1. **There is no single business which is not affected by information technology in whatsoever way. Is there a general rule of thumb to follow in the e-commerce?**

No – except, possibly, don’t ignore it or treat it as an afterthought to your regular business. E-commerce is increasingly the “normal” way to do things, and companies that are successful devote much time and resource to making sure that their value proposition online is as well thought out and delivered as anything else they do.

A persistent problem in many businesses is that, faced with new, Internet-enabled competition, they try to preserve their existing distribution channels and business models by mimicking them online. In some instances, this is the right thing to do, but surprisingly often, doing so leaves you open to competitors that have no existing business to defend. Competition online is often subject to strong network effects, meaning that it can be extremely important to establish a dominant position early – before the economics of the market financially justifies it.

2. **Some businesses are quite successful although they are not working with the newest, latest technology. Why, to quote the title of one of your papers, does not always win the best technology not always win?**

My point about the best technology not always winning is more directed at technologists – who often things that the technology that is “best” in a technical sense (most advanced, say, or most adherent to the principles of technology the technologist believes in) deserves to win. If it doesn’t, the technologist concludes that this is due to a conspiracy, most commonly arranged by whoever ended up winning the market – be it Microsoft, Google, Facebook, or whoever.

For every new technology that comes along, you will always find a number of initiatives and companies that didn’t quite cut it, even though their ideas were right and the implementation beautiful. Perhaps their timing was wrong. Perhaps they chose the wrong initial market. Perhaps they were part of a larger company that didn’t understand the importance of the new technology or were fearful of its consequences. Or perhaps they just had bad luck.

3. **Conversion is a keyword in today’s e-commerce. How can a merchant convert visits on his website into sales?**

To a large extent, what makes you successful online no different from what makes you successful in any business: Offering a good product or service at a price the customer is willing to pay. Being online, however, allows plenty of opportunities to surround your existing product or service with electronically enabled experiences and extensions.

A big problem with many online offerings, in addition, is that they impose complicated procedures for the customer, especially around payment. Sometimes these complications are deliberate – to make sure online sales do not harm traditional sales, for instance. Sometimes they are a result of thinking too much about security. Sometimes they come from an insistence on making electronic commerce simple for the company rather than the customer. Small differences in design, especially of the process the customer has to go through, can make a big difference.
4. Design is not just what it looks like. Design is how it works, said Apple co-founder Steve Jobs. You claim that the presence on the web is no longer determined by having a nice web site only. And yet, contemporary web-based design can be used to generate business. Where do you see specific triggers at the interface between design, usability and conversion?

In general, design of a web site matters – but content matters more than colors, pictures and logos. Specifically, many companies forget that customers will enter their web site not through the front door – i.e., through the home page – but directly into any page visible, often through search engines. This means that you must design your web page not just to be esthetically pleasant – it must also be logical in its structure, be consistent in its message and quality no matter where the customers come from, and, most importantly, easy to find and link to for customers. If you type in the name of your product or your product category in a search engine, your site better be the one that pops up on top – or you have done something wrong.

5. For a few years already another buzzword has been on everyone’s lips: social media. In brief, where do you see the most poignant relation between higher sales and social media - if there is any at all.

Social media can be important – especially if you sell branded, high-end goods and services. They can enhance your value offering by providing customers contact with each other – many technology companies, for instance, use electronic forums to let customers help each other use, fix and even extend their offerings. They can also be a threat – news travels extremely fast on social networks, and you certainly don’t want to be the company whose poor service or stiff prices everyone is talking about. That being said, social networks offer you a chance to quickly fix mistakes – and to communicate how fast you fixed them. In short, social media offers you and your reputation everything a small town offers – only on a much larger and much faster scale.

6. Online business and e-commerce promises opportunities. On the downside, like everything, e-commerce is not only related with opportunities, but also with threats.

For most companies, e-commerce is a good opportunity, but for many it can be the first chink in the armor, the first sign that an industry upheaval is on its way. For the music industry, for publishers, for newspapers and for anyone selling access to information or entertainment, e-commerce can, long-term, be a threat to the company’s whole existence. The key lies in recognizing this threat early and turning the digital marketplace into an opportunity. For every industry facing a disruptive innovation threat such as e-commerce, there are companies that go out of existence, but also existing companies that seize the initiative and thrive in a digital environment. Often, these companies owe their existence to executives who had the foresight to see what was going to happen before it showed up in the financial results – and the legitimacy with their shareholders and their workforce to take action before everyone could see that it was necessary. Surprisingly often, these executives were not technical specialists – but they understood their business thoroughly, and that makes all the difference.