

Episode 179: Podfest Masterclass Summit

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Speaker: Chris Krimitsos

Dr. Mark T. Wade:

And for today's episode, we have something pretty special lined up for you. We are going to give you a sneak peek at one of our Summit Talks sessions. That's right. We have our Summit Talks summit going live, and I want to give you a sneak peek at it. So you're going to get the audio version of this episode, but what I want you to do is make sure you head over to <https://summittalks.online>, to get access to all of the amazing Summit Talks sessions and video sessions waiting for you over there. So in the meantime, enjoy this audio version of another amazing Summit Talks.

Dr. Mark:

Want to know how an in person mega conference went virtual and crushed it. Find out how Podfest did a one day virtual summit in record time. If you're interested in how an in person event host can still provide amazing value through virtual events, then this session is for you. Hey, there summit hosts. I'm Dr. Mark T. Wade, founder of Virtual Summits Software CEO of Viral Summits, and your host here on Summit Talks the largest, most impactful virtual summit for summit hosts. Now we're in for an absolute treat right now. We have legendary Chris Krimitsos with us founder of Podfest expo. Now, Chris is the author of the book Start Ugly, a timeless tale about change and innovation. He's facilitated over 2000 events that have brought together business owners towards economic growth. He's also the founder of the Tampa Bay Business Owners and created a national event, Podfest Multimedia Expo, which has become the top podcasting conference in the world. Now he's also a filmmaker and producer creating the film, The Messengers, a podcast documentary, which obtained worldwide distribution and theatrical screenings. This came after producing two TV shows earlier in his career. One of which is actually being archived in the Library of Congress. So grab your pen, grab your paper. We're going to have some fun on this one, Chris, thanks so much for being here with us today.

Chris Krimitsos:

Hey Mark. Thanks for having me.

Dr. Mark:

Well, I cannot wait to dive into this. There's so much you're doing, I mean, we could probably for hours and hours and hours, so we're going to have to pull out the most important gems that you got in that genius brain of yours right away. But before we go down that path, I'd love for you to take a few more moments and tell our summit hosts, just a little bit more about yourself.

Chris:

So I think you've covered a lot of the highlights. So basically I use events to facilitate community. So first and foremost, my community is what's really important to me. So whether it's an entrepreneur community, a creative community, uh, I will use events, virtual or physical, to create collisions and create community. So that's really what I, I love doing. And I love featuring new talent, uh, harnessing talent, growing talent from my community. I'm not a, if you like anything, you listened to me, I just want to be very clear where I come from.

Chris:

I'm not the guy that's going to do the big flashy event with the big name speakers. There's nothing wrong with that. I'm the guy that's going to harness it out of my community and bring people up the ladder of success from within the community. Yes. Well, I feature big name speakers. Absolutely, but it's not my purview. If the speaker doesn't want to stay for our conference, I would rather not have that speaker. Uh, that being said, sometimes there's times you want to do that, but my field of expertise is highlighting the people within your community, harnessing the genius within it. And then literally allowing that to grow almost like a farmer farms their land growing that group of individuals. And then they grow the next group and then so on and so forth.

Dr. Mark:

I absolutely love this concept. I want to dive right into this actually. So, um, I can imagine all the different reasons why this is so powerful and beneficial. Talk us through some of the benefits that have come from harnessing, as you said, the genius from within the community, how does that end up helping the overall community, the business and, and others?

Chris:

Well, the first thing you have to do as an organizer is communicate, what is your vision? What are we all doing here? What's the point of the conference? And a lot of organizers don't do that. So for instance, Mark, you're doing like a lot of interviews to make your summits available right now. We just had a summit where I literally had 101 to ones in a week with all my speakers. So like are you meeting with your speakers and communicating the vision?

Chris:

Most conference organizers don't even know what their vision is. So that's a huge fatal flaw. So now the speakers who are your attendees, right? So I like featuring my attendees. So I'll, I'll put out a speaker submission to my attendees. First they get first crack at filling out the speaker spots. You have to have different places to place different people. So there are some people that you kind of already are all stars because you see their marketing materials. Like they get to the point, they know what they're doing. Those peoples get solo breakouts possible. Keynote stage always is, is for the best of the best, right? Uh, or a very current topic that everybody needs to hear. Then if you want to try new people out, uh, without any what I call damage to the conference, right? Um, not damaged, but it is a risk, right?

Chris:

You're taking a risk on a new person. You can put them on a panel or you could create what I call speed round presentations. And we hear a lot of these, uh, ignite talks, PechaKucha is another word for it. So we have a, we just added case study talks. So they're five minute case studies. If we see that someone could convey a point in five minutes and they do really well, uh, we'll upgrade them next year or invite them back. Uh, the cool part about that though is you could feature 30 speakers within a three hour timeframe. So you could actually find some really great talent and give people a leg up to try stuff out. And I always encouraged them to do so. So that, that helps you feature the talent in the community. Now here's the crazy part. Mark. If you're able to harness the talent in the community, that contents better than most professional speakers, I mean like it's a 10 to one.

Chris:

I mean, almost always it's better than most professional speakers, not because the professional speakers, aren't great. They're a lot of them are phenomenal. It's just the audience knows the community and there's a pressure that a professional speaker might not have. And that is, I don't want to disappoint my friends who come to this conference each and every year. So they put an extra work that a professional speaker might not always put in. I'm a professional speaker. So like it's a caveat. There are some amazing professional speakers that go above and beyond, but the majority, they usually mail it home. They have a stock presentation. I very rarely will. I'll always, um, I'll get to know the crowd and then adjust. I, I usually sometimes will adjust my slides right before I go on for the audience. But most speakers, they have a stock presentation. So that, that makes a huge difference.

Chris:

Um, recently, because of virtual summits, we've been able to discover a lot of untapped talent within our, uh, within our community. So I could tell you right now I have 10 rising stars that I didn't have before, but to discover them it, there is a percentage like not everybody is like a rising talent. We, you know, we just did a, an event with 377 speakers. So to discover 10 is a lot, but we had a lot of speakers come through.

Dr. Mark:

So in this, on the virtual event that you just held, there was 300 something speakers on it?

Chris:

377 to be exact, uh, in a, in a two week timeframe, uh, except for one of the one four hour time, everything was live streamed. And except for we created a new thing called case study talks. We used to do a PechaKucha, which is if anyone's familiar, it's like an ignite talk, five minutes, 20 slides everything's timed out.

Chris:

Uh, so we said, I kinda like PechaKucha, but the problem with it is people don't know what the word means. Then you tell them ignite talk. If they've never done one, you've got to explain it. So we created a new thing this time called case study talks, and it's a case study around your topic. And someone's like, well, I don't know if I have a case study. And I was like, well, what do you speak on? They go, this, I go, great. That's your case study? And they're like, well, how do I do that? I go, just tell us about what you talk about and what you tell us your numbers. Tell us what your number one episode is. So interestingly, we were able to feature 30 people, but the rest pretty much was live. Yeah. Like over 300 were live. Yeah. So there was 30 that were pre-recorded.

Dr. Mark:

All right. We're going to dive right into that because this is, this is incredible here. So first off, um, we just, you just went through and laid out, um, the different types of sessions you would normally do. So the first thing I would ask is, did you imitate that or mimic that virtually? And secondly, if they were live, how did you facilitate all of those? Did you not sleep? Was there somebody else talk us through that process?

Chris:

Um, well we have a small team, so, um, technology-wise we were using a tool that was integrated with Zoom. So Zoom, think of that as our breakout rooms, but there was a architecture and we've used Virtual Summits Software as well. So like, depending on what tools you use, um, um, technology agnostic, meaning as long as the technology gets me there, you're not going to hear me bitch and moan much about it. Um, but you have to have someone on your team that is tech savvy. So we had a tech savvy individual that was familiar. Um, we had to, we tried first with general Zoom rooms and that was a nightmare. So we upgraded to Zoom webinar, which gave us more control for obvious reasons. And then we thought this is part of my Start Ugly philosophy. We just started figuring it out as we went, instead of doing all the research.

Chris:

Cause we figured, Hey, it's much quicker. Uh, then we realized that we couldn't do breakouts as efficiently as we wanted to. Cause what you just said, Mark. Um, if we had other, if we had other facilitators, they're not as seasoned to like, like I know you would know how to do it, but most people don't and you got to keep things at a 30 minute slot. So we had very quick clip, if that makes sense. So we took breakouts out of the way. So we had three leaders, uh, let's call 'em, uh, facilitators of the Zoom feed. Each Zoom was capped out at 500 people, uh, three going on simultaneously. And then we partnered them up with a moderator. The moderator would, um, help with the chat and the Q and A, and then we had, we had another moderator that was moderating the speaker.

Chris:

So it was almost each track, had three people working at behind the scenes, one for the tech, just to make sure everything's going well, another one facilitating chat. So we would ask the questions for the audience. And then the other person is the one that put together the, the lineup of the speakers and they would introduce the speaker. So it was, um, it was pretty awesome. We were doing three tracks at the same time, uh, just about daily twice a day. So it would imagine like in the morning we'd have like three tracks and there'd be a break. And then the afternoon we had three tracks. We had like four different languages spoken. We had one in full Mandarin, a couple in China. Uh, I'm sorry, in Spanish. And then when we had one, Arabic was just one presentation, I believe was in Arabic, a little bit of Arabic, but we, we had four different languages spoken. Majority of it was English.

Dr. Mark:

Wow. That is incredible. That is a lot of moving pieces. And I'm sure with that as smoothly as it ran and as much experience that you have, we know with virtual events, virtual summits, livestream conferences, there's always something that tends to go wrong and there's something unexpected, some kind of challenge. Um, what was, what would you say was the biggest challenge of putting on this livestream summit that you ran?

Chris:

Here's the crazy thing. Cause I've been doing this stuff since Ustream came out, like I've been playing with live streaming for a long time. I remember Gary Vaynerchuk. We brought him in, no one knew who he was at the time. And I, there was no speaker fee forum, uh, back in the day. So I've been in this game for a very long time. Um, the most, the craziest thing was the live stream was the most efficient thing we did. It was when someone, uh, we had one person that we were featuring, phenomenal human being, but that person was being advised by someone, um, on their team. And they were like, Hey, we want to play these prerecorded interviews live. And I said, listen, we've already tested this. It's going to come

out pixelated, because of this bandwidth speed, you're better off going live, but they were scared that somehow something would go wrong.

Chris:

Unfortunately for them, when they played the prerecorded, something happened with their bandwidth and went out twice. Luckily, I remember I told you, I have a team member that's tech savvy. So we already had it. So we took care of it of our end. So we, we were able to save the day. They were happy. We were happy, but I'll be crazy honest, live stream is better than playing a prerecorded. Uh, I couldn't believe it. I was like, I'd rather have, at first I was like, Oh, let's do it all prerecorded. And I was like, you know what? In this instance live was much better, but let me be very clear. We were playing the prerecorded live. That was why it was the problem. We, weren't just saying here's a prerecorded Vimeo link, and then releasing it, we've done that that's phenomenal success, but everything in the thing was live. So if you try and play a prerecorded live, it's a bigger pain in the ass. You're better off just going live if that makes sense.

Dr. Mark:

Yeah, absolutely. So I want to kind of dive into, I mean, this, this is a huge undertaking. Most of our summit hosts are just getting started. So you are not going to do a 376 speakers.

Chris:

I don't advise that for anyone. Like I've done 2,000 events, I've built up a muscle in a community. And the only reason I could do it is not because of not because I'm so expert it's because I have a community that's there to support and I could find the speakers. And it's a lot easier now because of what I just mentioned that community years ago. And it started with 14 people at a meetup. So we've grown since then over the seven years.

Dr. Mark:

Absolutely. Absolutely. So most of you, you're going to start off with either a one day seminar or a small multi-day summit. And then this is the aspirational goal right here. Okay. So you're going to work up to that. Um, I want to talk about something else that you did that was extremely creative, um, with this live stream summit that you did, which the Guinness Book of World Records kind of competition. Talk us, talk us through that. How did you come up with the idea to begin with what was the goal of the idea? And then explain it a little bit.

Chris:

So you'll enjoy this in a, we were the last podcast conference. So technically like there's a couple others that are similar sized to us, but this year with the only physical live event, largest in the world to go on, because after we were done the Corona shut everything down. So we, we were, we were very fortunate in a lot of different ways. So we were able to secure a lot of things and fulfill everything for our sponsors. So sometime in May, I was like, I want to do something. And I need a really simple software. I don't want too many moving parts. And I really, I got referred to Virtual Summits Software.

Chris:

So we wound up using Virtual Summits Software. And what Virtual Summits Software allowed us to do was not worry about the technical aspect, because it's fairly simple to use. So, and that, and that's what I wanted. And, you know, a lot of people were like, Hey, use this use that. I'm like, no, like I'd rather use

something that's going to work. And I don't want a million moving parts right now. I just want to get this down. So the first thing is, let me test if my audience is receptive to a virtual event and, uh, loved using Virtual Summits Software. I had a friend that, uh, wanted to use, he wanted to use the, um, he wanted, he was going to help me with the tech side. So anyways, we started and he goes, listen, man, I gotta move next week. So can we launch this thing on Saturday?

Chris:

I'm like, I know we, we had, we had like 10 of our best speakers recorded content. I said, it's Saturday. Now you're talking about next Saturday? He goes, yeah. So we sent our first email on Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and we had 874 people registered. And we had a 11.2% conversion to the paid from freemium to paid. So it didn't take a genius to figure out like, okay, we got something here. If our audience that many people within a three day lead time respond with no outside help, no graphics, no nothing. Um, it was a real success of Virtual Summits Software. It gave us the confidence of like, alright, what else can we do? So then my other friend and Mark, this is something. If you're a promoter, you have to have really positive friends that could support you because everybody around you is going to say, you're crazy.

Chris:

Cause promoters. Unfortunately, it's just a tough, it's a tough business and there's not a lot of us. So you got to surround yourself with other great people. So I have a good friend of mine who I helped him with his YouTube channel recently. And he said, why don't you call the Guinness World Records and do the largest event? I go, I don't know. That sounds a little crazy. Cause you talk about all the time. It was funny how the Coronavirus really made me question all these things that I used to always say. So anyways I go, all right, I'll just call, call them up and see what's going on. They were like, listen, podcasting is hot. Virtual is what we're doing. Cause we can't really do live things right now. And they created a category for us for the largest virtual summit for our podcast and conference.

Chris:

And that's all I needed after that, it was off to the races. We put out a speaker submission to our community. Over 300 people applied within like four days. So I had to shut it down. Cause I was like, now I have to review 300 speakers with my speaker committee, which literally takes like a week. Cause we take every submission seriously. And then that's how we started. And that's when, once that rally and call, I held a Zoom call with my top hundred pillars of my community. And I told them, we're going to crowdfund this. I had a two week crowdfunding, cause I only had a five week period to pull this off. And within 40 minutes we raised a hundred percent of goal within that. Under the two weeks we raised 392% of goal. And what I said to them is I'd like to give the majority of the summit away for free and not make money a barrier.

Chris:

So they backed it. So literally in the two weeks, only a day and a half, you had to pay for it. The rest was all free. So we gave it away for free. And now Mark, we're leaning on changing the name to Podfest Global because we truly, during that summit, we became a global phenomenon with people from Nairobi, Cairo in the, uh, um, of course Australia they're always included, but like underrepresented places all over the world and people were just, they couldn't believe the community, the culture and the quality of content. And that's kind of what those are our like three Cs. Community, culture and quality content. That's kind of what we rely on now.

Dr. Mark:

That's just phenomenal. You, you literally just gave us so much to talk about right here. First off you broke a Guinness World Record. You did.

Chris:

So I want to be very clear on this. We set a Guinness World Record because it never existed.

Dr. Mark:

Set it and create an entire new category for it or.

Chris:

And t's in, it's in review. And I want to be very clear. Anyone looking to do a Guinness World Record, we have actuaries now like CPAs having to review our docs. So the, uh, setting the record per their guidelines is amazing. Now I got to get it reviewed peer reviewed. That's a pain in the ass, but it's well worth it. So I'm in the process of finding PWC accountants and people to certify it and then submit my documents, which I have. But I just want to be very clear where we're kind of, it's all that. So hopefully, uh, you know, we're getting our certificates.

Dr. Mark:

That's amazing.

Dr. Mark:

That crowdfunding an actual conference. I don't, I mean a virtual summit that is.

Chris:

I've done that twice. I've done that twice. One for this one and one for a friend who had a huge thing.

Dr. Mark:

I'm writing this down right now, then I don't know what you're doing because that is phenomenal. I want to talk about, I do want to dive into that how the, the, the Guinness Book of World Records kind of competition how that played into helping promote it because you know, promotion of a virtual event is always one of the more challenging. If you're not using paid ads, you got speakers. But as most people know, a lot of times the speakers don't follow through always. Um, so having some extra thing that provides a way to promote it is incredible. So how, what did you see happen from that? Like give us some of the outcomes from actually just even having that being a part of the agenda.

Chris:

Yeah. So you're, you're a hundred percent, right. It's very tough to get people to promote your event because if their speakers are really good, they speak a lot. So, uh, why would they share their speaker card? So with Podfest, there's two things going for us. One they've already invested in the community. So these people are part of our community. So they're going to share the cards. But once we were able to get the approval of the Guinness logo on the speaker card, why, the question is, why wouldn't you share the card? Cause that's like a PR play for you. Uh, then what was interesting is we emailed our base

and we said, Hey guys, we'd like to make a card for you as well. You're attending this event. So then we created attendee cards and those went viral. We had hundreds of those go out to people.

Chris:

So we figured, Hey, the attendees sometimes are more excited than the speakers. So we created I'm attending cards. And those went over really well. And we had, um, at least a hundred people ask us for attendee cards. So that attendees will always get you more attendees, a rule of thumb for events, Mark. I always ask someone that's just promoting. I go, when is your audience the most excited to be at your event? And most of the times they'll be like, Oh, at the keynotes or, Oh, you know, in the breakout session for this or at the after party, I go, no, they're most excited right before they're about to attend the event. After that the excitement level goes down and your job is to keep bringing it up and up and up and then finish on a high. So you have to harness the excitement level, which is right before an event.

Chris:

So we actually had a pre week event pre event week, which is when everybody's the most excited. And most people don't do that. The pre event is when you could get the most promotional push out of any event, uh, before the event starts, once the gun goes off, like a race, the anticipation and excitement's done now we're in it. So that's when that's also for promoters that are looking to get people's attention for whatever that you have to upsell or for next year's event. It's right before the event starts. You want to like educate them, cause they're the most excited and they're paying the most attention to your messaging. So that's very, very key. So that's a, so the, the Guinness World Record definitely played into it. We're able to do some Facebook ads as well, which helped us harness. A lot of people, sponsors love being part of like Guinness World Record.

Chris:

Um, we learned a lot through the process. I will tell you that they set the record at 5,000 attendees, and I want to be very clear. The audience that we cater to, and this is really important for people listening to this or watching this. Um, we don't cater to followers. So Mark, you're like a leader in your own business. That's what we cater to. So to get 5,000 of those people, and their time is busy is like nearly impossible. So we were able to make it right at the last minute and set the record, but it was, um, you had, we had to give a lot of compelling reasons why people had to attend. So sometimes it's the education. Um, we had, so in the architecture that we set up, we had the ability for attendees to set up their own meetups with fellow attendees.

Chris:

We had 4,980 people attend meetups that were not set up by us, which is incredible. We had over 52,000 interactions within, uh, this, you know, virtual event. It was, everybody said it was the closest thing they've ever felt to a real event. And we got that feedback, literally hundreds of times. I believe the distinction like, cause I know you'll, you're thinking like what, why, what, what made it that? Um, one is speaking to all my speakers before the event and explaining our culture and ethos. Even if they know it already, I reinforce it again. Two, is I empowered the attendees to set up their own meetups in the community section of this application that we're using. Um, and three is I don't set up a lot of rules to punish the one person that winds up punishing everybody else. So I just seek and destroy those people individually as needed what I call the crumb snatchers.

Chris:

They always come in, uh, instead of making it known to everybody, I think that kind of kills your momentum. So you, you want to be very careful of setting blanket policies that impact everybody for one person that was breaking the rules. You just wanna, you just want to punish that one person. Not everybody else.

Dr. Mark:

Man, so much wisdom and insights here. I have a question I want, I want to circle back to the one day summit and talk about that a little bit as well. But first the question burning my brain here is like, I mean, traditionally, Podfest has been a just in person event is they're now going to become a virtual component moving forward?

Chris:

Honestly, even before coronavirus is just good business to have a virtual events that we're going to have one anyways, this has just given us, we were able to do it, yeah, hyperspeed, because now we reach all these people. I think sponsors, I got a lot. So this is great for anyone telling you. Here's what sponsors told me, Hey, I've sponsored virtual events and I didn't get anything out of it. And these are people that pay me money every year telling me this. And I'm like, well, I've always over-delivered in the physical event. I don't know why I wouldn't do that in the, in the virtual. Now, luckily I had one sponsor that came in big for me, Libsyn and phenomenal people. They're like, Hey, you've always delivered. You're doing this. Um, for diversity and people all over the world, we want to back this initiative. And then I got some smaller sponsors in StreamYard and uh, some really good, good, good names. People know Adobe. And they came in to test the waters.

Chris:

And as a promoter, you wanna, you want to have your prices, but you always want to, uh, if they don't offer you what you want, be willing to barter and trade, partial trades because building the relationship. I wish I knew this when I first started. Took me like 10 years to understand this. Building the relationship is more important than your prices. And this is one of the only businesses that I would recommend that other business I'd be like, no, stand by your price. When it comes to this stuff, they don't know who you are yet. There's a lot of people, yapping dogs that are doing this stuff and they're not, you know, maybe delivering. So we, uh, we may, we make the sponsors feel like, we tell the community that sponsors are part of our community and then we gamified it. So what we did was, uh, last minute we sent out a Google doc to all of our attendees and said, Hey, here's the, here's the things that our sponsors are doing.

Chris:

You could either purchase, or you could give them a shout out on social media and then just click the button if you've done it. So we had close to a hundred people that did that. Then we awarded all of them prizes. So everybody won something. So we've always gamified that. And we've always, uh, on the live events we give over 50% of them won something. Last year's main prize was a ZERO-G flight, um, on one of those planes. So we're always looking for creative prizes this year. Uh, we had a lot of really good prizes. It was like free microphones, um, year with Adobe. And then this one, one gentleman that spoke for us, he has this thing called Pod Decks. It's like a deck of cards and you could ask questions. So I just called Travis up and I said, Travis, how about if I pay for shipping, we do.

Chris:

We do a little joint venture and I'll make sure that people get it. So the other 50 people get a Pod Deck, which is a really cool prize, but it didn't, you know, it didn't cost much, but it's the thought that counts, I think that people, you know, we gave away headsets at cost three, 400 bucks, five of those. So we make sure that we take part of our profit and reinvested in the community cause they're supporting our sponsors. So the interaction that our sponsors get, they really don't get anywhere else because people don't put that extra thought. So we have a full team member at this point that is there to facilitate, um, what we call collisions with the attendees and the sponsors

Dr. Mark:

That I love, those, those ideas and gamification. So just to clarify that, so when this, that was more for the sponsors, the speakers or the attendees with the gamification where they would then share it immediately.

Chris:

With the attendees, we would just tell the attendees, Hey, if you do any of these things, like some of these guys had 30 day free trial. So it wasn't even like a cost to anyone. So it's like, Hey, if you sign up for 30 day, click on that, you know, like a, what do you call it? Multiple choice, click on the button that you did that. So we know, and we're going to give you a price. So we don't care. As long as they did something, what happened was it turned into a game where they were having fun. So they were like, eh, screw it. Let me help. So all the sponsors they'll put out a tweet for someone, they sign up for this person. So now we had close to a hundred people sign up for that. Guess what? Next time I do a virtual event, probably be two, 300 people.

Chris:

So the sponsors, I did have one sponsor, phenomenal sponsor, great people, virtual events services. And I, the challenge for me is I'm very passionate about what I do. I kind of begged them at the end. Like guys, I knew I could fill up their calendar. Um, but they were just like, yeah, you know, we're going to sit it out. And I'm like, man, they went through all these bad events, got nothing. The one event that I know I could get them 41 to ones. And I had people asking me like, where can we go get virtual events services? So we had to set up a community board of just general people that could help them. So sometimes you just want to, I have to work on and I always work on this doing a better job of conveying value because I feel, forget about the money, I feel like I did them a disservice because I could've just built up their business for the year on this one event, but they didn't see the value.

Chris:

But you have to get the money. If you know, you're providing the value site, sometimes I'm tempted. It's like, let me get you here. And then you pay me later, but you can't do that as a promoter. You have to because our, what we do is so invisible people don't always appreciate it after it's done. So, you know, you learned that the hard way.

Dr. Mark:

Well, as we start to wrap this up here, Chris, I do want to circle back to that one day summit. And just, I know you mentioned it, you use that almost to test the waters for the virtual event, but let's talk about what that was like. Cause it was a pretty impressive event that you pulled together there as well. It was branded amazingly. So kind of just talk to us about what it was, what it was called and what was the point or like the kind of goal of it.

Chris:

Yeah. So, so let's just say this, let's say you don't, you don't want to really get too crazy. You want to do a half day, one day, whatever. Um, we had to ask ourselves, what do we have of value that differentiates amongst all these people doing virtual summits? The challenge with virtual summits is now you got your local yokels that has never done a summit. And now they're just putting their two best friends on and you're, you're fighting the perception that all virtual summits suck, which they don't. Right. There's some great ones. And then there's just a lot of mediocre ones. It's, it's kinda like, it's kinda like what consultants go through. Like they have to fight the perception of all consultants are bad.

Chris:

That's not true. Right. So we have to think about, okay, what do a lot of these virtual summits do? A lot of them are talking heads, right? And if you don't find your subject matter expert, you have to find someone that's really engaging and knows their stuff for two talking heads to be really successful. So we said, okay, well visually we want to differentiate because in our space, everybody is doing these two talking heads. Um, so what we said was we want to find speakers that could talk with a PowerPoint up and their heads on the side. Okay. So split screen, but via Zoom, it was very easy to promote. So then we said, okay, what can we offer? So we called it Podfest Masterclass. So we figured, okay, this is going to be a masterclass like Oprah does her masterclasses. These are going to, and so what do podcasts has always want?

Chris:

Audience building and monetization are the top two things across the board pod-casters need. They always want to build their audience and they want to figure out how to make money. So we, cherry picked 10 or 12 of the best presenters through our ecosystem. And we said, Hey, can I get on kind of like what you're doing right now, Mark, can we get on a Zoom? I'm going to record this with us, but I need you to go through your PowerPoint and speak to me as if I'm your audience. And then what I'd like to do is after is giving me a tip so we could have that as the premium product. And they all said, yes, we prerecorded everything. And the cool part is once that was done, we use Virtual Summits Software, which allowed the morning group to be free. Then it locked it up in the afternoon at like 1:00 PM.

Chris:

And then we had the second half for free. The feedback we were getting right out. So right out of the gate, the first presentation was like, you want to wow them. So the first you got, so you gotta like, uh, so we were like, okay, what can we do? We put the best on the first in the morning, then we had like two other phenomenal. And then we ended with a good one. Then, then then the, after one, the lead off hitter has to be amazing as well. So like you have to really grab them. Feedback started coming in first thing in the morning. Oh my God, I just learned more in an hour. Then I have entire conferences and we knew that was going to happen. So then we took that feedback in real time, captured it and started emailing the base that was passively watching this.

Chris:

And then they started buying. Um, most of our sales came before the summit started. So my recommendation for anyone is you're not going to get as many sales after so you want to push up before the summit as hard as you can to get the sales in because that's when they're the most excited. And then yeah, it was really easy using the summit software. Like people would say, Oh, I don't know where to register. Honestly, they just didn't look at the link. So we just send them the link. Here you go.

And they're like, Oh, thank you so much. It's so easy. It's all there. We use Vimeo as the backend and that's, I mean, it was fairly, I mean, it was the simplest thing we've done and it was all prerecorded. So we did a prerecorded, which I'll do again, by the way, if it's, if it's based on the content, people loved it. Um, we'll be using it again for prerecorded. Now, if I want to do bigger, there's other things that I use for that. But virtual summit was great for what we needed it for.

Dr. Mark:

Yeah. I was seeing some of the comments from the people on the audience. It was phenomenal. They were blown away loving it. So it was an amazing event. Okay. So Chris, as we wrap this up, last question I have for you. What has been now you've had lots of things from in-person events. I'm talking specifically here with your virtual events. What has been the biggest positive impact you've received from hosting these virtual summit?

Chris:

Uh, the impact for me is now we're able to serve people the world over which, um, I'll give you the craziest example of how this is going to impact Podfest. One, we just doubled our database, like literally between these two virtual summits, like it literally grew our database by twofold. The Guinness World Record had a lot to do with it, but so did the one we did with Virtual Summits Software because we had 874 people opt in, so they were spreading the word.

Chris:

Um, the other one is, uh, when we go back to live events, we will have a virtual section of our live event where our speakers will go into a virtual room and teach people all over the world that will be joining us virtually. So we're going to hybridize the model to allow everybody to be part of what we do. So that's going to change our growth trajectory. We already been doubling year over year, but I think it's going to actually 3X us over the next couple of years in some ways. So that's going to be huge. And the feedback was that we were able to deliver, um, almost as close to a live experience as anyone's ever experienced that to me was really prideful that we were able to give people. We had one lady, the feedback she gave us was she goes, I would just want to thank you guys.

Chris:

But, and by the way, all our conferences, we close out with a gratitude ceremony. So the audience is the closing keynote. It's a very unique thing that we do. So it's about the community. So we had one lady, she said I've been in my house now because I'm quarantined because of coronavirus. And I was able to watch the entire summit and it gave my life meaning, cause I'm stuck in my office for the whole time. So I mean, how do you not feel good about that? You know, like imagine being quarantined now you have us to hang out with for the whole week. Um, and it gave, it gave her a purpose. So for me, I, I love it. I will be doing tons more virtual events. We're actually creating an entire virtual division of our company to facilitate this. So we're really excited about the future.

Dr. Mark:

Amazing. Well, Chris, this has been absolutely fantastic. So much insight. I mean, we could obviously keep pouring these strategies and tips for hours. So I appreciate your time, your energy, everything you've shared with us. Um, you're going to see all of Chris's information here next to the video, reach out to him, follow him on social checkout Podfest, for sure. Virtual and in person I've been do it. It's an amazing conference. Love it. Um, also Chris has been super generous to give us this special Summit Talks

bonus right below the video. So let Chris let's jump into a special Summit Talks bonus, any additional gift you'd like to give here?

Chris:

Yeah. So there's just a couple of tips I want to, uh, end with, um, you need to build your conference like a five course meal. And unfortunately, a lot of people don't realize that like it's gotta have a beginning and it's got to amp up to a peak and then it's got to finish like almost like I feel like I just had a family reunion, now I'm leaving. So a couple of things we've done is, um, we have an awards that we call The Pazzies and The Pazzies started in the beginning because we deal with a lot of people that are, uh, and this is with every conference. Oh, I see Mark, he's a polished rock or Chris, you've done this. How do you do it? And I, I feel inadequate or whatever. So The Pazzies poke fun at our most successful people's failures. So we actually give awards to the biggest screw ups that our most successful people have had.

Chris:

So with podcasting, it's forgetting to record an interview. Um, we, one person that was doing their vocal warmups, like mimimi, mamama, and he forgot that it was on his track and he put it out on his podcast. And it was funny because he deals with like, um, his audiences, uh, private clubs, like golf clubs and yacht clubs. And he's got him doing his vocal warmups on his, uh, thing. So we award that and then we have a Glen the Geek Community Hero. So he's a member of ours that's been around forever. So every, whenever we see someone does a lot for the community, we give that award out. Uh, and then we have, um, a leaderboard for people that are the most interactive. So the cool thing about virtual events, you could track stuff. So you figured out what you want to track and then you reward that, but you got to communicate it.

Chris:

So I would just say, I'm figuring out how to give these awards to people in your community. When we poke fun at our most successful people, our goal is to get people started and going. So we have a huge, um, group of success stories every year, because what will happen when the virtual summit or conferences done, they'll say, wow, I was scared to start. And I saw you guys screwed up worse than I ever could. So I'm going to get started. And that's kind of the ethos of what a lot of these conferences are, right? If there aren't for entrepreneurs, uh pod-casters, whatever it is for creatives, it's giving people the belief that they could do it and get going. So gamified that through a prizes.

Dr. Mark:

That's amazing, Chris, again, phenomenal, great insights. Thank you so much for sharing with us today, your time, your energy and your wisdom.

Chris:

Thank you, Mark. I appreciate it.

Dr. Mark:

Thank you summit hosts for hanging out with Chris and I. I'm Dr. Mark T. Wade, your host here on Summit Talks. Remember your message matters. One of the most powerful ways to get that message out to the world is with a virtual summit. Also, don't forget to grab your summit super pack, which has your all access pass. My One-Day Summit Formula and six months of the Virtual Summits Software. Plus

some very special bonuses from our partners, speakers, and sponsors, but it ain't going to be there forever. So grab it now while you still can. And I'll see you on the next session.

Chris:

Now, I want to end this episode by saying to all the summit hosts listening right now, I believe in you and you can do this. Summits are by far one of the most powerful ways to quickly grow your list, launch your platform, make more money. And most importantly, make an impact in the world, even if you're just getting started. So don't get caught up in analysis paralysis because the world needs to hear your message. And there are people who are waiting for you to help them just get started because imperfect action is always better than no action. Thank you. See you on the next episode.