



The Raw vs. the Cooked

By Jaan Elias, Director of Case Study Research, Yale SOM

At the end of the 2006–2007 academic year, the Yale School of Management’s Case Research Department produced our first web-based, multimedia case study — “Equity Office Properties (EOP) Trust.” The EOP case website drew together various “raw” materials concerning the buy-out of Sam Zell’s real estate investment trust by the private equity firm Blackstone. The site included videotaped interviews, deal documents, analysts reports, and links to newspaper articles. This new “raw” format for a case study proved to be quite a hit with students and faculty, and we have continued to add web-based, “raw” cases to the inventory. Over half of our case production (17 cases) this year were entirely web-based or had a significant web component.

These web-based, “raw” cases represent more than a move to a different medium. They open up pedagogical opportunities consistent with Yale SOM’s new integrated curriculum. Traditional cases (what we have come to refer to as “cooked” cases) inevitably simplify a management situation because a narrative requires an understandable beginning, middle, and end. Therefore, the cases are told from a single point of view and focus on a set of questions that tend to fall into one or two disciplines. However, a website is a more flexible format, allowing a number of points of view or story lines to be considered simultaneously. This creates the opportunity for a single case to be analyzed from multiple perspectives. For example, a web-based case study of General Electric’s Ecomagination Initiative was taught this year in Professor Fiona Scott Morton’s Competitor course, but the class session also brought Professor Ravi Dhar to discuss the case from the Customer perspective and Professor Doug Rae to look at GE from the point of view of State and Society.

Major Differences between “Cooked” and “Raw” Cases

Cooked, narrative case	Raw, multimedia cases
Linear narrative with a privileged point of view	Multiple points of view of equal weight
Focus on a single discipline	Multiple foci within one package
Separate explanatory notes	Explanatory notes embedded in package
Clean, boiled-down fact pattern	Messy, original documents
An artificial construction (real world problems don’t come in cases)	More realistic presentation of information
A story line that presents a set of facts	Preserves real-life uncertainty as to the “real” facts and story line
Students read, then work	Students work as they are navigating through the website

At least six-month lag between an event and the production of a case	Recent events, with the possibility of adding more information as it becomes available
Limited number of black and white exhibits	Colorful, even animated exhibits and graphics, limited only by the imagination of the case writer

It is important to note that “raw” and “cooked” are not mutually exclusive categories and neither suits all circumstances. Sometimes a faculty member will desire an extremely raw case to force students to consider original documents and construct their own story. For example, the case on the rivalry between Wal-Mart and Target consisted of a short introduction and then a collection of internet links to documents and news stories. At other times, to focus the analysis of students, the faculty member will ask that more cooked elements be included within the case. For example, the Suzlon website included a narrative account of the company’s founding and expansion, and used the website to provide internet links to technical details of wind turbine manufacture and government policies concerning wind energy.