CARLETON UNIVERSITY — SPROTT SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

Case Assignment Questions

BUSI 4607A — Management of Technology and Innovation — Fall 2026

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Purpose of this document

This document sets out the assignment questions for all eight case sessions in this course. For each case there are two sets of questions: one for the team presenting the case, and one for the team submitting the written case report. The two sets are deliberately different. The presenting team is asked to analyze the situation and commit to a recommendation. The reporting team is asked to test that recommendation. Neither set is a superset of the other, and neither team should assume its questions are the only ones that will be raised in class.

How the two roles fit together

Each case session runs for one hour: a 30-minute presentation followed by a 30-minute discussion. The reporting team are the primary discussants during that second half. Your questions are written so that the presenting team must take a defensible position and the reporting team must have prepared a genuine challenge to it. Both teams are graded partly on that exchange, so a discussion in which the reporting team simply agrees serves neither team.

How the questions are organized

The presenting team's questions come in two parts. Part A is the set of core case questions — the questions the case itself puts on the table, and the ones this course has used for years. Part B carries the analysis past the case's own framing and into the course frameworks. Both parts are required, and the marking scheme does not distinguish between them.

What is being assessed

The case presentation and written case report each use a 45-mark rubric with nine dimensions. The two rubrics are not identical: the presentation rubric emphasizes delivery and defence, while the report rubric emphasizes depth of written analysis and discussion. Read the questions with the relevant final rubric beside you.

Deliverable	Authoritative marking scheme
Case presentation	**45 marks across 9 dimensions; see the final Case Presentation rubric on Brightspace.**
Written case report	**45 marks across 9 dimensions; see the final Case Report rubric on Brightspace.**

The final Case Presentation and Case Report rubrics published on Brightspace contain the complete criteria and take precedence over this overview.

Four standing expectations

These apply to every case in the course and account for most of the marks lost in past years.

- Name your framework and justify it. Do not simply apply a framework because it is familiar. State why it is the right lens for this problem, and match the level of analysis to the question. An industry-level framework applied to a firm-level problem will lose marks even if it is executed well.
- Use the exhibits. Every case in this course carries data that most students never open. Analysis that relies only on the narrative and ignores the numbers is incomplete, and it is visible immediately.
- Substantiate alternatives and criteria in theory. Generating three options is not analysis. Explain why those are the plausible options, and on what basis you are choosing among them.
- Finish the job. A recommendation without an implementation plan — who does what, in what order, with what resources, and what you stop doing — is not a recommendation.

Deliverables and deadlines

Deliverable	Who	Format	Due
Case presentation slides	Presenting team	PowerPoint. One member submits for the team to the BrightSpace Assignments folder for that case.	11:59 pm the day before class. The folder closes at the deadline; late work receives zero.
Written case report	Each student on the reporting team, individually	Max 10 pages double-spaced, including a one-page reference list. Each student submits their own file to the BrightSpace Assignments folder.	11:59 pm the day before class. The folder closes at the deadline; late work receives zero.

Case and team package map

Team numbers and packages are assigned in the first class. The table below reproduces the package structure from the course outline. Find your team number in the left column to see which case you present and which case you report on.

Team	Presents	Writes report on
1	Kodak and the Digital Revolution (A)	Netflix
2	AI Wars in 2025	Matching Dell
3	Adobe Systems, Inc.	AI Wars in 2025
4	Netflix	Innovation at Progressive (A)
5	Google Inc.	TopCoder (A)
6	Matching Dell	Kodak and the Digital Revolution (A)
7	Innovation at Progressive (A)	Google Inc.
8	TopCoder (A)	Adobe Systems, Inc.

Week 2 — Thursday, September 17, 2026

Kodak and the Digital Revolution (A)

Topic: Types and Patterns of Innovation | HBP Product #: 705448-PDF-ENG

Required reading: Schilling, Chapter 3

For the presenting team

You are the analysts. Take a position and defend it.

Part A — Core case questions

These are the questions the case itself puts on the table. Answer all of them.

1. Compare traditional photography to digital imaging. What are the main structural differences? Will digital imaging replace traditional imaging? How have value creation and value appropriation mechanisms changed in digital photography relative to traditional photography?
2. How would you assess Fisher's attempt to transform Kodak? Why did it fail?

Part B — Analytical questions

These carry the analysis past the case's own framing and into the course frameworks.

1. Classify digital imaging along the dimensions in Chapter 3 — radical or incremental, component or architectural, competence-enhancing or competence-destroying — from Kodak's point of view specifically. Each classification carries a different implication for whether Kodak could have responded. Say which implication follows from yours.
2. Construct the technology S-curves for silver-halide film and for digital imaging. Using the exhibits, locate Kodak on each curve as of the case date and estimate how much time the company actually had. Show the evidence behind your placement.
3. Kodak built the first digital camera in 1975 and held significant digital imaging patents. Explain why that technical lead did not convert into a market position. Your answer should distinguish between what Kodak could not do and what it chose not to do.
4. Set out the alternatives available to Daniel Carp and the criteria by which you are choosing among them. Recommend one, and give an implementation plan that states what Kodak commits resources to, on what timeline, and — importantly — what it stops doing.

For the reporting team

You are the discussants. Prepare to test the presenting team's case, not to restate it.

1. The presenting team will have committed to a classification of digital imaging. Identify the single strongest assumption underneath it and build the opposing case. If digital imaging is classified differently, what changes about Kodak's options?
2. Kodak's competence in chemistry, coating, and high-volume manufacturing is usually presented as a strength. Analyze it instead as a core rigidity, using case evidence on how those assets shaped the decisions Kodak actually made.

3. One reading of this case is that Kodak's failure was a business model failure rather than a technology failure: film sold consumables at high margin forever, digital sold a device once. Evaluate that reading against the exhibits.
4. Take a position on whether any strategy available to Carp preserved Kodak's profitability, or whether decline was structural by that point. Whichever you argue, identify the specific case evidence that most weakens your own position.

Week 3 — Thursday, September 24, 2026

Adobe Systems, Inc.

Topic: Dominant Design | HBP Product #: 801199-PDF-ENG

Required reading: Schilling, Chapter 4

For the presenting team

You are the analysts. Take a position and defend it.

Part A — Core case questions

These are the questions the case itself puts on the table. Answer all of them.

1. How was PostScript established as a de facto standard? How did Adobe make money from PostScript, despite its being an open standard?
2. What should Adobe do? How can they win the standards war? Should they focus on eDocs or eBooks? Will the eBooks market tip, or will there be multiple standards? How can Adobe make money in this market?

Part B — Analytical questions

These carry the analysis past the case's own framing and into the course frameworks.

1. Assess how strongly the eBook market exhibits the conditions for a winner-take-all outcome: increasing returns, network externalities, availability of complementary goods, and switching costs. Rate each condition and justify the rating from the case, rather than asserting that the market is or is not winner-take-all.
2. Compare Adobe's and Microsoft's positions on installed base, control of complementary goods, and credibility with publishers. Use the case data. State who holds the advantage on each dimension and where the balance sits overall.
3. Adobe gave away Acrobat Reader and charged for the authoring tools, and PostScript before it followed a related logic. Identify what mechanism made that work, and assess honestly whether the same mechanism is present in eBooks.
4. Lay out Adobe's strategic alternatives in the eBook standards battle and your decision criteria. Recommend one and specify the implementation: what Adobe gives away, what it charges for, which alliances it forms, and how it sequences these moves.

For the reporting team

You are the discussants. Prepare to test the presenting team's case, not to restate it.

1. Challenge the premise. Is this a standards battle at all, or a market that does not yet exist in commercially meaningful volume? Establish which, from the case evidence, and explain what that changes about the right strategy.

2. Any Adobe strategy here depends on publishers and hardware makers adopting it. Analyze their incentives. Do those parties actually want a single standard to win, and does Adobe's proposal serve them?
3. Build the case that Adobe should not contest this battle at all. What is the opportunity cost of the resources involved, and what is the strongest argument against your own position?
4. Assume Microsoft wins the standard. Design Adobe's fallback position and assess whether the presenting team's recommendation leaves that fallback available or forecloses it.

Week 4 — Thursday, October 1, 2026

Netflix

Topic: Timing of Entry | HBP Product #: 607138-PDF-ENG

Required reading: Schilling, Chapter 5

For the presenting team

You are the analysts. Take a position and defend it.

Part A — Core case questions

These are the questions the case itself puts on the table. Answer all of them.

1. Assess the timing of entry for both Netflix and Blockbuster to both the online (mail-based) DVD rental market and the video-on-demand market.

Part B — Analytical questions

These carry the analysis past the case's own framing and into the course frameworks.

1. Apply the first-mover advantage framework from Chapter 5 to Netflix's 1997 entry. Work through each potential advantage in turn and determine which ones Netflix actually realized, as distinct from which were theoretically available to it.
2. Blockbuster launched Blockbuster Online in 2004. Using the subscriber and financial data in the exhibits, evaluate what the fast-follower position gained and what it cost both firms. Quantify where the case allows.
3. Video-on-demand is the next entry timing decision. Identify the factors from Chapter 5 that determine optimal entry timing here, and assess where each one currently stands for Netflix.
4. State your alternatives and decision criteria for the VOD question, recommend a timing and a mode of entry, and give an implementation plan that addresses what happens to the DVD-by-mail business while VOD is being built.

For the reporting team

You are the discussants. Prepare to test the presenting team's case, not to restate it.

1. Netflix's recommendation system and distribution network are routinely described as sources of advantage. Test whether they were genuine barriers to imitation. What would a well-resourced competitor have needed to replicate them, and how long would it take?
2. Argue the case for Netflix delaying VOD entry. Identify the specific costs of entering a market before the enabling conditions are in place, and locate the evidence in the case that those conditions are not yet met.
3. Blockbuster had stores, brand recognition, and cash. Make the argument that its failure was one of execution and organizational commitment rather than timing, and identify what that implies about the limits of the timing framework.

4. Identify the enabling condition the presenting team's recommendation most depends on — bandwidth, content licensing, device penetration, or studio willingness — and stress test their plan against it not arriving on schedule.

Week 6 — Thursday, October 15, 2026

Google Inc.

Topic: Defining the Organization's Strategic Direction | HBP Product #: 910036-PDF-ENG

Required reading: Schilling, Chapter 6

For the presenting team

You are the analysts. Take a position and defend it.

Part A — Core case questions

These are the questions the case itself puts on the table. Answer all of them.

1. What were the key factors behind Google's early success?
2. Do you expect the search business to become more concentrated — that is, dominated by fewer firms? Is search a winner-take-all business?
3. In addition to enhancing its core search business, should Google also branch out into new arenas? Which of the following would you recommend: building a full-fledged portal like Yahoo!'s; targeting Microsoft's software hegemony; or becoming an e-commerce intermediary like eBay?

Part B — Analytical questions

These carry the analysis past the case's own framing and into the course frameworks.

1. Identify Google's core competencies using the three tests in Chapter 6: does it create value for customers, is it difficult for competitors to imitate, and is it extendable to new markets. Be precise about whether the competence lies in search algorithms, in advertising monetization, or in infrastructure — the answer changes the strategy.
2. Conduct an external analysis of Google's competitive position as of the case date and rank the threats by seriousness, using the financial and market data in the exhibits to support the ranking rather than intuition.
3. Google states its intent as organizing the world's information. Evaluate each major strategic initiative in the case against that stated intent and against the core competencies you identified. Which initiatives are consistent, and which are not?
4. Set out the alternatives — focus on the core search and advertising business, or extend into adjacent arenas — with your decision criteria. Recommend a direction and specify which initiatives get funded, which get cut, and how the organization is structured to deliver it.

For the reporting team

You are the discussants. Prepare to test the presenting team's case, not to restate it.

1. Challenge the presenting team's identification of the core competence. Argue for a different one and follow it through: what strategic direction does your version imply, and how does it differ from theirs?

2. Build the argument that Google's expansion into adjacent arenas destroys rather than creates value. Use the segment-level data in the exhibits, not general reasoning about focus.
3. Google's culture and its engineering-led resource allocation are presented as assets. Analyze them as a source of core rigidity, and identify what kind of strategic threat such a culture would be systematically slow to recognize.
4. Close with a prediction: state where Google's competitive position will stand fifteen years from the case date, and name the single assumption your prediction rests on. Record it. We return to this case in Week 12.

Week 7 — Thursday, October 22, 2026

Matching Dell

Topic: Competitive Strategies | HBP Product #: 799158-PDF-ENG

Required reading: Doha, Pagell & Swink (2018), “The Imitator's Dilemma”

For the presenting team

You are the analysts. Take a position and defend it.

Part A — Core case questions

These are the questions the case itself puts on the table. Answer all of them.

1. Why has Dell been so successful despite the low average profitability in the personal computer industry?
2. How effective have competitors been in responding to the challenge posed by Dell’s advantage?

Part B — Analytical questions

These carry the analysis past the case's own framing and into the course frameworks.

1. Describe Dell's Direct Model as an activity system rather than as a list of practices. Identify which activities generate the advantage, and explain how they reinforce one another such that copying any one of them in isolation fails.
2. Compaq, IBM, Hewlett-Packard, and Gateway each attempted to match Dell. For each, use the exhibits to establish what they imitated, what it cost them, and what result they obtained. Present this as a comparison, not four separate descriptions.
3. Apply the imitator's dilemma. Explain the trap these rivals face: what happens to their innovation output, short-term profitability, and long-term valuation if they continue to allocate R&D toward imitation.
4. Choose one rival and advise it. Lay out the alternatives — continue imitating, differentiate, or withdraw from the segment — with decision criteria, then recommend one and give an implementation plan that confronts the channel conflict problem directly.

For the reporting team

You are the discussants. Prepare to test the presenting team's case, not to restate it.

1. Argue that Dell's advantage is not imitation-proof. Specify what a rival would have to change, what it would cost, and how long it would take, using the case data on cost structure and inventory.
2. The imitator's dilemma predicts that sustained imitation harms long-term valuation even where it lifts short-term profit. Test that prediction against the evidence on Compaq and Hewlett-Packard in the exhibits. Does the case support it, complicate it, or neither?

3. Identify the trade-off the presenting team under-weighted — channel conflict, the installed base, supplier relationships, or the corporate customer's buying process — and quantify what it does to their recommendation.

4. Turn the framework on Dell itself. Under what conditions does Dell become the imitator, and what in the case suggests those conditions may be forming?

Week 9 — Thursday, November 5, 2026

Innovation at Progressive (A): Pay-As-You-Go Insurance

Topic: Service Innovation | HBP Product #: 602175-PDF-ENG

Required reading: Berry, Shankar, Parish, Cadwallader & Dotzel (2006), MIT Sloan Management Review

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For the presenting team

You are the analysts. Take a position and defend it.

Part A — Core case questions

These are the questions the case itself puts on the table. Answer all of them.

1. Customers of auto insurers are very price sensitive. How problematic is it to Progressive that customers almost always select the insurer that offers the best price?
2. Assess the viability of the Autograph system. What level of consumer acceptance will it take to make Autograph successful? What are the barriers to consumer acceptance? Should Autograph be expanded nationwide?

Part B — Analytical questions

These carry the analysis past the case's own framing and into the course frameworks.

1. Position Autograph on the Berry et al. framework — type of benefit against separability — and justify the placement. State what the framework predicts about the adoption path for an innovation in that quadrant.
2. Progressive spends more on service features than its competitors do, in a market where customers demonstrably will not pay a premium for them, and still earns superior returns. Using the exhibits, explain the mechanism by which operational savings are converted into value-added service.
3. Identify the competencies Autograph requires — actuarial, technological, operational, and distribution — and assess against the case whether Progressive has each one or must acquire it.
4. State the alternatives for the national rollout decision and your criteria. Recommend go or no-go, and if go, give the implementation plan: pricing, target segments, rollout sequence, and the conditions under which you would stop.

For the reporting team

You are the discussants. Prepare to test the presenting team's case, not to restate it.

1. Build the strongest possible no-go case from the evidence. Which specific findings from the Texas pilot cut against national rollout, and how much weight do they bear?
2. Reconcile two facts in tension: auto insurance is price-driven and customers do not pay for service features, yet Progressive is more profitable than rivals who spend less. Test whether the advantage genuinely lies in service design or in underwriting and risk segmentation, and what follows if it is the latter.

3. Autograph requires customers to accept continuous monitoring of their driving. Analyze the adoption barriers this creates and assess whether the presenting team accounted for them or assumed them away.

4. Assume competitors replicate Autograph within eighteen months. Determine what Progressive has actually gained, and evaluate whether the advantage is durable or merely a lead.

Week 10 — Thursday, November 12, 2026

TopCoder (A): Developing Software through Crowdsourcing

Topic: Business Model Innovation | HBP Product #: 610032-PDF-ENG

Required reading: Amit & Zott (2012), MIT Sloan Management Review

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For the presenting team

You are the analysts. Take a position and defend it.

Part A — Core case questions

These are the questions the case itself puts on the table. Answer all of them.

1. If you were a senior manager at TopCoder, what are the main capabilities you would need to develop to succeed at running the firm? Are these capabilities similar to, or unique from, those needed to manage a more traditional firm?
2. As a client of TopCoder, what would your main areas of concern be with this type of outsourcing? Has TopCoder done enough to overcome them?
3. The chief executive believes that project demand will automatically create programmer supply. What are the reasons for doubting this core assumption of the business model? What are the reasons for agreeing with it?
4. What changes are required in the firm to allow TopCoder to achieve ten times its current revenues?

Part B — Analytical questions

These carry the analysis past the case's own framing and into the course frameworks.

1. Map TopCoder's business model using Amit and Zott's design elements — content, structure, and governance — and identify which of their four design themes (novelty, lock-in, complementarities, efficiency) is the dominant source of value. Justify the choice.
2. TopCoder is a two-sided platform. Analyze both sides using the case data: what each side receives, what holds each side on the platform, and how the two sides depend on one another. Use the exhibits on community size, competition volume, and client count.
3. Only a small fraction of the community earns meaningful income from the platform. Determine from the data whether this is a structural feature that makes the model work or a fragility that threatens it, and explain the mechanism either way.
4. Set out the alternatives for scaling profitably, with decision criteria. Recommend one and give an implementation plan that specifies exactly which elements of the business model change and which are left alone.

For the reporting team

You are the discussants. Prepare to test the presenting team's case, not to restate it.

1. Challenge the scalability claim directly. Identify where the model breaks first as it grows — on the community side, the client side, or in platform management — and support the diagnosis with case data.
2. Argue that online competition is the wrong governance mechanism for genuinely complex, interdependent software. Propose what would replace it, and be explicit about what would break in the rest of the model if you did.
3. Evaluate the presenting team's recommendation against developer incentives specifically. Any change that alters how or whether developers get paid changes participation. Trace that second-order effect through and determine whether it strengthens or undermines the recommendation.
4. Assess whether TopCoder's model can be imitated, by whom, and what — if anything — protects it. Relate your answer to the design themes the presenting team identified.

Week 12 — Thursday, November 26, 2026

AI Wars in 2025

Topic: Profiting From Technology | HBP Product #: 725484-PDF-ENG

Required reading: Schilling, Chapter 9. Supplement: AI Wars in 2025 — Unit Economics Analysis (726851-XLS-ENG). Both teams are expected to use the spreadsheet.

For the presenting team

You are the analysts. Take a position and defend it.

Part A — Core case questions

These are the questions the case itself puts on the table. Answer all of them.

1. What were the key factors behind Google's dominance of search, and which of them still hold in 2025?
2. Google's researchers published the transformer architecture in 2017, and Google did not win the generative artificial-intelligence product market. Where did the value go instead?
3. Is generative artificial intelligence a winner-take-all business? Compare your answer with the one this class reached about search in Week 6.
4. Should Alphabet defend the search advertising business, deliberately cannibalize it, or build alongside it?

Part B — Analytical questions

These carry the analysis past the case's own framing and into the course frameworks.

1. Using the appropriability framework in Chapter 9, characterize the regime governing large language models. Work through the mechanisms — patents, trade secrets, tacit knowledge, lead time — and determine what, if anything, is genuinely protectable at the model layer.
2. Inventory Alphabet's complementary assets and classify each as generic, specialized, or co-specialized. Then answer the question that matters: which of them actually converts an AI capability into revenue, and which merely look valuable?
3. Using the unit economics spreadsheet, compare the contribution per query of a conventional search advertising result against a generative AI answer. State your assumptions explicitly and identify the assumptions under which the AI answer becomes as profitable as the ad-supported result.
4. Set out Alphabet's alternatives with decision criteria, recommend one, and give an implementation plan that is specific about how the business model changes — pricing, ad placement, what revenue is deliberately cannibalized, and over what period.

For the reporting team

You are the discussants. Prepare to test the presenting team's case, not to restate it.

1. Google's researchers published the transformer architecture in 2017 and Google did not win the resulting product market. Determine whether this is best explained as a failure of the appropriability regime, a failure of complementary assets, or a failure of management. Commit to one explanation and defend it against the other two.
2. Stress-test the presenting team's spreadsheet work. Identify the single assumption their recommendation is most sensitive to, re-run the analysis with that assumption wrong by fifty percent in the unfavourable direction, and report what happens to their case.
3. Argue that no firm captures durable value at the model layer, and that value accrues either below it in compute or above it in distribution and workflow. Establish where that leaves Alphabet specifically, and what it would have to own to be on the right side of that split.
4. In Week 6 this class analyzed Google in 2010 and made predictions. Retrieve them. Compare the strategic direction recommended then against what Alphabet now faces, identify what the 2010 analysis could not have seen, and draw a conclusion about the limits of strategic planning under technological uncertainty.

A note on how these questions should be used

The questions are a floor, not a ceiling. They mark out the analysis that a competent treatment of each case must contain. They do not exhaust what is interesting in these cases, and the strongest submissions in past years have been the ones that went past them — usually by noticing something in an exhibit that the questions did not ask about.

Two practical points. First, the reporting team's questions are written to produce disagreement, and that is intentional. A discussion period in which both teams arrive at the same conclusion by different routes is a weaker session than one in which a real difference is argued out with evidence. Second, you may not know in advance which position the presenting team will take. Prepare for more than one.

Questions about the assignment should be directed to the instructor at ahmed.doha@carleton.ca well before the submission deadline.