

Zooming into the future

TEACHING NOTES

The authors prepared this case solely as a basis for class discussion and not as an endorsement, a source of primary data, or an illustration of effective or ineffective management. Although based on real events and despite occasional references to actual companies, this case is fictitious and any resemblance to actual persons or entities is coincidental.

Case synopsis

Zoom was founded in 2011 as an online meeting platform and it quickly grew to one million users in only a few months. Over the next few years, Zoom grew steadily and in 2019 the company went public. Then the crisis hit! And it turned out that an upside-down world was what Zoom needed. Due to the restrictions that followed the pandemic people had to rely on technology for remote work, school and other gatherings. This resulted in Zoom's daily users going from 10 million to 300 million. Due to this intense expansion Zoom has had some growing pains and complications. It became apparent that their security measures were insufficient and which affected the image of the company. This damage cost them some of their clients, e.g. NASA prohibited Zoom. Due to the loss of trust and the fact that the world is moving towards a post pandemic state, Zoom is facing challenges on how to move forward. Hence, a crucial task is to clearly define Zoom's positioning and therefore, we ask: What should be Zoom's strategic positioning in the post pandemic world?

Learning objectives

This case involves many implications regarding positioning and the corporate identity. Using theoretical frameworks will make it easier for the teacher to present the case and for students to gain understanding of it. Moreover, using theoretical frameworks when teaching allows for students to be able to solve similar cases in the future by applying the same theoretical frameworks. We suggest using the Corporate Identity Matrix, presented by Urde. By using this framework teachers can showcase the importance of having a clearly defined identity while students also get the opportunity to practise their analytical skills to define what the future position of Zoom should be.

Corporate Identity Matrix

The Corporate Identity Matrix consists of nine elements that reflect the brand's identity. One of the external elements of the matrix, the positioning, is the most relevant element for this case. The importance of having a clear positioning contributes to a stronger identity and if that element is missing, the corporate identity will not be as holistic and clearly defined. The positioning element lacks a clear definition in Zoom's case and therefore the corporate strategy is not clearly illustrated (see **Figure 1**). The following statement from Urde (2021) gives a great definition of coherent identity, and it can be stated that if the one element is unclearly defined, the brand is not coherent:

"When a corporate brand identity is coherent, each of the eight other elements inform and echo the brand core at the center of the matrix, resonating with the company's values and what the brand stands for. The brand core, in turn, shapes the other elements" (Urde, 2021, p.5)

When Zoom began their journey, they positioned themselves as an online video platform for businesses. However, during their pandemic, they went from being business oriented towards becoming a platform for anybody at any time. Given the rapid growth, and the following success and profit, it is time to redefine their position and predict what the future will look like. Hence, a learning objective from applying the Corporate Brand Identity Matrix is the insight that Zoom's current position is unclear and since all nine elements need to be coherent this causes positioning problems for Zoom. If a company's stakeholders do not perceive a company's positioning the same way as the company itself it can result in a gap between image and identity. Thereby, a further lesson learned from applying the Corporate Brand Identity Matrix is the importance of being able to claim the desired position among stakeholders as well and not only internally.

VALUE PROPOSITION Accessibility, performance, and brand/status.	RELATIONSHIPS If employees are happy, they deliver happiness to the customers. Happiness is they key to success.	POSITION The future desired position for Zoom is not clearly defined and hence its is hard to form a positioning strategy
EXPRESSION Deliver happiness by bringing people together.	BRAND CORE/PROMISE To care - for our customers, employees, company, community, and selves.	PERSONALITY User-friendly, welcoming and easy.
MISSION & VISION Develop a people-centric cloud service that transforms the real-time collaboration experience and improves the quality and effectiveness of communications forever.	CULTURE Focus on happiness and make people feel valued.	COMPETENCES Ability to listen to customer feedback, identify new features, and deliver them to the customer quickly and economically.

Figure 1 Zoom's Corporate Brand Identity Matrix

Corporate communication

Another learning objective in this case is the importance and power of corporate communication when a company is faced with a changing business environment. Corporate communication can be defined as:

"... an instrument of management by means of which all consciously used forms of internal and external communication are harmonised as effectively and efficiently as possible, so as to create a favourable basis for relationships with groups upon which the company is dependent." (Van Riel, 1995, p. 26; cited in Roper & Fill, 2021 p.213).

Hence, implementing a corporate communication strategy is suggested for Zoom in order to maintain and develop relationships with different stakeholder groups. With regards to teaching the case, it is important for the students to gain understanding of having a holistic communication strategy that presents the company as a united front when facing difficulties. Moreover, Roper and Fill (2012) points out that corporate communication can be used for strategic development which aims to strengthen the brand and to position or reposition an organisation while also influencing stakeholders of the organisation.

Another important element of communication is transparency and that being transparent when communicating enables stakeholders to understand a company on a deeper level which also can result in a more favourable reputation (Roper & Fill, 2012). Hence, using corporate communication can be a crucial stepping stone for Zoom to claim their future position.

Lastly, with this paragraph we argue that the case of Zoom and the future position of the company should teach the students the possibilities of using corporate communication in a time of change and that this change not necessarily has to be a crisis.

Key learning objectives

Figure 2 is built upon Bloom's taxonomy (Bloom, 1956) and presents the key learning objectives for this case. It combines the most important verbs to describe what was learned about the case as well as stating the most relevant takeaways.

Key Learning Objectives		
Remembering	... having a strong identity goes a long way	That brands constantly need to evolve to stay competitive and retain customers
Understanding	... the relevant model discussed in this case	If one element of the CBIM is missing, the identity is not coherent
Applying	... the relevant models to develop a coherent brand identity	The use of theory and CBIM
Evaluating	... the brand positioning after the crisis	Constantly evaluate your position in the market
Creating	... and defining the brand's positioning	Be open for new opportunities in the future

Figure 2 Key Learning Objectives

Discussion questions

In order to start the conversation and thus get students to participate in an interactive discussion and demonstrate critical thinking, it is good to start with the proposed main question. The class is supposed to lead the discussion and bounce off each other, the teacher can then help steer the discussion in the right direction and use the additional questions to do so. Furthermore the class is intended to use their knowledge and conclude from the discussion to present answers and a solution to the case.

Main question:

- What should be Zoom's strategic positioning in the post pandemic world?

Assisting questions:

- If Zoom decides to position themselves more towards the educational segment. What action can Zoom take to appeal more to this segment?
 - Should they consider developing a learning platform similar to Canvas to create a more seamless educational experience for both students and teachers?

- What are the opportunities in creating an educational platform for Zoom?
 - Possible revenue stream?
- Should Zoom compete directly with their biggest competitors in the organisational segment like Microsoft Teams and Google Meet?
- What will happen to social events in the future? Do you think Zoom will be a part of the events?
- Do you think Zoom should focus on being more “fun” instead of being more “serious”?
- Is digital school the future?

Teaching suggestions

This chapter contains suggestions about how the teacher can present this case to the class.

Introducing the case

To introduce the case it is suggested to start by asking the class about their own experiences of using Zoom, is it a service they enjoy using or do they have any fun Zoom incidents to share with the class? After this more informal conversation the teacher should introduce the case using a PowerPoint presentation or a similar option. Further it is recommended to include relevant videos, for example of how Zoom intervened with our daily lives during the pandemic. This is a way to present the case in a more fun and interesting way to catch, and keep, the students attention.

Discussing the case

When entering the discussion phase the conversation should be more formal since the students are now taking on the role as decision makers within the organisation. To initiate the discussion the teacher should make sure the question is clear and that everyone understands the relevance of the question. Furthermore, a whiteboard should be used for a summary of suggestions and to draw models, for example the Corporate Brand Identity Model and the positioning graph provided in the written case. This will assist the teacher to provide the students with the key learning objectives from the case as well as keeping up a good discussion with the class. The teacher should lead the case and encourage the students to participate in discussions. However, it is important for the teacher to avoid influencing the participant’s opinions and thoughts and rather let the class take control of the discussion. The teacher has the additional questions to direct the class in the right direction.

Concluding the case

To conclude the case the teacher should start by summarising what has been discussed in class and based on this the class should decide on what position Zoom should claim in a post pandemic world. Moreover, the teacher should present the current situation of the real case and how the decision making process is going, preferably by reading the statements presented by the CEO of Zoom and the CTO of an IT-company. To end the case there should be time for final questions to make sure the students have obtained the previously stated learning objectives.

Time plan

The whole presentation and discussion should take around 2 hours. The teacher starts discussing the background of Zoom and the incident and its effects, following up with explanations. The teacher should use the Corporate Brand Identity Matrix and the positioning graph as well as discussing the concept of corporate communication to help the students to reach a conclusion about the future positioning of Zoom. After the presentation of the case, if there is any confusion from students, it should be addressed in order to make sure that everyone understands the case and the question asked. Following this, the class discussion should take place. As previously stated, the teacher has the additional questions as a tool to direct the discussion in the right direction but the focus should be on letting the class take the lead on the discussion and avoid affecting it as much as possible. By the end of the discussion the students should present their solution and what decision they would make if they were a part of the executive management. After the discussion the class should come to a conclusion and then the teacher should present the current state of the case and what the experts opinions are. Finally a short concluding discussion is suggested to get the students opinions on the current state of the case. It is suggested that the time divisions of the case is as seen on **Figure 3**.

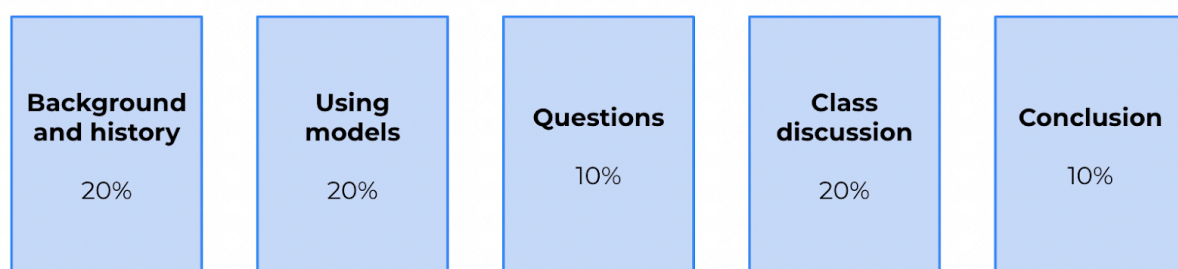


Figure 3 Time Plan

Board plan

The case presenter should have a predefined board plan as a structure for the case that is discussed in the class. The board plan is a tool that allows the presenter to keep an overview of the key points suggested by the students. **Table 1** presents an example for the presenter with a pre-filled board plan. However, we recommend that the presenter starts with a clean table and writes down the ideas discussed in the class and

allows the discussion in class to flow naturally with minimum influence from the presenter.

Key challenges	Alternatives	Actions
Defining the most crucial and urgent issues for Zoom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Security and safety on the platform • Unexpected growth in users • Unclear positioning in the market 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formally address the security issues and work towards fixing the problems in a way that everyone understands. • Meet the new demand, e.g. hiring experts, making sure that Zoom can handle the sudden growth. • Use models to define desired position and based on this define actions needed to reach this
Define actions required to successfully respond to the problems due to the unexpected growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Release official statements addressing the defined issues • Transparent communication and openness regarding the process • Listening to customers complaints and use the feedback to develop Zoom 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrange a press conference to address issues and communicate action plans • Official communication as well as making use of their large social media following to address complaints and communicate with social media followers e.g. responding to customer complaints on social media platforms. • Take customers' opinions into consideration and communicate that they are listening to their complaints and are working on improvement.
Propose a future strategic position for Zoom and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Position Zoom more towards businesses • Position more towards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on security and add more business related features to the platform. Make sure that functions like screen sharing works better.

	<p>educational segment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Position Zoom as being for everyone. Businesses and educational institutions but also for the more informal use of the service. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adding a teachers version to Zoom and perfecting the features used for teachers and offering an educational platform to create a seamless teaching experience. Adding more fun and creative features and further increasing the security of the platform to appeal to businesses.
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Table 1 Board Plan

The Board plan consists of three sections: “Key challenges”, “Alternatives” and “Actions”. The sections should be filled in step-by-step throughout the discussion. The challenges box includes the main comments from the audience regarding the key tasks Zoom is facing. The alternative covers the options to overcome each task and followed by the action plan.

Reflection

On January 25th, we discussed three potential case ideas with our teacher Mats Urde. After a good discussion, we came to the conclusion that a strategy case for the video conferencing tool Zoom would make the best case. The case is unique and relevant for us as brand management students, and students in general, since it has been our main source of education and communication during the past two years. Furthermore, it will be interesting to see if the class’ management decision will be the same as what Zoom decides to do in the future.

Writing a case ourselves has been a great learning experience as we got to apply the relevant theories and frameworks to the case. Additionally, this is a new way of writing for us as students, where we don’t have to focus on general academic writing. It is a good exercise to step out of the academic routine and work on a real-life case. Getting the chance to work the other way around, creating a case without solving it, has been a good practice. However, it was a challenge to pinpoint the issue and the most crucial problems for Zoom.

Another challenge for us has been to take on the role of case writers and then writing from teachers point of view as well as combining it with a more managerial perspective. However, this has made us gain a holistic understanding of the case and taught us to analyse it from multiple perspectives.

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