

IT640 Networking & Telecommunications – Course Scenario

Throughout this course, you will be working with a scenario in which some basic background information is given about a retail store. This information could apply to any retail store in general. Your goal is to select a small-to-medium-sized retail store of your choice, making sure that it is in an industry that you are familiar with or perhaps want to know more about. Each assignment that you complete in this course will be based on the general retail store scenario and any additional information that you discover during your exploration and problem-solving process. Be sure to refer back to the Discussion Board in Unit 1 as you progress through the problem-based learning (PBL) process. Or, better still, write down the outline provided in the Unit 1 Discussion Board as a guide for you to follow throughout the course.

Problem-Based Learning Scenario

A small-to-medium-sized retail store provides products to the local community. Currently, the business has 30 employees, including 5 sales representatives who serve new and existing customers. The company was recently acquired by a new experienced owner who is excited about his new business venture, but apprehensive because of recent problems that the company was experiencing before he came on board. The business is highly competitive, and it is common knowledge that most companies such as this use technology to manage the daily business activities. This company lost some clients because the computer network was not always performing up to par. Efforts to work around the network performance issues failed because of the time it took to manually attempt to work around the problem.

The owner, Michael, knows that the computer network issues must be addressed right away if he is going to keep the business running. Because he has no background in information technology (IT), he feels lost. Although he has an in-house IT support person, Matt, he is not skilled in the area of networking. Michael would like to send Matt for some networking training in the future, but that will not resolve the current networking problems. Michael feels frustrated because he does not even know what his company needs in the way of a network; he only knows what the company needs to be a successful retail company. In a recent conversation, Michael was overheard saying, "We provide products and excellence in service to customers through the teamwork and personalized attention provided to our community." Michael is concerned because service levels are dropping, and he knows that he must address the issue.

His vision for the future of his business includes an increased customer base by 10% through the use of a company's Web site and by being able to process paperwork in real time. He knows that he needs to start writing more orders overall and, if possible, increase orders by 5% on a monthly basis. A recent audit of the phone bill for the traditional private branch exchange (PBX) voice and fax lines revealed that a significant amount of expense was incurred in the area of telecommunications. "In the age of the Internet, these types of bills are outlandish," Michael exclaimed. "This business needs to embrace the information age if it is going to survive." He has heard about the practice in the industry of allowing sales representatives to log into the network remotely, but does not understand how this works securely or if his network can even support that capability. One of his friends mentioned cloud technology, and he simply laughed. After he mentioned the issues with his network, his friend agreed that the cloud was out of reach for now, especially because he did not want the liability of insecure transactions or data loss.

Without any documentation in-house as to what kind of network he has and what kind he needs, Michael knows that he will need to make some kind of financial investment into the networking project. He will need to hire a consultant to manage this endeavor, and to that end, he is prepared to secure the necessary financing to accomplish this important technology project.

Employee Interviews:

Joe, Sales Representative

"I really love what I do, but the job can be really frustrating sometimes. When it comes to servicing our customers, technology is the name of the game. They want the information when they want it, and I do not blame them. Half of the time, our network is so slow, we cannot get any work done. If quotes do not get generated, they can't be accepted, plain and simple. I know the new owner is going to try to fix the problems; I just hope that he can in time. It seems like my commission checks are getting smaller and smaller."

Sue, Customer Care Specialist

"I take pride in being efficient, and I like to have answers for my customers when they call me. Lately, however, the computer network here has been so problematic that I have had to ask customers if I could call them back with the answers to their questions. I find this embarrassing, but there is nothing I can do. I apologize, and most of the customers understand; sometimes, I get a few upset customers who really have an attitude toward me though. I do my best to make them happy, but sometimes they do not accept the fact that I cannot access their order information on the network. I think it makes us look really bad, and I do not blame customers for threatening to take their business elsewhere."

Matt, IT Support

"The owner seems so stressed, and I wish I could be of more assistance. Networking is really out of my league. I know the basics, but my certificate in IT support really is all I have to work with. I would love to attend more training classes and maybe even become certified in networking, but these aspirations do not help the current situation that the company is experiencing. I hope that things improve and that perhaps I can learn some additional networking techniques from the consultant they bring in."

Sara, Customer

"Over the years, I have enjoyed working with this company. The employees have always been open and honest; I feel like I can trust them to provide great service and have the best prices. Sometimes the computer system acts up and the customer service staff is unable to generate the invoice paperwork that I need to provide to my job. I have to show proof of purchase to get reimbursed from my employer. The paperwork must be generated on the company's letterhead, so I cannot simply use the papers I have. Sometimes it is inconvenient to wait, but I value the company's mission of offering quality service to the average person."