

Episode 202: A Secret Speaker VS Speaker Strategy To Skyrocket Your Summit!

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Speaker: Amber Vilhauer

Dr. Mark T. Wade:

Hey summit hosts, Mark T. Wade here, founder of Virtual Summits Software and your host here on the Virtual Summit Podcast. Well, we are in for a treat today. I cannot wait to jump into this episode. We have so much incredible insights to dig down into all possible because we've got legendary Amber Vilhauer is with us today, and we're going to hear us some incredible strategies she's used in her summit. Now, Amber, before we jump in until all of that summit, goodness, I'd love for you to just take a few more moments and tell our summit hosts just a little bit more about yourself.

Amber Vilhauer:

Sure. Well, I'm really happy to be here. People that run summits are very close to my heart. I think it's such a, an important way to grow authority in your industry to get your name out, to engage with other influencers and guests and really grow your career. And my story is no different. Um, I started my business back in 2007. It's called NGNG Enterprises, which stands for No Guts, No Glory. And we work with influencers both big and small who are ready to get serious about their results. And so they usually come to me because they need a great website. You know, they've probably even been through the first round of website that didn't do anything for them, and now they're ready to get serious. They want a great website that is experiential, that's baked with strategies. So they're actually getting results out of it.

Amber:

Then the conversation usually transitions into one of marketing. How do I actually get my message out in a meaningful way that fulfills me, not just doing what I was told I should do and I'm secretly miserable. Um, but then also how can I start to attract in more qualified prospects, right? Not just anybody and everybody, but I want the people who are really aligned with my values that I can do make the most impact with. And so we can help people with marketing, funnels, courses, webinars, you name it. And over the years, I also have done a lot of book launches, which is one of the things that we're probably most known for at this point. I'm working with first time authors and 13-time New York Times bestselling authors, everything in between, but man, it's summits, Mark that along the way, I'm an internet marketing nerd.

Amber:

I've tested it all. And I ran my own summit. Um, I even remember what year it was, but it feels like it was probably about six or seven years ago. And it was an absolute game changer in every way that one summit has generated well over hundreds and hundreds of thousands of dollars. It could be inching on the million dollar market. This point must be, um, all because I ran a summit, had 15 incredible guests baked with really innovative creative strategy. It was all about service to the audience first. And it was just such a great experience that then I used as a platform to start working with other summit hosts and helping them build out their model to achieve the same results. So I'm totally geeked out to have this conversation today. I really appreciate being here.

Dr. Mark:

Well, I am super excited to have you here. I normally say I'm the biggest nerd on, on the, on the live streams or on the episodes. I think, I think we're going to equally nerd out over here. So I'm very excited about this. Well, let's, let's talk about this. Let's go back to that first summit. Like you, you mentioned you jumped into that and it really kind of changed everything. Um, and we're going to get into some of the specific, uh, strategies you used in that. But right now, just kind of give us an overview of what it was, why you decided to do it. What was the goal? Let us know, let help us understand.

Amber:

It was so strange. I literally woke up one morning on a Saturday and everything in me just felt like you need to run a summit. And at that time it didn't, I don't even know necessarily why or how, but I just felt this bolt of inspiration. So I went to 99designs back then they had a logo store and I picked this logo. If you go to the website, now you'll see like this was years ago. Um, but the, the strategies that I'm going to share today are absolutely still more than relevant today. It's going to totally change the game for you as well. But I went and I did it. I, I got a logo off of 99designs. I called it the Authentic Business Success Summit. I knew that I wanted to host an event that people could buy ongoing forever, so it's still for sale today, but it was, it was targeted to small business owners, entrepreneurs, teaching them mindset and marketing strategies on how to actually grow their business online.

Amber:

And so I thought, okay, great. I've got my logo, I've got my name. Now I need to figure out who I want to have come speak. And so I made a short list of speakers. I invited them. Most of them said yes, right out of the gates because of the strategies that we're going to share today. I up recording about 15 one hour interviews. Some of them went longer because the conversation was unbelievable. And we did this on Google Hangouts, man. That's how long it was back when Google Hangouts was just sort of coming out. And so there were some glitchy moments when I was interviewing Hal Elrod and it was all new and I was just nervous. You know how it goes? It's like, so you look at people on Mark's show and it's like, wow, someday. I want to have that, all of that experience, but we all start at the beginning.

Amber:

And so I have those moments where I recorded a whole session and it didn't save. And I thought I was going to lose my mind. All those gory stories, I've been through it, but you push through on the other side. Um, and our summit was all raised for, we wanted to center it around raising money for charity, which is something that made the summit really unique. Um, the speakers loved it. The audience loved it. It created enormous value in the marketplace. And again, people still study it today and think what ideas can I rip off of this and do it, you know, for my own niche. And they're seeing results with it as well.

Dr. Mark:

Well, I want to dig into this actually a little bit right here. Um, when you looked at that from what you did with the charity summit. So this is unique already just off the bat versus just a straight up list, build summit or a monetization based summit. Um, so I think this is incredible. Uh, I want to look at it when, you know, going back to what you knew then not now, you know, a lot more now, but back then, why did you decide you wanted to do a charity summit? Like what, what was the reason you decided that this is going to happen? And this is what you're going to do versus maybe some kind of marketing things specifically for yourself.

Amber:

I'm always trying to raise the bar, let me put it that way. And what I saw is that, now summits have had waves, right? There was a huge wave, 15 years, you know, 10, 15 years ago, it kind of died down a little bit and then it had a huge wave again and died down a little bit. It's huge again, right? It'll continue to have those peaks and valleys. So this was kind of that second big boom. And I saw list-build monetization, the upsells, the funnels, the, this, that, that. And I thought, well, what are we doing to raise consciousness? Like what are we doing to give back in a bigger way? And as a summit host, you are leading, you are influencing your industry. So how do you choose to lead? How do you choose to influence your industry? Well, I wanted to do things differently.

Amber:

So I had decided to make mine about a charity and it felt so good to raise the standard in my industry, Mark. And so what I did is when I went out and I got my speakers and they committed to participating in the event, I asked each of them to pick a charity that they want to represent. And it's all over the board. Um, Joel Comm picked Water is Life. Um, we had Charity Water. I'm looking at a couple of them now Make a Wish Foundation. Front Row Foundation. Dogwood Alliance was actually one of the winners. I chose Team Rubicon. So we all had our charity. And then what I did is I pitted the speakers against one another and it was whom ever brought in the most number of sales would be awarded half of all sales for their charity. And the thinking was, well, gosh, I would want to save face.

Amber:

Like I wouldn't want to be the one that didn't refer anybody in. Like, what does that say about me and my charity? Like I had to show up for my charity here and it was a way to also then get the charities involved. So I went to Team Rubicon and I said, Hey guys, I'm going to run this summit and I'm doing it in your honor. And do you think that increased the marketing power on their end? They want to see us succeed too. So now they're starting to market the summit, I'm marketing the summit to try to drive sales back to Team Rubicon. All the other speakers were thinking, well, shoot, I can't, I've got to raise the bar. I have to start marketing this more. Lisa Larter must've sent six emails to her email list and we know as summit hosts, it's hard enough getting a speaker to send one email and Lisa just kept pounding it and pounding it and it was beautiful.

Amber:

And so it made an incredible impact on the speakers because they thought, well, what am I doing to really give back in a bigger way and to the, to the audience and the customers and the viewers and the charities themselves. And so it was a really, it was really special event. And by the way, um, I can also plug now fast forward. There's an organization called B1G1 that makes giving back in this kind of way more automated. So they have pre-vetted 500 plus causes around the world that are legit and good in lots of different categories. And you can assign a trigger action and a reward. So for example, I can say anybody who opts in for my summit, I want to plant a tree in that person's name and B one G one is the software that tracks that impact and makes the donations right out of your account. And then it can give your opt-in subscriber a report or like a little gift certificate via email that says, Oh, congratulations, Mark. Because you signed up for Amber's summit, we donated, you know, we planted a tree in your name, thank you for being a part of this summit. So there are now tools that enable giving back to be much more easy for the summit host. And now you are raising consciousness and raising the standard in your industry.

Dr. Mark:

That's incredible. I love that software right there, because so many times, you know, even good-willed you, you offer something, you do something and you know, but you may forget to actually reach back out and let the people know that you did it for them. So that's, that's super cool. I want to actually circle back to the strategy though, because I think this is, I mean, I think this has huge potential and power even now today of like, how did you, let's say if it w if you were going to redo this in a summit now, would you still do it based on a charity, or is there another way you could do that even if you were doing like a list building style summit, or monetization gold summit, how would you do that? And how did you go about getting the speakers on board? Because I know that I could see how they could all come on board once they start seeing everybody else doing it. But how did you explain it to them at the beginning?

Amber:

Sure. Well, I sat down and I figured out a couple of people that I, I thought would be early wins and I sat down and I recorded a video for each speaker custom to each person. Now I'm a little bit of a talker. So some of them are as much as five minutes long. And I basically said something like John, John Lee Dumas was one of the early ones. And I said, look, man, I love what you're building with Entrepreneurs on Fire. And then I would get really specific, not just, I love what you're doing, but like specifically, what do I like about what he's doing? So he knows I'm actually paying attention to his interest and his angle. So I'd give him some sort of something special and unique that also drives connection. So very strategic. And then I said, listen, man, I have an idea that I think you would be great for.

Amber:

I'm one of the host to summit, but wait, wait, wait. Before you say no, because everybody's knocking on your door, asking for summits. I want to tell you why mine's different. It's for charity. And so I want to select a charity that is close to your heart. And I want to put that out there publicly. I want to interview you. It's on mindset. It's on entrepreneurship. I want to drive traffic back to you. I want to do this. I want to do that. So I would explain the model to him. And I would say, Hey, if this is at all interesting to you, just tell me a yes and I'll send you the next steps. And I really appreciate it. And he wrote back and I actually back then printed out what he said. Cause it was so cool. I wanted to remember it. And he just said, I get dozens of these requests all the time.

Amber:

In fact, I even have a preset auto response that says, no, thank you, but I love your approach. I'm all in. Tell me what's next. And it was really special. And so I just, I think it was because of my positioning, the angle of charity, um, the custom video ask was I was hard to say no to Mark. And to answer your first question, if I had to do it all over again, I would absolutely do it for charity. I would absolutely pin the speakers against one another. Um, and maybe if it weren't based on, if I wanted to, to ideate some sort of a bigger list-building challenge, I might choose a different way to do it. I'm not sure we'd have to sit down and really look at are your goals. We'd have to look at who's your customer base. But one thing I will say is I'm always looking at how do I make a win-win out of something or even better a win-win win. So in this situation I won because people were giving me exposure. This speaker one, they got exposure. They got to look good and feel good in front of their industry peers. And then the charity wins. It's a win-win win. If you're always thinking about having other people win first I'm telling you, you're going to win all day long. So be of service first.

Dr. Mark:

I love that. Yeah, no, it's, uh, it's going to be, it would be hard for somebody at that level to not participate. They don't want to, like you said, look bad in front of their, um, their sponsors. And I could see that still even, you know, if it was charity based on, um, I would assume that the list build side of it would still be pretty impactful. So that then leaves, it leaves it open for monetization on the back end. Well, I want to talk about another strategy that you did with this relative to that, but focused on the customers, the audience at this site at this time. So you had a unique spin on how you had them engaged and involved in this summit. So kind of talk us through that and how that worked?

Amber:

I was just going to bring that up, Mark. We're totally on the same page. I had 14 speakers. I wanted 15. So what I did is I put up like a coming soon type page so that people could get an early engaged into what I was building. And then I did a very public campaign. So the public could vote in my 15th speaker. So this is a great way to get early exposure to your summit. You could even say like summit coming soon, 37 bucks, if you pre-order now, by the way, and then do the campaign that, Hey, we need our 15th speaker, vote this person in. So I had a two week campaign and people basically had to go to a page type in their name, email address, and the name of the speaker that they wanted to vote in. And you could sit there all day, every day, voting the same person.

Amber:

And if you wanted to, I allowed like Nancy Solomon was the woman who ended up, uh, winning. It was the people's choice. And Nancy, I don't even know how many emails that woman sent out to her email list. She called in favors from her friends. I mean, she was promoting it all over social media and she had people constantly voting her in, but then other people wanted to be in so there I publicly displayed the results every day to show who was, who was in the leading position. So I had other people who are trying so hard to beat Nancy. I mean, it came down to a hairline race. I'm not even kidding you. It was so entertaining. And that's a way that you could get people on board. And by the way, since I had asked people to type in their name and email address, in addition to who they're voting for now, I captured a bunch of names of people in the public.

Amber:

They had a vested interest in the summit because they were part of the voting the last person in. So then you can set up a funnel or a sequence or a special offer. You could invite them to a webinar to close them in early into the summit or come up with other creative ways. How can I get those people on board to help me promote the summit? What incentive can I be giving them? So it's a, win-win, there's always an uplevel button, which is why I'm a big fan of giving yourself plenty of time to execute. I had so many people over the years, Mark, that would say, Oh, I want to do a summit. And it has to launch in the next three weeks. Okay. We can do that, but it really doesn't give you much time to make these kinds of decisions that will ultimately bring you greater success in the future. So just remember to give yourself enough time to plan.

Dr. Mark:

That is great. Well, I want to ask, what tool did you use for the voting? I'm sure everybody's thinking that right now.

Amber:

So back then, it was literally a, just a, probably a gravity form on my website. There are so many better ways to do it right now. So, you know, it could even be as simple as an opt-in form, that's hooked up to Active Campaign or something. Um, but it was a lot of manual work back then. Nothing was as easy as it is today.

Dr. Mark:

Absolutely. Well, and, and so I love this concept here, you did this on the front end, in the sense of before the summit began to get people engaged and involved, but you also did on the backend too, after it was over, you had the customers determine who was the best interview, kind of talk us through that process. Why, you know, why did you do that? What was the outcome? What was the goal, uh, help us understand?

Amber:

I'm always creating it's fun, right? So I knew early on that I really needed my speakers to show up in a big way. Number one, with promoting and number two, I wanted them to give a knockout performance. Why wouldn't I want that? And so a lot of times, and you might know this from the speaking world, like you'll get speakers who have the same things to say on every single podcast. And so yes, it adds value to your podcast or to your summit. But you know, that fan base may have already heard the same thing from John Lee Dumas, from whoever for the past 15 episodes. So it can actually, you know, reduce the value of your summit. So I'm always trying to get like, what are different questions that I can ask? How can I get to the meat of what this person believes and what their values are and what stories?

Amber:

So the interview itself, I spent quite a bit of time preparing for it, but I wanted that interview to sing. So what I ended up doing is I told the speakers in advance, Hey, there are two ways you can raise money for your charity. Number one is based on promotion, but number two is based on how great your interview is. And so what's going to happen is I'm going to allow people to buy into the summit during this window of time, let's say it was a month. Then they're going to have two weeks to absorb all of the content and vote for who they thought was the best interview. And whomever is the winner gets five grand for their charity flat fee and Hal Elrod was actually the winner. And so we donated that to Front Row Foundation, which was really special. He had agreed interview, but it was a tight race down at the end. And I wish I could remember the tool that was used for voting because, um, I'm sure it's still around today. It was very simple. It was just a widget on a sidebar. You go, you watch the interviews, you vote one time, click, and you're done. Uh, it was a pretty tight race though, down to the wire. And so it was just nice that the speakers knew that at least they had two different chances to win money for their charity. Um, so they really showed up in both ways.

Dr. Mark:

That's incredible. I guess I can imagine those last couple people are just pushing or just hoping that they're going to get it, which again, you're going to stay on their minds even longer, the speakers' minds even longer. So for those of you listening in to this, wanting to make an impression and a relationship with those speakers, this is one way to stay at the top of their mind, even after the summit ends. So, um, let's go and talk about the sponsorships. I know this is an area myself included. Most summit hosts hate this area. This is a tough spot. A lot of times it's challenging. It's difficult in many instances, some hosts just say, you know what, I'm not going to do anything. And I just give up. And in some places I think that's probably best. They should focus more attention on other areas that they can have greater

impact, but you decided to do something a little different. So talk us through that strategy and how it impacted.

Amber:

Yes, I should have looked this up. I created a document that was, uh, that offered different sponsor packages. My fail is that I didn't give myself enough time to try to get sponsors. I think I gave myself like a month, month and a half, and it's really hard getting the right decision maker and then the call gets pushed and then you finally get on the call and then they have their preliminary questions and then you pass that round. So then you get past the next person and it's like this whole song and dance. Um, but I got really pretty far with two companies, but then I just couldn't seem to lock it in at the last minute because I hadn't done this before. So I didn't have a proven track record. And that was the only reason that they just couldn't quite pull the trigger on it.

Amber:

They love the lineup, they loved the charity angle. They loved all of the nuances of what I was doing to, you know, push promotion even further, but it was just a risk for them. So that was really disappointing. But I had packages starting, I think, around a thousand dollars. And then it went up to \$10,000. I wanted a \$10,000 donation. I called it, the Ambassador of Awesomeness was the title of the one company that could do that could sign up. And I had everything from like, we're going to promote you through, you know, the emails that we send or, you know, you're going to have a strong presence on the website and other social media marketing and things like that. Um, since at the last minute I couldn't lock in a sponsor. Darn it. What I ended up doing is I thought, well, pivot, what else can you do?

Amber:

Well, I ended up signing up for the affiliate program for multiple different companies and I just called them my affiliate sponsors. And I made it very clear that if you click on this link and you buy a product or service from, I dunno, a hosting company, then I might receive a small commission for that. So I was very clear upfront, but that was one way that I could try to drive sales anyway. And so on, every single email that I sent out market was like, today's sponsor affiliate sponsor is whatever hosting company. And here's a little blurb about why I choose them and why they're so amazing. So you have to bake it with some sales and, and, and specificity so that people are actually clicking on the link and you're trying to compel them to make a choice in a change. I also had a page on my website that was like our sponsors that we're so grateful for.

Amber:

And I was right, so they can feature them on the front end of the website. I had them featured on the back end of the website. So as soon as you bought into the summit, you went into a backend membership portal still today. Each speaker had their own page with their interview bullets about what they spoke about, a free gift. Um, I promoted a sponsor on every single page and, um, I also allowed members of my email list to invest in an idea where they could offer a bonus as well. So the back end was baked with strategy. Um, and actually I just remember another thing that I could share, I'll make a little note though, and circle back to that. That totally different strategy that I remembered

Amber:

Selling each individual interview was, was the thing that came to mind, Mark. So kind of unrelated, but after the big push for the campaign, I would set up a single sales page so that for \$27 or whatever it was,

you could buy John Lee Dumas' episode. Then I reached out to John and said, you know what, Hey, I think you should just be promoting your single episode. That's what your audience wants the most from you. So why don't you do another promotion? Send this out to your list. I'll give all the sales to, you know, charity, if you win. And then on the backend I upsold into the full summit package. So that was just another thing that, that people can absolutely do as another takeaway strategy.

Dr. Mark:

That is incredible right there. Just to break that down for everybody listening here is you have them press, you have them push, everybody promotes it. And then once that's kind of gone through, you pull out their individual session, their individual interview or presentation, and you say, I'm going to sell this. I'm going to give this, you know, why don't you give this to your audience? They've been hit. You know, they promote that to their audience because it's relevant. It's them to their audience. They get that donation into charity. But then on top of that, anybody who purchases season upsell, which then generates more revenue. So this is, this is a really great strategy right there. I just want to break that down. Um, as we start to wrap up here, I want to get to another thing that you did to generate a decent amount of revenue for your summit. That didn't involve you having to sell anything to anyone, um, other than offering some freebies to your audiences. So let's talk about this strategy where you reached out to your community and got your community involved. Tell us what that strategy was and how it worked.

Amber:

I actually got this idea from, um, my book launch work, uh, back in 2007, I was launching books for, they were compilation books. So think of Chicken Soup for the Soul, but it was for, um, a publishing company out in California. We were launching books for Les Brown and Lisa Nichols and their communities, right? And so as part of the big Amazon bestseller launch strategy, which by the way, it was much harder to, to rank on Amazon back then we would ask all of our speakers or excuse me, uh, authors in the compilation book to donate bonuses so that when you go buy the book on book launch day, all of the authors in the book, there were usually like 20 or 30 authors would each have their own set of bonus packages. So now you buy one book and you're getting tens of thousands of dollars' worth of bonuses.

Amber:

And each author would have their own opt-in funnel, right? Where you could opt in for their bonuses. So I took a page from that and I thought, well, why couldn't I do this with myself? So what I did is I sent an email to my community and I think I only had a list of like 1500 people back then. It wasn't a lot of people, but I said, guys, I'm running this epic summit called the Authentic Business Success Summit. I've got these amazing speakers. We have the promotional reach of more than a million people. I mean, I've got the charity component, I'm doing this people choice award. I've got these, you know, all this stuff. And I built it up, which was all true. And I said, this is going to be an unbelievable opportunity to get your brand seen. And you can now have an entryway to these speakers because you share something in common.

Amber:

You share the summit in common. So what I'm going to offer 10 people is the opportunity to come up with a bonus package for anybody who buys into my summit, we will allow people to join your email list, to get your bonuses. Um, so it could be you're giving away a video course, an e-book. You're giving away a free coaching call, whatever you want, put it in a bundle, give me a landing page so that people can opt into your list and get these bonuses. And in exchange for this opportunity, it's a thousand dollar

entry fee. Again, I have 10 people, thousand bucks each, you're going to get an opportunity, grow your email list, associate with speakers, blah, blah, blah. I had those 10 people sold within hours. And so all I had to do is as I gave them some strategy on how to make the most of the opportunity, I didn't have to do that. I chose to do that. It's a, win-win. Gave them some strategy, asked for their landing page, featured them. You can see it right now. You can see the longest ever list of amazing bonuses if you buy this \$197 summit. It's a slamming deal for everybody.

Dr. Mark:

That's incredible. I love it. A slamming deal for everybody, Amber. Well, this has been a slamming, uh, interview and episode for sure. So much great value. Uh, we could keep nerding out and jamming out on this for hours. I know, I know everybody's thinking too right now, Mark anymore, Amber in my life, where can I find her? Where she hanging out at? So go ahead and let everybody know where you're hanging out and the best way to get in touch with you.

Amber:

So <https://NGNGenterprises.com> is our main company website where we offer services, help you grow your business online. And I have social media channels all over the place for <https://www.ambervilhauer.com>. You can do AmberV.com for short and um, but I'm all over the place. And I'm really easy to talk to. I'm not one of those inaccessible people. I love the people. I am the people. So anytime you want to reach out and just send me a message and let me know what you think, I'd be glad to hear from you. Okay?

Dr. Mark:

I love that. All right. Well, Amber, we're going to wrap this up, but I want to leave it with you to have the final word. So let us, uh, have a final parting piece of wisdom.

Amber:

Yeah, well I have to end with no guts, no glory, because when you are venturing off to put your name out there and put your content out there, put your ideas out there. It is one of the scariest things, and it might not be something that you feel like on the front end, it's in your quiet, the stuff you wouldn't tell, anybody that you think and feel. And in those moments, I want you to remember no guts, no glory, because if I didn't have the freaking guts to reach out to those speakers, if I didn't have the guts to share my ideas with the world, stuff that nobody else was doing, and I had no proof to back it up. If I didn't have the guts to ask, I wouldn't be where I am today with the amount of impact that I'm making in the world. And it is so fulfilling and it feels so, so good. So I'm glad that I had the guts back then. It's a great reminder for you today. Pass that onto your audience as well and do good stuff in the world.

Dr. Mark:

Love it, Amber. So good. Thank you so much for sharing with us, your time, your energy and your wisdom today.

Amber:

Yeah. You're the best Mark. I really appreciate what you're doing. Thank you.

Dr. Mark:

Thank you. And thank you some hosts for hanging out with Amber and I. I'm Dr. Mark T. Wade, your host here on the Virtual Summit Podcast and remember your message matters. And one of the most powerful ways to get that message out to the world is with a virtual summit. Don't forget. Check out the show notes over at episode 202. So you can get all these amazing goodies that Amber just talked about and we'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. 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.