important to see that when it comes to your readers that, yeah, Pinterest users can be bouncy, and they come over and they bounce away. And maybe that's really great for ad or affiliate income. But there's also an element of like, wanting people to stick around for a while,



## Episode 26: Kate Ahl

to get to know you, to invest in who you are, to share your recipes with friends. And then they make them or share your articles with friends because they've read them.

Kate 24:23

So don't lose sight of the end user because that, you know, if your person is on Pinterest, and you know that they're searching for things, head down and remember who they are, because that's all that they care about. They just care about the fact that when they walk into your store and visit your website, they can find what it is they're looking for and you are the solution to their problem.

Lauren 24:48

Yeah, that's exactly right. I think that we all just got a little lost on all of this because the way that Pinterest delivered traffic and because it delivered so much of it, we just saw Pinterest as this platform for just straight traffic, right? We didn't have to evaluate the intention or any of that stuff really, because it was just about getting a click and getting them over to your website where you could then elaborate. Now we have these platforms where we have to think about relationship building and all of this, and Pinterest is just evolving a little bit more into where the rest of the platforms are.

Lauren 25:27

And, yeah, it sucks, in some ways for business owners but it also makes sense, you really can't blame the platform for it. The only other thing I want to say there too, is that I think that when people are evaluating whether or not this platform is right for them, they also have to think about this in the right context. You can't compare it necessarily, or you shouldn't just compare it to where your traffic was to where it is now, it's also about what other platform is going to give it to you, you know, if YouTube or something else will serve you better than go ahead and go on it.

Lauren 26:09

But I know, at least for my newer bloggers who have not been on Pinterest forever, for them, I still recommend Pinterest because at the end of the day in their world, what better platform is there to drive quick traffic. If you're starting on Instagram from zero, good luck, if you're aren't going to pay for any ads, or any other platform, it's very, very difficult to start from zero. And I still think that Pinterest is one of the best ways to get your initial traffic much quicker than any other source. If at some point, you then decide it's not right for you, then that's fine. But I still think at least in that space, for most people, it's still one of the best platforms.

Kate 26:52

Yeah, and you have to fight the dopamine hits of the world. It's really easy to choose Instagram, because it can, even if you start at zero, you can have a couple likes or people follow your whatever. And you feel like Pinterest isn't doing much right away, but it does. It's like once it catches on, it catches on for a long time. And I agree with you, it still can drive great traffic. And we wouldn't tell somebody not to invest in Google, because it doesn't make us feel good. Right? Like we're still gonna do it, because we know it's good long term.

## Episode 26: Kate Ahl

Lauren 27:26

Yeah, absolutely. And Google is super competitive, and it's only going to get more competitive, but it's still high quality traffic and Pinterest has always been high quality traffic. Well, this has been really awesome, I'm really glad that we got to talk about all this like high level stuff. You've seen some really insightful things. I'm really excited to also share that resource on your latest episode and all that about Pinterest, you know whether or not it's still a search engine, but where else can our listeners find you? Is there anything else that you want to share?

Kate 28:03

Yeah, um, I don't have anything else, I feel like this was a great conversation for me to be able to share where I'm at too, so I appreciate the invite here just to talk about this. But, *Simple Pin Media* is really where everything is there. All the resources with Pinterest, and then the *Simple Pin Podcast*. You can also, if you are new to Pinterest, and you are trying to figure out how to use IDEA pins, we've been doing a ton of experimenting on our Pinterest account. So that's just [pinterest.com/simplepinmedia](https://pinterest.com/simplepinmedia) and you can get some inspiration from what we're doing there and hopefully take that away.

Lauren 28:38

Well, I will link all of those resources. And y'all, if you are wanting to know what the latest and greatest working things are on Pinterest, definitely follow Kate and listen to her podcast because she's got some really awesome stuff about all the stuff that's working and more of all the stuff that we've talked about today. Well, I really enjoyed this a lot, Kate and I know my audience will as well. So thank you so much for joining me.

Kate 29:05

Yeah, you bet. Thanks for having me.

Lauren 29:07

All right, y'all. I'll see you next time.

Lauren 29:11

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