A First Look at Zoom’s New Whiteboard

August 2022
A New Whiteboard

Zoom, in the second half of 2020, announced a reintroduction of the whiteboard functionality that many teams have used in conjunction with Zoom Rooms or Zoom for Home. This new Zoom Whiteboard wouldn’t be tethered to a device, but rather a cloud-based platform that users could iterate on regardless of location or software variant. In addition to the ideate-from-anywhere approach, this new whiteboard would be persistent and accessible to users both in and out of meetings. With new functionality and architecture to address how teams operate since the pandemic of 2020, the new Zoom Whiteboard would deliver on the vision of a single collaboration tool for the workplace.
This spring, Zoom released the new Whiteboard to the world, making it accessible to users through the Zoom desktop application, in browser, and in meetings. This initial release enabled teams to brainstorm ideas in the moment, regardless of location or form factor being used. Additionally, the release provided a persistent Zoom Whiteboard so teams can easily build on ideas and iterate over time.

While this may sound like an incremental improvement in a world where digital whiteboards abound, it created an integrated experience for teams that’s hard to duplicate. It represented a shift which we’ve seen across the industry, from content being a secondary consideration in the meeting, to a more equal pillar of collaboration.

Zoom Whiteboard features a canvas to brainstorm and lay out ideas, similar to a static whiteboard. The power of Zoom’s Whiteboard is seen when you fill the canvas, as a static whiteboard would require erasing while Zoom can add additional canvases and save them together as a single project. Teams can easily share the canvases with colleagues regardless of location, eliminating the need for blurry pictures from mobile devices. Adding to the power of Zoom Whiteboard is the ability to grow the canvas as content is added, usurping another inherent limitation of the static whiteboard. The tools provided within Zoom Whiteboard are simple and easy to use, from sticky notes and text boxes to shapes and connecting lines. Contributors can also draw or write with inking functionality that mimics static whiteboard interactions. Building on the initial release, Zoom is continuously introducing new features and functionality to Whiteboard.
Collaboration by Zoom

In a world where every vendor promises to enhance collaboration, the toughest challenge is how to differentiate an offering while leveraging the same basic building blocks of human behavior. Many vendors are limited in this sense, as they can only solve for one aspect of collaboration and rely on partnerships or integrations to complete a workflow. While this challenge persists for most solutions in the market today, Zoom is steadfastly different. As one of the only vendors attempting to address all the elements of collaboration at scale, Zoom is differentiated in its aspiration to deliver the end-to-end meeting workflow. Industry-leading voice and video capabilities mix with the ease of use that Zoom is known for, to deliver a seamless meeting for distributed teams. Combine these pre-existing pillars of collaboration with the same approach to content co-creation, and the resulting experience is more than compelling.

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Upon launching Zoom Whiteboard, team members in a meeting initiate a co-creation session by clicking the Whiteboard icon to share a digital canvas where all meeting participants can contribute. The ability to leverage Zoom Whiteboard to ideate over time is a major step forward when contrasted with the typical side-by-side approach of most digital whiteboard and visual collaboration tools. Even if a tool has an integration with Zoom, it still requires approvals and acceptance of terms outside of Zoom, breaking the workflow and creating friction for new collaborators. Once created, a whiteboard can be shared and accessed by colleagues outside of a meeting by simply clicking the Whiteboard icon in either the app or web version of Zoom. Alternatively, a user can initiate a whiteboard anytime and bring it to a meeting for co-creation or presentation purposes. The combination of ad-hoc and persistent functionality within a single platform for meeting and sharing is what the majority of teams require to adopt a digital whiteboard.

This all-in-one collaboration suite is available to all Zoom users, with a limitation of three concurrently editable whiteboards for Free and Pro license holders. Business and Enterprise users have access to unlimited whiteboards included in their subscription. By providing digital whiteboarding capabilities to all license holders, the chance of a casual Zoom user testing and adopting the solution increases. Over time, Zoom Whiteboard will increase the visual literacy within an organization, and slowly chip away at lingering end-user resistance to visual collaboration tools. The ability to integrate whiteboard functionality with already-implemented online meeting services is likely to appeal to corporate users, potentially prompting teams to re-evaluate the need for stand-alone digital whiteboard solutions. This isn’t to say that purpose-built visual collaboration platforms will fade, but simple digital whiteboards will find it hard to compete with the value proposition of an integrated, streamlined approach to collaboration within the digital workplace.

As reported in Wainhouse’s 2022 State of the Market for Visual Collaboration, this strategy can be seen across the market, with the most notable meeting services now offering basic whiteboard functionality at no cost to the user.
Today’s Challenges Require Whiteboard

Over the past two years, information workers have made a shift in expectations when meeting remotely with colleagues. The days of just having meeting access have fallen out of favor when contrasted with full meeting participation. For many workers, audio-only calls are a thing of the past, as is restricted access to content. Instead, workers look to have full participation in the meeting, regardless of location. This shift, along with the ever-changing in-room dynamics of local COVID-19 regulations, has created the need for persistent, interactive content for synchronous and asynchronous work.

To address these changes, organizations are looking for solutions that can flex with the workforce and enable productivity regardless of in-room or hybrid resources. This translates to software platforms that enable co-creation in addition to voice, video, and screen sharing. This need was seen in the first year of the pandemic as visual collaboration and digital whiteboard offerings grew at an unprecedented rate globally. Now two-plus years into the pandemic, organizations are ready to make long-term investments to meet these new expectations, which is why Zoom’s Whiteboard is perfectly timed to meet the market.
Within Zoom Whiteboard sessions, shapes and connecting lines are simple to understand and easy to add. The ease of use is consistent for almost all interactions within a whiteboard, as every element is added within 2-3 clicks by the user. New users quickly pick up the interactions needed to ideate, brainstorm, and build mind maps and org charts. Most recently, Zoom released templates for Whiteboard, enabling teams and users to apply elements based on the desired workflow or outcome, which further accelerates both adoption and day-to-day workflows. Between the guides and ease of use, the Zoom Whiteboard is well-positioned as the entry-level tool for teams looking to familiarize themselves with digital whiteboards and visual collaboration tools.

Leveraging Zoom’s Whiteboard

While Zoom’s Whiteboard is still adding new functionality regularly, the roadmap is well-suited to address market needs, starting with the ease of access through the same app and web versions as voice, video, and chat. Zoom is concurrently working to address the challenges of hybrid work, as canvases can be shared with colleagues and those outside of the organization through both in-meeting and asynchronous functionality. Bringing the team together for synchronous work is straightforward and requires less effort from the participants in comparison to 3rd-party tools. Getting a user started in a canvas is also simple, as there are only three guided steps needed before getting to work. Reducing the learning curve makes it easier to adopt, in contrast to tools that require full training sessions prior to use.
Wainhouse’s Conclusion

Zoom’s approach to digital whiteboarding is well-founded, building off the basic workflows of share, present, and ad-hoc content capture. The persistent nature of Whiteboard means teams can rely on the platform throughout a project or engagement, making the toolset an integral part of the meeting workflow in addition to asynchronous work. Between the current feature set that Zoom has released to date, and the short-term roadmap that is planned for 2H 2022, Zoom Whiteboard will be very well-positioned to raise the level of visual literacy across organizations, and capture the attention of existing and new Zoom users.

ABOUT ZOOM

Zoom is for you. Zoom is a space where you can connect to others, share ideas, make plans, and build toward a future limited only by your imagination. Our frictionless communications platform is the only one that started with video as its foundation, and we have set the standard for innovation ever since. That is why we are an intuitive, scalable, and secure choice for large enterprises, small businesses, and individuals alike. Founded in 2011, Zoom is publicly traded (NASDAQ:ZM) and headquartered in San Jose, California. Visit zoom.com and follow @zoom.

ABOUT WAINHOUSE RESEARCH

Wainhouse Research provides strategic guidance and insight on products and services for collaboration and conferencing applications within Unified Communications. Our global client base includes established and new technology suppliers and service providers, and enterprise users of voice, video, streaming, and web collaboration solutions. The company provides market research and consulting, produces conferences on technology trends and customer experiences, publishes a free weekly newsletter, and speaks at client and industry events.

ABOUT THE RESEARCHERS

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