





Teaching notes

How to scale a startup? The Use Bike case and the expansion of rent a bike service in Brazilian hotels

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Abstract

Objective: the “Use Bike” case presents the dilemma faced by César and his partners to finding a way to expand their business. Initially, they have two choices: the sales method through trade representatives or the expansion by franchises. Business experience reveals the various challenges, as well as the advantages associated with each choice. The use of trade representatives implies the need for a bigger investment for the acquisition of bicycles and business expansion, i.e. challenges in terms of cash flow. On the other hand, creating a model for franchising that allows to reproduce the success of the business, requires overcoming challenges and complexities. The presentation of these experiences, with information about the implementation of the project and considerations collected directly from the company's executives, allows the students to be able to discuss the entrepreneurial journey, from the validation of the business models and the possibilities of scalability of a startup that is not exclusively digital.

Keywords: Startup. Business model. Scalability. Business expansion. Franchising.

Como escalar uma startup? O caso da Use Bike e a expansão da locação de bicicletas em hotéis no Brasil

Resumo

Objetivo: o caso da “Use Bike” apresenta o dilema vivido por César e seus sócios para encontrar uma forma de expandir seu negócio. Inicialmente, eles têm duas alternativas: o método de venda por representantes comerciais ou a expansão por franquias. A experiência empresarial revela os diversos desafios, bem como as vantagens associadas a cada uma das escolhas. O uso de representantes comerciais implica na necessidade de maior investimento para aquisição de bicicletas e expansão do negócio e, conseqüentemente, maiores desafios com relação ao fluxo de caixa. Por outro lado, criar um modelo para franquias, que permita reproduzir o sucesso do negócio, exige vencer desafios e complexidades. A apresentação dessas experiências, com informações sobre a implantação do projeto e considerações coletadas diretamente dos executivos da empresa, tem a finalidade de permitir que alunos sejam capazes de discutir a jornada empreendedora, a partir da validação de modelos de negócios e das possibilidades de escalabilidade de uma startup que não é exclusivamente digital.

Palavras-chave: Startup. Modelo de negócio. Escalabilidade. Expansão de negócios. Franquias.

TEACHING NOTES

Teaching objectives

How to scale and expand a startup's business model? That is the question to be discussed and answered by the students who carry out this study.

Unlike some startups, whose operations are entirely digital, the challenge of expanding Use Bike is more complex: the business is supported by a web information system for registering and controlling the rental of bicycles; however, the physical support structure for bicycles is necessary, as well as the publicity of the service in each hotel, to speed up the operation.

In addition to observing and debating about validating hypotheses relevant to a startup, students can develop analyses regarding their expansion models and the search for rapid growth to avoid direct competitors in the market.

It is recommended to use this study in disciplines of management and business development, entrepreneurship, and marketing, whether at the undergraduate or graduate level, *latu* or *stricto sensu*.

Therefore, it is up to the professor: (a) to provide factual information as a way of supporting the discussion on franchising models and sales by sales representatives; (b) to provide startup references and business model validation; (c) to plan classes with related content, adapted to the reality and local preferences of their bibliographic sources, so that, based on this knowledge, students can reflect on the challenges of this implementation.

Sources and collection methods

This study was based on information from primary sources – provided by one of the founding partners of Use Bike, represented in the text by the character César, his actual experiences, and business metrics. Secondary sources: Use Bike, Ministry of Tourism in Brazil, ABIH, BikeRio, Olympics Rio 2016, whose electronic addresses are available for consultation (Table 1), and data provided by the Business Technology Incubator of the University of Vale do Itajaí (Univali).

Table 1

Electronic addresses consulted as secondary sources of information

Name	Endereço eletrônico
Use Bike Instagram	https://www.instagram.com/use.bike/
Ministry of Tourism in Brazil	http://www.turismo.gov.br/
Brazilian Association of Hotel Industry	http://abih.com.br/
BikeRio	https://bikeitau.com.br/bikerio/
Olimpics Rio 2016	http://www.rio2016.com

Note: Elaborated by the authors.

As information, below (Table 2), the corporate structure of Use Bike, together with the mutual contract's convertible into participation, firmed with investors.

It is important to point out that the models of convertible mutual contracts give the investor the possibility of converting the agreed percentage into participation shares, based on some contractual triggers, thus proportionally diluting the participation of the founding partners.

Table 2

Use Bike's corporate structure

Name/ Description	Percentage / Option	Participation Type
César	33.34%	Participation quotas
Roberto	33.33%	Participation quotas
Luiz	33.33%	Participation quotas
Angel investors	10.00%	Convertible loan
Newton Evolution (Acceleration Program)	12.00%	Mútuo conversível

Note: Elaborated by the authors.

Discussion questions

Questions were designed so students could reflect on the models of startups. In particular, on the scalability and expansion of the business. Other expansion models can also be exposed, in addition to those collected in interviews with entrepreneurs, that is, the possibilities of franchises or commercial representatives.

- (1) Considering the success of the pilot project in the "Marvelous City," describe the minimum viable product (MVP) used by César to validate the startup model. For you, what justifies the validation of this model?
- (2) Based on the success of the implementation of César's pilot project, with the effective participation of 30 hotels and the acceptance percentage of 97%, which showed the possibility of expansion or growth, do you consider that the mechanisms used for the conquest of financial resources at that time can be the same to consummate the development, at the national level? Or could Cesar seek other financial contributions? Which ones?
- (3) Highlight the advantages and disadvantages relevant to the two models studied by the entrepreneurs (commercial representation and franchises). Explain, in this way, what the Use Bike expansion would be.

Suggested educational plan

For the case application, it is suggested its prior availability for reading and searching for literature related to startups, entrepreneurship, marketing, and franchising, depending on the context. However, as it is a short report, it is also feasible to read it during the study presentation. A 60-minute class is enough to discuss the case, but if the option is to read in class, a 90-minute class is more suitable.

After reading, it is recommended to start the discussion with the first question, referring to the validation of the Use Bike business model. The objective is to raise points regarding César and his partners' actions to identify if the opportunity was viable, before spending unnecessary resources. Even without a fully finished product, it was necessary to make a sale to get a sense of market acceptance.

The sale needed to happen with more than one potential customer so that we could replicate this business model and, subsequently, could contemplate scalability. It is recommended, here, that the teacher question only the points raised by the students to generate more discussion about the beginning of the business. In the beginning, the definition of a startup can be

presented – a repeatable and scalable business model – and each action taken by the partners in validating the Use Bike model can be scored.

After the initial discussion, the second question, referring to scalability, should be made available. This study already reflects the identification by the partners of two alternatives: franchising or sales through commercial representatives. However, this is a favorable moment to think about more options and discuss other possible models, such as direct sales to large hotel chains. It is worth remembering that other challenges may arise depending on the method followed.

The startup scene is explicit: financial resources are needed, and, depending on the model, they can represent a significant amount for purchasing bicycles and the composition of the cash flow. The teacher can always question the feasibility models so that the students can evaluate the challenge as a whole. It is essential to highlight the different scalability difficulties of a fully digital startup versus the Use Bike business.

Below (Table 3) is the bimonthly cash flow model of the startup's operation, which demonstrates the financial challenges and supports the discussion of each model.

Table 3

Use Bike's bimonthly summary cash flow

April and May 2016		
Description	Payable/ Receivable	Amount
Angel investor contribution	Receivable	R\$ 75,000.00
Angel investor contribution	Receivable	R\$ 75,000.00
Newton Evolution contribution	Receivable	R\$ 150,000.00
Bicycle purchase (15 hotels, 5 per hotel)	Payable	R\$ 135,000.00
Partners pro-Labore	Payable	R\$ 18,000.00
Travel expenses (RJ)	Payable	R\$ 7,000.00
Receivable – bicycle rentals	Receivable	R\$ 2,500.00
Balance		R\$ 140,000.00
June and July 2016		
Description	Payable/ Receivable	Amount
Balance of previous month	Receivable	R\$ 140,000.00
Bicycle purchase (15 hotels, 5 per hotel)	Payable	R\$ 135,000.00
Partners pro-Labore	Payable	R\$ 18,000.00
Travel expenses (RJ)	Payable	R\$ 7,000.00
Receivable– bicycle rentals	Receivable	R\$ 35,288.00
Bicycle maintenance	Payable	R\$ 6,250.00
Balance		R\$ 9,038.00
August and September 2016 (Olympics)		
Description	Payable/ Receivable	Amount
Balance of previous month	Receivable	R\$ 9,038.00
Partners pro-Labore	Payable	R\$ 18,000.00
Travel expenses (RJ)	Payable	R\$ 10,000.00
Receivable– Bicycle rentals	Receivable	R\$ 343,056.00
Bicycle maintenance	Payable	R\$ 12,500.00
Balance		R\$ 311,594.00

Note: Elaborated by the authors.

In conclusion, to clarify franchises, it is recommended to apply the last question – a survey of the advantages and disadvantages of this expansion mode. One can analyze additional literature on the subject, presented in the next section.

The professor could opt for additional discussion on startup scalability. A section on this type of business was created with some suggestions.

Case analysis with literature support

This section aims to provide the teacher applying this study with some references and information capable of enriching the discussion.

Contextualization: entrepreneurship, business models and startups

The word "entrepreneur" comes from the Latin *impredere*, which means "to decide to carry out a difficult and laborious task" and "to put it into execution" (Maximiano, 2011, p. 17). The entrepreneur, then, is the person who can make things happen, as he is endowed with sensitivity to business, financial acumen, and the ability to identify opportunities (Silva Júnior, 2014). In this case study, the vision of the opportunity of the Use Bike entrepreneur is reported.

In an analysis using a test carried out by Endeavor Brasil (2016), César resulted in the profile of a "born entrepreneur." From his history in the business world, entrepreneurship is part of one's lifestyle.

With his entrepreneurial profile, idea, and opportunity in sight, César knew that his initial challenge would be figuring out how to generate revenue. A business model describes the logic necessary to generate profit which, once adopted, defines how the company "goes to market" (Teece, 2010).

For Osterwalder and Pigneur (2011), a business model describes the logic of creating, delivering, and capturing value by an organization, with the value being an aggregation or set of benefits that a company offers to customers.

A business model is a conceptual tool that contains a set of elements and their relationships and allows expressing the logic of how a company can generate revenue. It is a description of the value a company provides to one or multiple customer segments and the architecture of the company and its partners to create, market and deliver that value and relationship capital in order to generate profitable and sustainable revenue streams. (Osterwalder, 2004, p.15)

César was looking for this business model even before he had a finished product. It would help validate his entrepreneurial opportunity without having to expend many resources. In addition, as demonstrated in the case, he had experiences with other businesses, and his experience in the world of startups could help him at the beginning of his venture, providing greater chances of success and reducing expenses with resources.

According to Blank and Dorf (2014), a startup is an organization formed to seek a repeatable and scalable business model. Ries (2012) also adds that she works in conditions of extreme uncertainty due to new market dynamics and the constant search for innovation.

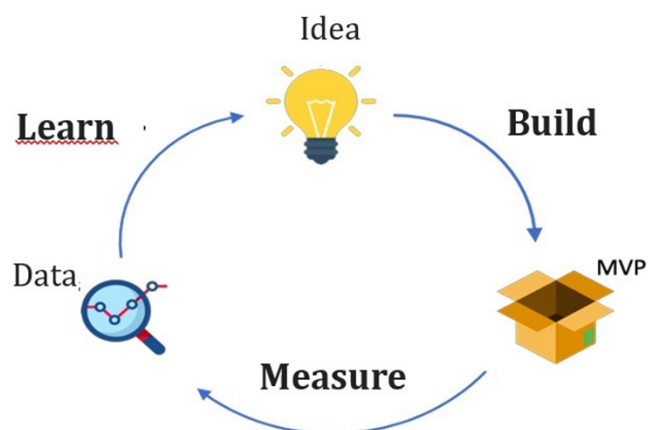
Use Bike's entrepreneurs sought information and were aware of the risks since the beginning of the business; therefore, they knew the validations they had to do to find a repeatable and scalable business model. In this regard, Ries (2012) suggests that entrepreneurs validate strategic hypotheses and create quick experiments with the least possible use of resources. They are measurable to find the best strategy to build the business. If

these experiments are invalidated, it will be necessary to change the strategy.

Next (Figure 1), the "build-measure-learn" validation cycle is demonstrated, whereby Ries (2012) informs that, to validate a hypothesis, entrepreneurs must: build a minimum viable product (MVP); measure the use of this product by users; analyze the data; and learn, whether the hypothesis is validated or not.

Figure 1

Loop "construct-measure-learn"



Note: Adapted from Ries (2012).

The minimum viable product (MVP), according to Ries (2012), is the most miniature version of the product/solution, which helps the entrepreneur to go through the "build-measure-learn" cycle with the least amount of effort possible.

As demonstrated, the startup validated its revenue-sharing business model with hotels by making the first sale. After selling to other hotels and defining the pilot project, it validated its model as repeatable. That is, other customers approved it, and the entrepreneurs were then able to maintain their strategies and follow through with the plan.

The next challenge was to scale the business model, to make Use Bike available in other locations in Brazil, and, in the future, to reach the global market, mainly Latin America.

Due to the nature of the business, which had a digital system but required physical assets, the partners analyzed the expansion models by franchises and by commercial representatives. After finding a way to scale the business, Use Bike is no longer a startup and has become a revenue generation and growth plan.

Business scalability: franchises, commercial representatives and other possibilities

Many professional consultants recommend the franchising model to entrepreneurs seeking resources to quickly create enormous business chains (Michael, 2003). Through the interviews, entrepreneurs tend to opt for the expansion model through franchises since they offer less risk, both for the franchisor and the franchisee. On the other hand, they also understand the challenge of creating this model.

According to Law No. 13.996/2019, art. 1st, Business franchising is the system by which a franchisor authorizes by contract a franchisee to use brands and other intellectual property objects. It is associated with the right of production or exclusive/non-exclusive distribution of products or services. It counts with the

right to use methods and systems to implement and administer the business or operating system developed or owned by the franchisor through direct or indirect remuneration, without characterizing a consumption relationship or employment relationship about the franchisee or its employees, even during the training period.

For Degen (2009), opening a franchise can be a "win-win" business for the entrepreneur (franchisor) and the franchisee. Franchisees benefit by entering a guaranteed business with a well-known and widely accepted trademark (Kotler & Keller, 2012).

In addition to benefiting from the franchisor's advertising campaigns, the franchisee receives a tested business plan. Adopts a proven business model; acquires scaled purchasing power from the franchisor; receives the training necessary to succeed in the business; has administrative support. In some cases, they can access financing in addition to participating in a large company, which enables their independence as an entrepreneur (Degen, 2009). These are some benefits of being a franchisee and why entrepreneurs widely use this model.

According to the Brazilian Franchise Association (2016), the revenue of franchises in Brazil in 2015 reached the mark of 139 billion reais - an increase of 8.3% compared to the previous year. The sector grew by more than 10% in the number of franchised units spread across the country.

The franchisor also receives some benefits by choosing this expansion model. In this sense, Degen (2009, n.p 48) mentions, for example, the help of franchisees to rapidly expand the business, who contribute with work, with the capital necessary to open new markets, and agree to operate according to the requirements and the defined model, in addition to paying fees and royalties.

Kotler and Keller (2012) also point out that franchisors benefit from the motivation and hard work of employees, who are entrepreneurs and not "contracted labor," depending on the franchisees' familiarity with communities and local conditions. These benefits can help Use Bike to expand its business with the necessary quality and, above all, with the franchisees' capital to reach other locations in the country quickly.

Although the franchise model offers several benefits for Use Bike to expand its business, the partners also analyzed the commercial representation model, verifying its challenges and benefits. Commercial representation is governed by Law No. 4,886/65, which was amended, in 1992, by Law No. 8,420, which, in its art. 1, defines:

Autonomous commercial representation is exercised by a legal entity or an individual without an employment relationship. On an occasional basis, it performs, on behalf of one or more people, the mediation for the execution of commercial business, brokering proposals, or requests to transmit them to those represented, whether or not they perform acts related to the execution of business.

The action required for expansion through commercial representation is more straightforward than creating a franchise model, despite requiring more investment on the part of Use Bike. By the way, this is one of the main critical points raised by César in the interviews, as he can influence the direct sales model for large hotel chains. The initial financial resource is intended for the purchase of bicycles; without it, cash flow problems can arise, temporarily preventing expansion, depending on obtaining financial returns from new customers to continue the plan.

In this case, an alternative to be discussed is attracting investments through corporate credit lines in banks, not only

via angel investors and investment funds. Considering that, as demonstrated in the case and reported by César in an interview, the startup seeks to avoid further dilution of the partners' participation.

Suggested additional discussion

In addition to covering the Use Bike expansion model, we suggest discussing the scalability of startups with fully digital models and others partially digital, as they still need physical assets. For example, Netflix does not need physical assets. However, it uses the subscription model and "software as a service" (SaaS) (software-as-a-service), offering the user solutions to watch movies and series of any kind.

The repercussion of Uber's expansion may be another point in the discussion - it is a digital platform that connects people with the need to travel to a specific location with others, which can provide transportation. In this case, physical assets (cars) depend on customers, people who want to move around, and people willing to travel the route using their cars.

Another example is the Airbnb platform, which connects people who need accommodation to others with properties or spaces available to receive guests. Presenting some reports on these platforms is recommended to enrich the discussion.

Case Study

This teaching notes is an integral part of the case study.

Araujo, G. da S., Schwade Junior, O., Alberton, A., & Marinho, S. V. (2023). How to scale a startup? The Use Bike case and the expansion of rent a bike service in Brazilian hotels. *Iberoamerican Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business*, 12(1), Article e2073. <https://doi.org/10.14211/ibjesb.e2073>

Conflict of interest statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Authors' statement of individual contributions

Roles	Contributions			
	Araujo OS	Schwade Jr O	Alberton A	Marinho SV
Conceptualization	■	■		
Methodology	■	■	■	■
Software			N/A	
Validation	■	■		
Formal analysis	■	■		
Investigation	■	■		
Resources	■	■		
Data Curation	■	■		
Writing - Original Draft	■	■		
Writing - Review e Editing	■	■	■	■
Visualization	■	■	■	■
Supervision			■	■
Project administration	■	■		
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