***Scenario:* Poppler’s Gift Shop**

Hubert Poppler is a self-made man. As a child, he always wanted to run his own business and 5 years ago his dream came true when he opened his own store, a gift shop located in Arizona. Popper left behind the world of big retail where he had been a manager and went into business for himself. Since opening the store, business has been strong as Poppler made use of his retail and marketing skills. Unlike many gift stores that serve a single attraction or location and sell cheap novelties, Poppler ensured his store sold unique local Southwest items. In fact, business was so good that he expanded twice — opening new stores across the state in prime tourist locations like Sedona, AZ.

Today Poppler’s is again looking at expanding even in the face of tough economic times. As part of his strategy to compensate for lost revenue due to the decline in tourists, half of Poppler’s stores are now dedicated to selling inexpensive household products. This ingenious strategy has kept the locals coming back as he offers better prices than many competitors. Poppler’s also keeps the locals coming back for his own special brand of snack products made by Nibblers Fine Bakery, a company run by his brother-in-law.

The increase in business and the addition of everyday household items, however, has made it more difficult to manage inventory. Poppler is also faced with the challenge of managing the split between the tourist’s and the local’s needs. Poppler uses outdated manual inventory tracking, simple cash registers, and he does not keep detailed sales records. Employees simply take note of the items on which they are low or out of stock at the end of the day, and the manager orders more. This system, however, is not effective as, on more than one occasion, Poppler’s stores lacked the items the customers wanted to buy.

Poppler remembers his days in the big box stores and wonders if technology is the solution to his problems. He wants to know how to bring his company up-to-date and what systems he should purchase. Poppler is especially interested in computerizing his inventory and tracking the preferences of his customers, both tourist and local. He also wants to be able to see online what his stores are selling since he cannot spend much time at any one store.

Poppler has had several questions keeping him up at night including: Can technology truly be cost- effective for a small business with only 40 employees spread across four stores? Is there any other way that technology can benefit Poppler’s such as when training new employees?