Episode 125: 15 Specific Session Styles You Should Be Using In Your Summit
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Why is every summit just stuffed full with information Q&A style interviews? It's so boring. There are 15 different session styles you could be implementing and it will make your summit stand out above all others. Let's take a look at those right now!

Info

Resources: InterviewLikeAPro Free training
https://www.interviewlikeapro.com/

- Viral Summits.com/concierge

You've heard me talk a lot about the need for Virtual Summits to evolve. Matter of fact at Summit Fest Live this year the entire theme of the conference was "Evolution Of Summits".

Why? Because there are a lot of summits being run poorly.   There are a lot of "List Grabber" style summits being done, and unfortunately they are taking a toll on the summit industry.

Now summits aren't going anywhere, don't get me wrong here. Actually there are going to be more summits run this year than every before.

With the advancement of technology like the Virtual Summits Software and more and more virtual summit coaches and online programs popping up, summits are going to be happening a lot.

And rightfully so. Even when run poorly they are still the most powerful and effective marketing strategy available to grow a brand or business.

However, with poorly run summits, comes speakers with distaste for those summits which creates lower speaker promotions and hence lower performing summits.

With that being said you have to evolve your strategy. You have to think outside the box. You have to run different types of summits.

This is exactly what we are doing with our Viral Summits Done For You Concierge Service.   In today's episode I want to talk about one aspect that we are evolving and improving or changing so that you can model it in your own summits.

First though, I strongly believe a One-Day Summit Series will be the best most powerful summit strategy from this year and beyond.

It's important to stop thinking of summits a single one off marketing event, like a webinar or lead magnet, and start thinking of it as a business strategy.

Those who are implementing summits into their brands and businesses are growing, scaling and succeeding.

Start off with a one-day summit, then do a one-day summit series, and then plan an annual multi-day summit. I know it sounds like a lot, but if you do it in that order you will master the processes of how to do a summit, it will seem relatively simple and easy as you progress from one day summit to summit series then finally by the time you decide to do a multi day summit you will know exactly what you are doing and be able to knock it out with ease.

Plus the amount of information you'll learn in the process is priceless on how to improve your summits and get better results.

Ok so let's jump into the topic for today.

In our Viral Summits Done for you summit service we are completely evolving summits.

Our goal is to re-invent how virtual summits are done. Now this can't happen overnight, we understand that, but it can start happening.

We are planning on several different key aspects to focus on this year.

The first is the theme or type of summit. We want to get away from the traditional "Information" based Q&A style summits.

You might be thinking, well Mark if you take away the interviews what will you have instead. We will have an entertainment style event, with information or story woven through it.

I'll talk about this more in depth on a different episode.

The next area we want to evolve is engagement. We have to move away from passive sit back and watch style summits to active engaged events.

We are going to do that with specific engagement strategies paired to the style of summit chosen, but also by incorporating a physical component. We want to add physical deliverables that are given to the attendees who purchase the summit offer. Creating a more personal and intimate experience.

The third area, which is the area I'm going to focus on today is the actual way the information is distributed.

Or the Session Styles or Types.

The most common and honestly most over used style is the traditional interview session.

Now that can be broken up into two types of interviews: A traditional Q&A style where the host simply asks each speaker questions and the speaker simply answers them.

BORING!! There are soooo many of these types of informational interviews available why would someone waste 3 or more days listening to them on a summit. Your audience is tired of these. This should be the least amount of sessions you perform, but unfortunately it's the most common.

The second style of Traditional Q&A is the hybrid style. This is a hybrid between Q&A and a presentation. Meaning the host intros the speaker, the speaker presents like a masterclass, and then the host asks some questions at the end.

This is definitely better than the first type for sure.

But I want to talk about a few other options that are rarely done, and can really improve the engagement & view satisfaction of your audience.

The next type of session is a panel. Now any of these could be live sessions, or pre-recorded, so we won't get to caught up in the details of a Live streaming panel, versus a pre-recorded panel. Or any of the other types.

Just know you could do these live or pre-recorded.

But a panel is just as you would expect. It's 3 or more topic experts that answer questions, or give information based on a topic mentioned by the host.

The best way to make these pop is to make the questions difficult, or even a little taboo.   Have the speakers present opposing or different viewpoints from each other.

This also keeps it from being repetitive. We've all seen those panels where each speaker wants to talk and they just end up repeating each other in a different set of words.

Focus on making it deep information, that stimulates thought and makes the panelists think. And it should have them all together when this is happening, so that they can comment off of each other.

If you do this live taking some questions from the audience is a phenomenal way to get engagement.

Also another option with the panel is instead of bringing actual speakers is to bring students of your program on to talk. This highlights your expertise, makes you look good, and gives credibility to your program & ability to get results.

Just be careful not to make it too heavy on singing your praises. There should be some specific purpose or point to having them on there to share other than to just talk about how great you are.

The next type of session is probably one of my favorites. It's the Debate style session.

This is where you have 2 – 3 speakers with completely opposing view points, or conflicting opinions debate each other on why one is correct over the other.

There is nothing that gets an audience riled up more than seeing a little controversy.

Now the challenge with this is you have to find speakers who are willing to oppose a separate view point, and at the same time not be unprofessional or mean.

You also need to have well thought out questions or topics for them to debate, that will give each speaker an opportunity to have an upper hand.

You shouldn't just stack one side of the argument just because you agree with one or the other. During the debate the host needs to stay neutral and maintain order.

I love this type of session, and honestly very rarely ever see them done in a virtual summit.

The next type of session is the keynote. This is the main speaker who presents a topic or information for 20 to 60 minutes. This is not a Q&A style interview. This is a straight up presentation or masterclass style session.

The main point is to present a topic or information to the audience and teach them something. Pretty straight forward here.

You do need to be careful with choosing the right speakers for this. You want to ensure they are engaging and entertaining and not put your audience to sleep.

The next type of session is a great one. It's the workshop style. These are excellent for creating engagement.

This is where the speaker will be doing an interactive or done with you style of session.

This does not need to be live streamed all though it is even better when they are.

Typically you will give your audience an advanced notice of this session and anything they need to have ready or prepared in advance to participate in this workshop.

A couple easy examples are if it was a cooking or food summit. Having a speaker or chef create a specific dish or food together with the audience.

You would give the audience a grocery list to get the ingredients in advance, and then together they would prepare and cook a dish.

Or lets say it was a public speaking summit. You could have a workshop on how to craft your signature talk, where the speaker walks through with them how to come up and create and write out a signature speaker presentation.

These sessions are typically a little longer, anywhere from about an hour to four hours, with 2 hours really being the sweet spot.

It can't just be a long presentation. It needs to be a workshop style where they are actually creating something.

I've seen some of these done in the funnel building space and even chat bots topic.

Where the attendees will have specific software or programs they have created and will walk through with the speaker as they set up their funnel, or chatbot for example.

It's good to have worksheets, or downloads that go along with the session so that the attendees can follow along.

These style sessions have some of the highest attendee satisfaction ratings when done well.

These can even be done by the host to highlight their skillset or program/product. As well as giving these to sponsors as a part of their package. It's a huge value for the speaker who gets this type of session.

But it is very very important they understand how to do a workshop and don't just do a presentation. At the end the audience needs to have completed something.

The next type of session is a Live Q&A session.   Again any of the above styles could also be live streamed.

However this type of session is specifically to answer questions from the audience. Most typically this is done with just the host and the audience.

However you could bring on a special speaker and let the audience ask them questions.

You can do this simply by having them type questions in the comments, or depending on what tool you are using you can even bring the audience member on camera and have them ask and talk live on camera.

This creates the most engagement in this type of session as the audience feels a moment of prestige or value when they get to actually have their voices heard and be seen by the other attendees.

Now you could do this completely at random, or you could have some pre chosen attendees lined up for this session if you are worried about the type of questions, or what they might say.

I'd definitely be clear with the audience before they hop on with what is acceptable and unacceptable while they are live.

You don't want someone hopping on just to use this as an opportunity to quickly pitch their business or product.

It's always good to be clear upfront on this especially if it's live.

With that being said you could pre record this with a small group if live streaming is not something you want to do during your summit.

The next type of session is a fun one, but shouldn't be used too much. This is the fireside chat. This can feel similar to a Q&A style session so it's important to make it look and feel different.

For example if you have the opportunity to record this in person with your speaker it would be the best. Or if you are doing it virtually add a more laid back component, like having the host and speaker sitting in lounge chairs or having a glass of wine.

Also these are typically less teaching and information and more backstory or inspirational in nature.

This takes some thought and skill on the hosts part to craft some great topics and items to talk about with the speaker.

It's also usually reserved for important or noteworthy speakers. It's also a great way to get a speaker who speaks regularly to break away from their standard presentation and get some original content and information out of them.

The next type of session is a meet and greet. This is a live component and can be done in a variety of ways such as a zoom meeting, or a webinar that allows for break out rooms. Additionally Remo is a software that integrates with Virtual Summits Software which specifically allows for break out sessions with face to face interaction.

This is a great benefit for your sponsors as you can give them a specific breakout room, as well having speakers available for the audience to talk with makes it a very valuable and engaging environment.

It takes a little pre planning and ensuring your audience knows when these are happening so that you have a group of people available live to interact.

I'll cover three other similar types of sessions here as well. Round Tables, Group Share & mastermind sessions.

Round tables is again a break out session where a couple of speakers are live and they are teaching or answering questions for the audience.

You would typically have 2 – 3 of these going at the same time and allow the audience to choose which break out room they are going to attend.

The group share is similar where they go into a break out style setting, but you allow for your attendees to interact with each other. You would typically select 1 or 2 attendees to lead each group and they would simply share their story or their experience.

This is really good if you want to highlight some of your students who have had success with your program or product while they answer questions from your potential clients.

You can also use the group share style session as a networking aspect to meet the other attendees which builds rapport and typically leads to the audience staying with you and your community longer.

The mastermind session is very similar but is more focused on building their business or improving something.

You would keep these into smaller groups of 4 – 8 persons. You should still assign one "table leader" who keeps the order and ensures everyone gets a chance to participate.

And each person gets the opportunity to ask a question or ask for help. There would be a set amount of time each person gets, with the table leader keeping track, and then the other members would get to provide feedback and suggestions on how to help solve the problem.

 Another aspect is the "pitch your business style".   Very similar to the mastermind and group share but is more focused on letting the attendees talk about themselves and their businesses.

All of these are very similar with slightly different angles being presented. The main purpose is it allows for the audience to engage, participate and meet other attendees.

This is more difficult and definitely takes some planning, and can become a problem if there are any technical issues, but when executed correctly it really creates satisfaction and engagement.

Plus it is very different from your typical information based summit.

The last couple session styles are not very common and aren't necessarily needed on every summit, but are good options to throw in if you are trying to make your summit stand out.

Performance Entertaining Session: A storytelling session is the next style which is just as it sounds. It's based more about telling a story which is focused on creating emotion.

Not so much like a presentation or keynote, think more about reading a kid a bedtime story at night.

It should be 100% entertaining and story focused. It should be short, anywhere from 5 minutes to 40 minutes maximum, and should be used primarily to create emotion and entertainment with your audience.

It's best to use this only with a presenter who knows how to tell stories. Most keynote or speakers don't know how to do this well. They end up just doing a presentation which is no different than a keynote.

The power of a story is that it creates emotion, and is more memorable than just a normal presentation, which means your audience will remember it longer and think back to it and you when that topic arises in the future.

It's great for embedding yourself long term into your audiences memories and thought processes.

The next session type is the Hot Seat. This can be done as a singular person with one speaker and can be live or pre-recorded, or can be done in similar fashion to the round tables.

The main difference is that it is focused not on teaching a specific topic, but instead focused on that one person who is in the hot seat. What is their business, question, problem or item they want help with .

The speaker would help them work through that problem while the rest of the audience learns from listening.

These are great to raffle off or to increase participation in something. For example letting the audience know you will be doing a hot seat and they have a chance to be chosen, BUT you are only going to choose from those who have purchased the all access pass, or they have to share the summit on social to be entered into the mix to be choosen.

It definitely helps get more participation when they know they have the chance to get personal attention from the host or speaker in a hot seat.

The last style I'll mention here is not really a typical session but more an event that you can do which is outside the box, and like the last one, is great to increase participation.

This session is a "Picture With The Influencer". This takes a little planning but essentially you would say that on the final day at a specific time, anyone who has purchased the all access pass can come on live and get a quick picture with a specific person. Could be one of the speakers or the host, but it needs to be someone that they want to have a picture with.

You would send out a special link to all those who purchased to a zoom meeting for example and they would one by one be brought into the meeting room with their camera on, and have it as a side by side view and you would take their name/email & a screen capture and then send it to them.

You need to plan appropriately for the amount of time. I like the easier way which is I put all the pictures into one google drive or dropbox folder and then send it to that

group and let them find their own picture. It saves time from having to email 100 individuals their picture.

I also like to put this option in the largest summit offer option. It helps to increase sales from the lower tier to the higher tier.

Again it needs to be a person they would want to have a picture with, and you need to be clear up front of how it works. They come in say hello, get a picture and then you remove them from the meeting room, and bring in the next person.

You don't want them each talking for 3 – 5 minutes with the speaker or it will take all night.

It's a really cool way to increase engagement and give them all something from the summit (those who purchased) as well as increase purchases to the highest tier.

Ok, wow, that was a lot of different Summit Session styles. There are so many possible options, but instead most summits just have the traditional information focused Q&A style sessions.

WHY? There are so many other options!

Of course you don't have to use all of these on every summit, but mix it up. Keep it different. Focus on surprise and delight and increasing engagement and you will have an incredible summit.

Even if your summit numbers aren't huge, incorporating session stlyes like we just talked about will make you stand out, and even your speakers will be impressed with the difference between your summit and all those other list grabber style summits.

And remember when you impress your speaker, and they do something different and fun, they are a lot more likely to share that summit & their session with their audience, which ultimately will increase your summit success!!

When you implement these different sessions into your summit be sure to reach out to us and let us know. I love watching and supporting summit hosts who are creating amazing summits and helping the industry evolve to something incredible.

Well that's it for today.

Remember your message matters and you have an impact to make in the world. If I can help you out in any way don't hesitate to reach out and let me know!

See you on the next episode.

Interview types

1. traditional Q&A:
2. Hybrid
3. Panel
4. Debate
5. Keynote
6. Workshop
7. Live answer questions
8. Fireside chat
9. Speaker/sponsor meet and greet - remo
10. Entertainment/Performance: story telling, poem, band, music, etc
11. Pictures With The Speaker
12. Hot seats
13. round table
14. group share
15. mastermind session