

1.3: Introduction to This Course

As the story of Apple suggests, today is an interesting time to study business. Advances in technology are bringing rapid changes in the ways we produce and deliver goods and services. The Internet and other improvements in communication (such as smartphones, video conferencing, and social networking) now affect the way we do business. Companies are expanding international operations, and the workforce is more diverse than ever. Corporations are being held responsible for the behavior of their executives, and more people share the opinion that companies should be good corporate citizens. Because of the role they played in the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression, businesses today face increasing scrutiny and negative public sentiment.⁶

Economic turmoil that began in the housing and mortgage industries as a result of troubled subprime mortgages quickly spread to the rest of the economy. In 2008, credit markets froze up and banks stopped making loans. Lawmakers tried to get money flowing again by passing a \$700 billion Wall Street bailout, now-cautious banks became reluctant to extend credit. Without money or credit, consumer confidence in the economy dropped and consumers cut back on spending. Unemployment rose as troubled companies shed the most jobs in five years, and 760,000 Americans marched to the unemployment lines.⁷ The stock market reacted to the financial crisis and its stock prices dropped by 44 percent while millions of Americans watched in shock as their savings and retirement accounts took a nose dive. In fall 2008, even Apple, a company that had enjoyed strong sales growth over the past five years, began to cut production of its popular iPhone. Without jobs or cash, consumers would no longer flock to Apple's fancy retail stores or buy a prized iPhone.⁸ Since then, things have turned around for Apple, which continues to report blockbuster sales and profits. But not all companies or individuals are doing so well. The economy is still struggling, unemployment is high (particularly for those ages 16 to 24), and home prices have not fully rebounded from the crisis.

As you go through the course with the aid of this text, you'll explore the exciting world of business. We'll introduce you to the various activities in which business people engage—accounting, finance, information technology, management, marketing, and operations. We'll help you understand the roles that these activities play in an organization, and we'll show you how they work together. We hope that by exposing you to the things that businesspeople do, we'll help you decide whether business is right for you and, if so, what areas of business you'd like to study further.

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