

# How To Sell Your Speaking – #103

## How To Sell Your Speaking Programs



Would you like to close more speaking gigs this year? Do you want to increase your speaking fee? My guest today is Bob Strange (AKA The Closer), a speaker consultant with 30 years of experience handling speaking inquiries and deal negotiation for top keynote speakers from Steve Wozniak to yours truly.

In our conversation, we talk about how to sell your speaking programs, how to qualify a speaking inquiry, and dealing with price objections. Bob also shares the one word which will instantly tell you if a client can pay your fee? Enjoy the episode.

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In this episode:

- How To Sell Your Speaking Programs
- How To Qualify A Speaking Inquiry
- Dealing With Price Objections



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James Taylor 0:06

So welcome, Bob to the SpeakersU Podcast. Great to have you on board. Now for those people that don't know I give a little bit of a precis about you a little bit of your background. But tell us how you

get started in this strange and interesting world is professional events and speaking and talent management.

Bob Strange 0:25

It certainly is certainly an interesting world. James, thanks for having me with you today. It's been a long journey, I suppose. I started off in the entertainment industry, per se after I was at art school in Glasgow, and then I moved into producing festivals, touring, with bands, running venues, and clubs all purely stumbled into stumbled. For the last two decades, I've been working with businesses, I've been working with keynote speakers, politicians, comics, media figures, politicians, and comics maybe

James Taylor 1:06

quite closely aligned. They're closely aligned. And

Bob Strange 1:09

I've worked with a range of people in what range of businesses from all international associations to private clients. I started in the speaking industry, purely by chance at the beginning to the northeast. I started working again purely by chance with an organization called speakers UK time they're one of the first companies to see the value of moving the agency game onto the internet. So they were a small company that booked wedding bands and carry bands in the northeast of Scotland and quickly became a major player in the speaker industry annoying a lot of the

James Taylor 1:51

disruptors as we call it,

Bob Strange 1:52

yes, disruptors as the word. That's exactly what we ignited a lot of operations. But we were bringing in the business at one point, it felt like we were printing money, to be honest with you. I was breaking certain speakers three or four days a week, somewhere getting more than one booking. And I was the favorite number on their call display for the law with

James Taylor 2:17

these. When they saw you're coming up on their phone, they knew that there was money at their side of that,

Bob Strange 2:22

but and then the men days, and then it all went crash. And you know, we had that banking, collapse 2008 advisors to the banking client base like us suffered. So I scrambled around as an independent operator for two or three years. And then I made the big move to London. I spent the last 10 years or so working for a couple of bureaus quoting Craig Cohn performing artists, and for the last three, nearly four years, I've been working with Maria Maria Fran is only limited one of the good people in the industry. We've done things like books, Steve Wozniak, on a boat down the Thames I've had Callie, will it be hosting, launching our new super cruise ship with Sophia Loren in attendance during a storm. So it's been fun. I've seen most aspects of the speaker industry from both sides. Currently, what I'm looking to do is kind of repossession myself, I'm

not wanting to be in the agency game for the rest of my life. I'm looking to work with a small group of selected speakers, people who got that on, are generating their own inquiries have got a bit of a presence. But they're looking for somebody who knows what they're doing CPR hands, I suppose to Scorp jobs, ascertain budgets, see if people are time wasters or not. And then, you know, make deals happen. close deals for them. I know quite a lot of speakers. Would you like to get involved in the nitty-gritty side of negotiations? So that's where would I kind of come in kind of reassessing myself repositioning myself as a closer type figure? The closer the

James Taylor 4:23

closer? I love that. I mean, it could be a Kenny Rogers song that, you know, the closer but but but I think it's an interesting, you know, obviously the kind of service that you provide to the speakers. It's not right for every speaker.

Bob Strange 4:39

Well, it's not I'm also prepared to look at a one-off inquiry. I don't, that doesn't have to be all from a small group. If if there's a speaker out there, who's got a really difficult deal and they feel like a safe pair of hands, a bit of advice would be appropriate, then I'll do that sort of negotiation. Yeah,

James Taylor 5:00

so, so the kind of speakers I guess that you'd be ideal working with, obviously, you and I, we met through Maria Franzoni. And we did some work together through that, actually, in London, you know,

speaking thing that had in London. And then when you start talking about Okay, starting to make some changes, and you really, you know, you've kind of thought about what is your core value the thing that you can do better than pretty much anyone else? is this idea of when an inquiry comes in taking that inquiry that comes in and closing and making it happen, you know, that's a key part in the, in the sales process. And I guess, you know, follow-up speakers is actually the part that many of us really dislike, it's not the most comfortable part.

Bob Strange 5:46

I think so James, I do I think that's, that's, that's what I'm trying to do for for speakers, I think speakers do find out but uncomfortable. Can I was speaking to Jeff botch a name from the blast from the past the other day, he said that sometimes he feels he scares the clients when he talks to them, because there is too much of them and they get overwhelmed. Yeah, sometimes he feels that he needs somebody that can step in, and, and become a calming influence.

James Taylor 6:24

And I guess there's the other strong quote, which we hear from a lot of speakers, and this isn't the case for all speakers, but some speakers a great selling themselves, they know their value in the market, they know the numbers that they can move, they know that they are fundable. They know they can speak to a chief marketing officer, for example, and say, this is the number I can approve your KPIs. And this is how I do it. So it can be very specific. But I would say that it's not generally the rule. So I guess one of the things that you're able to do is you're able to take on that role of being that voice of that speaker, but I'm guessing you would have to really

know that speaker pretty well, and the product or services that they sell, and how they can have ideal clients. Is that is that true?

## How To Sell Your Speaking Programs

Bob Strange 7:15

Yeah, I have to scope things on both sides. James, I have to know that the the speaker that I'm going to work with has that product, if you want to call it that, to sale is providing me with the background on the product, but the background on themselves. As much as anything else. I'm looking for someone who's pretty much you James.

James Taylor 7:41

So basically, you're looking, you're looking for a speaker, who maybe has a small office, small team, maybe they have an assistant already, maybe you have someone that handles their social media marketing, they're bringing, you know, basically the they have someone else that handles the marketing, the generating leads, whether that's through paid ads, or SEO or articles or content, or however they're doing a podcast. And really what your value is, is once those inquiries start to come in, then you get them that that prospective client offered across the way you

Bob Strange 8:12

get them across the wheat from the chaff mixture of whether or not they're worth talking to and get them across the line.

James Taylor 8:18

Great. So tell us why do you think so many speakers miss the importance of the sale, the selling part because I know it's very easy, but law speakers get really caught up in social media, and we're gonna get under Paris and we're going to I need to get my Instagram followers up. And very few speakers, you end up speaking to actually seem to really spend a lot of times thinking and analyzing really knowing the numbers understanding the sales side, what is it that you think is that why is that disconnect, you think happens with a lot of speakers,

Bob Strange 8:51

I probably going to show my age, where I come from in the pre-web agency game, which is quite old fashioned and I do see a lot of value in LinkedIn, etc. Those types of platforms. But in terms of making a deal and making a sale, making a sale even to be grammatically correct. You need to be at least talking via proper communications. And you need to get on the phone. That's how I do deals. I speak to clients find out what they want, and make sure that the product matches, and then we dance the tango of money.

Bob Strange 9:41

That's a day.

## How To Qualify A Speaking Inquiry

James Taylor 9:42

So tell us something I see common characteristics of good speaker bureau agents, people that work working in talent and talent management outside is when they get an email, let's say an email



inquiry. an inquiry comes to the website. they can smell Whether it's a going like, is something that's likely to close? And what are those little, maybe weak signals that you see in an email in that first inquiry that you can pretty much tell straight away, this client has a budget, or they don't have a budget?

Bob Strange 10:16

I think you're one of the alternate time giveaways if we want an invitation, or we will like to invite you to participate. any use of that kind of, we've got no money. What we're seeing that's, that's, that's a dead giveaway for me an invitation, particularly if it comes from an academic organization or Association. It's usually a dead giveaway. They've got three reasons to pay you and a couple of olives. So no, that's a big giveaway for me, I just, I can sniff them out. I think it's

James Taylor 10:56

just anything, anything else anything, your sensory, your olfactory senses can tell you about the email that's coming in,

Bob Strange 11:04

I suppose, apart from the invitation, warrants, anything that refers to academics, academic academia, a pleasure to request, you know, it's, you can just you can feel it, James, that's, I don't think there are no dead giveaways. But you can just if you've been doing it for a long time, you can feel it.

James Taylor 11:28

The one I always looked at was I always linked to the email address. Yes, coming from it. And like in Gmail, or at Yahoo, or something, I instantly, I didn't discount it, but it went for but if I could see at Coca Cola or, or something like that it was a recognizable brand,

Bob Strange 11:45

I will often have a look and see if there's a LinkedIn profile associated to the contact cm Ryan, see whether or not they're just an intern? Yeah, well, you know, get an idea where they are in the organization, obviously, that will

James Taylor 12:00

help. So let's go let's imagine inquiries come in. It doesn't say the word invitation. It doesn't come from an academic it comes from like bona fide the type of corporate client doesn't have to be a particularly big client. How do you go about qualifying that one to know whether they actually first of all have the budget and whether your speakers necessarily right for them? What do you immediately quote them numbers? Or do you send them? What do you send them? Or how do you try and get them on the phone? Do you check change modality, what

Bob Strange 12:26

do you try and do was work towards getting them on the phone, but obviously, it depends on whether or not the initial inquiry looks like they are well prepared themselves. If they have got a clear indication idea of what product they right to buy, we were interested in talking to James Taylor, regarding an in-person keynote speech, or we were

in a virtual scenario, and we're looking for a keynote, they need to look like they know what they're after. And it's not just a general, speculative inquiry about a speaker who can count the number of sheep in a field at night is gone, it's got to have a degree of relevance. And they've got to look like they know what they're taught without asking about, if they're at that keynote level, I will, on some occasions, jump in with an approximate fee, give you a ballpark figure. Don't try to nail it Don't be as reasonably vague, but I'm quite happy to give an indication. And then obviously, if the FAA indication is too high, you're saving a bit of time, and we walk away.

James Taylor 13:36

And so basically, you're initially almost qualifying by fee level. So you see between a range the between these numbers, but we'd have to have a conversation. So what if they come back and that fee is within the range that they're looking at, then you're trying to get them on a call to go a little bit further to make sure that the content and the speaker are right.

Bob Strange 13:54

That's correct. Yeah.

James Taylor 13:55

Great. So So you've done that. When it comes to coming to your you put forward a speaker, you have a maybe you have a call with the client, do you always do try and get the speaker on that call with the client? Or do you find isn't is actually worth more if you just have an initial conversation, first,

Bob Strange 14:15

cracking 510 minutes, when we can go over the fee feeling again, discuss whether or not we've got the budget, then I can, you know, I can get a very, very quick scope and feel for what they're looking for. And then I would take it to the next stage of setting up a discovery call if you want to use that chain, the fees freeze. Yet the speaker involved at that point, I would like to find out before that, what length of time you're wanting them to speak for, you know, what's the audience their basics. Again, you know the basics of scope so that I've got something to put in front of the speaker.

James Taylor 14:54

I often call it what you do there and that 510-minute call. I call them triage calls like I'm the bad field, you know this the doctor, the paramedics going around and he's marking on the heads of the people ABC or like this person's gone and no way we're going to help this thing. This one here Yeah, we can actually do something this this person is fine this can hold on. So you can have during that initial, that initial call that mudroom triage call qualifying, doing a little bit more qualifying. And then what point would you try and bring the speaker into the conversation? Does it happen before the client confirms? Or do you wait until you get a deal done for

Bob Strange 15:31

occasionally do I will always offer and I do think it's useful for a speaker to be prepared to do this, I will quite often offer the opportunity to have an I'm committed 1520 minutes short conversation before they commit to signing in on paper. And then obviously, after that, we'll have a proper briefing call. You can't avoid

a briefing call. And I really don't like to speak because we won't do you won't do a briefing call. And I think it's important to do that. But I cannot filter through a lot of the dross before that conversation, you can know exactly what the product is that you're trying to say. Got it.

## Dealing With Price Objections

James Taylor 16:16

So so let's imagine we've got a client, maybe they're looking at two or three speakers. You've had a call with them. They're in you're in the kind of right kind of budget area. Maybe you've had a little briefing call with the speaker, and that client or the decision-maker from that client. Now it comes down to objections dealing with objections, what are the most common objections that you hear from clients as to why they shouldn't book, your particular speaker, the things that come with questions that come up the most,

Bob Strange 16:50

I suppose the key is always budget, James, it's always going to come down to money, a lot of the times, even if you've got them that far, that quite often we'll try and have that point in time. get you down a couple of grand that is always what's your budget is always going to be key to things. Other than that,

Bob Strange 17:15

what

Bob Strange 17:17

will be the difference.

James Taylor 17:19

So on that in the budget, so we're obviously in that we're in a land time of virtual just now as well.

Bob Strange 17:27

A few extras, if you think there's something appropriate that makes it helps get something over the line, you can offer you can we offer each person access to a little program for testing.

James Taylor 17:41

So basically, you're trying you try Nestle reduce the fee, but what you're doing is you're you're just trying to separate yourself out from maybe

Bob Strange 17:50

can do it that way. Or if there is an alternative, I mean, in the virtual world that we work in, it's quite good, because it's quite easy to come up with a slightly alternative product to see if you can go from doing a live stream to doing a pre-record, which has benefits for the speaker in terms of easier, less pressure, fewer time pressures, we can do it that way. Or you know, and so you can offer a pre-recorded or you can cut it right down to something, something that's not a 45-minute keynote to something that's a 20 minute, short, snappy, pre-recorded. You know, there are different ways, obviously,

James Taylor 18:33

so, so you're going back and forth, you're having a little conversation with the client there. Maybe they want your speaker, whoever your speaker is, there may be trying to haggle a little bit over the fees. You come to a deal. Okay, this is where half everyone's happy with this, everyone's content with this. I'm just wondering, like, okay, and they maybe go away. Okay, we're gonna have a think about it. How am I this is something I always, I think is very difficult for a speaker to do. Which someone like you like a closed open do or bureau agent can do much better, is like how to be persistent without being pushy, without kind of going over the line. I mean, how do you do that?

Bob Strange 19:17

Very difficult, as easy to quickly overstep. It's easy to send one too many emails away and the day, I just try to be as disciplined as I can, if I've got them to the stage where you are up against one other person, I will make awesome the other person that you need, make sure that they've got everything they need via a video clip or whatever. And then I'll just you just have to go away and leave it for a couple of days or leave it over the weekend. Try not pester the hell valley of them. But you know, give up two or three days and then passed on the hill.

James Taylor 19:56

I've heard of one. One beer agent, I've worked within the past. You She writes, all those kind of little reminder emails on a Friday, but she has a tool. I'm not sure which one tool she uses, but they don't get sent out until Sunday evening. Because she wants to be first in their inbox if they may be checking a lot people kind of go through

this their schedule on a Sunday night think what they've got in the coming week or first thing on a Monday morning. He said, I always want to be that in that inbox at that point. So that Oh, yeah, I need to call back the agent about that speaker.

Bob Strange 20:28

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, going right back to the very beginning of paddling and inquiry, you have to be quick. I don't think, we dealt with that. But at the beginning, if I get an inquiry, I would practically be stiff. If it was back to the days of fax machines or bought, I would be stealing. I got to deal with it quickly. But the deal. I mean, I like to, I like to get back an email from a client when thanks for the prompt response. I'm surprised that you know, wherever to play man is,

James Taylor 21:01

and it's hard now because you're dealing in all these different time zones all the time, especially with virtual, so you might be a speaker that's based in, you know, the east coast of America, but you're getting inquiries from Singapore, or from Dubai or something as well. But I know the thing, you know, the way we have our system set up working with you is for transparency for everyone. When an inquiry comes in on our website, it automatically sends you that inquiry, so you get that immediately. I get that another member of my team gets that as well. And, and sometimes like if it's really late at night, I might just ping you the send a little WhatsApp message. But usually, you're on it usually. Yeah, I've already seen it. Because it's going. Yeah, it's really quick. So on that process of being quick. Let's say the client has agreed, yes, I know we're going to take we want to go with this speaker talks about the process of the speed of to contract and to deposit and to invoice.



Bob Strange 22:02

I tend not to be involved in the invoicing side of the game. That's a bit of the game I think is better dealt with from somebody and accounts.

James Taylor 22:13

But you can only do it when you're thinking about the agreement, are you getting that client to pay that first deposit within? a signature or you know,

Bob Strange 22:23

anything else? That depends the timescale of the job doesn't make any sense. If we've got a short run-in or a half-decent on it if we've got a runner running over a couple of months, I want to get a deposit 14 days after about paperwork saying I wait to get back the paperwork to a client the same day, as they've said that we're going to go ahead I like to have Yeah, for most people what within the same day for the card, ideally with invoices attached, ready for payment, 14 days at the most that are for the deposit. And then I want the balance of the job paid. In an ideal world 30 days in advance of the job. I'm not waiting till after the job you pay me. That's absolutely key.

James Taylor 23:11

It always reminds me that the Chuck Berry, I'm not sure if you ever work I know you're obviously you had a long time working in the music industry before you ever got into the events in the speaker

industry. But I always talk with Chuck Berry that the reason he used to do that funny duck walk when he danced on stage and play is that that was a signal to the rest of the band that he'd been paid because you still put the cash in his socks. And that was a signal. We're being paid guys. So we're fine.

Bob Strange 23:40

Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, I've had my two rain days where I've just collected money from a promoter and I'm able to shake at the side of the stage so that as he goes, we could see that we've been paid. And then if you kick-off, and he gets

James Taylor 23:54

started, you just show fantastic. So if someone's listening to this just now and they say this sounds perfect. This is exactly what I need. Now we're starting to see gigs coming back inquiries come back in again. But you know, I'm writing this new book, or I've got this, I'm creating these online courses or Frankly, I just don't think I'm the best person to be selling myself anymore. And I've got maybe a member of the team but they're not. So that's not their strength. What's the best place for me to be to reach out to us they can maybe have a conversation about you being there closer.

Bob Strange 24:24

Start off with my LinkedIn profile. Start off on LinkedIn. Bob strange, the closer you will find me on my contact details. Are there. recommendations are there from feet because I've worked with clients that I've worked with so it's fairly conference comprehensive,

you will see that I've been doing it for a while. I can be reached via that.

James Taylor 24:47

Fantastic. Well, Bob, thank you so much for taking some time out today. I could hear your phone pinging and what's up, so that's always a good sign. That usually means that there are inquiries coming in. Yeah. Well, Bob, thank you so much. It's great to hear about your neck. Step on your own journey and your own kind of professional journey I wish you all the success obviously we're enjoying working together and you could doing a lot of closing a lot of deals for me and hopefully there's a lot of other people will be listening to this just now who you'd be perfect for to start working together and partnering up with. So thank you, Bob, thank you so much for coming on the show today for your time, James. Thanks

Bob Strange 25:19

very much