**Mini-Case: Microsoft Fights Fake E-Mailed News Release**

The fake e-mailed news release began like this:

**MICROSOFT BIDS TO ACQUIRE CATHOLIC CHURCH**

VATICAN CITY (AP)—In a joint press conference in St. Peter’s Square this morning, Microsoft Corporation and the Vatican announced that the Redmond software giant will acquire the Roman Catholic Church in exchange for an unspecified number of shares of Microsoft common stock. If the deal goes through, it will be the first time a computer software company has acquired a major world religion. (Janal, 1998, pp. 270–273)

The fake news release went on to say that Bill Gates and Steve Ballmer would be invested in the College of Cardinals, and Gates was quoted as saying, “The combined resources of Microsoft and the Catholic Church will allow us to make religion easier and more fun for a broader range of people.” The release also claimed that there would be a new software application called “Microsoft Church”; that the deal would give Microsoft online rights to the Bible; and that comedian Don Novello, playing his *Saturday Night Live* character, Father Guido Sarducci, hosted the announcement that was broadcast by satellite to 700 sites worldwide.

If anything remotely like this were true, which is ludicrous, it would have been a front-page, top of the newscast story. So how could anyone believe it on an e-mail transmission? So many people believed it, or, at least, thought it might be true, that they contacted Microsoft for confirmation. The company had to issue a news release denying the rumor. The fake news release also made the news.