ABSTRACT
The Connected@Iowa State program is in its third year in 2000, and we now have a comprehensive, year-long program to introduce students to computing at Iowa State University and to provide top-notch on-going support throughout their campus experience.

Our annual program starts anew each April with a comprehensive booklet [3], Connected@Iowa State, mailed to all new incoming students. The 2000-2001 edition provides information about:

- How students use a computer during their academic career at ISU.
- Computer options … labs vs. purchase.
- Computing support available at ISU.
- Minimum standards and levels of support.
- Buying strategies when purchasing a personal computer for use at ISU.

This booklet is followed closely by a mailing to parents about buying a computer for their student. Connected provides guidelines for purchasing a new computer, as well as a checklist to determine if a computer they already own will connect to the campus network and support the software distributed to students when they arrive at ISU.

Students can visit our Back-to-School website beginning in June for information about special computer bundles. Our Easy Early Order Program [2] offers volume discounts for a wide range of pre-configured systems. These configurations can be ordered and waiting for students when they come to school in the fall.

Once students return to campus, we have a variety of support options. Two sites are available to provide technical assistance.

1. BACKGROUND
For as long as owning personal computers has been a part of student life at Iowa State University, Academic Information Technologies' Microcomputer Product Center [5] has been the source of campus-based purchases at academically discounted prices. Established in 1983 and beginning with rather modest goals, sales of hardware, software, peripherals and accessories to ISU departments, as well as sales to individual qualifying students, staff and faculty, have grown to over $9.6M in FY00 which ended June 2000.

Although our remarketing operation matured early into a solid business model, our after-sales support structure for students lagged behind in terms of effort expended, coordination, and documentation. During fall semester 1997, we began steps to improve support targeted at our student community who chose to own a personal computer. Since that time, our program has evolved into a year-long, comprehensive relationship that (1) aids those students who are interested in making a purchase in selecting a computer that is compatible with the campus network.
environment, (2) documents procedures to connect to the campus backbone [8], (3) provides public-domain and site-licensed software through an easy-to-use distribution method [4], (4) provides on-site networking assistance to students in residence halls and drop-off service for all students, and (5) maintains two help centers to resolve networking and application problems.

2. YEAR-AT-A GLANCE
Iowa State University operates on a semester calendar. Our fall semester classes begin approximately two weeks before Labor Day. Fall Semester 2000 classes will begin on Monday, August 21 and run through mid-December with graduation on December 16. Spring Semester 2001 will begin January 8 with graduation on May 5.

Like many universities, it becomes increasingly difficult to describe our summer semester schedule. It seems some special session starts or ends nearly every week. The more traditional summer schedule includes two sessions. The Summer Semester 2001 schedule will begin session one on May 21 and end July 7, and the second session will begin on June 12 and end with graduation on August 11, 2001.

2.1 January - Connected@Iowa State
Our "flagship" document, Connected@Iowa State, has become the vehicle to explain our suite of services. The following is a partial table of contents from our 2000 issue:

Welcome from the Director.............................................. 1
How Am I Going to Use a Computer?.............................. 2
Do I Need My Own Computer?...................................... 3
Bring or Buy: Connecting is the Key.............................. 4
Is My Computer Ready for College?.............................. 5
What if I Have an Older Computer?.............................. 6
Why Do We Make Recommendations?......................... 6
Ethernet Guidelines...................................................... 7
Hot Tips...................................................................... 8
How Do I Pay for a New Computer Purchase?.................. 8
Buying a Personal Computer......................................... 9
Buying Tips.................................................................. 10
What to Look for in Systems Today............................... 10
Buying a Computer From ISU and the MPC................. 11
Who Can I Call for Help?............................................ 12
Special Services......................................................... 13
Glossary.................................................................... 14
MPC-Sales: Value and Performance Systems............... 15
2000 Easy Early Order Program Form......................... 16
Ethernet Kits for Sale in MPC-Sales......................... 17

In January we bring all contributors to the Connected booklet together in a planning meeting. While the booklet is primarily a collaborative effort between the MPC-Sales team and AIT’s Communications team, we rely heavily on input from other areas within AIT including: the Solution Center, providers of end-user networking support; Customer Services, providers of end-user support for problems escalated beyond the Solution Center, as well as in-depth applications and project planning assistance; and Micronet, a group of public services and technical services staff who create and test the Solutions! CD.

Brainstorming sessions reflect on what is particularly successful with the current program and on what parts of the current document seem to spawn the most questions. With these items in mind, assignments are made to all participants and deadlines are set for first draft submissions.

2.2 February – Collaboration Reigns
Support for Connected is truly an all-inclusive project within AIT; not a single area escapes in terms of either providing technical input, editorial input, or both! As a testament to top-down support, the booklet opens each year with a welcome from the AIT director. We remind the director in February of the due date for the opening.

Our web team works closely on the booklet also, as it contains a variety of URLs throughout the document. Close collaboration is required to coordinate filenames, timetables, etc. Even in a tightly knit working environment, such as AIT, our coordinated effort to revise and update Connected often serves as the mechanism for groups within AIT to learn about new projects and products.

2.2.1 Solutions! CD
In keeping with a commitment to provide access to information technology for students, Iowa State University distributes site-licensed network software at no charge to its students. In the February timeframe, the Micronet group begins to solidify plans for the fall Solutions! CD offering. Solutions! includes public domain and site-licensed software. A locally developed package named Scout is distributed on the CD, as well. Scout can install and configure the included software so it is compatible with the ISU campus network services. All documentation for using Scout is included on the CD, as are other related support documents. For Fall 2000, software included on Solutions! included Netscape Navigator/Communicator, the email package Eudora (ISU maintains a site-license for the pro version), a virus protection utility (ISU maintains a license for the Dr. Solomon Anti-virus Toolkit), and utilities such as Telnet for remote access and FTP (File Transfer Protocol - Fetch & WS_FTP) for transferring files.

2.2.2 ISU Support Guidelines
About this time, a team of AIT staff is committed to establishing updated microcomputer support guidelines. Although AIT provides no-charge support through the Solution Center and the SNAP team for students needing assistance to connect to the ISU network, the "no-charge" assistance is only available for computers that meet our minimum guidelines. While we believe these minimums are not very stringent, they do serve to eliminate some of the more difficult – and sometimes impossible – support situations that can occur with the few very old systems that we see appear on campus every year. Our hourly support rate of $52 tends to discourage requests like the "help me connect my whitebox 486," especially when we cannot guarantee a maximum support fee to resolve the request. We usually can demonstrate the financial wisdom of either purchasing an upgraded system or simply using the outdated equipment for stand-alone services, e.g., the 486 may fulfill the individual’s word-processing needs and they can take advantage of public computing laboratory facilities to read email, do homework, etc.

Effective Fall 2000, we published the following minimum support guidelines (see Table 1 for Wintel guidelines and Table 2 for Macintosh guidelines):

Table 1. Minimum Support Guidelines for Windows Machines
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Operating System</th>
<th>Windows 95</th>
<th>Windows 98</th>
<th>Windows NT 4.0</th>
<th>Windows 2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Memory</td>
<td>32 MB</td>
<td>32 MB</td>
<td>48 MB</td>
<td>64 MB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>64 MB recommended</td>
<td>64 MB recommended</td>
<td>96 MB recommended</td>
<td>128 MB recommended</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processor</td>
<td>133 MHz Pentium or better</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>200 MHz Pentium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unused Disk Space</td>
<td>500 MB to 1 G</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Minimum Support Guidelines for Macintosh Machines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Operating System</th>
<th>Power Macintosh</th>
<th>Power Macintosh GE, G4, and iMAC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Macintosh</td>
<td>Mac OS 7.6.1 minimum</td>
<td>Mac OS 8.1 minimum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mac OS 8.1 or later preferred</td>
<td>Mac OS 9.0 or later preferred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memory</td>
<td>32 to 64 MB for Mac OS 8.1 to 8.6.1</td>
<td>64 MB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>64MB or greater for Mac OS 9.0 or later</td>
<td>128 MB or greater recommended</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unused Disk Space</td>
<td>500 MB to 1 G</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.3 March – Back-to-School Program
The Back-to-School (BTS) Program is the largest coordinated effort in the yearlong project. We target all incoming students with one or more mailings. Depending upon the anticipated living arrangements (on-campus vs. off-campus housing) and targeted requests, a student may receive mailings from several entities – all of which coordinate information regarding computing on the ISU campus.

2.3.1 BTS Coordinator
A student coordinator plays a key role in what we call our Back-to-School program, aka our Easy Early Order Program. Historically, the BTS coordinator has been selected from a second or third year student on our MPC-Sales staff. The most obvious advantage of selecting an experienced part-time staff member is that we need to train for this program alone. A seasoned part-time sales associate is already familiar with the everyday business of the Microcomputer Product Center and already has customer service and sales experience and training.

The following is an excerpt from the BTS Coordinator job description:

**Responsibilities:**
- Represent the MPC, Solution Center and Academic Information Technologies during the Student Resource Fair
- Respond to student and parent correspondence regarding computers and networking issues when coming to Iowa State University.
- Collect information from students for the Back-to-School Early Order programs (mailings, email, phone requests and orders).
- Assist in developing and distributing BTS marketing materials
- Assist MPC management team with the broad range of BTS-related activities.

- Record activities and prepare summary report due September 30.

**Requirements**
- Preferred: major in Management, MIS, Communications, Marketing or related field of study
- Working knowledge and experience with MPC-products, procedures and policies.
- Understanding of AIT’s Solution Center and ISU’s Office of Telecommunications and their respective roles in providing student networking solutions.

Entering the program as the BTS Coordinator in March, the student has an opportunity to participate in the final revisions of the Connected@Iowa State booklet and is poised to begin planning for the spring and summer orientation projects.

2.3.2 Telecommunications Mailing to Residence Hall Students
ISU’s Office of Telecommunications has been a major partner in educating students about computing needs in the Residence Halls since the first halls were wired for Ethernet in the early 90s. Since AIT’s Connected booklet has become so all-inclusive, Telecommunications has been able to revise their networking handout and reduce their effort to a simple handout versus a complex, multi-page brochure.

Planning for Fall 2000 became even easier since “port on every pillow” became a reality during Summer 2000. Previous semesters, Telecommunications sent a mailing to everyone with a Residence Hall contract; their handout included details for requesting activation of the Ethernet port in their room. This fall, with every port live and waiting for residents to move in, the documentation supplied by Telecommunications could be pared to that information required for telephone service along with pointers to AIT and the Connected booklet for networking information.
Included in the Telecommunications March mailing is a one-page, tri-fold brochure, *Want to be connected at Iowa State?*, that AIT provides to explain our Easy Early Order Program. The handout includes prices for Ethernet kits for Wintel desktops, Wintel laptops, and Macintosh computers. The prices and specifications are based on current inventory and market conditions and are subject to change by the time student return in August.

This “Want to be connected?” mailing serves two purposes. First, it provides a mailing to be returned by the student to indicate that the student expects to order an Ethernet kit – including the brand and model of their computer. The mailings that are returned help us project quantities as we place orders for components in July. Second, it is a response form that can be used to request information regarding the early order process.

Given the total “package” which includes the *Connected* booklet, the Solutions Center, the Solutions! CD, and the SNAP team, the questions directed to Telecommunications regarding networking in Residence Halls has been dramatically reduced. Therefore, as expected, the performance bundles have faster processors, more memory, larger hard drives, and a larger monitor.

2.4.2 Prepare Orientation Handouts

Although the most prominent orientation activities take place in June, orientation sessions seem to occur at just about all times of the year. Early May starts the first round for students intending to enroll in the fall semester. Although AIT does not staff a booth or deliver a marketing message at the May orientation sessions, we do have an opportunity to include handouts in a variety of venues.

2.5 May – Orientation, Campus Partners, and Vendors

2.5.1 Summer Resource Fair

The vehicle for reaching new students during summer orientation is through the Resource Fair. Over 50 offices on campus are represented at booths that are open and staffed 11:30 a.m. – 1 p.m. each day there are orientation groups on campus.

Spread across two tables, AIT’s display is the mechanism for attracting students to our booth. While some offices have invested in elaborate displays, many offices – like AIT – rely on more modest folding displays on tabletops. We know the display must be eye-catching and include just enough information to draw students and parents to us for a conversation. During May, our BTS Coordinator works with our Publications team to prepare our booth. This year one vendor provided a “drawing card” that proved to be very successful (see section 2.6.2).

2.5.2 Working with Campus Partners

Although ISU does not require students to own a computer, there were two programs this year that “strongly encouraged” students to have a laptop computer; the two programs are both in the College of Design. The Landscape Architecture program is starting a traveling scholars program and the students in that program are encouraged to purchase a powerful Wintel laptop. Upperclass students in other Design disciplines are being encouraged to purchase an upper-end iBook. After meeting with the faculty in these programs, the MPC-Sales staff communicated these needs to our vendors. As a result, these program needs were used as a guideline to configure several of the back-to-school performance bundles.

Other partners include the Office of Admissions and the Registrar. Both offices play significant roles in the student and parent orientation visits to campus. As an example of cooperation with Admissions, this spring we provided over 300 copies of the *Connected@Iowa State* booklet for distribution by Admissions counselors as they visited schools across the state.

2.5.3 Continuing Dialogue with Vendors

It’s critical that vendors understand the importance of our publication deadlines. We cannot “put *Connected* to bed,” i.e., submit final copy to the printer, until all the bundle descriptions and prices are available. Regular contacts and reminders are needed to keep our publishing deadlines fresh in their minds and, hopefully, high priority on their schedules. Unfortunately vendor representatives seem to have an even higher turnover rate than our...
help desk staff, so you can rarely rely on vendors working with experience from previous years.

2.5.4 Stocking Items
We start stocking items in May for items such as cables, Ethernet cards, and boxes to use for kits. Because we ran out of cables in 1999, we ordered our cables early this year. We delayed our Ethernet card order and in July we were in for a surprise. See section, “Gotchas.”

2.6 June – New Student Orientations

2.6.1 Resource Fair
We staff a booth at the Resource Fair during June. Booths are available for students and parents to visit from 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. on each day of summer orientation. The Resource Fair is held in a large, elegant ballroom, called the Great Hall, in the ISU Memorial Union. With its high ceilings and polished oak floor, coupled with all the enthusiastic “vendors”, students and parents, the environment tends to be lively, crowded, and noisy. Exhibitors compete for limited resources, i.e., parents and students are asking themselves, “What booths are most important to visit in the time available for visits AND LUNCH?” Thus our marketing message is critically important.

Our poster display, although quite professional in appearance and content, is among the more modest. We don’t have a large, lighted booth like you see at conventions, unlike some of the departments who participate, e.g., Residence Halls. On the other hand, computing is certainly one of the hot topics for many students and parents, so we find ways to make it apparent that we are available to talk about computers.

This year we used two “tricks.” The first was incredibly simple, inexpensive and effective: empty computer boxes. We placed CPU and monitor boxes from a Dell system in front of our booth. The size and instant recognition of the Dell name were very effective in drawing attendees to the booth. (We also learned they came in handy for people to use as a writing surface to jot down notes.)

The second was a promotion provided by Apple. Our calling card consisted of a simple 8.5”x11” neon-yellow sign, “Win an iMAC,” that was placed strategically at the top of our display so it could be readily be seen above the crowds and above the top of other displays.

Our BTS Coordinator staffed the booth, along with a representative of AIT’s Solution Center. We provided copies of our Connected booklet, preliminary Ethernet kit and early order forms, as well as other AIT handouts. While our BTS Coordinator was there to primarily answer questions about computer purchases, the Solution Center representative was available to talk about other services.

For Fall Semester 2000, ISU students will have a web-based option, WebM@il, for receiving and sending email. Making a computer available for students to experiment with ISU’s WebM@il was also a popular drawing card.

2.6.2 Getting Students and Parents to the MPC
The iMAC promotion provided an added benefit to our overall marketing and support strategy: it was effective in getting parents and students to walk across campus to visit our Microcomputer Product Center showroom. With over two dozen systems and peripherals from five vendors on display, as well as an impressive display of accessories, vendor literature, and software products, our MPC-Sales showroom provides a casual and friendly setting for visitors. Here they can read literature, experiment with many software packages, and take the opportunity to get hands-on experience with various systems. They can also take advantage of our trained staff to ask questions, prepare system quotes, purchase a wide variety of “cash and carry” items, or place orders for hardware, software and peripherals.

As a generous contributor of showroom equipment and wall displays, our regional Apple representative is always cognizant of opportunities to get visitors to the showroom. While students could pick up a card at the Resource Fair to register for the iMAC, they could only participate in the drawing by taking the completed card to the MPC showroom. Of the 1,000+ visitors to our booth, over 250 enrolled in the drawing. The Apple representative and Apple’s ISU student ambassador were responsible for drawing the winner’s name and making the appropriate contact.

2.6.3 $1.6M+ Business in June
In a year in which departments faced budget reversions and many departments grudgingly spent significant sums in July through December to make necessary Y2K upgrades, we anticipated a quieter-than-normal month for sales in the MPC. In a word, we were WRONG. Fiscal year 2000 finished at a record pace with sales surpassing $1.6M. With the loss of a significant staff member in late March, we were counting on a quiet spring to balance the empty position. While this does not contribute to the specific topic of the paper, it lends credence to Murphy’s Law: if something can go wrong … it surely will!

2.7 July – Early Order Program Mails
Despite careful planning, we didn’t get the Early Order booklet to the printer until July 7th. Containing order forms that must be returned by July 30 in order to have systems waiting when students arrive in mid-August, we know that we’ll be cutting deadlines very close in late July and early August. To compensate for later than expected postal mailing of the paper booklet, we decided to make the booklet available online in a PDF format AND we sent email to students who requested the mailing (an email address field was included on the request form). The email simply reminded the student and parents to watch for the order brochure in the mail and it offered them the option to preview a copy on the web. By printing and completing the order form, students can fax their order to the MPC and easily beat the July 30 order deadline.

2.7.1 Processing Orders and Confirmation Letters
Orders are processed as soon as they arrive, although orders are not placed with vendors until the last week of July. When individual orders are placed, we prepare a personalized order confirmation letter. Each customer has five business days following the postmark on his or her confirmation letter to cancel without incurring a restocking fee.

As orders arrive, trends quickly become apparent. With two years’ experience, we’ve found we can make some sound decisions regarding placing stock orders. This is the third year of the ‘early order’ program, and while it has been modest, the growth has been rewarding and significant. With a less-than-polished effort for Fall 1998, we sold approximately 100 systems
to incoming students and in Fall 1999 that number topped 200 systems. This year we’ve had nearly 700 requests for early order forms, and we anticipate selling up to 400 systems, representing a doubling of orders during each of the past two years.

With over 4,000 new incoming freshmen each fall, we know a large segment of our target audience is not responding to our current marketing strategies. Reviewing our promotional strategies and materials will be a major focus when planning next year’s program.

### 2.7.2 Training Staff for the Onslaught

The week students return to campus is always frantic, and the only way to survive is to be impeccably trained and as fully organized and prepared as possible. Of course, it is almost always true that each fall means we have new students staffing the MPC.

Students must be fully trained to respond to any questions that arise. “Can I change my order?” “What if I can’t pick up my computer on Wednesday as planned?” “How do I connect to the network?” “Where can I buy a floppy?” “How do I change my schedule?” “Do you know where English 105 meets?” Yes, we try to answer all questions. For those questions that are obviously misdirected, we train our students about other service providers on campus.

The point is, for those questions that are directly related to our business, we can’t afford for our fulltime or part-time sales staff to be interrupting each other with questions. July is the month when we concentrate on finishing both our user and our internal documentation and holding our training sessions during a month that, while busy, is not as hectic as June was or as August will be!

### 2.8 August – Back-to-School Frenzy

#### 2.8.1 Ready

Back-to-school systems begin to arrive the first week in August. We assemble orders in bundles with the software and accessories boxed or bagged together and placed with the appropriate systems. Sales paperwork is prepared in advance, so the process of pickup goes quickly and smoothly when students arrive.

If vendor rebates are valid for any of the products purchased, the rebate forms are also included. We provide documentation to complete the Ethernet (DHCP) setup in a residence hall room and to configure a system to use off-campus dial-up services. If vendors provided any freebies, e.g., t-shirts, pens, or mouse pads, we also distribute these with the bundles.

Paperwork provided with the systems includes warranty information, configuration details, and a Thank You letter from the MPC-Sales staff. We know our customers have many options when purchasing a computer and we appreciate their business. (Now does that sound like a line that you’ve heard during your recent air travel?) We enclose all the paperwork in a report folder to improve the chances that it will be noticed and retained.

Based on past experience, we order additional bundles and we “stage” these for fast processing just as we do for individual orders. We make our “opportunity sales” decisions based on the popularity of the bundles being ordered. We also prepare additional marketing materials so students who didn’t preorder will be aware that a limited number of systems are in stock and available for immediate delivery. This has been a very successful program. We’ve devised a very simple system to easily show what stock is available without tying up floor space. We prepare matched pairs of numbered index cards and attach one on the bundle in our storeroom. The other index card is placed on a bulletin board behind the sales desk where it can be seen readily at a glance.

#### 2.8.2 Set

We anticipate and plan pickup based on the residence halls opening dates. On the early order form, students are asked to indicate the date when they expect to pickup their order. Staff hours are extended during back-to-school week. We arrive early each day to setup up for business and we stay after doors close to reconcile records and to regroup for the next busy day. To the extent possible, additional staff coverage is scheduled.

Every evening we check all routine business supplies; e.g., cash register tapes, invoice paper, pens, staples, and anything else used in processing paperwork. Extra copies of all forms used are placed where everyone expects to find them. Our in-house accounting team increases the change in our cash draw during back to school, and they make extra cash pick-ups during the day. To speed cash-and-carry sales, many of our back-to-school products have prices adjusted so they round up to the next whole dollar when sales tax is applied.

Our staff is briefed daily on product availability and any changes to policies. We also place a back-to-school message on all our phone lines to explain possible delays during the back-to-school week.

#### 2.8.3 Go!

On our busiest days everyone “works the floor.” Customer lines are inevitable and tolerated, but every effort is made to keep things moving smoothly. Managers triage customer lines to make sure that people are in the correct line, to direct them to another area if they need assistance with something other than a back-to-school order, and to provide general information about services provided by AIT. If a problem develops at critical point, e.g., cash register, or point-of-sale terminal, the customer and a manager may move to a back office location to keep other lines moving forward.

During these high volume times, it is important to recognize staff and help them during the hectic pace. Donuts, chips, cookies and soft drinks are kept in a nearby break area. We rotate staff between high traffic, front-desk tasks and phone or warehouse duties to give them a break. And since noon usually means more rather than less traffic, pizza often provides lunch on the run.

It is important to recognize good service and performance, as well as service problems, as they occur. We make notes of errors or concerns, and address them at the end of the current shift or before the start of the next day. We also commend staff for outstanding customer service and discuss creative methods used by individuals to alleviate problems or to soothe impatient customers.

Over 200 systems were delivered during Fall 1999 BTS; and we will report Fall 2000 volume in our paper presentation.

### 2.9 September – SNAP Team

In 1997 the concept of the SNAP team was born, and by fall semester the team was providing on-site and centralized setup service for students wanting to connect to the campus network services. SNAP – Student Network Access Program – is funded
November is also the time we begin to review the upcoming year’s schedule, and begin the project planning necessary to complete the many components of our program. While a formal tool has not been used in the past, next year we plan to use project management software to establish our baseline schedule and to ensure that deadlines are met throughout the project.

2.12 December – Autopsy the Year’s Results
Although today’s environment never leaves us with a particularly quiet time, the month of December is probably as close as we get to having time to take a deep breath and carefully review our year’s program in great detail. ISU’s class schedule typically provides a week after fall semester ends and before the majority of AIT staff start thinking about taking time off for the holiday break. This week presents a great opportunity for meetings that may not conflict directly with rush schedules involving project deadlines.

We begin here with assignments to “autopsy” the year in minute detail and prepare for the planning meetings that start just after the first of the year.

3. LESSONS LEARNED OR HOW WE’VE MADE LIFE A BIT EASIER

3.1 Another Bundled Item
Notice in the Table of Contents “Ethernet Kits for Sale.” When we first began selling Ethernet cards, cables, splitters, etc., we did so one item at a time, which meant recording the sale and maintaining inventory for multiple items for each residence hall student wanting to connect to the network.

In fall 1998, we started offering complete “kits.” The kit included an approved Ethernet card, a 14’ cable, and documentation that explained how to configure various operating systems to connect to the campus network. The biggest issue that remained was students coming back to exchange their 14’ cable for a 25’ cable. We priced them the same so we didn’t have to deal with collecting additional funds, but still the exchange was very time-consuming – both the actual exchange and reconciling inventory. It meant a return trip to the MPC for the student, which was not positive from a customer service viewpoint.

For Fall 2000, all Ethernet kits will include a 25’ cable and we don’t plan to advertise the 14’ availability. We anticipate we'll still have a handful that need to exchange the 25’ for a 50’ – how else can you create a modern art masterpiece using the extra cable on that big blank wall (what do they do with these?) – but we expect to have very few exchange requests for the shorter cable. (See section “Gotchas” for a surprise that surfaced just before the deadline for submitting this paper.)

3.2 Simplifying Sales Transactions
Another change that will speed processing sales of Ethernet kits is the addition of a cash register in our remarketing center. Previously each sale was entered into our business system and there was more effort and time expended on simple, quick sales than is desirable. In July 2000, we incorporated a cash register into our business processes. With a preprogrammed key, the sale of an Ethernet kit will be as simple as ringing up a single item and handling the sale by check, cash or credit card. The reconciliation with our business system will then be done via a batch process at night. This will make these transactions much more timely during
a hectic time when every moment saved is appreciated by customers and staff alike.

3.3 SNAP Team Carries Supplies and Spares
The SNAP team will carry certain supplies and spares beginning this fall, which will hopefully alleviate much of the need to make return appointments/trips for a specific computer. It was not uncommon for a SNAP worker to get to a room and find that the person who made the appointment did not have an Ethernet card, or a cable, or a splitter, or some combination of these. Since the appointment process is arguably the most complicated element of making this entire service work smoothly, eliminating repeat visits is expected to streamline the process for some significant number of students.

4. NEW FOR FALL 2000
We have new inserts for Fall 2000 bundles. We are including a customer comment card. Until now, we’ve only had anecdotal comments regarding service. If we get even the standard 5-10% return, we will have gathered some valuable, first-hand data to use for future planning. We are also planning to experiment with a discount coupon valid toward a future purchase.

5. “Gotchas” Along the Way
In June 2000, we learned that the SMC cards we had been using were not going to be available in quantities for fall. Thus began a quick evaluation process to select alternate Ethernet cards. Once the selection was made, we contacted the vendor for pricing and availability.

To our surprise, the vendors offered a special “bundle.” The SMC Ethernet card came bundled with a 10’ cable for $11, or the card could be purchased separately for $22. Seems like an obvious choice, until you consider two things.

In May we ordered 2,000 25’ Ethernet cables, with many of these expected to be used in our Ethernet kits. In 1999, we packaged 14’ Ethernet cables for our kits, but then did a booming (and unwelcome) business in cable exchange when masses of students returned wanting to exchange their 14’ cable for a 25’ cable.

At this writing, we have not resolved the issue, but we will report on our decision in our SIGUCCS session.

6. FUTURES
6.1 Personalized Letter to Students and Parents
We’d hoped to add a letter to students and their parents during Spring 2000 - “hoped” being the operative word. As we prepared the letter for mailing, we coordinated the review with the Admissions Office since we were using their mailing list. In the process, we learned that our non-personalized letter did not meet with their approval. While they do not have the authority to veto the mailing, goodwill dictated that we either conform to their suggestions or that we abandon the letter as it stood.

Our intent was to mail a standard letter to the parents of all incoming students as a separate point of information regarding our back-to-school sales promotion. Each student had received the Connected booklet, but with the volume of mailings that students and parents receive, we know our earlier marketing message – buried as it was in a massive mailing of a broad range of materials – was quite possibly overlooked. A separate targeted letter was likely to be an effective tool in terms of getting students and parents to take a second (or perhaps a first) look at our previous mailing.

Once we learned that we needed to rework the letter to personalize the greeting and mail the letter in a windowed envelope, we faced with deadlines we couldn’t meet and expenses not covered in the project budget. Thus we quickly decided to make the letter a project to tackle next year.

6.2 Expanding Our Reach
Iowa State University does not require that students own a computer, nor do we anticipate that we’ll be moving to mandated ownership university-wide anytime in the near future. As mentioned earlier in the paper, however, there are a few programs that “strongly recommend” student ownership of a portable. For our back-to-school program next year, we plan to be more proactive in reaching out to every college to make them aware of our services and to explain the process for recommending systems for specific programs.

Plans are to expand the year-round activities and preparation of our program during October and November by being more proactive with our partners on campus. The goal is to improve our relationship and visibility with Admissions, academic counselors and orientation groups through presentations on our programs and services tailored to their needs. Admissions can help us build awareness with parents and students before the holiday and graduation buying seasons, and our technology support is a recruiting plus for the University. Parents and students often ask academic counselors for computer recommendations, and we can assist them by providing handouts that detail specific bundles. As more departments work with AIT, we can provide recommendations targeted for specific majors, departments or colleges. Finally, campus orientation guides are students themselves and often base their comments on their personal experience, so we must find ways to meet and introduce them to the MPC Sales and Service areas so they have a complete and positive picture of the services we provide.

6.3 Credit Card Sales
By conference time we’ll be able to report on credit card sales. Originally planned for July 1, 2000 implementation, we delayed adding credit card sales until mid-July. On July 1, 2000, we upgraded our business software, Solomon, to version 5. A major release, it involved not only revised screens and processes for our sales area, but a much more fully integrated system for dealing with service tickets by our MPC-Service team. With Murphy’s Law prominently in mind, we decided to schedule credit card sales to follow the upgrade, which, in itself, required extensive retraining for all of our sales and service staff.

6.4 Deliveries to Student’s Home
We’ve been asked to pursue the ability to “drop ship” student purchases to their home. The primary impetus for this move is to accommodate parent’s requests to purchase high school graduation gifts of a computer and/or accessories through the MPC-Sales unit. We’ve just begun working with vendors on this concept, and have learned enough to know that some of our vendors will be able to accommodate this type of service better than others. Perhaps we have the seeds of another SIGUCCS paper in this effort.
7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
The authors wish to acknowledge the yearlong cooperation and support of our fellow AIT staff. Without them, this program would not have evolved to become such a success. While the documents, the CD, the Ethernet kits, and the programs are all crucial “products” that contribute to the success, it is the people behind each of these components that make our jobs at AIT so rewarding.

In particular, the students working in MPC-Sales are responsible for the successful execution of much of this program. We rely heavily on the BTS Coordinator for the development of materials and for the majority of interactions with students and parents during the June Orientation sessions. As well, in August when we are handling the pickup of systems and sales of Ethernet kits, our customers are far more likely to interact with student employees than our fulltime staff.

In addition, the authors wish to acknowledge the truly outstanding support provided by the Office of Academic Information Technologies for the staff in pursuit of professional development. Beginning with Pete Siegel, AIT’s Director from 1998-2000 who recently left to assume the position of CIO at University of Illinois Urbana Champaign (UIUC), and continuing under our Interim Director, Dorothy Ohl Lewis, AIT recognizes and values the importance of attending conferences like ACM/SIGUCCS. We applaud your support and vow to bring new ideas and enthusiasm back to share with and inspire all of AIT.

8. REFERENCES