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How Good is Your Digital Footprint?

Guest was Kristin Zhivago

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How Good is Your Digital Footprint?

Note: This is a transcription of an interview. It has not gone through a professional editing process and may contain grammatical errors or incorrect formatting.

Transcription of Interview

Joe: *Welcome everyone. This is Joe Dager, the host of the Business901 Podcast. With me today is Kristin Zhivago. She is the co-founder of Cloud Potential and the Cloud Era Institute and has spent decades as a revenue coach in the tech industry, helping CEOs and entrepreneurs grow their companies. Kristin, I would like to welcome you and surprisingly, after arranging the podcast, I was reminded you were the author of 'Roadmap to Revenue' which happens to be one of the first Kindle books I think I purchased.*

Kristin: *Well, that's great.*

Joe: *That message was all about making it easier for the customer to buy. Is that message still aligned with what you're doing today?*

Kristin: *Yes, I haven't stopped trying to help people sell the way their customers want to buy. It has just gotten even more important in fact since I wrote the book. And the book, it's an evergreen book in the sense that it teaches you how to interview your customers in a way that you'll get the most benefit from it, understand what they're really thinking when they're trying to buy your type of product.*

I have an interviewing method that I've worked out over thousands of interviews, and I'd give away the whole method, down to... you know, everything, you do the email, you send out, how you approach them, how you do the interviews, the questions you ask which I've worked out over all those interviews, it's a good starting point for helping you understand how they buy your product, and it's never what you think.

Joe: *I always thought it was very practical, and I've always kept it around and used it, so it's always kind of on my tablet, on my Kindle, rather than be it back in my library somewhere. But not to downplay the book but a lot of people can tell me what to do with a customer, but the problem today is I think focusing on getting that customer in the first place.*

Kristin: Yes, that's definitely true. It's all tied together actually. In fact, what's happening now, I'd say over the last year and a half or two years, having been on the digital side of things for years and years, I think Google has become even more important. Google is now the gatekeeper to your customer and in fact, Google has the customer's best interest in mind. If Google doesn't serve up what the customer is looking for as efficiently as possible, Google wouldn't be number one. The reason they stay number one is because they keep focusing on that.

Google wants what your customers want, so in a sense, they're an extension of or a view into your customer base. If you take that seriously, then you can really work with Google and give them what they need, give Google what it needs so that people can find you when they're looking for you and have the right idea. You need to give Google a whole, good

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solid picture of what you sell and who you are your whole identity. People don't really look at it that way. It's just not search engine optimization; it's having Google come to your site or look at what people are searching for, look at your content, look at your title tags, there are a whole lot of things that you can do that will feed Google the information it wants, so it's not confused or disappointed. Like if your domain authority is really low or your bounce rate is really high. Google just says, "Hmm, I don't think I'll put them on top." I guess the bottom line for that is, if Google isn't seeing you or presenting you, then you're invisible these days.

Joe: *It's not enough to know my customer even. I better know Google very well.*

Kristin: Yeah. Well, you need to know what Google represents. In other words, what the customers are looking for and there are enough tools now on the web, up in the Cloud where you really can see what you need to see about the customer and the competition, exactly what your competitors are doing, what keywords they're using, what back links they have linking into their site. I mean, it's just amazing how transparent it has all become now. So you can see all of that, and there are best practices that apply to what Google looks for, and it's really a system. It's not magic. It's not Tuesday it's this way and Thursday it's that way even though they change their algorithms like 500 times a year, literally and yes, you can get sideswiped by that. But overall, there are best practices and if you follow them, you're going to be way ahead of probably 90% of your competition, because most people don't.

Joe: *Well, what's the mistake? I think there are two different people. There's one that is*

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a step behind, just starting to develop an online presence still. I mean, they have one, but it's been kind of that brochure style thing that they're starting to get into social media and doing some things. Then there are the other ones that have been real active. What's the starting point? How do I start getting better? Do I just start with SEO, SMO?

Kristin: What we've discovered and what we've done over the last year and a half is we've investigated 28 different industries and more all the time, but at the moment it's up to 28, and what we're doing is we're looking at the leaders, the people that are winning and getting the most traffic and the most customers, the most conversions which are sales basically. Sometimes you can measure a conversion by a download or whatever, but the revenue is there, and I'm a revenue coach, that's what I care about is revenue. We looked at the people who have been doing the best job, and we discovered that they share best practices in common, and it turns out those best practices fall into six separate areas, and this is held true all the way down. We're doing digital impact appraisal for people, for companies, where we come in, and we examine their digital footprint and their influence compared to their competition, and we look at their competitors as well and see how well they're serving people in these six areas.

The six areas are how well are they serving their customers, are customers looking for them, are they showing up when they come, how many of them are finding them for their keywords that Google says, "Oh, this company, I'll display these keywords for them..." There're customers; there's search, there's paid search which actually can be profitable if you do it right, there's a good solid look at the conversion rate and what you're getting out of your investment, there's the whole competitive analysis, and then there's technology. If

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you don't get the technical part right, if your site's too slow or you're not serving up mobile properly, Google is going to penalize you for that and drop you down in the rankings.

Again, those areas are the customers, search, paid search, conversion, competitors and technology, we look at all of those and come back with basically a report card and say, look, you're strong over here but weak over there and what we have found is your Website is all of those things. If you're not getting those things right, your Website is not going to be effective. We just help people however they need it. We either get involved by doing some work or we teach their people how to do it and to fill in those blanks, because if one of those is weak, the whole thing gets thrown off.

Joe: *Is there an immediate payback? I mean, do I get an ROI on this immediately? How do I recognize that?*

Kristin: It depends. Everything is based on accountability. We measure everything. Everything we do is based on facts, and these are third-party, out there on the Web, look at tools that you can use that will tell you right up, okay, this is how many times you're found for this word, and these are the types of people looking for you and here's where they're located. It's all factual. Everything we do is factual. If we help you improve your speed, sometimes we'll end up doing our best practice as a service, for the smaller companies, and we'll just come in and fix all that stuff that's broken.

I should say that one of the things we look at is a mix, the actual mix of lead generating success that people have had in their competitive market, and it's always a mix of search

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and social and direct links into their site and referral of some sort – I think there's one other. In any case, we look at that mix, and we see how well they're doing, and one of the things we've noticed by the way is most companies with the exception of presidential elections and things like that are not really getting a lead benefit from social. What's happening now is people running around, most of our clients are small or midsized companies that have a Website, beyond a brochure, they've elevated at least beyond the brochure type and they just keep redoing it and redoing it and redoing it, without understanding, without this baseline of understanding where they really are and where they really stand out there in comparison to their real operating environment, as far as the customers see them and as far as competitors.

They often don't realize how transparent it all has become so that if you're doing AdWords for example, anyone can now see exactly which ads you're running, how often they end up in the number one position, how much you've spent, how long you ran the ad, what the ad actually says... I mean and so they don't just realize how competitive this has all become.

Joe: *You hit two really good points there, and the competitiveness of it is very true because I mean, you go to a Website now and you look at something, or you sign up for something, and that trails you for two or three weeks. Every ad, every... I mean, I don't bookmark anything anymore because there's an auto-bookmark procedure on the Web. Is there truth to that?*

Kristin: Yes, that's remarketing and yes, the only problem with it is that it often trails you after you've bought. Let's say you bought something the one time, that's it, you're done. It

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can also trail you when you've bought something that you would never buy again, like diapers for your new niece's baby or something, or your niece's new baby I should say.

Joe: *You're talking about that you work with some small companies. How does a small company compete in this competitive world?*

Kristin: Well, it's interesting because when we have looked at all of those industries and looked at the leaders, there're about three to five people in any industry that are just leading the pack. What we found is that there are in fact best practices and if you follow them, and some of it are really basic stuff, like meta descriptions... Okay, when you do a search in Google, there's the blue link at the top, the big sort of blue headline link at the beginning of the little search result and then there's a link, and then there's some black text. That black text is the meta description. Google doesn't pick which text unless you don't give them a meta description. If you leave the meta description black for a page, Google will just pick whatever from your site, which isn't good because that's when your sales start.

That moment when people are looking in search because most of searching, even b to b buyers, something like 94% of them go to the Web first and search, you really have to pay attention to that detail. What's in that black text, those two lines of black text. It's 160 characters and with a tool like Yoast, which is a plug-in for WordPress, you can actually make good meta descriptions that include your focus keyword and help Google say, "Yeah, these people really have it together, and when we go to their landing page, everything looks right..." People aren't even doing that and so again, if you start the best practices,

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and you do those basics, those foundational basics, you're going to be way ahead of all those other competitors who haven't got a clue, and there're lots and lots of those.

Joe: *I need sales. I need to put groceries on the table tomorrow. Can I wait for all this to develop? I mean, are there still a place for cold calls and cold emails or is that kind of just out the window now?*

Kristin: Let's put it this way, I've never liked cold calls. They call them cold for a reason. They don't work very well, and it's the old problem of running up to someone on the street and say, hi my name is Joe, will you marry me. It doesn't work. There are situations where you can call people, but for another reason, get to know them and then suddenly, you're not cold calling anymore. There's a lot of that that can be done and people don't do that very well. They don't think it through about the human being on the other side of the phone and the fact that you've just interrupted their busy day. People don't like phone calls as much as they used to. They'd much rather get an email or chat.

My point is, you can do all that outreach but if the bulk of your customers are coming to your site anyway, why not make it easy? Why not put chat on your site, which is really easy to do now and make it so that someone knowledgeable is ready to answer any questions. People are much more, especially the millennials now, are much more likely to chat than they are to talk on the phone. There's a lot of things open to you that you could start doing tomorrow, like your meta descriptions, that would, at least, make better use of what you are already doing.

Joe: *That's a great point. There are still ways to give people the opportunity to talk to you. They're just different rather than taking a cold call or taking a cold email or something, right?*

Kristin: Do you want to get a cold call? When a sales person calls you, are they doing it right or they're just sort of calling you out of the blue and they don't really know who you are, and is it disrespectful because they don't really understand... I mean, how often does that actually work? It really doesn't.

Joe: *You could probably say how many times have I purchased from anyone that has cold called me in the past year and how many times have I purchased from anyone that I found on searching Google. There's a difference.*

Kristin: That's right, and it also depends on the scrutiny. What I talk about in my book about the light scrutiny, medium scrutiny, heavy scrutiny, and intense scrutiny types of sales. Light scrutiny is an impulse purchase, and intense scrutiny is all the way up to getting married, consulting services, big projects, millions of dollars and that kind of thing. Each one of those scrutiny levels has a different buying process and questions that are asked and people that are involved.

In the light scrutiny area, you can ask two questions and buy it. In the intense or heavy scrutiny areas, there are contracts, there are proposals, there're 200 questions. That's another thing people need to understand about what they're selling and how to make it easy for someone to buy from you. Nobody's even close to doing that. I mean the only

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company that really gets it right every time is Amazon so far.

Joe: *What does Cloud Potential, your company, do? Can you give me the elevator speech?*

Kristin: Sure. What we do is the digital impact appraisal which I told you about, and we don't really want to help anybody without doing that because it's our way of making sure we've seen the whole picture because we want to give them the balanced view. And you know, a lot of times, every company does a few things right and there are some medium-sized companies for example that might have a really good SEO person on staff or a good content writer or something, so they're doing some things right, but they're missing on the others, and it's just dragging the whole effort down.

Once we do that appraisal, and we come back, and it's like a two and a half hour meeting, believe it or not, but nobody gets bored because we're really showing them what they look like to everybody else, so it's really interesting to them. Then in this long report that we go through together and it's all charts and graphs, and then we recommend, and we say, okay, these are your strengths and your weaknesses, these are the things you'll need to do to immediately... like maybe there's a speed problem on the site, that's one of those instant things that you can fix to raise your rankings, and then we just start helping and again, we're not always the ones to do the work.

We're happy to have in-house people to do the work and just do some training. We can do a little recruiting if need be, to bring some people to it. Sometimes for the smaller

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companies, they just say do it, just do it and we just keep working with them and it's a very intense relationship because we need information and content for them. We can provide writers to generate content for them. We basically get a machine going, a revenue machine based on the whole digital side of things and making sure it works.

Joe: *What I understand is that that planning process, and I'm kind of a Lean guy, so I think of PDCA and plan-do-check-act and things, but that planning we always talked about needed to be let's say 50% of the equation. But what you're saying, that kind of developing that current state, doing that report card, doing those things are critical before you take the next step because going to work on SEO, it has to complement the other five things you talked about there, it's all intertwined.*

Kristin: Yes, it's all intertwined, and I'll tell you a very quick story. We have a client who was doing a great job on getting paid clicks. They had a paid for click company that they were paying per click, and so that company was really interested in getting a lot of clicks coming in, and they did. This company was selling a \$3000 item that you can buy, by the same name – I won't say what the name is because I don't want to give away the client – but by the same name, you can buy a \$100 version of that type of product for your garden hose or something.

It's the same kind of thing but one of them, my client was selling a \$3000 version for research and development guys in big companies, and they have other products by the same name that other people sell that are much cheaper. The pay per click people were doing the ads so you couldn't tell which was which. You couldn't tell that this client stuff

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was the \$3000 version that the other people wouldn't buy. They would click over, come to the site, see that it was not the garden hose thing they were looking for and click away. Their bounce rate was like 74%. Anything over 50% on a bounce rate is not good. So Google was looking at that and saying, "Oh man, these people, nobody likes their site so I'm not going to put them up as high on the rankings, and I'm going to start charging them more for their clicks." So the more they got coming in, the more it was hurting them, revenue wise and otherwise and lowering their ability to attract appropriate customers. So that's the kind of thing that can really mess you up.

Joe: *I actually need to do it in some type of sequence and really prove those assumptions I have and each of those logical steps let's say of the funnel.*

Kristin: Yes, there's no shortcut for this. The internet is going to affect your revenue one way or the other. It's already affecting you now. Google is already searching you, putting you up, customers are looking for you. All that stuff is going on with you or without you. If they come and they don't see what they're supposed to and you kind of interrupt their buying process because the landing page isn't a clear path, it's too confusing, you've got all this 'about us' stuff instead of 'here, buy this,' it's not a straight thing and not a straight path , then you're just hurting yourself.

Joe: *Google is the main person we have to address but the other places, the Bing, the Yahoo, is there big differences or should I just look at what Google's doing and the other ones fall into place with the other search engines?*

Kristin: Well, I don't remember the exact statistic. I just saw it recently, but something like 90% of the searches are still done on Google. And again, don't quote me; I should look it up and have it in my head, but they're still the number one big Kahuna search engine, and I don't see that changing anytime soon. The other guys are there, fine but most people use Google, so you have to go where the market is.

Joe: *I don't know what that number is, but I know it's big. People are a lot worried about security and personal identity now, and they seem to be, but they still give all their life data to Google. Is that something that is on the horizon that we need to be aware of and planning for? Is there a change within the marketplace, taking place at all?*

Kristin: By the way, I just looked it up, it's 80%. Google is 80, Yahoo is 9.5, Bing is 8.5, and others are 2%. So, there's your answer. It's kind of an odd question to answer. There are so many facets to security and I do think that like there's Dashlane now for your password, and there're layers of security that are coming up to meet the market need, but those bad guys are getting better and better at what they do. So, that's a tough question to answer. I don't have a good answer to that one yet.

Joe: *Where I'm at is that I'm trying to prevent maybe search engines from finding out so much about me. Do you think people are worried about that, or they have embraced technology so far?*

Kristin: I know what you're saying, and I don't think people are as worried about it. here's what I think... When people are working with organizations that they trust, and

Google looks at that too by the way. Your domain authority is partly based on whom you hang out with. Who's linking into you determines part of what Google thinks about your reputation as a vendor and as a good citizen out there in the Cyber world? I think once you started doing business with a reputable business, you just feel like they're not going to take... think of how many companies have our credit card information and it's shocking to me how little we're up against fraud and things like that. The nice thing about capitalism is that people step up to the plate for their own sake, to protect their own reputation. They take steps to make sure that your data is secure. Is it perfect? No.

Joe: *I think you make a great point there because I mean, how many times do you buy on Amazon for an example, because it's Amazon. You know you are taken care of, you got ways to communicate, and you get it in two days or a day.*

Kristin: Yeah and they worked out the free shipping thing. I mean, I go to Amazon first all the time and have for years because of that.

Joe: *You're in the midst of a speaking tour kind of. I'm glad you were able to talk here. What's going on there? Are you speaking at trade shows or at companies? Could you tell me a little bit about that?*

Kristin: I do this when I got something new to say. I did it when I launched my book, both of them actually, but in 2011 when I put out the second book. In this case, I feel even more strongly about this whole subject because wherever we go and whomever we talk to, the small and medium sized business owners, and managers, CEOs, and entrepreneurs,

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are really struggling right now. They feel like they're doing all this stuff, and they've tried. They all tell me, well I've tried SEO, and I've tried PPC, and nothing moved the revenue needle. And even really successful companies that have been going on for years, their revenue is slipping and slipping and slipping, and you know, these people are successful, hardworking, good solid citizens, and they're just stuck. They don't know what to do.

This is really one of the biggest problems in business that I've seen in all the decades I've been in business, and I'm just determined to help people get through it and take control over their marketing again and be confident that what they're doing will work. The good news is, there are best practices, and if you follow them, you will succeed. That's the good news, and I'm spreading it as far and wide as I can.

Joe: *Is there something that maybe I didn't ask that you like to comment on or something you could add to this conversation?*

Kristin: I guess the main message and it goes back to my book and then what I'm doing now is that customers are the ones who buy. That's where the money comes from. They're the ones with the wallets, and they will not reach for their wallets while they're scratching head, and Google is not going to serve you up if you're confusing, if it's not all perfectly clear what you do, and what you offer, and who you are, and what makes you special, and all those little indicators that they're a robot, their algorithm needs to see and need to confirm that and support that. This whole clarity of message and understanding what that is and then being able to present it in a way that you get past the Google gatekeeper and then, even after that, that what you present is something the customer wants to see and

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will interact with and reward you financially.

Joe: *Something that popped in my mind as you were talking there is that Google sounds like to me is my new distributor or my new manufacturer's rep out there or something, right?*

Kristin: No, that's true. That's absolutely true. They're coming through Google. And if you're not good to Google and the way Google wants, and there's no way to teach the system, millions of people have tried, it doesn't work, it's stupid, but Google will reward you if you play by their rules and their rules are not that impossible. SEO guys would want to make you think that it's all magic and this algorithm and the penguin update and the panda update and all of that stuff, honestly, it's really just a set of best practices. It is difficult. It's not easy. But it's not impossible, and it's not magic.

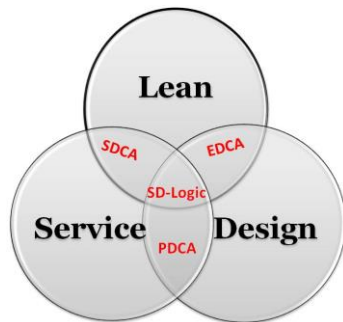
Joe: *What's the best way for someone to contact you and learn more about you?*

Kristin: They can email me. It's Kristin, kristin@cloudpotential.com. They can also come to Cloud Potential. Sometimes I turn on chat, and I'm right there, but Cloudpotential.com, we've got plenty of ways to contact us. I think our phone number is up there as well.

Joe: *Okay. Well, I would like to thank you very much. It was my pleasure, and I look forward to hearing more about you, and I think you got another book in the works. Okay, Kristin, thank you very much.*

Kristin: Thank you, Joe. Take care.

Joe: This podcast would be available on the Business901 iTunes store and the Business901 blog site. Thanks, everyone.



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Joe Dager is President of Business901, a firm specializing in bringing the continuous improvement process to the sales and marketing arena. He takes his process thinking of over thirty years in marketing within a wide variety of industries and applies it through Lean Marketing and Lean Service Design.

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