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How Zoom Conquered Video Conferencing



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In 2020, [Zoom](#) grew so quickly that its brand became the default term for video conferencing. “Let’s jump on a Zoom,” has become as ubiquitous as, “Just Google it.” What drove that explosive growth in the face of competition from brands like Cisco, Microsoft and Google?

Not just a pandemic winner

The Covid-19 crisis caused an enormous surge in demand for video communications with so many people unable to meet in person, but that alone doesn’t explain Zoom’s ascendance. They were growing rapidly long before Covid-19 shut down offices, events, and travel. Zoom had already surpassed its larger competitors in the years preceding the pandemic:

Most Popular Video Conferencing Apps

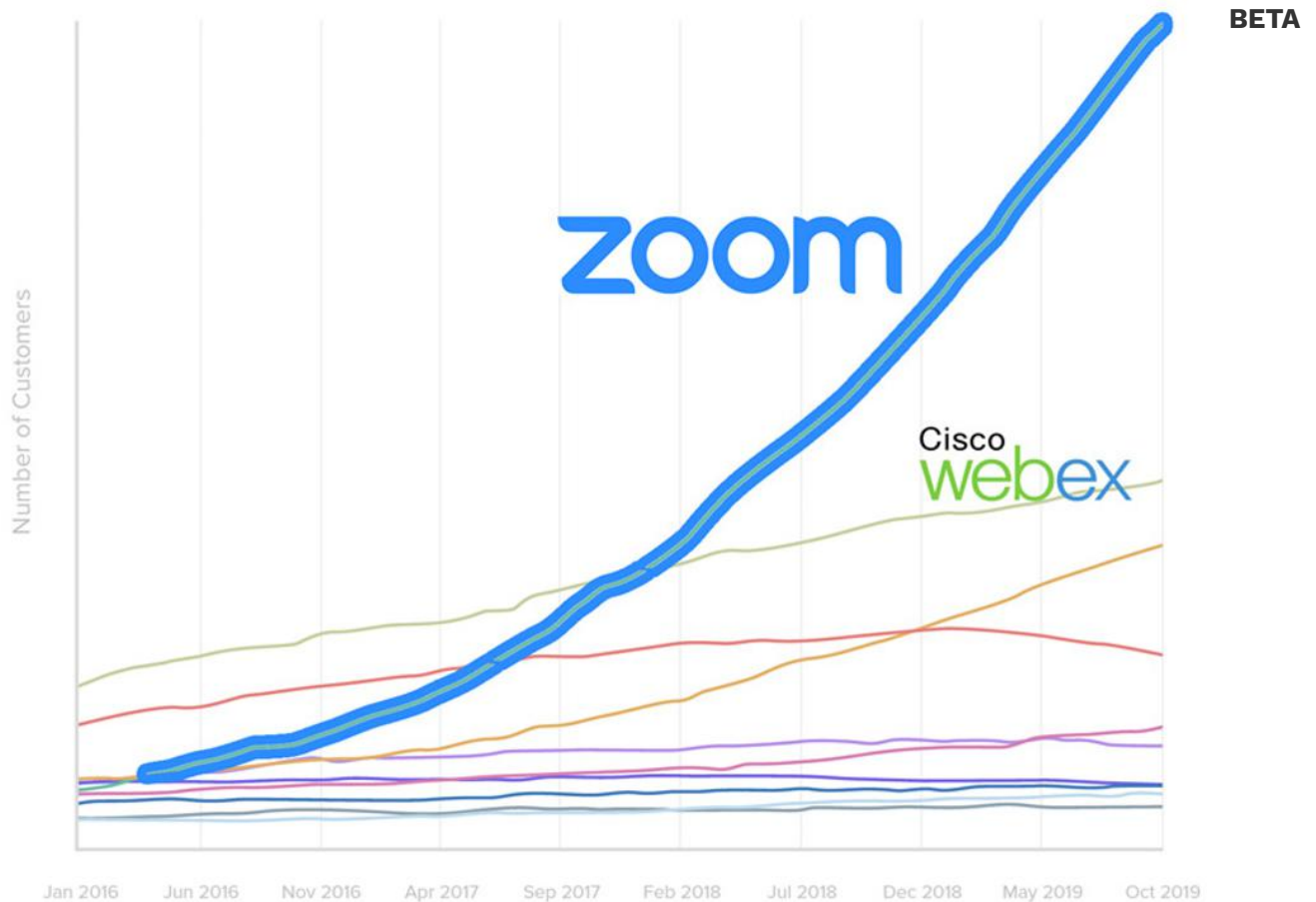


IMAGE CREDIT: ZOOM.US AND ROGER DOOLEY

The [2020 Businesses @ Work](#) report from Okta notes, “Zoom was the #1 fastest growing video conferencing app in 2016, and it hasn’t slowed down since. Over the past three years, Zoom has enjoyed an astounding 876% growth in number of customers in our network. For comparison, second-place Cisco Webex grew 91% over that same period.”

As with Amazon, the pandemic crisis simply accelerated Zoom’s already robust growth.

The Mission is “Frictionless”

Zoom’s [mission statement](#) is remarkably simple and straightforward:

- **“Make video communications frictionless.”**

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Zoom Beats Microsoft Teams, Google Meet With Game-Changing New Features

At a time when most corporate mission statements try to acknowledge every priority and every stakeholder, this short, direct message stands out.

Most importantly, this statement provides **clarity** to every team member. If you are a developer, network expert, or any other Zoom employee, you know that any action you take should *never* increase customer effort or increase complexity. If you do, you'll be contradicting Zoom's reason for existence.

Zoom was founded by Eric Yuan, who left Cisco's Webex unit to focus on mobile-friendly video conferencing. Webex was the dominant video conference player before Zoom passed them.

I couldn't find Cisco's mission statement on their website despite using both their site search and Google. But, a [third party site](#) offered this:

- **“Shape the future of the Internet by creating unprecedented value and opportunity for our customers, employees, investors, and ecosystem partners.”**

This statement is so broad and jargon-laden that it provides no clear direction for team members. How could a developer or designer possibly know if a new feature or a interface design will “create unprecedented value and opportunity?” Will fixing something that customers complained about really “shape the future?”

This mission statement is itself high friction.

A little too frictionless?

Zoom grew more rapidly than its much larger competitors because it made things easy for its users. Easy to set up, easy to use, easy to change one's background... maximum simplicity, minimum effort. But, in striving to make onboarding a user as simple as possible, Zoom skipped some security precautions.

One of these lapses made Mac computer webcams [vulnerable to hackers](#). Another security hole allowed “[zoombombing](#),” in which a hacker could enter and disrupt an ongoing video conference.

Not unlike fellow unicorn Uber, Zoom initially focused on exponential growth, not perfection. After its software was universally adopted, Zoom changed its code to beef up security.

Although security issues could have derailed the firm, Zoom's growth continued without interruption.

The Zoom lesson

Taking on giants like Cisco, Microsoft, and Google might have seemed like a fool's errand in Zoom's early days. But, Yuan let one principle drive the firm's efforts: make video conferencing as easy as possible for everyone. Minimize user effort. Eliminate complexity.

In my book *Friction*, I show how other firms used a similar approach to disrupt competition. Whatsapp blew past other messaging apps with an onboarding process that took barely two minutes, and let new users invite their friends with a tap of their screen. Amazon's Jeff Bezos was talking about “frictionless shopping” in 1997 - a time when many retailers were still trying to decide how important ecommerce was.

History shows that nimble startups who are relentless about creating an effortless customer experience can surpass far larger competitors. Large organizations can do the same, of course, but only if their leaders can exhibit the same clarity of purpose as Zoom's four-word mission statement.

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