

top of the search engine rankings. I can't help you much with the first four, but I can certainly help with the fifth.

There is a dark side to this heavy preference among consumers for a top-ranking company. More than once I have been contacted by businesses in desperation, who used to have a top 10 ranking but no longer do. I remember, in particular, a financial advisory business that used to rank top five for a wide range of loan search terms, and had grown from a one-man-band to a sizeable business in just a few years as a consequence. However, following a change in the Google algorithm (the way the rankings are calculated), its site had fallen out of the top 20, probably never to return, and it was ultimately forced to let all its staff go. The business was up against some very big banks with millions to spend, so regretfully I concluded there was little I could do (certainly within the much depleted budget available). Still, I will remember that desperation for a long time. Most problematically, the business had little substance to it beyond its web presence and had done nothing to build the capital or industry relationships necessary to sustain it through difficult times.

I tell this cautionary tale for a particular reason. I want you to remember that the web is only one channel for a sound business (albeit a hugely important and growing one) and that search algorithms are subject to constant change. Just because you're in the top 10 one week doesn't mean you'll always be there. Your competitors don't stand still. In fact, you have no god-given (or Google-given) right to a particular position. The search engines - and the traffic they bring - are fickle beasts. Forget this at your peril.

However, I do want you to be more excited than scared. I am passionate about the power of the internet and the potential it has to transform business, politics, and our entire society. As I have said, 40% of all sales could be online by 2020 and, with the help of this book, your store could be right on Main Street for millions of customers right across the world.