David Abrams: 00:00 Hello, hello and welcome to episode number 43 of the SaaS breakthrough show brought to you by Demio. The SaaS Breakthrough show will be an inside look at what is working in marketing for SaaS companies today by the marketers who are in the trenches experimenting on a daily basis to grow their MRR and build amazing businesses. My name is David Abrams and I'll be your host today as we bring on Maria Willoch, who is the VP of Sales and Marketing at the video creation platform VIBBIO. Now, Maria has spent her career in customer acquisition, the past five years in the video marketing space alone. Maria is passionate about inbound marketing, ABM and all things Martech and lives by the motto "track everything" and in this episode we talk about how to set proper expectations coming into a VP role in early stage SaaS company, how you should think of a Beta process to get feedback and how to actually get valuable feedback.

David Abrams: 01:01 The struggles to find your ICP early on, how not having an ad budget didn't deter the VIBBIO team at all from finding great growth strategies. There's a ton out there. There's a ton of channels that can work for you as well. The KPIs and the testing mentality needed to fail fast and find winning channels. It was an incredible episode and I was lucky enough to meet Maria and the VIBBIO team at SaaStock in Dublin. They have a great team out there. They had a great booth setup, really interesting episode from early stage to now acquisition phase of their company. We have a lot to talk about with Maria, so let's go ahead and let's jump right in.

Narrator: 01:49 This is the SaaS breakthrough podcast, uncovering what's working today in SaaS marketing by the actual SaaS marketers who are building companies day in and day out. Let's get started.

David Abrams: 02:06 Hey Maria, thanks so much for joining me today here on the SaaS breakthrough podcast. I'm excited to have you. I'm excited I got to meet you at SaaStock and how are you doing today?

Maria Willoch: 02:16 Yeah, I'm doing great and likewise. I was so happy to meet you guys. Thanks for having me.

David Abrams: 02:21 Yeah, really excited to have you here. Talk a little bit about VIBBIO. What you guys are doing, I think is really unique. Really powerful, but for our listeners who don't know yet, maybe explain a bit about the company, when it was founded, who your customers are, maybe ACV and what'd you guys are doing uniquely in the market place?

Maria Willoch: 02:39 Definitely. So VIBBIO was founded in January of 2016. We're getting, getting to a certain age actually, was founded on the idea that a video is going to become a huge trend for marketeers and that's going to be painful. So Marianne, our founder sat down and tried to figure out there must be some, some clever way to make this easier. And where we are today. We launched our video creation platform as Beta back in October of last year and then first full version on February of this year. That is a SaaS platform that helps businesses create video without the hassle of editing. We sell to the larger end of the SMB market and the lower end of the SMB market and our current ACV is around 13,000 USD.

David Abrams: 03:38 That's awesome. So sounds like it took you guys also some time to build the platform out. Actually, when did you join the team? Were you there when the product was already done or were you coming in before the product?

Maria Willoch: 03:47 I came in just before the product was about to launch full version, I joined around the new year, 2017/18, so they had already been through a few iterations with Beta customers. Lucky enough to be able to be part of that last journey which was really, really interesting. Yeah, definitely did take some time and it took a few tries to, to actually get to

product market fits. Which I think for a lot of people, right. And I think what the team had been doing really well before I came in and what we're still, I think doing pretty well is we are very good at going out and actually testing things and taking them down quickly if we see that they don't work.

David Abrams: 04:29   Marketers' dream testing and experimentation. When you first come in and you're coming into an early stage product that's about to come out, maybe go into that Beta version, you got some customers. What are the expectations of you as VP sales and marketing?

Maria Willoch: 04:45   Well, they're obviously really, really high, which is a kind of daunting perspective and I think especially coming in to a company where so VIBBIO had a lot of tech people and people who had done a lot of traditional marketing and we're really good at things like branding, corporate side of things. And so there, there was a huge implication to me to kind of take everything and just run with it and get results really quickly. I think what was important to me coming in was being really clear that I am going to take my time getting a data baseline for everything that we do. I'm really upfront on the fact that I'm going to need three to six months to experiment and to figure things out. And that was, I think that that's been important for the success that we've had and I've had so far as actually doing that instead of just running on full speed and frankly do something that doesn't scale.

David Abrams: 05:42   That's really interesting. Good feedback. I think for a lot of marketers joining a team, it's easy just to jump in with both feet. So this is what we're going to do. But it sounds like you kind of set expectations to start with and how you're going to do, talked first, then you were able to kind of take the time to do it. So it sounds like your major goal first coming in was achieving that product market fit. Like you said, probably the founders were already working on that, some of those traditional marketers, like you said, but maybe talk a bit about how you use that really beta period, the Beta paid customers to validate product market fit, maybe even how you acquired some of those customers. I think a lot of people struggle to bring in those Beta customers when they're first starting their Beta process.

Maria Willoch: 06:24   Yeah, definitely. I think a really important thing for me, in any kind of process where you're just starting out is finding this interesting balance between we want to get to a process that is scalable but on the way there we might need to do some things that don't necessarily scale. So when it came to actually getting Beta customers, it was super old fashioned legwork. It was actually identifying companies that we figured could be an interesting fit, contacting them, basically cold emailing them saying, hi guys, we have this interesting thing. We think there could be cool match for you guys, you know, let's set up a chat. And, and that worked really well for the first few ones. So once we got them and obviously through feedback from them we spent. So just before I joined the team, they had, they were done with her first round of Beta testings. We were heading into the second one. So I had a pretty good baseline on or at least the beginning of a baseline for, for what, what, what is our ICP potentially going to look like. And then it was something about going out and talking to people and getting them to test stuff and go from there.

David Abrams: 07:35   Ok so you doing that cold reachout to who you expected it to be. So you just kind of made some assumptions, email them. The question that I was going to ask is once you have them, how do you get those people to actually utilize the product, learn from them, get feedback from them? I remember when we did Beta, we had almost a thousand people in our Beta program and a lot of them came in for free and didn't use the product. How did you guys actually get like real good quality feedback from them and actually have them utilize the product? You're doing it together? Are you giving them better guidelines, more education? What does that look like?

Maria Willoch: 08:13   Two major success factors that I see, looking back on that. Number one, we didn't have a free Beta, we actually had a paid

Beta and they paid, not our current ACV, but they still paid a fairly significant sum, which meant that they did have a commit to actually get their money's worth out of the product. And then second part is what you were mentioning. We did give them a rather extended onboarding run, which meant that we gave them a lot of extra training, a lot of extra follow up. We help them up with workshops and getting alignment from their teams, which I think looking back worked really, really well because I've meant that we were able to get several stakeholders and the result of that is that out of the 10 paying customers that we got through the Beta phase nine are still or have renewed on actual kind of full platform terms.

David Abrams: 09:10   That's amazing. That's awesome. That's 90 percent Beta to paid success right there. And what about the ICP? So as you're coming out of Beta and you're collecting this data, you have 10 Beta paid users, you're learning about them, you're talking to them, you're going out and having conversations. What are you starting to realize who that ICP is and how are you collecting the data? Like what is, what is creating the ideal customer versus just a customer?

Maria Willoch: 09:35   Yeah, that's a really interesting question. I'm not going to pretend to have all the answers, but I can definitely say a few things on how we did it. I think for me it was a combination of, obviously coming in and looking at these customers and try, number one is always, you know, what kind, what factors can we find here that these nine or 10 customers have in common? Are there any identifying factors that we can move on from. That being said though, it was also important to me to simply go out into the market and talk to people. So I joined a lot of different forums. I joined a lot of different Linkedin groups trying to just kind of asking people open questions saying, you know, is this something that's interesting to you? Not in a salesy way at all, but just in gathering info. And that led me to having a few of, you know, the kinds of, of kind of sales meetings where you say, you know, I'm not going to sell you my product, I just like to show it to you and get your feedback. And that gave me a pretty interesting baseline for what types of companies actually responded to different parts of the platform and to different parts were offering. And then we went from there and we just kind of plunked everything into a huge spreadsheet and started trying to organize it around, So because it was really, really important for us to, to get a lot of data on these. So an example of an assumption that I had going in, I had an assumption, on, you know, size of company that would be (inaudible) for us and specifically when it comes to their revenue, I had a huge assumption that that was going to be a leading factor for us when it turned out that it didn't. One factor that has turned out to be really important however, is the ratio between their marketing budget and their marketing team, a very important factor and RSVP is that they tend to have marketing budgets on the larger side, but the team is actually on the smaller side, meaning that they are low on resources but high on funds.

David Abrams: 11:35   Efficiency would be the winning sales proposition there.

Maria Willoch: 11:38   Exactly.

David Abrams: 11:40   That's awesome. So looking at that stuff, so you start to understand like, you know, this is who they are, how does that translate to identifying them in a marketplace that's full of so many B2B companies and then how do you actually use channels to find those people?

Maria Willoch: 11:57   It's really hard. I can tell you that. There's a lot of people out there trying to crack this code. I think for us it was a lot about, first of all, yeah, digging into different forums and as part of that, so once we kind of got our ICP more and more identified, we realized as a lot of other companies are doing that, one of the major identifiers that we can use as what other marketing tech are actually using and a huge part of our roadmap is hopefully kind of plunking ourselves onto the rest of that, of that

tech stack. So that meant that we started, once we kind of got up and running a little bit, we actually doing targeted marketing. We started targeting pretty heavily on, on groups and audiences that were discussing or using or hanging out in places where you know, typically these, these other marketing tactics were discussed, were being utilized, which gave us some, some pretty, pretty interesting results. Another interesting thing was that we, in the beginning when we started doing this, we started trying to hang out a lot in Facebook groups typically for marketeers and kind of going in when we saw the engagement that we were getting there, we thought yes, we've struck gold, but then a month and it turns up and we're getting absolutely no business from that. So it's an interesting test for us and obviously made us move, move on pretty quickly to, to other channels.

David Abrams: 13:19   So definitely was able to see where you are getting direct ROI from versus interest without ROI, which is two very big things, very different things I should say. So you're starting to gather the stuff. You're starting to see some channels. You're coming out of the Beta launch. What experiments did you actually start running after those initial ones? The Facebook groups? Did you go into advertising? What are you doing to try to now narrow this down farther?

New Speaker: 13:48   So (inaudible) ad wise, we're only just getting started. Mainly because our budgets haven't been huge. So the main focus, I still kind of going in, I had the budget to hire one person and I had one person internally that I can kind of move around. So I had this one girl that was hired and she had been with the team from pretty early. She started as an intern and turns out she's really amazing at creating content. She's a great writer so I kind of repurposed her and said, okay, we need to start turning on content, blogging possibly, we need to start using ebooks, we need to start doing webinars. And then I spent my budget on actually hiring, I called the role of traffic monitor, but I made it very clear to the people that initially right now I'm really looking for someone who can just hack traffic because we don't really have the budget to drive traffic from, from ads. So I found a really interesting profile, like experimented a lot before. She's young, she's hungry, I'm really good at figuring stuff out and the two of them have turned into this awesome super team. At just kind of testing and see what works. So one thing that they really experimented a lot with has been actually doing dated video content. So as opposed to doing a downloadable ebook, Ashley doing kind of longer how to use tips and tricks, stuff like that, but in video format, and then flunking those down. Or flucking teasers for those down, into different relevant foruns, in different channels, actually driving traffic and conversions to our website based on that. So that's an example of something we started testing that we quickly quickly figured out that worked really well for us.

David Abrams: 15:27   That's really interesting. So you've really tried to find ways to bring in the free traffic from forums, groups, networks, bringing them in by, attracting them through some interesting piece of content to a gated video, bringing them that lead in. And then what are you doing a nurture sequence to them? Some type of email sequence afterwards. Are you moving them to an educational training? What does that look like?

Maria Willoch: 15:48   Yeah, no, definitely. So we have a pretty extensive nurturing setup, this is something I can talk about this part for hours. To me, it's been really really important to do good nurture from the get go. So one of my huge pet peeves, I'm obviously, I knew, I poke around a lot of tools and one of my pet peeves is when I'm really feeling that someone is sending me completely the wrong content at where I'm in the funnel, so we have a pretty complex nurture setup, which means that we can kind of direct people into content that is hopefully right for exactly where they are in their kind of journey into discovering video creation. So we combine nurture flows with pretty heavy lead scoring setup, which means that we are able to pinpoint pretty well what we should be sending you at this point. And then on top of that we have added quite a few human checkpoints. So every time someone moves to a certain point in the nurture flow, a human will be ping. That human doesn't necessarily

need to do something. And those humans, are typically a BDR in our sales team and he or she will just look it over the seat. Okay. As this person you know, are they actually getting different content, have they actually come to space right now where it makes sense for us to do a reachout or makes sense for us to maybe not do a personalized reachout, but to pull them out into more personalized plan, stuff like that, it's been really important.

David Abrams: 17:13   What system are you using to do all that?

Maria Willoch: 17:15   So we run on we're fairly Hubspot centric right now. So yeah. And then a few addons and right now also still a lot of Excel sheets to be honest.

David Abrams: 17:27   That's amazing. I think that's a really good system and set up. I think a lot of people, especially early on focus on traffic generation, number one, acquisition number two and nurture campaigns it's like the last thing to look at. It sounds like you put a lot of time and focus into nurturing the leads that you get to make them very quality leads. So you're leading a lot with education through that nurture sequence. Mostly education all throughout?

Maria Willoch: 17:52   Yeah. There are two main reasons for that. Number one is that, you know, we tested a few things and that's what resonates with our leads and number two is that we exist in a space where, so video creation platforms that necessarily something that everyone knows exists. We need to kind of bring them through this kind of educational flow of know everyone or mostly everyone these days agree that video is a big thing and we need to be using it. But a lot of people are (inaudible) thinking video is going to be big, it's going to be scary. I need an agency, I can't film myself. So we have all these different educational thoughts so we want to take them through to get them into the right mindset to look at our platform.

David Abrams: 18:36   Gotcha. That makes a lot of sense. Yeah, definitely. So when you're opening up in a very, I guess, complex product or an industry that has a new type of tool in it, this becomes an extremely important part of that nurture sequence. And so it sounds like you spend a lot of time generating the right leads based on that ICP and you're creating this very specific content to drive the right leads. What kind of guidelines or insights would you give to marketers wanting to do that type of inbound? Any lessons learned? Maybe even some of your ABM approaches to it?

Maria Willoch: 19:08   Definitely one of, one of the major things is, it's kind of what I touched on before. I think a lot of marketers, especially when we sit down to do kind of an inbound-ABM approach, we make a lot of assumptions when it comes to the customer journey. If you sit down and Google customer journey templates, you get all these amazing, beautiful pdfs with all this beautiful design when, when a customer journey is a working tool because it changes all the time. And so what a lot of us end up and I've been there before, I've been in a situation where I realized that I'm trying to force my customers through a journey that I'm assuming that they're on and I'm not adapting to the journey that they are actually on. So that's been a huge focus for us and actually iterated that all the time, checking in on, you know, our nurture flows on a weekly basis and seeing, do these make sense. So that's the first thing I think, second part is you know, try to be as personal as possible. So account based, as you know, it's been a huge buzzword for the past few years and I think a lot of people feel a little bit scared or intimidated by it, but remember that account base is simply about identifying the name of the account you're going after. That's the baseline for it. Then obviously there are lot of things you can do on top of that, but account based to me has also become this really good way of making sure that the marketing and sales team are aligned. That we actually sit down together and say, okay, who are we actually going after? What are the name accounts that we want in our pipeline? And then, and that's a great starting point to start to create good content, to start to create good nurture flows and to make sure that those two teams actually work together.

David Abrams: 20:44   I love that. That's really awesome. And you mentioned prior that you have this customer journey kind of outline that you'd go through weekly. Obviously it's great to do that so often you're continually now updating. It's kind of a new system that you have. Do you see that you have multiple customer journeys and how do you prevent yourself from getting overwhelmed because you could have so many different customer journeys from the same ICP? How are you able to handle that or kind of paint that dynamic picture even if it's always changing?

Maria Willoch: 21:15   So it is fairly overwhelming and it's something that I, myself spent a lot of my time on right now because I really believe is important. At this point in time, obviously as you're saying we spent a lot of time on right now because we're still fairly new and some of this is going to settle once we, you kind of drawn up a few paths. But I mean my, my best answer to that and kind of one of my best tips for someone, even if you're starting out is consider hiring someone full time to do that stuff, that person is typically called sales operations or marketing operations or both. And it's an invaluable hire. Is my next one, and I have a team of five because I truly, truly, truly believe that that part is going to be even more important going forward. And that's also for a second reason. It's mainly when you, when you, and this is both has to do with my space, but I think it has to do with all of us who accessed in the lead gen demand, gen digital marketing space, is that there's been this kind of journey over the past few years where everything has become very automated and very personal wise, which I think is awesome, but I do believe that we are going direction where we're going to see a counter reaction to that. There's a certain personalization creepy scale that we need to counteract and need to counteract that with being personal in a different way. Not being personal by saying, Hey, look at everything I know about you, but by actually being so, so, so much better at delivering relevant and valuable content and to do that, you actually need a person full time who just looks at this stuff and make sure it works.

David Abrams: 22:47   Is that a data person? Is that like a data engineer or is that specifically someone who's just researching inside of the industry?

Maria Willoch: 22:55   I think the person or the profile can look a little bit different from company to company, but the ones I've seen, I haven't seen it that many of them yet, but the ones I've seen that work really well, have either come from kind of an engineering background and maybe gone via product marketing to kind of get that mindset. It can also be someone who has a background in sales and digital marketing, but who has really analytical mind. Needs to hone your CRM, hone your marketing automation system and all the processes within it, hone to being kind of your go to research person to get an overview of what's happening.

David Abrams: 23:31   Got It. Makes a ton of sense and I love the advice. It's really, really true and something I totally believe as well. Now mentioning data and all this stuff and mentioning the tests that you guys are running, all of these channels. You said you move quickly on your experiments and you wind them quickly. What kind of KPI's are you looking at? How do you determine a failed test quickly to shut that off?

Maria Willoch: 23:54   Our North Star will always be two things, how many leads did we convert from this channel? So how many people go from unknown potential leads to known leads where we have their email under their consent to marketing to them and second, from there of those leads, how many of those actually convert into customers? So the converting into customers part doesn't really work that well for us for killing stuff quickly, because our (inaudible) kind of larger end of the SMB marketing sales cycle is up to a month. Right now it has been typically about pipeline creation and number of converted leads and then obviously there are a lot of kind of stuff things under there. But that's, that's the main one we're looking at.

David Abrams: 24:31   Do you guys have, I guess you're not really doing paid advertising, but you do have marketing budget time spent by your marketers. Do you utilize that to try to say, hey, we want to have leads under x amount of dollar or is it just quantity of leads?

Maria Willoch: 24:47   Right now is quantity of leads bit it's something that we will be changing probably early next year, but right now it's been about focus and about getting quantity of leads and then obviously looking at the quality of those leads. So end of year for us it's going to be really interesting because at that point we will also have enough data on which have actually been driving customers one, it's gonna be interesting to see.

David Abrams: 25:10   That'll be the moment of truth for sure. And so I guess looking forward towards the end of the year, which is crazy to say we only have about a month and a half left of the year. Insane. Outside of the personalization and the changes happening and what you think, like the nurturing and how we're going to be. moving leads through through our CRM is in the future, what other challenges or opportunities are you excited for looking forward from a marketing perspective?

Maria Willoch: 25:34   That's a great question. I'm really excited about, just a lot of really interesting tech happening right now and which is going to hopefully give us even better ideas of how we are feeding hopefully valuable content to our customers. I'm really excited about a lot of the tracking opportunities that are emerging. That also kind of feeds into what I was talking about earlier. The whole, I think the major trend that we need to look out for as we need to personalize, but we need to personalize in the right way. We need to move away from, and it might be surprising to a lot of marketers, but I still talk to a lot of people who still believe that when we talk about personalization, we talk about putting in, Hey Marie, I see that you guys are doing one cool video at Vibbio. That's not really what we're talking about. We need to move from personalization on kind of a name info to a personalization on a content level.

David Abrams: 26:33   Absolutely. I think of companies like Clearbit really kind of pushing us in that direction. The more information. I know you said you want to have that balance between like the creepy factor and like what we know about you, but the tools that help us just get more data about us so that we can give you the right information at the right time. So a lot of exciting stuff coming down the pipeline and I can only imagine what amazing marketers are going to be able to do with that type of information. But that was awesome. So I want to switch from those questions into our lightning round questions. Just five quick questions and you can answer with the best possible answer that first thought that comes to your mind. It's a ton of fun. You ready to get started? Alright, let's do it. What advice do you have for early stage SaaS companies starting today?

Maria Willoch: 27:18   Enable everyone to test.

David Abrams: 27:20   Nice. Creating that culture of testing,

Maria Willoch: 27:23   A culture of testing and making clear for your team from the get go that no ideas are bad ideas. We need data so go out and test. If we don't have data find data and if it's not working end it quickly.

David Abrams: 27:38   I really love that. That's a really, really great piece of advice. What skill do you think is vital for marketing teams to improve and build on today?

Maria Willoch: 27:46   Well, that's a tough one. I definitely think marketers need to become even more tech savvy. There's so much happening in our space. There's, you know, we need to stay on top of things and we need to get

even better on utilizing tools that are available to us.

David Abrams: 28:00   Yeah, that's definitely research too in the marketplace. What is available, what can we do and that continuous search for those new things. What about a best educational resource you'd recommend for learning about marketing or growth?

Maria Willoch: 28:14   I find myself going back to the Growth hackers blog. They really help you stay on top of things and giving you ideas.

David Abrams: 28:23   Yeah. I love that. That network, that whole community there is fantastic. What about a favorite tool you can't live without these days?

Maria Willoch: 28:30   Well, you mentioned it already, Clearbit. I love those guys.

David Abrams: 28:36   Yeah. So helpful. And a lot of tools are being really smart right now. Integrating Clearbit into their platform so you don't have to go out and have that third party connection. Go ahead. Sorry. Didn't mean to cut you off.

Maria Willoch: 28:47   No, just saying loving integrations.

David Abrams: 28:50   Yeah. Integrations have, I mean this is the new world of marketing. All of these integrations are going to be amazing in the future. What about a brand business or a team that you admire today?

Maria Willoch: 29:01   Well, these guys aren't really small anymore, but I can't get away from Intercom. Their content team especially does such an amazing job. Yeah. It's a website or content, the way they present that to you, it's, it's really, really amazing.

David Abrams: 29:20   We're huge fans of them as well. Their ethical standpoints, their content, like you said, their brand, their transparency, everything is just so spot on. It's so good. So what a great example. If you guys haven't seen their brand, definitely check out Intercom. Otherwise, I just want to say, Maria, thank you so much for your time today. For being so transparent, sharing the journey. I think we learned a ton of great information about what works and kind of the cultural things that you need in your marketing department, especially early on. So just to really appreciate your time today.

New Speaker: 29:52   Thank you. And thank you so much for having me.

New Speaker: 29:54   It was a real pleasure and I look forward to speaking to you again soon.

Maria Willoch: 29:58   Likewise.

David Abrams: 29:59   A huge thank you to Maria and the entire Vibbio team. They are working hard over there to create a really special video marketing SaaS platform. Highly recommend you go check out the website, see what they're doing. I watched a demo of the product over at SaaStock that it was really, really interesting how they've set it up, how they positioned it and what the product actually does for marketing teams. Now, if you have any other questions or thoughts, we'd love to hear from you.

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