



the TRUTH ABOUT SEO:

HOW SEARCH ENGINE
MARKETING *REALLY* WORKS

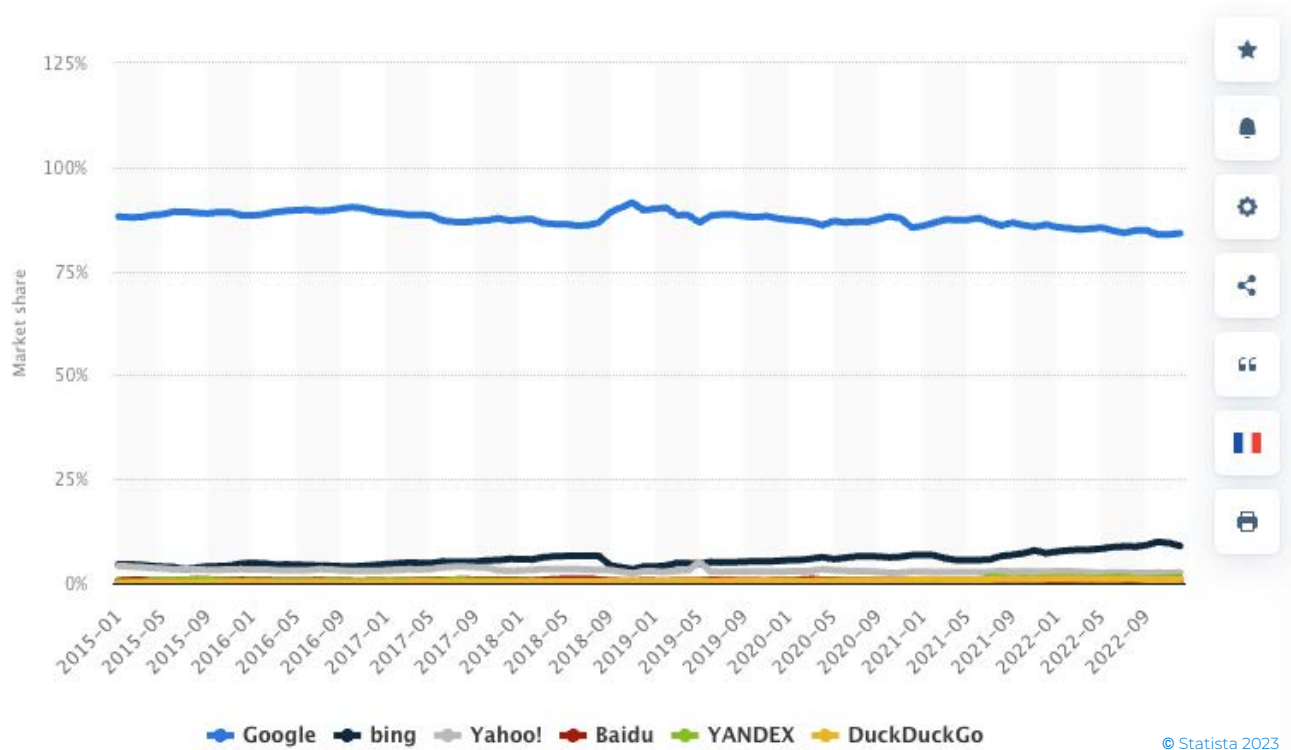
BY KRISTIN ZHIVAGO

THE TRUTH ABOUT SEO: HOW SEARCH ENGINE MARKETING REALLY WORKS

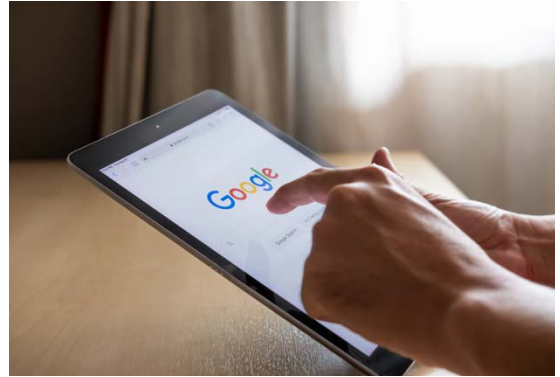
What is search engine optimization (SEO)? It's unfortunately one of the more misunderstood campaign activities by business owners who are trying to use it to attract qualified customers. It doesn't help that the industry is literally flooded with hypesters who promise immediate results.

My goal here is to explain how search engine optimization (unpaid, or organic) and search engine marketing (either paid or unpaid, or both) really work and what you have to do to rank at the top of Google's results.

And yes, I'm going to focus on Google here, because it still majorly dominates the global search market, [as this chart from Statista](#) shows clearly (original source is [StatCounter](#)). Bing has made slight inroads over the last few years, gradually increasing at about the same rate that Google is decreasing, but again, Google is still the top dog by a wide margin.



There are a few things you need to know about Google. Google changes its algorithm, on average, [12 times a day](#) and uses up to 200 criteria to determine rankings. There are those who try to game the system and get around the new changes; Google figures out that they're doing, and changes its algorithm again, to thwart them.



Gambling with your company's ranking success by falling for the “*I can get you on page one in 48 hours*” pitches is a good way to be disappointed. Most business owners are intelligent and can spot shysters, so they usually steer clear of those guys.

However, there's a much more common way to end up disappointed, which is to go with a seemingly legitimate SEO vendor, who cranks out substandard content for you month after month. This activity gives you a false sense of confidence. It's only after a year or so that you realize that the gains you were shooting for from your SEO—a steady stream of decent prospects—has not occurred. Worse, your competitors are appearing higher in the results on a regular basis for your key phrases.

It is often at this point that clients come to us, hoping we can change this pattern for the better.

We can, but it doesn't happen overnight.

Well, I should say that a little differently. Every so often, an article we write moves almost immediately to the top spot in Google results, and stays there for years.

We strive for that to happen with each article we write, but real-life marketing consists of doing everything you should do, then putting it out there and seeing how the market responds. In the case of SEO, the response is driven by a combination of what Google thinks of the article and what searchers think of the article.

In order to continue to dominate the search market, Google must serve up what people want to see when they type in a particular phrase. **The result should match the searcher's intent.**

If a particular article, page, or video turns out to be popular with searchers, to the point where they spend time absorbing it, Google will rank that content higher than content offered by companies hoping to rank for the same phrase. This is the big picture behind all the acronym-laden, SEO mumbo-jumbo.

Google has even made adjustments to its algorithm to downgrade those types of websites that are written specifically for rankings, rather than helpful content written for humans. Which is why those who promise immediate results are never as successful as they promise they will be.

I should say here that if you want **immediate** results, you should start advertising with Google (and other channels, such as social channels—assuming your prospects would expect to find you there). Our most successful clients do both unpaid SEO and paid ads, which work in tandem to bring in qualified leads.

We do learn lessons from the advertising that helps us fine-tune content and keyword phrases, and the keyword research we do for SEO helps our Google Ads experts create ads that work.

Now let's go back to the phrase I used a few paragraphs back: *"Doing everything you should do."* Let's look at what that consists of.



SEO SUCCESS: DOING EVERYTHING YOU SHOULD DO

We've created an SEO machine here, one that works.

First we start by documenting the keywords that your competitors are:

- 1) being found for and*
- 2) getting clicks for.*

We pay most attention to the keywords that your competitors are receiving clicks for, because that's our goal, too.

Just appearing on Google's search results pages ("impressions") isn't enough; you want the results "title" (the clickable link) and "meta description" (the description below the clickable link) to entice them to click through to your content, whether it be a site page, blog article, video, or other resource that you offer up.

We use the results of this extensive competitive keyword research to create a list of the keywords and related longer keyword phrases that we will focus on when we create content for you.

One thing we take into account is the "SEO difficulty" of the keyword phrases we identify. Keywords are ranked in these reports on a scale of 1 - 100, reflecting the competition for that phrase. Anything over 50 presents a pretty high hurdle for a top ranking.

We weigh this ranking against the number of people searching for that term in a given month. Usually, the higher the number of people searching, the higher the



SEO difficulty, but there are also more specific terms that get a good number of searches and rank below 50 for difficulty.

However, we have to weigh all of this against these other criteria: relevance to your specific product or service, the “intent” behind the search, and any geographic aspects that come into play for you.

RELEVANCE:

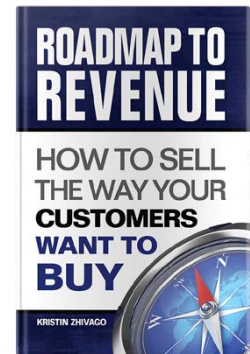
Have you ever noticed that the titles on Amazon products are super long?

For example: “*Corelle Stoneware 12-Pc Dinnerware Set, Handcrafted Artisanal Double Bead Plates and Bowls, Solid and Reactive Glazes, Dining Plate Set, Navy.*” If you are looking for a certain type of dinnerware, each one of these words could be important. If you are selling a product, or even a service, the more specific you can be, the better.

But beyond the keywords, you need to know your audience because you have interviewed them; I explain how to do this, in detail, in chapter 3 of [my book](#). Just looking at stats may tell you *what* is popular, but you won’t know *why*.

If you want to sell more, you absolutely need to know why your buyers would be more interested in certain content. One question I always ask in customer interviews is, “If you were looking to buy this type of product/service again, what would you type into Google?” What customers say helps us focus on the phrases they’d use with “intent.”

More on relevant content below.

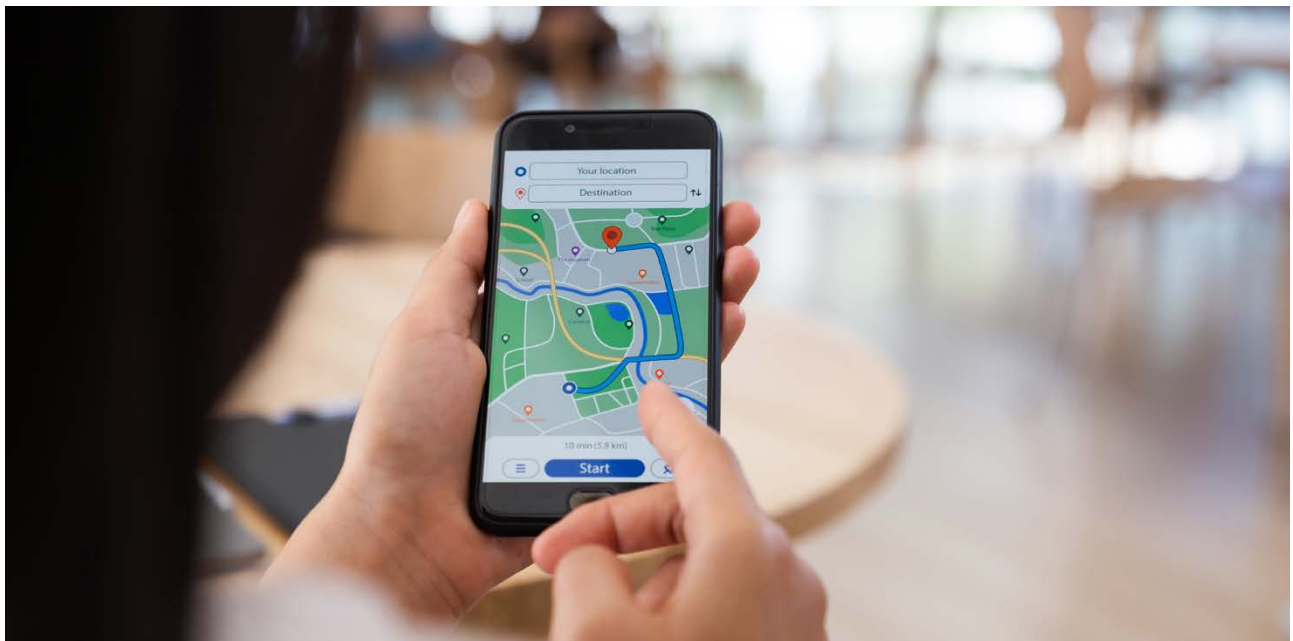


INTENT:

When you're selling a product or service, you're hoping to attract people who are actively looking to buy. You don't want to spend good money to attract people who are simply learning about the topic for their university class, for example. You want people who are intent on spending money on the right product or service. They will be very specific about what they want; everyone who has a computer is now pretty proficient at modifying their search phrase with different or additional words until the results give them what they were looking for.

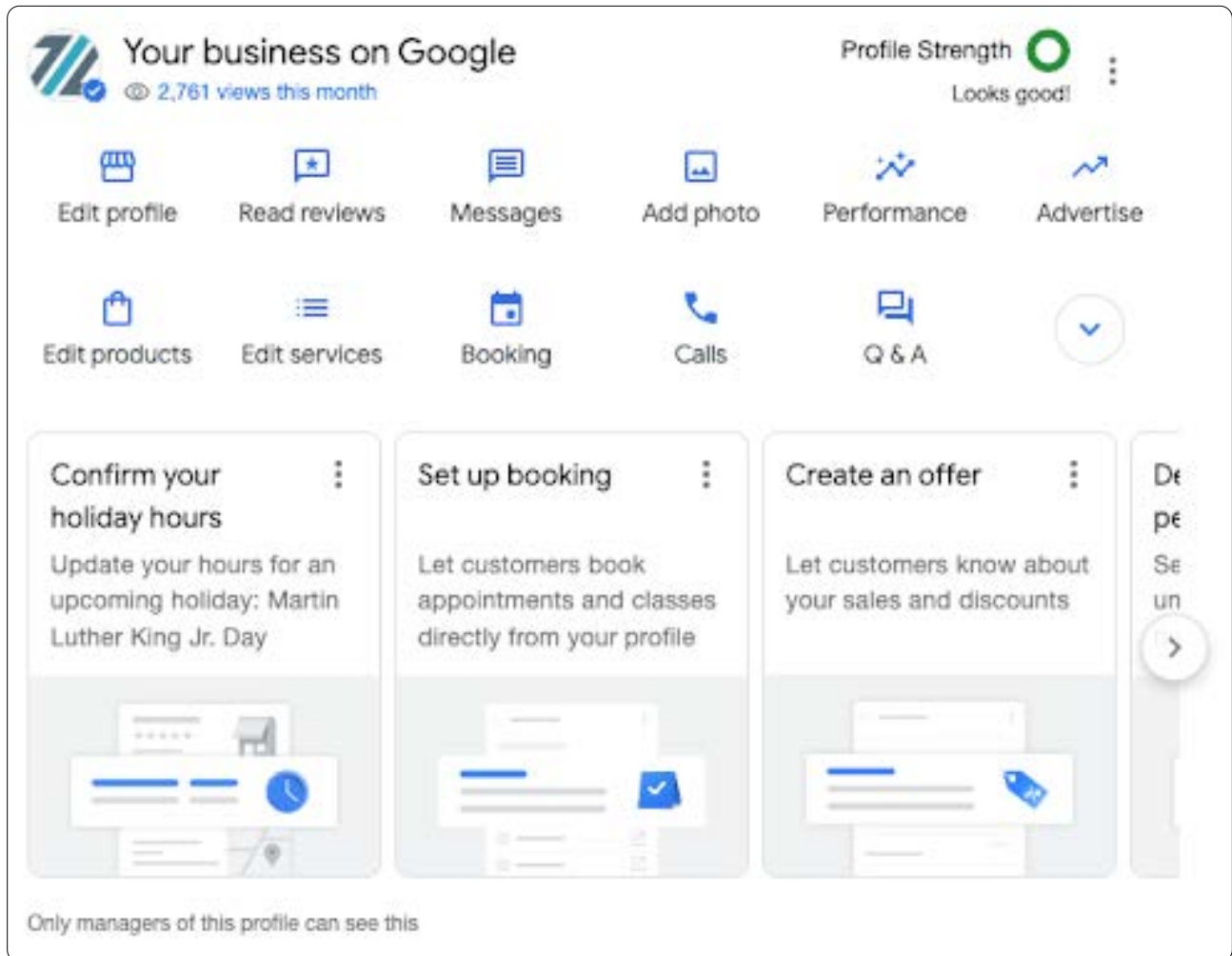
GEOGRAPHY:

This is most important if you are a local brick-and-mortar business. In fact, “[type of business] near me” has become one of the most obvious trends in search, especially if the person is using their mobile device (which is another massive trend). One of the most important things you can do, as a business, is work on your Google My Business listing, now called Google Business Profile (in fact, Google My Business, the app, is being retired).



PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR GOOGLE LISTING

You can now manage your Google listings—where your business appears as a separate tile with a map in Google search results—via Google Maps. If you have already created and have a listing in Google Business Profile, all you have to do is type your company name (not your URL) into Google. You will see that you have the ability to edit your listing. You will see a screen like this:



Having all information filled out in this listing is very important. As you have surely experienced as a Google searcher, especially if you are looking for something “near me,” these listings include pictures, your business hours, a link to your site, and customer reviews. There are even ways to exchange messages with searchers and receive calls through the Google app.



The more pictures you submit, and the more reviews your customers write, the better.

Google pays attention to such things, and potential customers definitely pay attention to reviews and pictures. Every so often, you should email current customers who have not submitted a review and ask them to help you out with a review. Google even supplies the

link you should send them so that, when they go to write their review, they will already be served up a window with the stars and review ready to fill in.

Please also note that while Google dominates the market, you should also pay attention to your business listing on Waze and Apple Maps. [Google Maps has 154.4 million monthly users](#); Waze has 25.6 million; and Apple Maps has 23.3 million. However, Apple Maps are now being used on Car Play, which is supported by [more than 80% of new cars in the U.S.](#)



Give someone in your company or your agency “ownership” of these listings to make sure that they are checked and updated regularly. It’s one of the most important things you can do for your company.

THE POWER OF RELEVANT CONTENT

We all use the web, and Google specifically, to find what we're looking for. If someone is interested in buying your type of product or service, they have **questions**. This is part of their [Mindset](#) when they set out to buy. I define the buyer's Mindset as their desires, concerns, and questions. The companies that address all three of these have the highest chance of success.

One of the questions you need to answer is,

“WHAT’S GOING TO HAPPEN TO ME AFTER I BUY?”

This is the most common question that buyers want answered, and it is the least-answered question in all marketing and sales literature. Which, of course, is crazy and sad. And unprofitable.

This is just one gap between sellers and buyers, though. **Another one is that sellers know all about their product, so much so that they take their own knowledge for granted.** In fact, buyers want to learn a number of things about a product or service before they make a purchase, and the more a business leader does to educate those buyers, the better. There are all sorts of content that buyers would find relevant, aside from the usually rather bland or too sales-pitchy product or service descriptions.

Here are some relevant and educational concepts that can feed your pages, blogs, social, and videos:

- ▶ How is the product made?
- ▶ Who is involved in making the product, and what do they do?
- ▶ Where is the product made, and why?
- ▶ What are the factors that drove the decision to make the product where and how it is made?
- ▶ What are the special properties of the product/service and why do they matter?
- ▶ What is the “big problem” this product/service is designed to solve, and how do we make sure we succeed in solving that problem?
- ▶ How is this product different from others, and how does that difference benefit our customers?
- ▶ Why did we choose the ingredients used or services rendered?
- ▶ What are some of the regulations that affect the creation of this product, and how do we make sure those regulations are satisfied?
- ▶ What do we care about—as it relates to this product or service—more than anything?
- ▶ How long have we been doing this, and what are the lessons we have learned?
- ▶ What should buyers look out for, when evaluating our type of product or service?
- ▶ What are some of the issues related to what we do, that buyers would want to learn about?

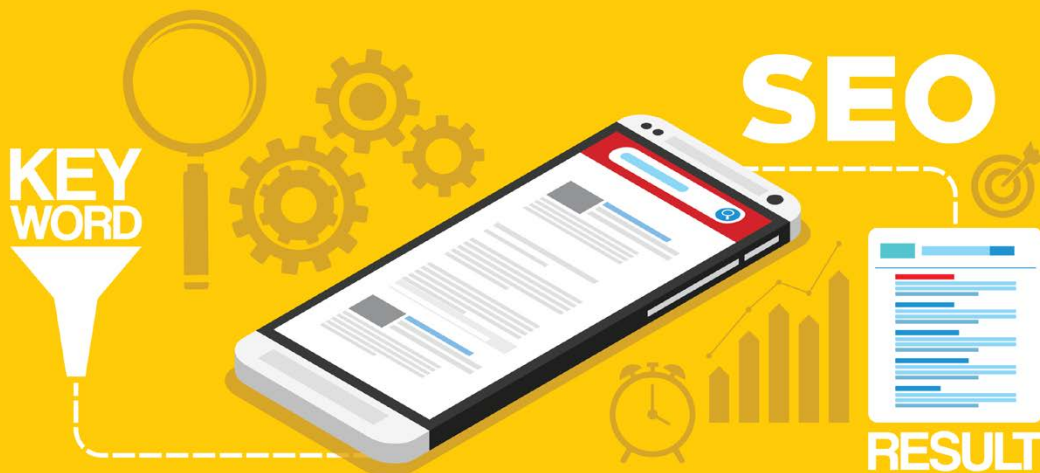
Real-life examples:

We have a client who sells a line of equipment lifts for data centers. The articles we produce focus on safety, “how to” articles on installing servers in racks, industry trends, and various resources that help them do their jobs, such as a massive database of all the servers their equipment lifts.

We have another client who sells luxury yacht cruises around the world. The articles we produce tend to focus on “all the wonderful things you can do at this location,” and what you need to know about chartering a yacht. We focus a great deal on what you can do in various locations, because anyone thinking of spending thousands or millions on a yacht charter often already has a location—and certain types of activities—in mind.

Another client sells ultra-high-performance concrete. For some years now, we have been explaining the properties of this new type of concrete, its uses, and, especially, how you can work with it using standard construction equipment (something their competitors can’t do). We also reveal the results of specific projects where the contractors used this new type of concrete.

We work with our clients to assess the quality of the leads that come in, so we can continue to increase the number of qualified leads and not waste their time with less-qualified leads. Our clients tell us about the quality of the prospects, so we can fine-tune both ads and content to continue to increase the number of qualified leads. We’ve created “dashboards” that our clients can use to check their own stats at any time.





I should also say that our writers are based in the United States, dedicated to specific clients, managed by a managing editor, and are hired for their ability to accurately reflect the “tone” of the client’s business and to provide interesting and educational content. All content is checked and double-checked for relevance, tone, grammar, and accuracy. And, of course, our writers are deeply familiar with the Mindset of our client’s customers, thanks to the customer interviews we conduct when we first take on a client.

The truth is, you simply can’t skimp on content. If you want to attract qualified leads, you need quality content. *Your buyers can tell if the writer is based in the U.S., understands and respects the customers they’re writing for, and understands what they’re writing about.*

By the way, if the company is selling largely to individuals in other countries, content written for those buyers should be written by the citizens of those countries. Otherwise the content simply won’t be compelling and the lack of cultural awareness will be a negative distraction for the reader.

You have a lot of knowledge that you could share with your buyers. We ask clients to “rant” on a particular subject before we write about it, so that their knowledge drives the information and perspective that the article contains.

CAN SEO HELP YOU SELL?

Of course it can. Like all other marketing methods and channels, though, it has to be done right.

The first place to start is to realize that you and Google have a goal in common: the satisfaction of people who are looking for answers—and solutions. So know that whatever you do, you should do for the benefit of the customer, with a hat tip to Google.

We serve up articles that are especially helpful and interesting to human beings, and we weave in the keywords that make Google happy. We endeavor to include those keywords in the headline, first paragraph, and at least one subhead, but we make sure that doing so doesn't make the content seem "forced" or "weird." Fortunately it's not that difficult because, again, Google is pleased when human searchers are pleased.

This is the main message I'd like to leave you with. **The way to please Google is to write content that addresses the desires, concerns, and questions that your buyers have. And keep at it. Frequency and recency matter to Google.**



Kristin Zhivago, revenue coach, is the president of Zhivago Partners, a digital marketing management company, and author of [Roadmap to Revenue: How to Sell the Way Your Customers Want to Buy](#). Zhivago and her team of digital marketing specialists focus on helping clients meet their revenue goals by using [Mindset-Driven Marketing](#),™ which matches the offer with the customer's Mindset for a positive outcome.

Zhivago spent years in the tech industry doing marketing and sales department turnarounds and building and running campaigns. As a marketer working in Silicon Valley in the wild west days, she helped introduce many of the technologies we all use today, including email, voicemail, spreadsheets and dozens of other applications, semiconductors, personal computers, industrial control systems, touchscreens, telecom and networking equipment, security systems . . . you get the idea.

Zhivago and her team all care deeply about their clients' success. As one client (a professionally trained engineer) says, "They are no-nonsense, tell-it-like-it-is, and all about getting things done. I've simply never encountered another company or founder that is so singularly focused on the success of their customers."



381 Seaside Drive, Jamestown, RI 02835
401-423-2400
ZhivagoPartners.com

© Zhivago Partners, All Rights Reserved
Mindset-Driven Marketing is a trademark of Zhivago Partners