

THE
Google
STORY

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AND

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CHAPTER 1

A Healthy Disregard for the Impossible

Sergey Brin and Larry Page cruised onto the stage to the kind of roars and excitement that teenagers normally reserve for rock stars. They had entered the auditorium through a rear door, leaving behind photographers, sunglasses, a pair of hired cars with drivers, and an attractive young woman who was traveling with Sergey. Dressed casually, they sat down and cracked smiles, pleased at their heroes' welcome. They were near the birthplace of civilization, thousands of miles and an ocean away from the place where their work together had begun. It seemed as good a place as any for a pair of young superstars, whose shared ambition revolved around changing the world, to talk about what they had done, how they had done it, and what their dreams were for the future.

"Do you guys know the story of Google?" Page asked. "Do you want me to tell it?"

"Yes!" the crowd shouted.

It was September 2003, and the hundreds of students and faculty at this Israeli high school geared toward the brightest young minds in mathematics wanted to hear everything the youthful inventors had to say. Many of them identified with Brin because, like him, they had escaped with their families from Mother Russia in search of freedom. And they related to Page just as eagerly, since he was part of the duo that had created the most successful

and accessible information tool of their time—a tool sparking change that was already sweeping the world. Like kids playing basketball and dreaming of being the next Michael Jordan, the students wanted to be like Sergey Brin and Larry Page.

"Google was started when Sergey and I were Ph.D. students at Stanford University in computer science," Page began, "and we didn't know exactly what we wanted to do. I got this crazy idea that I was going to download the entire Web onto my computer. I told my advisor that it would only take a week. After about a year or so, I had some portion of it." The students laughed.

"So optimism is important," he went on. "You have to be a little silly about the goals you are going to set. There is a phrase I learned in college called, 'Having a healthy disregard for the impossible,'" Page said. "That is a really good phrase. You should try to do things that most people would not."

As proponents of tackling important problems and seeking transformative solutions, Brin and Page were certainly armed with a healthy disregard for the impossible. And while not much older than the throng of high school students who packed the jammed auditorium, they were truly in a class by themselves. In the rich and storied history of American invention and capitalism, there had never been a meteoric rise comparable to theirs. It had taken Thomas Edison a quarter century to invent the lightbulb; Alexander Graham Bell had spent many years developing the telephone; Henry Ford created the modern assembly line and turned it into the mass production and consumption of automobiles only after decades of work; and Thomas Watson Jr. labored long and hard before IBM rolled out the modern computer. But Brin and Page, in just five years, had taken a graduate school research project and turned it into a multibillion-dollar enterprise with global reach. They were in Tel Aviv, but had it been Tokyo, Toronto, or Taipei, the Google Guys would have received the same raucous reception.

The youthful pair had changed the lives of millions of people by giving them free, instant access to information about any subject. And by being devilishly clever in the Internet age, they had created

promote the name. The two were astute businessmen, and knew that to succeed over time it was imperative that they remain in complete control of their privately owned business and its quirky culture. It saddened Page that many inventors die without ever seeing the fruits of their labors. Determined to avoid a similar fate, he and Brin understood how to use the right connections, access to money and brilliant minds, raw computing power, and a culture of limitless possibilities to make Google a beacon and a magnet. In the click of a mouse, it had replaced Microsoft as the place for the world's top technologists to work. Yet they knew that maintaining the pace of innovation and the mantle of leadership would be no easy feat, since they faced a deeper-pocketed competitor in Microsoft, and a ruthless combatant in its chief, the billionaire Bill Gates.

Supremely confident about their achievements and vision, Brin and Page had been on a roll ever since they started working together. They wanted no one—neither competitors nor outside investors—to come between them or interfere in any way. That combination of dependence on each other, and independence from everyone else, had contributed immeasurably to their astounding success.

"So I started downloading the Web, and Sergey started helping me because he was interested in data mining and making sense of the information," Page went on, continuing with the pair's history. "When we first met each other, we thought the other was really obnoxious. Then we hit it off and became really good friends. That was about eight years ago. And we started working really, really hard on it." He stressed this critical point: inspiration still required plenty of perspiration. "There was an important lesson for us. We worked through holidays, and worked many, many hours a day. It ended up working out, but it is hard because it takes a lot of effort."

Page said that as they told friends about Google, more and more people started using it. "Pretty soon we had 10,000 searches a day at Stanford. And we sat around the room and looked at the machines and said, 'This is about how many searches we can do, and we need more computers.' Our whole idea was to build a search engine that

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