

Episode 198: How To Use Your Virtual Summit To Build Partnerships

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Dr. Mark T. Wade:

Hey summit hosts, Dr. Mark T. Wade here, founder of Virtual Summits Software and your host on the Virtual Summit Podcast. We are in for a treat with this episode. We are going to be talking specifically about how to really establish some partnerships. And one of the ways you should be thinking about your summits in order to establish those. Now, all of that is going to be possible because we've got legendary, Natalie Luneva here with us today. And we're going to jump into that now, Natalie, before we go down that path of all of the amazing summit goodness we're going to talk about, I'd love for you to tell our audience just a little bit more about yourself.

Natalie Luneva:

Hi everyone. So my background is in marketing and growth specifically. So, and I got into organizing and hosting online summits as a way of growing companies that I work with. Um, so my, my background is in marketing growth. Um, I also help businesses just overall, um, grow, scale their operations and, uh, generate more clients and leads.

Dr. Mark:

Amazing. All right. So, well, let's talk about that summit then. Um, why don't you just take us back just a little bit, give us an overview of the summit. When did you decide to do it? What was it called? How many speakers and of course the fact that it was live streaming. So give us just a little bit of those details.

Natalie:

I actually organized a couple of summits, past year. One of them was for an e-commerce software company. So that was my very first event. And the goal of that was it was very put together very quickly, just because I think like around September, I came up with the idea because I was trying to reach out to a few potential partners, um, for that company. And I worked as a consultant for them. And so no one would respond to me. So people didn't want to really partner up with us, really the company wasn't that big. So there is this challenge. And so I thought, uh, what is the way, what, what would make them want to partner up with me? And so I came up with the idea of organizing a little online summit. I didn't know anything about that. And within two months, because, um, we, this was for an e-commerce company and we wanted to, uh, the topic to be around Black Friday, Cyber Monday. And so we only had like a couple of months to fully figure out what's happening, what's going on. And I was the only person that really doing that organizing and hosting the event the day of the event. Um, and so, uh, that was a, that was a very interesting, and that for first experience taught me that I need to have at least 90 days, uh, lead time to plan for everything.

Dr. Mark:

That is such great feedback right there, and very common to jump in. And, you know, sometimes it's better to not know on the first one, right. To just jump in and then get it done. And then you learn and then you have the information you need for the next one. So, um, so you were saying the, the, one of the first ones you started with was e-commerce. The most recent one, was this the, was this still with this same company or was this a different one? And what was that about?

Natalie:

No, the latest one was for, also for a software company. And that was for HubSpot, not sure if you know, HubSpot, but it's really like a company, a marketing automation company. And so that was for, uh, clients that use HubSpot. Then my goal was to partner up again, partnership is my number one because I want it to strike those partnership relationships. And so I invited the speakers that I want to be partners to be speakers. And so that word brilliant for a couple of summits that I organized and then the very next summit that I organized actually in the month of September. Um, I went big on that one and I got a bunch of very high profile speakers as well, now that I'm more confident, like Rand Fishkin and a bunch of other high level profile, um, people, um, but the, this next one is going to be, um, all about marketing automation.

Dr. Mark:

I love that. Well, let's, let's dig into this because this kind of brings us to the main topic we're going to talk about here is, is partnerships. So kind of take one step back and, and, and walk us through your thought process of why did you decide to like, you're, you're wanting to build partnerships and relationships and referral opportunities with, with new people that you haven't met yet. And how did you come across that idea of, Ooh, the summit is going to be the great way and talk us through your thought process.

Natalie:

I know I'm pretty wild, huh. Um, so I am looking at this from the growth perspective. What can I do to get the most benefit from input in the least amount of efforts and also repurpose all of the efforts and content as much as possible. So initially I thought about organizing like a community and then to add to the community. Um, I do like weekly sessions either. I am the one coaching, those sessions, um, teaching people, something in my community, in my mastermind group, or I invite someone else to talk about a specific topic. And so I thought, okay, how can I package all of that, make it very exciting and, uh, get additional leads, uh, increase my exposure, generate a ton of content and do that with just one thing. And so this is the idea of summits, how it came to be.

Dr. Mark:

Well, and it makes perfect sense. And I, I think you've, you know, you're the example here of how it can, it can definitely be beneficial. So when you, when you decided to do this, then kind of let's go into the topic decision. Okay. Cause a lot of times our summit hosts get caught up in, well, what should I run my summit on? Should I call it this? Should I call it that? And one of, you know, one of my firm beliefs is start with the end in mind and it sounds like that's exactly what you were doing because you thought this whole process through before even jumping into it. So kind of tie the dots together of how this, um, actually was going to accomplish your end goal.

Natalie:

I agree. Start with the end goal. My end goal was always partnerships with those companies. I knew that I was going to get those, uh, people as attendees and then they're going to get their contact information and then I can follow up with them. Um, but my end goal was partnerships. And so this is where I started little did I know that those people who are reached out to be speakers, I actually became sponsors. And so the event, one of the events that I put together, the very first one actually turned out to be profitable for the company that hired me to put it together for, um, for them. And I, we got two

sponsors. I didn't really go hard after them. Uh, but they covered the entire cost of, uh, organizing the event. On top of that, we got a bunch of content. We've got a bunch of, uh, attendees and leads, uh, you know, all of those partnership opportunities. So in the end it was profitable event for the, uh, organizing company.

Dr. Mark:

Let's dig down into the sponsors a little bit because that is an incredible, um, outcome there. So you said, you know, you didn't go hard after it's kind of happened. We'll talk us through that process. I mean, did they reach out to you? Did you ask them, how did that kind of, um, organic discussion happen so that maybe our summit hosts can try and facilitate that?

Natalie:

Yeah. So take let's step, uh, take a step back. I think, I think I didn't answer one of your questions, which is how did you identify the topic? And so I knew that like for commerce, for example, this was a really hot time to talk about specifically, uh, Black Friday, Cyber Monday. So this is what I wanted to do. Then the second event that I organized was specifically for nonprofits. And so nonprofits, uh, Giving Tuesday, I think this is like the day after Thanksgiving is their biggest donations. And so, uh, the second event was around nonprofits and how they can prepare for Giving Tuesday. So the first two events were basically, uh, for me to leverage the upcoming events and I knew that the topics are going to be hot. So the way that I really chose the topic and, uh, the topic of the events was I would suggest do not go too broad.

Natalie:

Like if you are marketing person who wants to, I dunno, acquire some leads for your marketing services or businesses, then do not just say, Hey, this is marketing conference, right? You probably need to pick an industry or niche first. So this is where I start, like start with a specific niche that you want to go after. Be narrow, let be those be events narrow for you. Um, and then after the first event, Hey, maybe you want to do it quarterly or annually. Um, so with this goal in mind, who I wanted to attract, what event can be this summit around, uh, who I want this to be speakers, um, for, um, this is how the idea of the, uh, event came to be, as far as the, uh, sponsors, I actually started reaching out to those potential partners of mine, who I knew were going to be a good partners. Um, and they just asked, Hey, do you actually have sponsorship opportunities? And I'm like, well, I don't, but you know, within an hour and put together a package and send it to them. So it was pretty fun. So, and, uh, you know what, no one complained about the price. Um, both of them said, okay, this is how much? Fine, we're going to pay them. And so they paid, they clear the invoice and I was so surprised about that.

Dr. Mark:

That is incredible. Well, what, what was I, and I always like to ask this because when it comes to sponsors, it's different, a lot of businesses and brands and products want different things, um, from, for example, a virtual summit. So what were a few of the items that the sponsors really were, were interested in? What, what brought them into it?

Natalie:

So I asked them before sending this package, I asked them, what do you really want to achieve from sponsoring this event? Almost all of them said, uh, the list of attendees. And even though I tell them, this is like a biggie, even though I told them that I only expect, this was my very first event, I only expected like 200 people to show up in hand. It was 400 people, but they were fine and they were fine

spending, you know, it was \$2,500 a sponsorship package. They didn't question that, they just sponsored. And so even though I only had 200 people attended the summit and they knew about the, that this was my expectation and they still didn't complain. And so the, uh, the, uh, the ability to, um, be a speaker is number one, the, uh, list of attendees is number two, what they wanted.

Dr. Mark:

That is such a great point that you make there. Um, a lot of times summit hosts can kind of talk ourselves out of sponsors because we're like, Oh, we gotta give them the world, or I need to have a 10,000 person summit. No, right now, if the audience is aligned well with that person, or company's audience could be a great opportunity, especially if you can find win-wins. And I love that a speaking opportunity as well as kind of A-list share. So let's go back into, um, the, the speaker selection. So you had the mind, the goal objective of creating partnerships using this summit. So how did you decide what speakers and kind of walk us through that process?

Natalie:

So, because all of those speakers, I wanted them to be my potential partners in the future because they didn't respond to my messages before I, uh, offered them to be speakers. And so my goal was really just to get the people who aligned very well with my audience. And so they are, do not compete directly with what I do or the company that I organize the event for, but they serve exactly the same audience. So for example, for the first event, the commerce events, I went after other software companies that offer, you know, that maybe work with Shopify and the clients that are in Shopify, for example, and they, uh, we do not compete, but they serve the same audience, Shopify users. And so if Shopify users let's say needs a software, number one, most likely, they're also gonna need some software number two.

Natalie:

Um, and so this is how I chose those speakers. Um, one question that I always asked in the, so I created a Google form and I send the link to them to fill out, one question I always ask in all of my events is how big is your audience? How big is your list? Because honestly, there are a couple of types of speakers. Um, number one is those speakers that are high profile. Most probably they will not share a lot of information about the events that they are speakers at because they probably speak at like dozens of events every single year. So those are the people who will attract audience to the events. So people are going to be more likely to sign up for events, if the speaker is going to be speaking, right? So this is type number A, let's say.

Natalie:

And then there's type number, I don't know, type B kind of speakers. Those are very well known. Uh, they are less than number than type A. They are still going to be willing to maybe share their information, but there are still up somewhere there up high in the ear and then type C speakers. Those are probably going to be the best prepared, uh, um, speakers. They are going to be willing to share your information about the event to their audience. Um, and then those are the people who were really one majority of those people. And then let's say there's type D speakers. Those that do not have their audience, they are not well-known. They probably did not have, you know, did not have any speaking opportunities or engagements in the past. And so those I usually would not admit, or I would ask for them to pay to be speakers, because that's also an opportunity. I know a lot of events, they charge 500 bucks for a person to speak at the event, if they're not able to promote the event to their audience. So

once people fill out their form, I know how many people is in their database. And so I pick and choose who I want to be speakers. And then they agree that they are to promote this event to their audience. And this is how I usually generate around 30 to 50% of all the attendees to the event.

Dr. Mark:

That was amazing. And especially I like that right there that, um, the option of having speakers pay to be a part of it. Cause you're positioning your summit in a higher profile sphere. It's like, Hey, look, you know, I call it a collaborative marketing strategy and it's only collaborative if everybody's contributing and these speakers that maybe cannot contribute as much from an audience base can still contribute. So this is a really great, uh, you know, perspective. I like that. I enjoy it. So you've talked about that ordering system, essentially, of how you chose, um, how you put speakers in there. Now you decided to go after the top first kind of talk us through that process of, you know, what, what challenges did you experience when reaching out to speakers and what tips or strategy can you give summit hosts when trying to reach out to speakers?

Natalie:

Good question. So I didn't go right after a type A speakers, because those are a little bit like they need more preparation. Usually they need to see a link to a website or somewhere like where the event is already hosted. So I would keep them for a little bit later. Uh, let's keep in mind that we're maybe at this point, like two and a half months before our events, so we still have time. So I start with type B speakers. Um, maybe those that are already have relationship with, um, I reached out to those. They agree to be speakers. And now let's say I collect like couple of those speakers, and now I can go to those type A speakers and talk to them and say, Hey, such and such is going to be a speaker.

Natalie:

Would you be interested? Is it? And the key thing is for type A speakers, those heavyweights, I really only ask them for minimum commitments. They don't have to become prepared to do a presentation, like 30 minute presentation keynote. I usually tell them it's up to you. If you'd like, this can be just a quick 15 minute conversation Q and A, and that's it. And this is how I got Rand Fishkin, where he doesn't need to have a whole blown presentation. He's okay to do like a presentation because it's still good for his audience. Um, but it is not such a big of a commitment. And so once those agree, then all other type B speakers would so want to be speakers. Right? And so they're much more likely to agree.

Dr. Mark:

Yeah, that's a really great process of going about it, giving the speakers those options too, makes it, you know, more agreeable for them. So very impressive. Now you talked about how you, you, you were reaching out to some speakers to become partners, collaborate, you know, the end goal being collaboration that you had reached out to before, before you decided to do a summit and they didn't respond. Talk to us about how using your summit positioned you with authority or influence and opened up these doors that maybe wouldn't have opened otherwise.

Natalie:

That's exactly it. You said it, it gave us the authority and positioned us on a completely different level compared to any other companies. And now, instead of me coming to them, begging for something, I give something to them of value that they find valuable, right? Plus they look at me different in a different light. Like I'm not just a person asking something of them, I'm bringing something of value to

them again. Um, and so all of a sudden those people who did not respond like it's, they didn't say, Hey, I'm not interested to be a partner of yours. Obviously they just didn't respond. So all of a sudden, when I sent messages to them about being a speaker, they, the final response was, Oh, sorry, I missed your previous message. Yes. I'm very interested to be a speaker. Oh. And by the way, I also have a friend of mine who also wants to be a speaker, let me connect you to him or her. So that was very funny.

Dr. Mark:

Yeah. It's amazing how that happens. Like, Oh, I'm sorry. I just happened to miss that message, but yes, I'll be a speaker. So it's great. I mean, this is the power of summits. Now with that being said, I want to, I want to kind of go into a little bit different area. Now you ran your summit as a live stream summit. So that in and of itself brings a lot of different challenges and other options and, and potential risk with, with a summit, kind of talk us through the thought process of why did you decide to do it live? And then what were some of the challenges that you experienced?

Natalie:

So very good question about live specifically because my goal was to partner up with companies going live and not just asking of them to send a pre-recorded, um, you know, 30 minute presentation is a chance for me to connect with them. I would ask some Q and A, you know, during the session. So it's all about connection. So that's why if you're going under partners, I would suggest to do it live. Um, and so that was my, like, I didn't even consider any other option. Obviously some challenges come when you do live. Um, I always recommend to have a team of a couple of people, someone who can man the chat and they showed that there's a, you know, engagement happening, answering those questions, replying to, um, uh, people's comments. And then second type is troubleshoot any problems. I've heard that in some events, uh, people will try to sign up, um, after the event starts, let's say events starts at 9:00 AM, 9:01, someone tries to log in and they were not able to login for other, that was not problem for me.

Natalie:

I've heard this happen. So I wanted to make sure that I had some, like support of the company that I did this event for. So someone is always there to troubleshoot any problems, watch their emails, support, and you know, anyone complaining about anything. So two people doing that, the third person me, um, actually hosting the event. Um, and then a few funny things happened to other speakers for my very first live event did not show up, which was very unexpected to me. Um, one of the speakers was a higher profile speakers who previously agreed. She just stopped responding to my messages, which I see you. You know, I assume that she agrees, you know, we have it on her calendar. She accepted the calendar invite that everything is good. She just made it, you know, busy. Um, she just didn't show up. The second person, um, because I asked every, uh, speaker to come in 15 minutes before it wasn't Zoom.

Natalie:

So, um, be available on Zoom so that they see that they're there, um, 10 minutes before their time there was not there. So I figured that the problem they're going, I'm going to show up. Um, sure enough, they did not. Uh, but what happened is I had some time, like the sessions were 30 minutes, so I basically kept the previous person, um, a little bit longer, like 10, 15 minutes. So we did an extended Q and A session. And then the next speaker who was supposed to go after the person who did not show up, I asked this person to come a little bit earlier, like 10, 15 minutes. Um, if possible, like, uh, I will take a couple of minutes off, uh, this free time to talk about something else. Uh, but I was surprised. Hi, uh, how I was

not really, uh, I was not freaking out because of that. It kind of naturally resolved itself. Um, so my biggest recommendation is like, if you, this is your first event, be ready for anything and do not freak out and do have a support, um, to have, uh, you know, in case something is not working. At least you are not the one who needs to figure all the technical problems. You have someone else with clear head who can do this while you are, you know, doing your live, your thing, the event live.

Dr. Mark:

I, I totally have to reiterate this because this is such an important point here. If you are doing something live because I've done lots of live streaming live speaking, your mind is about providing content and value to your audience. If you're having to sit there and try and think about the technical components, the support components, it takes you out of that zone of genius. So Natalie, this is such an important point here. Make sure that you have support, especially if you're doing live streaming, I'd say in general, but especially if you're doing a live stream event, live stream summit, have somebody support there that can, can handle any problems that arise. And I love this. I want to break this down. You said you kept the speaker. So you kept the previous speaker along for an extended Q and A, which ate up, let's say 10, 15 minutes, and then had the other speakers show up five, 10 minutes earlier, then you asked them.

Dr. Mark:

And so you had this perfect kind continuation of that, which I think is an amazing way to especially do it on the fly. Um, I think other great ideas is have a prerecorded presentation ready, or as the host, you could also for all of our summit attendees listening, or summit hosts listening right now, you know, have your own presentation ready that you could just jump in and give out a drop of the hat in case somebody falls out. So these are all great ideas on how to overcome these challenges. Um, so Natalie, with that being said, you took that idea. Um, are you, you, you learned from that with the first event, was there, well, let's just say it like this with your first several summits, you got a lot of wisdom and insights and experience from those. What would you say was the biggest one single difference you did from your first event to your last summit? Like what was the biggest difference?

Natalie:

I think operationally, you know, what to expect. And so you have those checklists and just make sure that when things happen, like you put it down as a checklist now, you know? Okay. Uh, the email went out that shouldn't have gone out. So for example, for one of the speakers, I had to cancel their session. And so I didn't know that everyone is going to get notification about the canceling. And so I'm like, Oh gosh. Uh, but now I know now I know that I need to turn off in the system that I use. I need to turn off this particular email notification. So it's all trial and error, but I create very nice checklist so that I make sure like what needs to happen four weeks before the event, three weeks before the event, two weeks before the event, the day of the event, after the event, because we didn't talk about this with we're running out of time, but I wanted to make sure that I mentioned this after the event is your biggest, uh, kind of bang for your buck when it comes, even if you are not finding an event specifically with sponsorships, but, um, what I did the day of the event, um, they created a separate Facebook group, um, for all the attendees to join.

Natalie:

And so I would promote this multiple times throughout the summit. This way I'm not only getting their email addresses, but also generate the supper channel where I can reach out to those people. Right. Um, and then I also invite everyone at the end of the day to join a networking session. So the very last

session is on the calendar and that's a networking session. Everyone who wants to join, feel free to join. If speakers are available to join, I would love that as well. Um, but this create this networking opportunity for you. And plus the very first event, I was so surprised, but the lady showed up her like a whole notebook of all of her notes, which was so cool. And you can use that as a, you know, as a case side, if you decide to organize it for someone else. Right. Um, so that's that. And then after the event, I created a separate, uh, meetings with every single speaker, um, to discuss potential, um, co-marketing opportunities.

Dr. Mark:

That that was the, that was the next question I was going to ask at this point, you've built this summit around the goal and objective of creating relationships, partnerships, collaborations. So setting up that, so what you did then was afterwards set up an individual meeting with those speakers. Um, did you have any other, uh, strategy for, you know, post summit strategy for as far as follow-ups and reach out to those speakers to really increase your percentage of, of opportunity for those collaborations.

Natalie:

Number one, you need to do multiple followups. One type of followup is to the attendees. So you need to create a replays because a lot of them ask, are replays available? So you need to send out an email asking, you know, thanking them for attendance. If they didn't attend to them, here's the link for you to watch the replay. You need to work on that, by the way, like the recording that you're having with the summit, you need to split that into multiple sessions. I have uploaded on YouTube and then I share the link with everyone. Um, what else send information about the, you know, your, your offer rates, um, to the attendees. So that's one part and then the other side to that is following up with all of the speakers. So I would send out an email, Hey, great event. Thank you so much for being a speaker.

Natalie:

Here's your recording. If you'd like to share it, um, you know, any information that you can share with them that, that they, the speakers are going to find valuable. You do that. Um, and then in the email you just ask, um, I would love to explore any opportunities to collaborate. It looks like we're serving the same audience. Looks like there's a synergy between what we do. We'd love to look collaborate further, almost every single, like 9 out of 10, agreed to the call. And then now I'm able to share information about, you know, my services, my software, whatever I have to sell or to offer with that items with the, you know, those speakers and my potential partners. And it was really surprised how open they were to chatting with me about that. And they were really, they really wanted to figure out what it is that I do and how I can help, you know, their audience or people just like, um, their audience.

Natalie:

And so some of them were just saying, Hey, I do those weekly sessions with my team, for example, where every single week someone comes and talks to my team, teaching my team about specific thing. Would you like to be one of the person come into, you know, online and doing like a weekly session? Um, with other speakers, we, um, decided to host like a webinar session where we promote this webinar to our audience. They promote the, to their audience. And so both of us are able to, uh, deliver, uh, content of value and then promote it to, um, whatever we have to promote ride during this webinar. So lots of different opportunities to benefit from, uh, co-marketing, co-partnership opportunities. Um, you just need to look for it.

Dr. Mark:

So true. Ah, this has been so great, Natalie, uh, incredible information, especially on this topic here. Partnerships, thank you so much for sharing this with us. Now I know the audience is saying Mark, I need more Natalie in my life. How can I find her, where she hanging out with, so go ahead and let everybody know. What's the best way to get in touch with you. And where are you hanging out at?

Natalie:

I'm active on Facebook, Natalie Luneva, LinkedIn, Natalie Luneva. Um, I also have my website, <https://natalieluneva.com>. Would love to chat with you. If you have any questions, we'd love to help you with that as well.

Dr. Mark:

Absolutely. Make sure you check out the show notes there. We'll link to all of those Natalie again, thank you so much for sharing with us your time, your energy and your wisdom today.

Natalie:

Absolutely. It was fun. Thanks a lot.

Dr. Mark:

And thank you summit hosts for hanging out with Natalie and I. I'm Dr. Mark T. Wade, your host here on the Virtual Summit Podcast. Remember your message matters. And one of the best ways to get that message out to the world is with a virtual summit. Now don't forget to check out the show notes over at episode 198, get access to all these amazing things that Natalie's just shared with us, and I'll see you on the next episode.

Dr. Mark:

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 and see you on the next episode.