

Audio Title: Mark Simon

Audio Duration: 0:30:09

Number of Speakers: 2

Transcript

Rui Zhi Dong: Hello and welcome everyone to Profitable Business Automation. My name is Rui and I'm very excited to have Mark Simon here today with me. He has worked in the entertainment industry for around 25 years and he has worked with most of the major studios and networks like Disney, Nickelodeon, Universal, ABC, Viacom and Fox. He has thousands of production credits to his name and he rubs shoulders with major Hollywood celebrities like Steven Spielberg.

So I'm very excited again to have you here Mark and I want to talk to you a bit more about your company Sell Your TV Concept Now as well as your background. So let's start with how this whole thing started.

Mark Simon: Well, do you mean the whole thing of Sell Your TV Concept Now or the whole thing of why I decided I wanted to work in Hollywood? How far back do you want to go?

Rui Zhi Dong: Let's start back from how you got into Hollywood then.

Mark Simon: Well, I had gotten heavily into the theater in high school and never had so much fun in my life. I've always been a cartoonist and I was always an artist. I love telling stories. I love making people laugh. In college I started getting into shooting film and thought, "Hollywood, I might as well try it now."

So two weeks after graduating, I was living in Hollywood. I just moved and started working there and worked my way up very quickly. I became an art director on my first feature film in LA and worked my way through that such, production designing movies and TV shows, and then was missing drawing. So then became a story artist and so I started doing storyboards. Then my wife and I move to Orlando to open up the Nickelodeon Studios. I became the second designer in Nickelodeon. From there I went to work with Spielberg and I was moving away from art directing and into now concept design and storyboarding.

That led me into writing and directing and then Jeanne and I, my wife and partner, started creating some of our own content and started selling shows, making deals all over the world. A lot of people kept asking us, "How did you do that?" So we started putting all these things together to show people. It was taking up a lot of time but we get more and more people asking us. How did you do that? What do I need to do? How do I meet people? How do I get meetings?

You know, all these questions that everybody had that took us years to figure out. We realized, "You know what? There's a huge need for the information that we've acquired over the years." My wife is also a top producer. She produced half of Nickelodeon's primetime lineup and we figured, "You know what? There's a business here to be able to help people."

So we stepped back. We organized all the information that we wish we had when we got started. So that's kind of the mantra on everything that we provide through our consultancy is what did we wish we had when we got started.

That's what we're offering everybody else and that's what launched – I guess it was about eight years ago. It's what launched Sell Your TV Concept Now and it has been growing every year. It has been great.

Rui Zhi Dong: Amazing. So you figured out that a lot of people, they wanted to know sort of what your pitching techniques were and there was a real need for this and you definitely have sort of the background, the experience to be able to provide that.

Mark Simon: Yeah. It's a number of things. It's how to pitch it. It's also where to go to pitch things. The biggest things, I would say, what makes the show that the networks are going to want.

So we ended up working with a lot of people on development, everything from their pitches to their one-sheets to their treatments, to their scripts, whatever it is, because generally if people don't have a lot of experience in the industry – and our clients range anywhere from someone who has never worked in the industry to a multi-Emmy winner and winning producer of *Deadliest Catch*. I mean it's the gamut of everything.

Generally people are missing a couple of things in their concept that would keep it from being something networks would want and we help them with that as well.

When you get in front of a network, you got one shot. So let's work with you to make sure that with that one shot, you give it the best possible chance because you don't want to get in there and hear something that you go, "Oh, I wish I had known that beforehand." Well, that's why we're here. We will let you know that beforehand.

Rui Zhi Dong: Right. So tell us a little bit about the actual service and products you provide. At the lower end, I guess you got some information products where they can figure out sort of the techniques, how to get in touch with the studios, what they need to do, how to present. Then you also provide consulting services at the upper end or is it sort of like a group session?

Mark Simon: Well, it's all that. Let me explain a couple of different things. Generally, the first step we do when we're working with anyone is a concept evaluation. So what that is, is it's a one-on-one session. Once we do the forms with you, we will get in all your materials, whatever it is that you've written whether it's a script, treatment, just stuff written down, any sketches, photos. You got a sizzle reel, a little demo and a shot.

We will take a look at all that. Then we get on the phone with you and tell you what worked and what doesn't work in your idea. I will give you some advice on what to make better. Then we end with giving you a game plan. Here are the steps that you need to go – from where you are right now, this is what you need to do to move forward.

Some of those things are things that we help with. Other things I just think that you need to do. It's up to the client on how they want to move forward. But we do record those sessions. We do send them to our clients so they don't have to worry about taking notes because we go through a lot of stuff. I mean these are in-depth. People freak out with how much information they get every single time. They have no idea how much we actually covered.

If we do – when we do those one-on-one sessions, we want you to have a successful show. If it's bad, we will tell you it's bad. If it's great, we're going to tell you it's great. You deserve the honesty and not just us patting you on the back and saying, "Oh, that's nice." No. You're paying for our expertise and you deserve the brutal honesty and we give it to you.

That's generally the first step because we can't tell you what we can do for you until we know where you're starting. Now a lot of people are do-it-yourselfers. So we do have our TV Pitch School, which is a do-it-yourself kit which takes you to three sections – development, packaging which is putting all the pitch elements together and pitching. How to land pitches, where to go, what to expect and how to follow up.

In there, there are also interviews with studio and network executives and top creators. It's huge workbooks, samples, demos, templates. I mean templates of what to put together on your treatment. It's a one-sheet template on what to say when you call to land a pitch, templates on what to say when you walk into some of the conferences, what conferences to go to, how to land pitch meetings.

It covers all of that. So it's a complete do-it-yourself kit which works great for some people and it's also a less expensive thing than doing one-on-one.

We do have a couple of different groups with this. So you get to work with us in a group environment but even in the group environment, there's always time for us to answer your specific questions. It's not just getting out there and listening with no interaction.

We interact with all of our clients in these sessions and one is called Accelerate and Accelerate is – I think it's like a 13-week course. It's all virtual so you don't have to travel for it. All the sessions are recorded so if you can't make one, you can always get back into it. It has got workbooks and everything but in every session, there's – what we do is we do live streaming slideshows. Jeanne, my wife and partner, is generally hosting all of those and she would take you through whatever that course is and then there's Q and A that answers any question you've got, anything that's coming up and there's also reviews through it of your concept.

So as you're redeveloping, she and I will go through your materials and review it for you during that course. Then we have another group course which is our Hit Maker Tour. In fact, we're in the midst of – as we're talking right now in early January, we're just starting our winter Hit Maker Tour, which is a really fabulous event that we've been doing for five or six years I guess where we train and mentor our clients on going to the major TV conferences which it's – everyone goes, who's working and selling in the industry.

So what we do is we do a number of sessions, virtual sessions beforehand with our clients or live. Training them on how to prep for the conferences, what to expect, how to make the most of it, how to land the meetings, what you're going to do.

Then we're there onsite with you. So if you want us to sit in on a pitch meeting, we will sit in on a pitch meeting with you. If we meet people there, who it would be you should meet, well, we can help make that introduction. If you've got questions, you can find us because we're right there at your beck and call at the conferences and we do another session on follow-up on how to make the most out of what you do. I mean in our clients, I've seen clients walk out with as many as 70 and 80 contacts from one event.

Rui Zhi Dong: Wow.

Mark Simon: Which you will never get wandering the streets and making phone calls. I mean the cost per pitch and what you get is more than 10 times less than any other way you could possibly make these kinds of connections and because we're there with you and – what's that? Were you asking how many people?

Rui Zhi Dong: How many people do you take for the Hit Maker Tour?

Mark Simon: We keep it no more than 15 per conference and we generally have between 7 and 15 per conference. So for instance the winter conference that we're doing, we're doing three different conferences in the same training. We're doing NATPE which is anything Hispanic or scripted content. We're doing the Realscreen Summit in New York which – both of which are in late January and Realscreen is all rowdy and documentary game shows and then in early February we do Kidscreen Summit which is all children's programming, live action and it's animated.

So Jeanne and I each have our own expertise on going to these conferences and we take our clients with us and the other thing our clients always love is that they're now not alone. I mean not only are we there with them but there's our group. So they have someone to talk to and what happens is – and we've got the greatest clients. This is so much fun. They always share experience and contacts with each other.

We get together at night. We sit down at the bar. Everyone will say, "Hey, did you meet this person? Oh, here's a card. Take a picture of this," and it's amazing how everyone helps everybody else, because we all go in knowing each other and sharing our information with one another.

Rui Zhi Dong: That sounds like a really great group.

Mark Simon: It's fantastic.

Rui Zhi Dong: How do you attract these people? How do you get them in at the sort of frontend? What sort of fees do they pay for the Hit Maker Tour?

Mark Simon: The Hit Maker Tour is \$3000 for all of our training and for us to be there live on site. Our fee does not include your cost for going to and registering for the conferences themselves.

However, because we partner with the conferences, our clients get the biggest discount that you can get for going in. So these are big discounts through – anywhere between \$300 and \$600 discounts usually.

So we scored a really great deal and then a lot of our clients get a lot of extra bonuses too. Like at NATPE, we've got our own special room that the conference provides us. There are extra meeting possibilities, things like that, that are specifically for just us because of our long relationship with the conferences.

Rui Zhi Dong: All right. What about on the frontend?

Mark Simon: Oh, how we find people or how they find us?

Rui Zhi Dong: Yeah. So how do they find you? How do you get them into your list? How do you sort of generate I guess these potential prospects?

Mark Simon: Well, one we got a lot of word of mouth because our clients just love working with us. So they talk about it. Of course we've got pretty high visibility at these conferences.

When someone walks around with a large entourage, everyone wants to find out who that is. We know a lot of the executives so even a lot of the network and studio executives send people to us because what they found is the people who worked with us are prepared and prepared people make a better pitch which for the executive means less waste of their time. So it's a real benefit for both sides. Our clients benefit from our working with them but the executives benefit from the people that we work with as well.

We also on our website we've got a free download of seven biggest mistakes to avoid in a pitch and by downloading that, you get on our email list. So it's great information but that also allows you to get the emails on the specials that we're offering, free events that are coming up, our monthly newsletter which we highlight what some of our clients are doing and what we have coming up or free subscription on whatever it is. It's a lot of fun, all that stuff.

We also do a number of free webinars. We've got – I've got one coming up in late of January on how not to work for free. So many people work for free and actually hurt the entire industry. So we're doing a whole thing on how to avoid that and what it really means. We did one last month on how to pitch without an agent. So again, being on our list and a lot of people, when they see that we're doing that, they spread the word around to all of their friends. Hey, here's a great event. I've been on stuff with Mark and Jeanne before. Register for this.

When you register for it, they also get to go on our list. So then you can keep up with the latest things that we have going on.

Rui Zhi Dong: OK. And these webinars, so I guess that you do them live each time. They're not sort of pre-recorded and automated.

Mark Simon: Correct. They are live. We do take questions at the end of them. We do answer your questions there. So it's great. I mean we have upwards of 700 people each on these. They're very, very popular.

Rui Zhi Dong: And are you using GoToWebinar for these?

Mark Simon: No. We're actually using Instant Teleseminar. I'm one of the original members of Instant Teleseminar. The guy who created it is really fantastic and it's just wonderful the way it works and so you can call in or you can Skype in or you can just listen to it streaming and watch the slides streaming on the web and generally people kind of do a mix of both.

I mean you want to see the slides because we do have a lot of slides going. So you can either ask the question live over the phone when the crowds are muted. When we have seven people, it tends to get loud sometimes. But you can also – there's a Submit Questions box on the streaming page while you're watching it so you can just take it and punch right up on our computer here at our studios. So we know who's asking what as we're going live.

Rui Zhi Dong: All right. With these webinars, do you typically sort of try to sell something at the end? So I'm guessing you offer some content at the start and then you pitch something at the end or there's sort of nothing at the end?

Mark Simon: Yeah. On the free ones, it's – what we do is we do say how we're going to help you because obviously there's a lot of information but in an hour, there's only so much we can cover. But you will get substantial information from it.

But then we share with you, OK, so this is where you are now or what we've talked about. This is how we can help you take the next step and for instance, when we're talking about how to pitch without an agent. Going to conferences is the biggest way to pitch without an agent. You **don't get asked** to a conference if you have one.

So then we talk about so here are the conferences coming up. Here are some discounts for them to get in and here's how we can help you be successful at your first one.

Conferences aren't cheap to go to and there's a year between each one. If you want to go to Realscreen year after year, you don't want to have to wait a year to fix what you learned from the first one. It took me four, five years really to figure out how to do these. We get you doing it right the first time.

Rui Zhi Dong: How much are these conferences to go to, generally like sort of the better ones?

Mark Simon: It's going to range generally anywhere from \$500 to around \$2000 depending on the conference and how long it is. So it varies. For instance, this winter NATPE, which stands for National Association of Television Program Executives, that's in January. It's three days

long. It's in Miami and then Realscreen Summit is four days long. That's in Washington DC also in January and Kidscreen summit is four days long at the Hilton in New York.

So those are the ones and there's a huge range. I think NATPE is under \$1000. It's normally like \$850 but our clients have a couple of hundred dollar discount. It might even be more than that right now.

Kidscreen is around \$1600 or \$1650 currently. It goes up more than that as we get closer. Our clients pay \$1350 so it's a minimum of \$300 discount. We give serious discounts for clients.

Rui Zhi Dong: Wow. So these clients, they – I mean the whole purpose of the conference to go there and meet the executives and have the opportunity to pitch or is it just to kind of network there?

Mark Simon: Yes, yes and other things. There are incredible speakers. There's things called – every conference is different. Some have booths where you can walk around and meet people in booths. Some, they have the studios and networks who are in suites in the hotels. Others, they've got sessions called 30 minutes with [0:18:13] [Phonetic] where a network executive will stand in front of a group of 40 to 60 people and describe what they're looking for and how to contact them.

So a lot of those sessions you can't pitch in because there are so many people there, but they tell you who and how to contact. Right after that, you can talk to them. There's pitching at some events. There's always networking. That's the thing.

I mean I've literally pitched and gotten interest in shows in an elevator. You've heard of the elevator pitch. I do it all the time because it happens and we get you ready for that.

We get you ready on how to – if you've got 15 seconds, what are you going to do? You will know what to do and how to handle it.

Rui Zhi Dong: So where do you cover that? Do you cover that sort of before they go to the conference and the information product on the webinars?

Mark Simon: Yeah, that's in the – Hit Maker Tour, it's the training that we do leading up to the conference.

Rui Zhi Dong: All right.

Mark Simon: We do three or four sessions leading up to it and we cover everything and when I say everything, I mean everything. Know what to expect, maps, where to stay, how to get there, how to land meetings beforehand, how to land meetings when you're there, what to say to people, what they're going to say to you, how to expect different things. We give you lists to make sure that you're bringing enough of everything and what you should bring so you don't get caught unaware. I mean we get you ready so you're a pro on your first time.

Rui Zhi Dong: Wow. That's amazing. So then with these webinars, which one are you sort of promoting? Are you promoting the Hit Maker Tour at the end?

Mark Simon: It depends on which one – on what we're doing. The one that we did last month, we were promoting the Hit Maker Tour. Others, we might promote our TV Pitch School. It just depends.

Whatever we offer that supports more information that we were covering, is what we're going to talk about because our goal is to help people. So if you're having an issue with writing scripts, we will talk about how we can help you improve your script at the end.

If you're a do-it-yourselfer, we will talk about our TV Pitch School. We also offer paid webinars. There are times we bring in some of the industry best and on our website we do have replays available on some of our big paid webinars like Adora English who sold 15 reality shows.

We get into with her and she offered up samples of that – any of the replays on that one. You can download samples of her trips to see what she used and she talks about each show and how she landed the rights and what she did and how she sold them to the networks.

It's absolutely incredible. So we offer a lot of different things. So no matter where you are and what you're doing, we have a way to work with you. Then one thing I didn't talk about is we also have our VIP clients. So they really want to work with us one on one where we're part of their development team. With all our experience on how to put these packages together, we can work with you one on one and that's – and in order to come up with an estimate, once we do an evaluation with you, then we know where your project stands and who you are and what you bring to it.

Then we can estimate OK, this is what it's going to take for us to work with you and your project to get it to the point where you really need to have to pitch to the networks.

So that's all one off. That's really specific to what your needs are and then I own a couple of other companies. I own an animation studio and a big storyboard house. So if you need to have designs or illustrations done, we can provide that as an extra.

If you've got an animation series and you want an animated sample or an animatic which is a video storyboard, or just storyboards, we could provide that as well.

So we also have staff scriptwriters. So if you've got a great idea and great characters but you just don't have the ability to write a great script, we can write the script for you. If you've written a good script but it's not great, we can come in and do an edit and polish it and really punch it up for you. So we're here to support you from wherever you are and get you where you need to be.

Rui Zhi Dong: Did you start Sell Your TV Concept Now before or after those – the animation studio?

Mark Simon: After. I've been – I've worked in, as you said, thousands of projects and I work in live action and animation feature film and TV. It's what I love. So Jeanne runs a consultancy. Obviously I spend a lot of time with it because I'm the co-owner of it and so if a show is in my wheelhouse as we say, where my expertise lies, I'm the one who works for those clients.

So we really do focus. Which one of us has the most experience, knowledge and passion for the realm that the clients have a show in? Then that person works with them.

Rui Zhi Dong: Awesome. With regards with the webinars, have you tried using some teleseminars? Have you tried using just audio versus webinar? Have you found one works better than the other with the people on your list?

Mark Simon: We've always had the slideshow going live as we do it because it helps so much as a visual. When we're talking about a conference, we can show you what it looks like inside or we bring on one of our guest speakers. We will put up a picture of a guest speaker and images of what they work on.

If we're talking about lists of things that you need to bring with you, we pop a list up there. When we're talking about how to put together one sheet, we will put up an image of a one sheet so we can actually be the same. When you look here, this is where you put this information. If you look at that, this is where you're going to put this.

Without the aids, it doesn't help as much. So we have set this up so that – streaming video would be too difficult in most people's computers. There would be a lot of issues with it. But the slide show works no matter what kind of system you've got, where you are in the world because we have clients literally all over the world to join us and all these. It's set up so it works at the maximum efficiency for everybody.

Rui Zhi Dong: How often do you run the webinars on a monthly basis?

Mark Simon: It varies depending on – a lot of it is depending on our schedule because we stay really busy because I'm also in production. We don't just talk theory. I'm actually in production all the time. So that kind of depends on what's coming up and what's relevant in the industry at the time.

The replays on our paid ones are available on our website. When you go to www.SellYourTVConceptNow.com you can find all of our webinars and lectures there and so anything you want as far as free ones and the other events. We [0:25:09] [Indiscernible] through the year.

So we've got our winter conferences which I mentioned and so we get people ready for those in November and December. We do the training through January and the events for January and early February.

In summer, there are a few events in Los Angeles, pitching events in LA that we get ready for so that's in late May and June. Then in the fall, there are a couple of conferences in the fall. There's

one animation conference in Ottawa and then there's Mipcom which is the biggest granddaddy of conferences in Cannes, France which is gigantic, 14,000 people.

Rui Zhi Dong: Wow, that's huge.

Mark Simon: So yeah, it's huge. It's amazing. So we do tours different times of the year depending on what conferences are coming up.

Rui Zhi Dong: OK. That's how you determine sort of what goes out, how much content you do, what sort of webinars you're going to run. Do you ever run sort of replays to your lists or they're always going to be live?

Mark Simon: Those are always live.

Rui Zhi Dong: Those are always live. OK.

Mark Simon: Things update and we want to be able to interact with people and to answer their questions. So we do them live, yeah. I know we're starting our next Accelerate Program sometime in February. Jeanie is running that so I don't have it in front of me the start date yet. But I know it will probably be mid to late February. The next session of Accelerate, that happens a number of times during the year. So of course VIP one-offs and doing the evaluation. Those happen on a daily basis.

Rui Zhi Dong: OK. And I noticed that you're using Infusionsoft in your business. Is it something that you find that's sort of important to sort of help your business? Is that a central part of running Sell Your TV Concept Now?

Mark Simon: Yeah, it helped us a lot with properly tracking everybody and helping our clients and giving them better information in a more meaningful way. We use CustomerHub which is a part of Infusionsoft for the members' only pages. So for our Hit Maker Tour, there's a members only website that only people who are in our tour can have access into.

They've got all the templates and downloads and information and we update that as we're going through the conferences with all the information that we want our clients to have to make it a more meaningful experience.

So what happens, we outgrew the system we were using earlier. We had been using 1Shoppingcart for our CRM.

Rui Zhi Dong: All right.

Mark Simon: But it was too limited for the quality we were wanting to provide our clients. So last year, we switched over to Infusionsoft and it's – that was a huge deal. I mean tens of thousands of clients that we moved over and making sure all their information got recorded. But what has happened is we can track and help our clients much more efficiently now.

Rui Zhi Dong: Fantastic. OK. Did you have any final thoughts that sort of you give to sort of small business owners who are trying to do similar things where they have multiple products that they want to offer to their clients?

Mark Simon: Anytime you do something with passion, that passion sells. People want to listen to it. So regardless of what kind of business you're in, if you're passionate about it, let the passion show. I love – Jeanne loves what we do. We love telling stories. We love helping people. We love working with creative people. Working with people on ideas to make them better is the most fun part of what we do. Yeah.

So I think that's fantastic. I think having – for anybody having a variety of ways of helping somebody by keeping it clear so that essential clients don't get muddled down and they don't know [0:29:13] [Indiscernible]. That's something that we're always working with as well because there's so many things we've done over the years and it's like, "You know, it's too many options or this is a stronger way."

We learn as we go and you've got to be willing to make those changes in order to deliver a consistently upgraded product every year. We're always trying to one-up ourselves because we want to provide the best possible experience with the people that we work with.

Rui Zhi Dong: Fantastic. That's great advice. OK. Well, thank you so much for being here and thank you to our listeners for listening to this show.

Mark Simon: All right. I hope to hear from many of you who have creative ideas. Just check us out at www.SellYourTVConceptNow.com and let's see if we can get you on the small screen. Thank you so much for your time, Rui.

Rui Zhi Dong: Thank you very much.

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