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Systems and Infrastructures

Write Up I

Dropbox was designed by Drew Houston and Arash Ferdowsi. When explaining why he created Dropbox, Houston describes becoming frustrated with having to use a USB drive to transfer files between his work computer, home computer and laptops- which he frequently forgot to bring with him. At one point, one of his hard drives crashed and he lost a huge bulk of his content. In addition to these problems, he struggled with attempting to share large amounts of data with colleagues through multiple email attachments[1]. Dropbox emerged to store and share large amounts of data using a system that was accessible across multiple devices and to multiple users.

Dropbox was launched in 2007 and had over 500 million users by the end of 2018.[2] It organizes its tiers of services offered into individual or team, each with different pricing plans. Differences in usage are divided on Dropbox's site into a few categories. "Dropbox core features" include cloud storage space, from 2 GB to "as much space as needed", access to a desktop app, access from any device able to connect to WIFI, and sharing capabilities secured with 256-bit and SSL/TLS encryption. "Content and accident protection" includes file recovery, remote device wipe, shared link controls and device approvals. "Productivity and sharing tools" refers to the tools Dropbox offers for sharing and working collaboratively on files stored in Dropbox. "Team management" is the tools offered for administrative control for larger companies such as billing, multi-team login, billing and audit logs with file event tracking. "Support" offers three levels of technical assistance: Priority email support, available to all users, Live chat support, available only to "professional" users and above and phone support, available to "standard" business users and above.[3]

Dropbox seems to be moving away from attracting individual users. It is competing with many other platforms offering to store and curate data and it has abandoned a couple of apps targeted towards individual use, like the photo app "Carousel". While Dropbox offers 2 GB of free storage to users with the option to upgrade to 2 TB of storage for $9.99/ month, icloud offers more tiers of storage for individuals starting at 5 GB of storage for free, 50 GB for $0.99/ month, 200 GB for $2.99/ month or 2 TB for $9.99/ month. Google Drive offers to store 15 GB of data for free, including photographs, documents and emails. These are only a few of the many other services which offer a more competitive platform for individuals storing personal digital files.

Dropbox now focuses on building its business capabilities. On their "About" page, they state "Our mission is to design a more enlightened way of working". Expanding on its original mission to allow file sharing, Dropbox is going up against Google Drive by including services that allow teams to collaborate

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[1] Ying, Jon "Meet the Team! (Part 1)" *Work in Progress*. Dropbox. February, 5 2009.
https://blog.dropbox.com/topics/company/meet-the-team-part-1
[2] Trefis Team "Dropbox is Doing Well, But Looks Rich in the Face of Industry". *Forbes.* May 21, 2018.
https://www.forbes.com/sites/greatspeculations/2018/05/21/dropbox-is-doing-well-but-looks-rich-in-the-face-of-industry-headwinds/#7e8b2c5836ed
[3] "Choose the right Dropbox for you". *Dropbox*. https://www.dropbox.com/plans?trigger=nr

on and build shared documents and projects. Dropbox recently unveiled a colorful redesign and the message "The world needs your creative energy"[4]. The primary audience for Dropbox is increasingly creative businesses.

Interestingly, as Dropbox is developing its business tools, it is also answering the call for the secure and responsible storage, organization and sharing of sensitive files. Businesses can limit access to certain files, monitor changes to them and recover lost versions making Dropbox a digital and more sophisticated version of the locked filing cabinet. It even offers a new premium feature that ensures that file storage policies comply with HIPAA.

One of the reasons that Dropbox is focusing on developing itself as a smart tool for businesses could be its desire to attract more costumers willing to pay premium prices for their services. 2 GB of storage, offered for free, will hold about 200 jpegs, about 125 pdf files or about 300 docx files, which is not much storage in our digital age. In addition to more storage, paid plans offer security like viewer history and file wipe as well as recovery up to 180 days, larger file sharing capabilities and basic support, like the ability to speak to a representative over the phone. Dropbox has made its "basic" service essentially useless for most users. This presents a First Function Issue- if a business or individual would like to use Dropbox, they will most likely have to pay at least $9.99/ month. Dropbox's business plans are billed per user per month (with a minimum of three users), starting at $15/ user/ month (at least $45/ month) and charging $25/ user/ month for unlimited storage space and "sophisticated control and security features". If a business decides that it can absorb the cost of working with Dropbox for storing and collaborating on files, another First Order Issue presents itself in training employees on how to properly use the app. Dropbox's basic interface is simple- files are organized by folder and sub-folder allowing businesses to customize organization based on their individual needs. As new functions are added and businesses conduct more of their work through the Dropbox platform, organizations will not only be responsible for training their employees on how to organize files and where to find the files they need, but how to manipulate new software in order to complete their tasks.

In the face of so many other applications developed for allowing businesses to create and collaborate on files- from Google Drive to simply sharing files through email- a Second Function problem may present itself in convincing employees to restrict their communication and activity on files to Dropbox. If a business is going to commit to Dropbox as its primary platform, employees must be careful to make any changes to documents or files through Dropbox or to replace all shared files on Dropbox with the most recent version. A potential problem could exist with multiple different versions of the same file existing on several different employees' computers. Another problem could stem with employees' frustration at not having access to certain documents. Finally, employees may be frustrated at the prospect of learning Dropbox's tools in order to do the work they were able to accomplish through other services in the past. These problems will have to be addressed by managing the corporate culture and should hopefully be relieved by Dropbox's ease of use once employees become accustomed to the platform.

As businesses become more active in how their employees create, collaborate on, organize and archive digital content, it could be that Dropbox and all of the services it offers are already irrelevant. New platforms that more seamlessly and thoroughly encompass a business's needs at every stage of

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[4] Richards, Katie. "Dropbox Wants to Unlock Creativity with an Unexpected Rebrand". *Adweek.* October 3, 2017. http://www.adweek.com/brand-marketing/dropbox-wants-to-unlock-creativity-with-an-unexpected-rebrand-that-features-a-trippy-video/

production could soon surpass Dropbox. Businesses may also determine that it is more efficient to instead incorporate a network of smaller platforms that perform each service more thoroughly. Before deciding to adopt Dropbox, businesses should determine what its needs are, from creation to archival storage of content, and investigate whether Dropbox truly meets all of these needs or whether there are other platforms available that do it better.