

Creativity and Feasibility
Final Exam
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It is extremely difficult to predict what technology-based business strategies will or will not be sustainable. In the 1950's and 60's there was much speculation about how technology would advance; however, all of these projections failed to understand how society would change and how that societal change would influence technological advances. The designers of "The Home of the Future" could not conceive of a world where the majority of mothers work outside the home. "The Home of the Future" was designed for a future with advanced technology and a social structure that was essentially static. In assessing the sustainability of WinstonNet it is important to remember that there is an important interplay between social norms and technology. The way we work and communicate will be the key driver of technological sustainability, not necessarily what technologies are most efficient or advanced.

I feel that local businesses will have a strong need for the services of WinstonNet in the near term (the next 5 to 10 years). I feel that the business driven demand for WinstonNet is the key to sustainability of the business model thus I have a very positive outlook on the sustainability of WinstonNet. As for the social and cultural aspects of WinstonNet I am less sure of its sustainability. I have several concerns regarding the social and cultural applications of WinstonNet that stem from the difficulty of projecting social and cultural shifts and their effect on technology.

As communication and information increasingly becomes the core of business in this region, wireless connectivity continues to be an extremely valuable resource. With this growing importance of connectivity, WinstonNet offers an extremely attractive service and price to local businesses. While there is a threat of new entrants in the form of new technologies, I believe it is unlikely that any of these technologies (such as WiMax) will be able to compete with traditional wireless internet on a utility-per-cost basis in the near future. As existing wireless technology has become a de facto standard for many devices the switching costs to move away from it are quite high. Also, as WinstonNet functions as the intermediary between the actual service provider and the city of Winston-Salem, the threat of opportunistic behavior from Azelstar is quite low. The largest threat I would see to WinstonNet in the business arena is if an emerging technology with better physical penetration of buildings were able to operate using existing hardware.

While I see the business model of WinstonNet in the arena of internet service for local business as quite strong, I have some concerns as to the sustainability of this model for social and cultural applications. While I see the importance of internet access for underserved groups, I do not see wireless technology as providing significant advances to these groups. At the core of my concern is the lack of actual hardware in underserved communities to access wireless connections. We must first give underserved groups access to computers before we can expect more advanced tools like wireless to provide significant benefits. Many of these concerns were discussed by my classmates; however, I feel the key is the lack of desire on the part of underserved groups to purchase

computers. I do not believe these groups place a high value on computers outside of cellular technology and game/entertainment consoles. This comes back to how social norms influence technology adoption. Underserved groups value technology for its communication and entertainment benefits and less so for its productivity applications. Even with a \$400 computer there are multiple electronic devices competing for those dollars in this arena. Given these difficulties, I believe some of my classmates have an excellent plan in bringing computers to underserved communities. This could be in the form of a mobile computer lab where people could access the internet via a wireless connection and be directed toward educational and job-related resources.

Culturally my view of the sustainability of WinstonNet's business plan is mixed. While I see many possible cultural applications of wireless connectivity in Winston-Salem, the difficulty seems to be adoption. Will the local cultural community adopt wireless connectivity as a tool over existing technologies and communication channels? I believe certain elements of the local cultural community are more likely to adopt wireless technology than others. The NC School of the Arts and the organizers of the River Run Film Festival seem to have embraced the cultural applications of wireless technology (as attested by the number of lap-tops and cell phones in these communities) and are very likely to use wireless technology as a cultural outlet for our community; however, older cultural leaders may be less likely to adopt wireless technology. I believe this is partially due to an age difference but mostly due to a definition of the medium of culture and art. Many traditional cultural leaders seem to view culture as something that cannot be experienced in virtual space. They seem to believe that cultural must be experienced first person and live. Others in this community simply see virtual displays as another "medium" by which to create and display works of cultural significance. The success of You Tube and My Space incline me to believe that culture can be experienced through wireless technology and makes me hopeful that this view will prevail in our community.

In view of this, I believe WinstonNet should leverage its projected success in the business community to advance its social agenda. There is significant opportunity to connect local businesses using WinstonNet's services with underserved communities. The most obvious application is job fairs; however, the business users of WinstonNet represent a vast repository of knowledge. This group may be interested in helping educate underserved groups on the use of technology for educational and career purposes. In my opinion the cultural community must decide within its self if wireless technology is the appropriate outlet for its content. I believe wireless and other technologies will begin to play a larger role in the cultural community of Winston-Salem in the future; however, I am not sure if this role will be simply informational or if it will transcend informational roles and move into an experiential role whereby people can experience cultural events via wireless technology. In short, I believe WinstonNet does have a sustainable business plan, though I see this sustainability being heavily derived from the business community.