

Power Tips & Strategies for Mind Mapping Software

Assess Customer Service Training Needs

Third Edition

Supercharge your visual mapping skills with these tips, tricks and best practices

through Customer Surveys

Improves overall sales
Increases "Repeat Customers"

Follow up on CSR Support Training

Facilitate CSR Training & Development

Prepare company for changes in support customer service

Establish connections between the training exercises and actual customer engagement

Developed skilled in-house trainers

by Chuck Frey

Table of Contents

Content that is new in the 3rd edition is colored red

Chapter 1: Mind Mapping Applications

Problem Solving	5
SWOT Analysis	7
Decision Making	8
Project Management	9
Group Brainstorming	11
Individual Ideation	12
Meeting Management	13
Note-Taking	14
To-Do Lists.....	14
Life Management	15
Organizing Complex Information	16
Managing Lists	16
Process Management/Quality Assurance	17
Job Descriptions	17
Performance Reviews	18
Training/Education	19
The Daily Capture Map	21
The Weekly Review	22
Scenario Planning	23

Chapter 2: Mind Mapping Tips

How to Use Symbols Effectively	25
Power Linking	26
Creating Effective Presentations	27
Linking Maps	28
Exporting Your Maps to Other Applications	29
Use of Color on Branches	29
Use of Pictures in Your Mind Maps	30
Not Happy with the Layout of Your Map? Adjust It!	31
Control the Level of Detail Displayed	31
Outline View	32
Create a Topic for Unsorted Items	33
Use the “TAP Process” to Create Effective Maps	34
Get Your Team to Use Mind Mapping Software	34
A Trojan Horse Approach to Exposing Coworkers [cont'd]	35
Learn Your Program’s Keyboard Shortcuts	35
Smarter Exporting of Your Maps	36
Want to Share Your Maps? Take Advantage of Web 2.0	37
Use Your Software to Present – and Capture the Subsequent Discussion	37
Group Write Your Next Proposal	38

Never Lose an Idea During a Brainstorming Session	38
Take Your Mind Mapping Skills to the Next Level	39
Keep a Collection of Visual Aids to Use in Your Mind Maps	39
Brainstorm Using Floating Topics and Lightning Speed!	40
Improve Your Productivity with Mind Map Templates	42
Organizing Slides with a Mind Map	42
5 Quick Ways to Add Color & Visual Interest to Your Mind Maps	43
45 Ways to Use Mind Mapping Software for Business	44
17 Ways to Use Mind Mapping Software to Think About Your Biz Differently	46

Chapter 3: Advanced Mind Mapping Strategies

Why Use a Master Map?	48
Know When to Divide Your Map into Sub-Maps	49
Collaborating with Mind Maps	49
Project Your Map on a Wall	50
Seize Opportunities to Create “Long-Lifetime” Maps	50
Optimize the Visual Style of Your Maps	50
Use the Power of “Refactoring”	52
Don’t Use Text Notes Too Quickly	52
Add a Multimedia Clip to Your Map	53
Create a Desktop Dashboard.....	53
Keep All of Your Mind Maps in One Folder	54
Don’t Overwhelm Others with Mind Maps	54
Funnel Timeline: A Visual Approach to Project Planning	55
How Mind Mapping Software Can Enable You to Be a "Career Renegade"	57
How to Break Through Mental Blocks When You're Mind Mapping	58
11 Effective Strategies for Sharing Mind Maps	59
10 Reasons Why Mind Mapping Software Should Be the Foundation of Your Personal Productivity System	61
Generate More Ideas: “Sleep On It”	63
Leverage Your Content Using a Mind Map.....	63
Use Whatever Works to Help You Stay Focused	64
Improve Your Problem Solving Abilities by Mapping Stakeholder Needs.....	65
Get a Clear Picture of the Threats & Opportunities to Your Business	66
How to Use Mind Mapping Software to Build Your Twitter Relationships.....	67
How to Visualize Your Customer’s Value Chain & Discover New Opportunities	68
How to Use Mind Mapping Software for Scenario Planning.....	70
10 Steps to Manage a Small Project Using a Mind Map	71
Building a Life Management Dashboard.....	73
Tips for Building a Dashboard Map for the Workplace.....	75

Chapter 4: Interviews

Personal Dashboards – A Powerful Productivity Tool	73
Perspectives on the Business Use of Mind Mapping Software	75
Mind Mapping on the Tablet PC with Eric Mack	79
Using Speech Recognition and Mind Mapping Software Together	82
Visual Mapping: An Essential Tool for 21 st Century Executives	85

Chapter 5: Ask the Experts

Mistakes to Avoid	89
When Is a Map "Done"?	91

Chapter 6: Case Histories

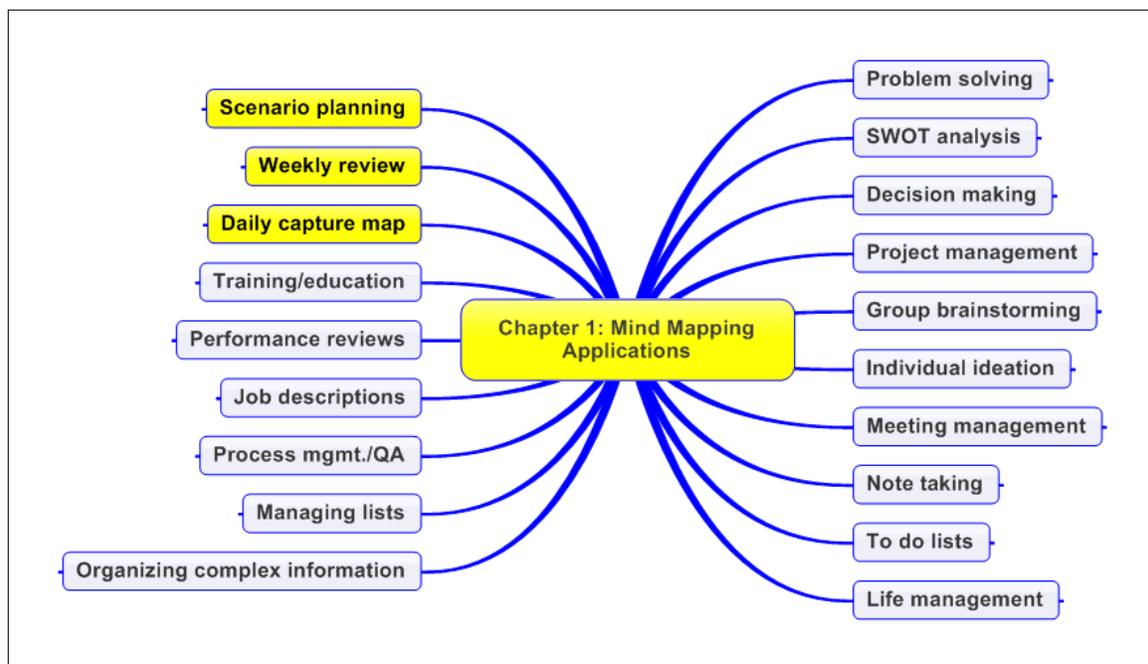
Business Proposal	95
Planning Projects Visually	96
Designing an Academic Presentation	97
Managing Stakeholder Dialogue During a Conference	98
Planning a Conference	100
Managing a Process Improvement Project	101
Website Search Engine Optimization	103
Create Time-Saving Templates to Streamline Work	105
Brainstorming	106
Scheduling & Product Mapping	109
Maintaining a Curriculum Vitae (CV)	112
Training Temporary Workers	114
Strategic Thinking for a Blog Topic	115
Developing Process for Reviewing Intranet Web Pages	116
Problem Solving with Clients	117
Total Life To-Do List	118
HBDI Four-Quadrant Walk Around	119
Tracking Job Opportunities	120
Consulting with Clients	121
Outlining a Novel	122
Selling Others on Visual Mapping	123
Building an Organizational Blueprint	124
Planning a Christmas Lunch	127
Creating Money Maps	128
Tracking Progress On an Aviation Restoration Project	130

Chapter 7: Mind Mapping Resources

Mind Mapping Software	132
Web-Based Mind Mapping Applications	134
Blogs That Cover Mind Mapping	135
Resource Sites on Mind Mapping	136
Squidoo "Lenses" on Mind Mapping	136
Discussion Forums/Lists	137
Recommended Books	137
Mind Mapping Insider Program	138
Warranties	139

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About the author: Chuck Frey is the founder of InnovationTools.com, the leading website for information about business innovation, creativity and brainstorming. He is also the author of the popular Innovation Weblog and the [Mind Mapping Software Blog](#).



Many people initially utilize mind mapping software for brainstorming – recording and organizing ideas. And that is, indeed, a powerful application of this type of software. But there's much more that you can do with it. You can use it to manage your workload, handle projects more efficiently, take notes, become better organized and many other productivity-enhancing applications.

Most executives today face an endless barrage of e-mails, phone calls and new projects, which makes it difficult for them to juggle everything. They are also required to gather, organize, analyze, synthesize and make sense of unprecedented amounts of information, deftly separating the wheat from the chaff and making fast, informed decisions.

Mind mapping software is uniquely suited to these needs. It's a whiteboard where you can do a mental "core dump" of your ideas, and then rearrange them as needed. It's an object-oriented environment, where you can attach nearly any kind of computer file to your maps and keep them just a mouse click away. Mind mapping software can also act as a powerful, flexible dashboard – a window on key business information, projects, resources and processes that can be tailored to match your work style.

In this section of the book, you'll learn about some of the most valuable applications of mind mapping software. This list is by no means all-inclusive; applications of it are limited only by your creativity!

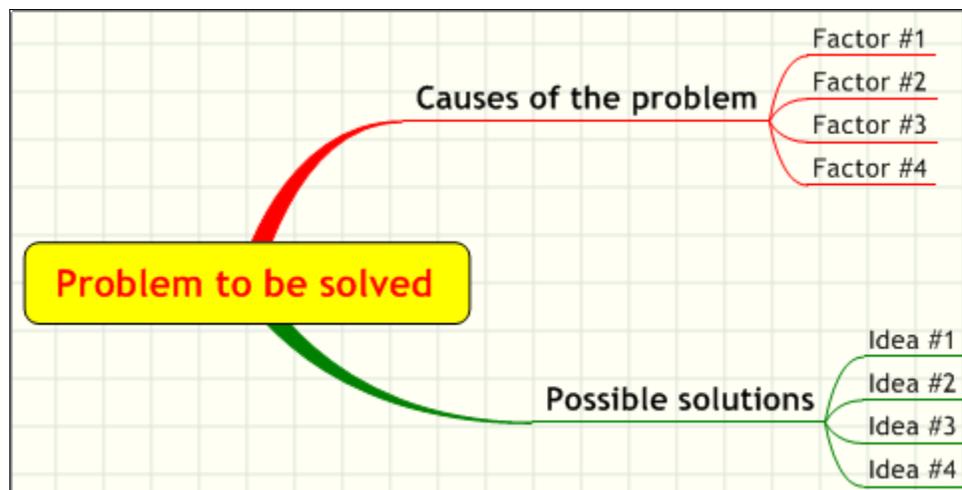
Problem Solving

A problem well-defined is a problem half solved. And a mind map is the perfect environment for exploring your problem in detail, breaking it down into its component parts to better understand the people, forces and circumstances that make it up. In fact, the very act of visually diagramming your problem can often illuminate one or more workable solutions.

The 6-step Creative Problem Solving (CPS) process, developed by Alex Osborn and Dr. Sidney Parnes, provides a structured framework for identifying problems or challenges, generating ideas and implementing creative solutions. The six steps are:

1. **Objective finding** – Identify the challenge, goal or desired outcome.
2. **Fact finding** – Collect data about the current challenge.
3. **Problem solving** – Break down the problem into its elements, isolate the most important part and state the problem in an open-ended way.
4. **Idea finding** – Brainstorm as many possible solutions to the challenge as possible.
5. **Solution finding** – Develop criteria for assessing the ideas you have generated, and select one that best fits your needs.
6. **Acceptance finding** – Create an action plan to implement the idea.

The flexible structure of a mind map makes it easy to devote one section of your map to each step of the CPS process. You can utilize a mind map to clearly state the challenge, break it down into its elements, gather and organize facts, generate ideas and even evaluate them. Even if you don't utilize this 6-step process, you can create a simpler mind map with primary topics for problem definition and potential solutions (like the example below). Why not try mind mapping to help you work through your next creative challenge?



Additional resources

- [The Osborn-Parnes CPS Process](#)

SWOT Analysis

SWOT analysis is a proven technique for strategic planning. It is based on a detailed analysis of an organization's **S**trengths, **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities and **T**hreats. Most commonly, a SWOT analysis is conducted by a work team, using a flipchart or a whiteboard. But there's one major problem with using these traditional media to record the information generated by such an analysis: the volume of information generated by the team can quickly outstrip the capacity of a flipchart or whiteboard. You've probably participated in meetings where the walls of the room have been covered with taped-up sheets from a flipchart pad. This visual discontinuity makes it hard for the group to manage the tidal wave of ideas it has produced or to focus on specific areas of interest.

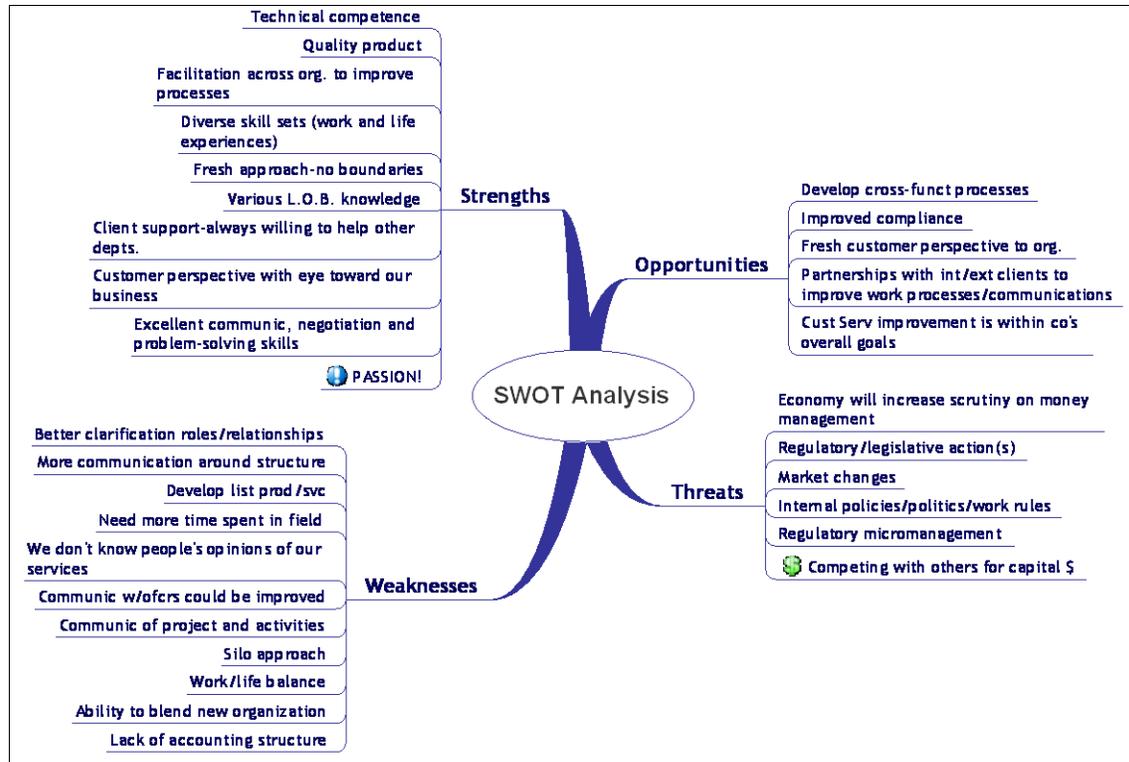
A software-generated mind map, with its expandable/collapsible hierarchy of topics and sub-topics, solves these problems quite elegantly. Here's how:

- A mind map can contain a large quantity of information and can manage it with great flexibility. Elements can be moved, and can be shown or hidden at will, giving the group increased flexibility to manage the information they have generated.
- The group can easily focus in on one segment of the map and develop it fully, while maintaining a good flow of ideas.
- Items can be prioritized, action steps can be outlined and responsibilities can be assigned, easily and visually.

Here's how to use your mind mapping software to manage a SWOT analysis:

1. Begin by identifying strengths and weaknesses. Support your map entries with facts, figures and supporting links and documentation where appropriate.
2. Review your external environment, including competitors, the regulatory environment, changing customer demographics and other forces that may be having an impact on your organization.
3. Identify opportunities and threats, and determine which are most significant – these need to be addressed first.
4. Identify potential strategies for addressing these opportunities and threats.
5. Test your strategies, using “what if” scenarios, identify obstacles and record activities that need to be carried out.

- Prioritize the strategies you've identified, based on the outcome of your "what-if" scenarios, and develop recommendations for those strategies that should be developed further and implemented.



Additional resources

- White paper: [SWOT Analysis Using MindGenius](#)
- Article: [SWOT Analysis – Mind Map It with Mind Pad](#) – AKS Labs

Decision Making

How do you make decisions? Most people consider the facts and make decisions in their head. While this may work for some situations, there are numerous others where there is so much information to consider, or so many possible alternatives or options, that it's hard for even the smartest person to reach an informed, well-considered and successful decision.

The next time you're faced with an important decision, why not utilize your mind mapping software to help you to make it? This type of software gives you a structured, visual way to:

- Document the decision to be made.

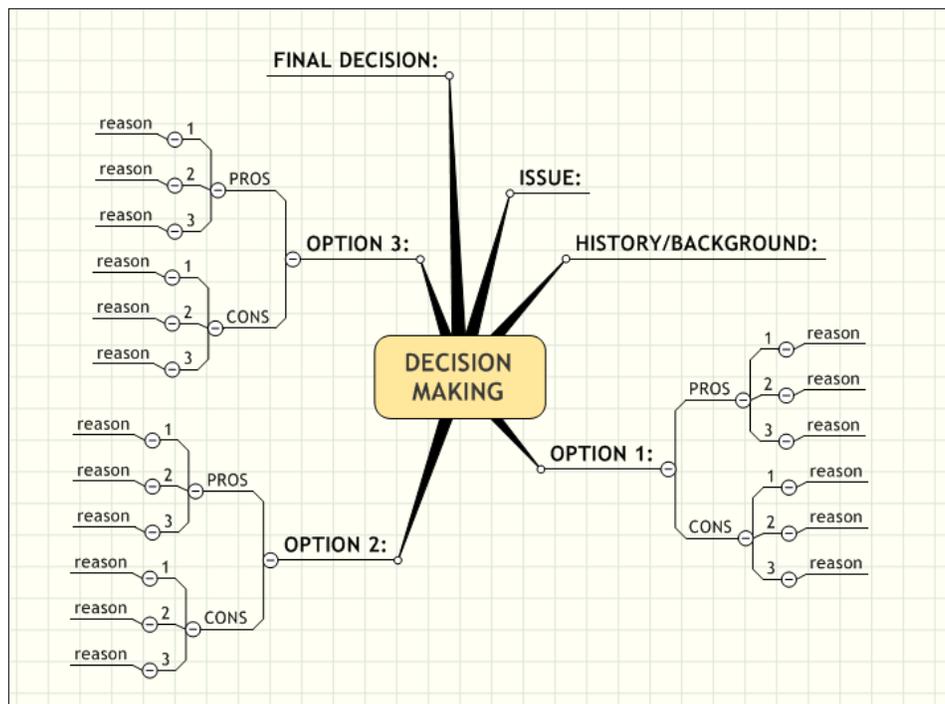
- Outline what you're seeking to achieve by making the decision (objectives).
- Define alternatives, options and risks.
- Explore the pros and cons of pursuing each alternative.
- Prioritize each alternative based on how well it achieves the intended objective.
- Make a decision!

Here's are some tips on how to use your mind mapping software to make your next major decision:

- Set up branches for recording the who, what, when, why, where and how of the decision.
- Add branches to explore success factors, risks and assumptions.
- Use the program's notes window to record additional details related to each item in your map.
- Remember to use your program's numeric symbols to arrange each of the alternatives based on the criteria you have defined, and filter the content of your map to show only those items that score high in all of your criteria. This will help you to isolate the best decision from among multiple alternatives.

Additional resources

- White paper: [Meeting Management with MindGenius](#)



Project Management

Mind mapping software can help you to overcome the difficulties usually encountered when trying to think through, prepare and manage for a project.

While programs like Microsoft Project are typically used to produce and maintain a detailed project plan, there hasn't been such a tool to help collect the ideas and information needed to define the scope or "front end" of a project, and to design an effective project plan -- until now. Typically, this information has been captured in paper notes or flip charts. Because this part of the project planning process tends to generate numerous pages of notes, reviewing them and organizing them into a coherent plan can often become a long, arduous process.

Mind mapping software can remove the drudgery from this part of the project process. It can help you to collect, capture and display this wealth of information in a highly visual, well-organized format. It can also help you to prepare more effectively and plan more thoroughly, which can help to increase your odds of a successful project.

Scoping the project:

During a project scope meeting, team members can transcribe the ideas and information they generate directly into a mind map. This detailed map can then be distributed to everyone at the end of the meeting, rather than days or weeks later, as is usually the case when you have filled up a half of a pad of flipchart paper with project details!

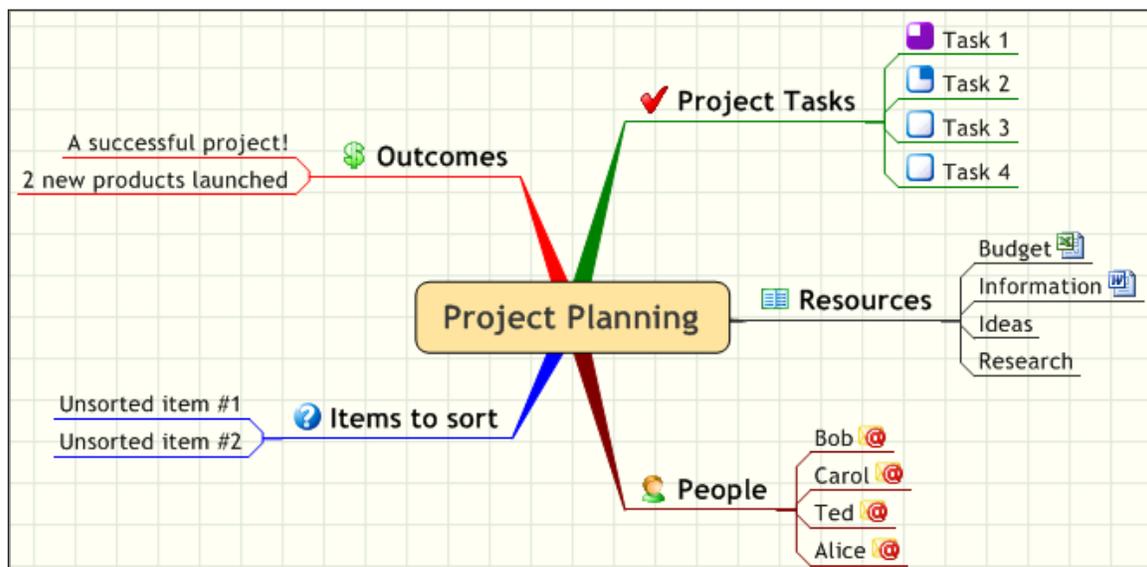
Project process:

1. **Define the scope of the project** - What needs to be achieved? How will we measure success? What risks do we face? What assumptions are we making as we begin this project? Are they valid?
2. **Planning** - What specific things do we need to do in order to accomplish this objective? What resources will be required? When do tasks need to be completed?
3. **Delivery** - As tasks are carried out within the project, we need some way to track if they are being completed satisfactorily, and to accommodate mid-course changes, if needed.
4. **Monitoring** - How are we doing vs. where the project plan says we should be?

Tips for creating effective project mind maps:

- Use symbols to denote high, medium and low risks. This enables you to easily see how the various risks you have identified compare with each other.
- As you add project tasks to your map, don't forget that many mind mapping programs allow you to assign dates and people to them. In addition, some programs (like MindGenius and MindManager) enable you to export action items

- to Microsoft Outlook, either as a task or an e-mail message. This capability allows you to assign project tasks to others on your team.
- You can also use symbols to define the sequence in which a set of project tasks must be completed.
 - Assign a specific category or symbol to your project deliverables. This will enable you to quickly filter your map's content on those important to-dos.
 - Smaller projects can be managed entirely within your mind mapping application. But for larger projects, you should seriously consider exporting your map's contents to a project management application, like Microsoft Project.
 - Create separate maps for the project scope and plan, then link them together.



Additional resources

- [Effective Project Management Using MindGenius](#)
- [White Paper on Using MindManager and ResultManager 2.0 for Project Management](#), by Nick Duffill of Gyronix

Group Brainstorming

Group brainstorming follows a well-defined process which is ideally suited to mind mapping software. You can use it prepare for your group brainstorming meeting, including:

- Selecting participants for the brainstorming team.

- Developing a meeting agenda.
- Developing ground rules and roles (facilitator, recorder, leader and group members).
- Developing open-ended questions that will be used to stimulate ideas during the session.

During a group brainstorming session, mind mapping software and an LCD projector can be used to:

- Record ideas visually.
- Provide visual stimulation to the group.
- Group ideas generated in a highly visual format.
- Prioritize ideas.
- Decide next steps.
- Assign actions to team members.
- Deliver a report of the results of the brainstorming session.

Mind mapping software enables the meeting coordinator to quickly and efficiently capture everyone's ideas, without slowing down the group's creative "flow." A number of programs include brainstorming modes, where keyboard shortcuts enable you to record multiple ideas in rapid succession.

Seeing all of the ideas projected on a screen provides a number of benefits: It makes participants feel like their ideas are valued, it serves as a catalyst to stimulate additional ideas and it can contain much more detail than a flipchart or whiteboard.

Additional resources

- White paper: [Brainstorming Using MindGenius](#)

Individual Ideation

In addition to group brainstorming, mind mapping software can be a powerful tool for individual ideation. Wallace Tait, speaking in a mind mapping podcast, explained how a software-generated mind map is a perfect medium in which to "pour" your initial creative thoughts, and to rearrange and expand upon them. This can help you to reach an "a-ha!" – a creative solution – faster than you could if you simply thought about the problem for a while in your head.

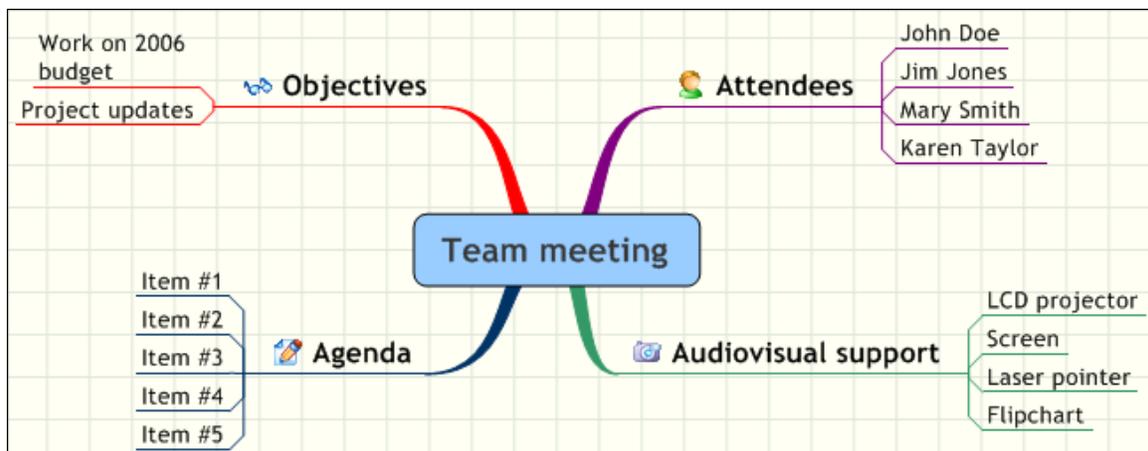
In addition, Wallace says once you've arrived at a creative solution, your mind map also gives you a systematic framework for taking action on it.

Meeting Management

If you have an effective process for preparing for a major business meeting, the meeting itself is more likely to be successful. Preparing for a successful meeting is a special type of project: it requires you to set objectives, to solicit the participation of co-workers, partners and people outside of your organization, to manage a myriad of room and facility details, and much more. Mind mapping software, with its powerful ability to gather and organize numerous bits and pieces of information, can help.

Here's how to utilize your mind mapping software to plan your next meeting:

- **Define your objectives:** What is the purpose of this meeting? What do you hope to accomplish? What will a successful outcome look like? Place each objective on a separate branch in the “objectives” section of your map.
- **Determine who should attend the meeting:** Who needs to be there? Who has the information or input you need for the project? Which decision-makers should be involved in this meeting, if any? Which of your subordinates will be working on this project? Who needs to be part of this meeting? Are there any outside partners, consultants or other people outside your organization who should be involved? Record each person's name and pertinent contact information on a separate branch in the “attendee” section of your map.
- **Define agenda items:** Let the objectives you have defined help to drive the agenda for your meeting. List the topics to be discussed, and who will lead the discussion of each time segment. Place each agenda item on a separate branch in the “agenda” section of your map.
- **Determine your facility needs:** Next, create a new branch within your map to explore your needs for the meeting room. Will any participants be making PowerPoint presentations (or use MindManager for group brainstorming)? You can use your map to define audiovisual needs (such as an LCD projector and screen), support for teleconferencing, lunch arrangements and much more.



Additional resources

- White paper: [Meeting Management Using MindGenius](#)

Note-Taking

Many people struggle with taking notes when a presenter or teacher is speaking. Often, they feel they must capture everything the speaker is saying. Unfortunately, time spent taking notes takes away valuable time from listening. As a result, many note takers fall behind what the speaker is saying, which may cause them to miss some important points.

Mind mapping is a powerful way to take notes during a meeting. Here's why it's uniquely effective for this application:

- While you can't use it to record every word a speaker says, you can capture the major topics and key points that a speaker or presenter is making. Often, this is all you need for your brain to recall the details associated with each major topic.
- Often, a speaker doesn't cover his or her topic in linear fashion. Instead, they jump around from one topic to another, then loop back to cover one or two additional points related to the first topic. A software mind map makes it easy to group and organize related topics after the presentation is over, and to add your own insights and ideas to those that the speaker conveyed. Try doing that with your hand-written meeting notes, where related items may be located on different pages of your notes!
- When you're faced with multiple pages of linear notes, it may be time consuming to find a specific bit of information. In contrast, you can find this same information faster and easier in a mind map, because of its superior organizational structure.

To Do Lists

Mind mapping software is an easy way to create flexible, highly usable task lists. Here are some tips on how to do it:

- Group related items together (for example, things needed to buy, phone calls to make, etc.)
- Visually diagramming your tasks makes it easier for you to see what you may need to add or include in your task lists.
- You can easily reorganize your map as needed to reflect shifting priorities.
- Most mind mapping software allows you to add dates, resources, priority levels, document links and other "meta data" to topic tasks.

- You can use symbols and/or numbers to denote the relative importance of each task, making it easy to see what needs to be done first, next and so on.
- Some mind mapping software enables you to export to do's to the "tasks" view of Microsoft Outlook – a very cool feature!
- Francois Lavaste from Mindjet recommends using mind mapping software to maintain a team to-do list. When you need updates from your team members, you simply e-mail the map to them, they make their updates and send it back to you. Or, you could place the map file in a shared folder on your company's computer network, where you and your team can update it as needed.
- When you complete a task on your to-do map, simply delete it. Or, if you prefer, create a "done" topic and move completed items to it.

You can easily incorporate a task list into just about any mind map you're working on, such as a project map, and quickly add tasks as you think of them. Additionally, you can utilize this mind mapping application both at the individual and team levels in your organization.

Additional resources

- Blog entry – [Managing Your To-Do List with MindManager](#) – LifeHack Blog

Life Management

Many people spend more time planning a party than planning their life. Why? Because it's hard work! If you've been putting off planning your life's future direction and scope, why not try utilizing mind mapping to bring clarity – and some fun – to this process.

A mind map is an excellent tool for life management because it can help you to clearly define your values, life goals and the strategies and step-by-step plans to achieve them. Here are some tips on how to manage your life planning with mind mapping software:

1. Define your main goal as the central topic of your map.
2. Next, add your primary values to your map as free-floating topics. They don't need to be connected to the central topic, but they are positioned like this because they ought to have an influence on any plans you make.
3. Add primary topics, one representing each of the major life roles or domains in your life (i.e., work, family, church member). Life is cut from one whole cloth. In other words, changes you make in one role of your life inevitably influence other parts of your life. So it's smart planning to consider how your main life goal may be realized through the lens of each of your major roles. Also, because the mind mapping format helps you to see your goal in the context of all of your roles, it should help you to achieve improved balance in your life.
4. Then add secondary topics, the steps and strategies you will undertake to achieve your goal within the context of each life role.

If your life planning map becomes cluttered with too many goals, consider creating sub-maps where you can engage in detailed planning for each life role.

Don't forget that you can not only use your mind mapping software to define your goal implementation plans, but also to monitor and track your progress. Many mind mapping programs enable you to attach dates or deadlines to branches (several even enable you to transfer them as tasks to Microsoft Outlook). You can attach numerical rankings to the action steps in your plans, making it easy to see what you need to do first, next, and so forth. In addition, some mind mapping programs enable you to attach symbols or markers to branches, which show you what percentage of completion you have achieved for each action item in your plans.

Additional resource

- Article: [“Create a Mind Map of Your Life”](#) – AKS Labs (Mind Pad)

Organizing Complex Information

Mind mapping software enables you to gather and capture a wide variety of knowledge, information and ideas in a very compact format. And it enables you to quickly reorganize it at will. This is one of its key strengths, according to mind mapping expert Nick Duffill. He says that mind mapping software is one of only a few types of programs that support “encapsulation,” where each topic of your map is a “container” – a receptacle that can contain a variety of related information, including sub-topics, file and website links, images, notes, e-mail contents, and much more.

Mind mapping software also supports a high degree of experimentation, if you will. Let's say you're working on a mind map, and you just thought of an important piece of information that you must include in it. So you place it where it seems to make the most sense. But then, after further reflection, you may decide that it would actually fit better in another section of your map. So you move it, and then reassess it. This process is something like playing “what if” with ideas, thoughts and concepts (for more details, please see the “refactoring” strategy later in this e-book).

Mind mapping software lets you “experiment” with different configurations of thoughts and ideas, and gives you the freedom to ultimately organize them in ways that make the most sense to you. That's powerful!

Managing Lists

This is a common use of mind mapping software. Because of its strong orientation toward creating hierarchies of related information, mind mapping software is ideal for creating many different kinds of lists, including:

- To do lists
- Active projects
- Contact lists
- Personal goals
- Shopping lists

Depending on the kind of list you're creating, you can easily attach key documents or notes to branches of your map, export tasks to Microsoft Outlook (if your program supports this functionality) or create links to other sub-maps.

Additional resources

- Article: [How to Manage Your Contacts in a Mind Map](#) – AKS Labs

Process Management/Quality Assurance

Many organizations today utilize Six Sigma – a customer-centric, data-driven problem-solving technique – or other quality methodologies to optimize their business processes. Achieving Six Sigma requires a number of steps, which can be recorded in a mind map format:

- Define the process in question (what do our internal/external customers expect from this process?)
- Measure its current performance (Current status/how often do defects occur?)
- Analyze its effectiveness (When, where and how do defects occur?)
- Implement improvements to it (How can we fix the process and eliminate the defects)
- Control improvements over the long term.(How do we ensure that the repairs stay in place?)

Mind mapping software is an ideal tool to help you to capture ideas, develop, collect, and organize process and project information, build process steps collaboratively, and assign tasks, priorities and deadlines.

Additional resources

- White paper: [Process Improvement at Air Products and Chemicals](#) – Mindjet
- Article: [Total Quality Management – Map It with Mind Pad](#) – AKS Labs

Job Descriptions

Mind maps are an ideal tool to outline the duties and responsibilities of the various jobs in your department, as well as the ideal qualities that candidates should have. Dwayne Melancon, writing in his Genuine Curiosity weblog, explained how he uses software-produced mind maps to develop more accurate and complete job descriptions, faster:

- Create a map template that contains the major aspects of the job description – skills and experience, what success in this position should look like, etc. – and then use it each time you must fill a position on your team.
- Dwayne creates two unique topics that are quite intriguing: “Things I’d hire on” and “Things I’d fire on.” “Things I’d hire on” are the things that most managers look for when hiring someone: past job experience and previous positions held, for example. Things people get fired for are often degree of “fit” and “cultural issues.” Dwayne uses this latter topic to develop interview questions that help him to discover any potential problems or incompatibilities between a candidate and the organization’s culture – things like how they handle pressure and ambiguity, and their ability to manage people and projects effectively.
- Once he’s completed his job description mind map, Dwayne then uses it as an outline to write a conventional job description. Of course, he doesn’t include content from his “things I’d fire on” in this write-up, but he believes this topic does help him to further define background and experience requirements that minimize his chances of hiring someone who he’d later have to fire.

Additional resources

- Dwayne Melancon’s blog post: [Creating Job Descriptions with MindManager](#)
- Download [Dwayne’s Job Descriptions Template](#)

Performance Reviews

Most managers find performance reviews to be a time-consuming task. They must pull together a myriad of information about their current performance, compare it to past reviews and the description of the job they were hired to do, and much more. This large amount of information can be easily and concisely summarized in a mind map. Here are some tips from Dwayne Melancon, author of the Genuine Curiosity weblog:

- Create a template to categorize and summarize the information you need for the typical performance review. This will speed the process as you review other people on your staff.
- Create major topics for performance feedback received from other members of your team, from other departments and/or external customers and your own observations about the employee’s performance.

- Create sub-branches for what they do well, and for areas of improvement. Add branches and file links as needed to record stories and meaningful quotes from the feedback you have received.
- Use the completed map as a guide to write the formal performance review.

Additional resources

- Dwayne Melancon's blog post: [A Map for Easier Performance Reviews](#)

Training/Education

There is no question that mind mapping software is a boon for corporate trainers and students alike. Wallace Tait has explored the benefits of using computer-based visual mapping for this application, and summarizes them here:

For teachers, mind mapping software represents a more manageable and structured format for information creation, organization, exchange, presentation and delivery than linear methods. Using the "TAP" method (explained later in this e-book), teachers and trainers can easily outline a course, gather and incorporate supporting knowledge and resources, and can easily tailor it to the needs of their students. The bottom line is that the same tool that is used to gather, sort and organize the course material can also be used to present it – a real time-saver. Try doing that with Microsoft PowerPoint!

For students, software-produced mind maps give them a more dynamic, visual learning experience – which tends to increase knowledge retention. You've probably heard the expression, "a picture is worth a thousand words." This is true of mind maps as well, which can incorporate colors, images, links and other multimedia content.

Students can also use mind mapping software to take notes during lectures or training sessions. They can capture the key points in a visual map, and then add supporting facts and information later. This can be especially valuable if the teacher or trainer moves sporadically through the course material; the mapping software enables the student to rearrange and group related topics together into a more cohesive set of notes.

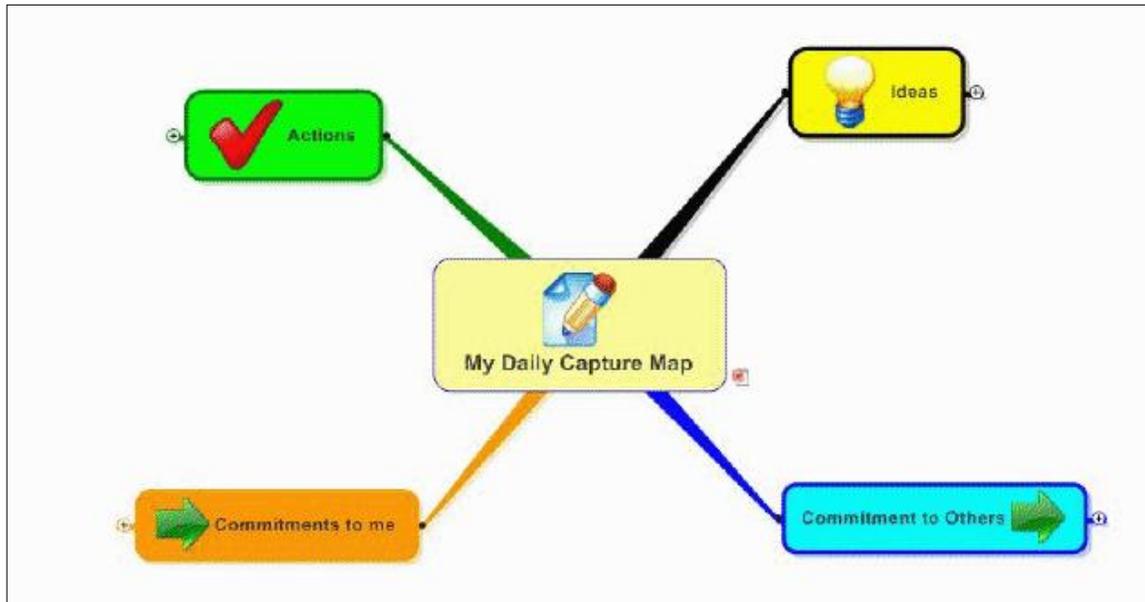
For trainers and students alike, mind mapping software is clearly a personal productivity enhancer!

Additional resources

- Article: [Academic Uses MindManager to Improve the Process of Creating Online Courses](#) – Mindjet
- Article: [Using Electronic Mind Maps as a Graphic Organizer for Instruction](#) – MapaCourse.com

New in this edition

The Daily Capture Map



One of the perils of the modern condition is mental clutter. During a typical business day, we think about so many things that it actually drains us mentally.

What if you could capture all of the ideas, to do's and commitments that are floating around in your head, clogging up your “mental RAM?” That’s the principle behind David Allen’s popular Getting Things Done (GTD) methodology, which teaches you how to empty your inbox and implement a closed-loop system to manage “next actions.” The result, ideally, is less stress and an almost zen-like level of efficiency.

Michael Tipper, author of the [Business Profit Productivity Blueprint e-course](#), explains how to create a daily capture mind map – the digital equivalent of Allen’s GTD methodology. It is a simple mind map, with 4 main topics:

- Actions
- Ideas
- Commitments to me
- Commitments to others

The ideas topic, for example, gives you a place to capture your ideas while you’re busy working on other things. As Michael points out in his daily capture map video training

session, this enables you to come back to the idea later, add more detail to it or copy and paste it into another map. Most importantly, he says, this process frees up your mind so it doesn't have to continually say, "What was that idea again?" Likewise, the actions topic gives you a holding place for any tasks that you think of throughout your work day.

Commitments to others is where you capture anything that you have promised to do for your colleagues, coworkers, clients and other important stakeholders. Finally, commitments to me is where you keep track of the things that other people owe you. If the number of sub-topics you've captured becomes too large, you can always break off those items into a linked sub-map. It's very easy to manage.

What do you do with all of this information after you've captured it? Michael recommends that you review your capture map as part of your weekly review process. At that time, you can transfer topics to the appropriate maps.

I have used mind mapping software to maintain a to-do list, but Michael takes it to a whole new level with this daily capture map. I love how he segments the different types of tasks that most of us must manage each day. Of course, if you think your situation is different and you need to capture other types of follow-ups, then you can create topics to manage them as well.

You can learn more about how to work with daily capture maps and other types of business maps in Michael's excellent [Business Profit Productivity Blueprint e-course](#), which I highly recommend.

[New in this edition](#)

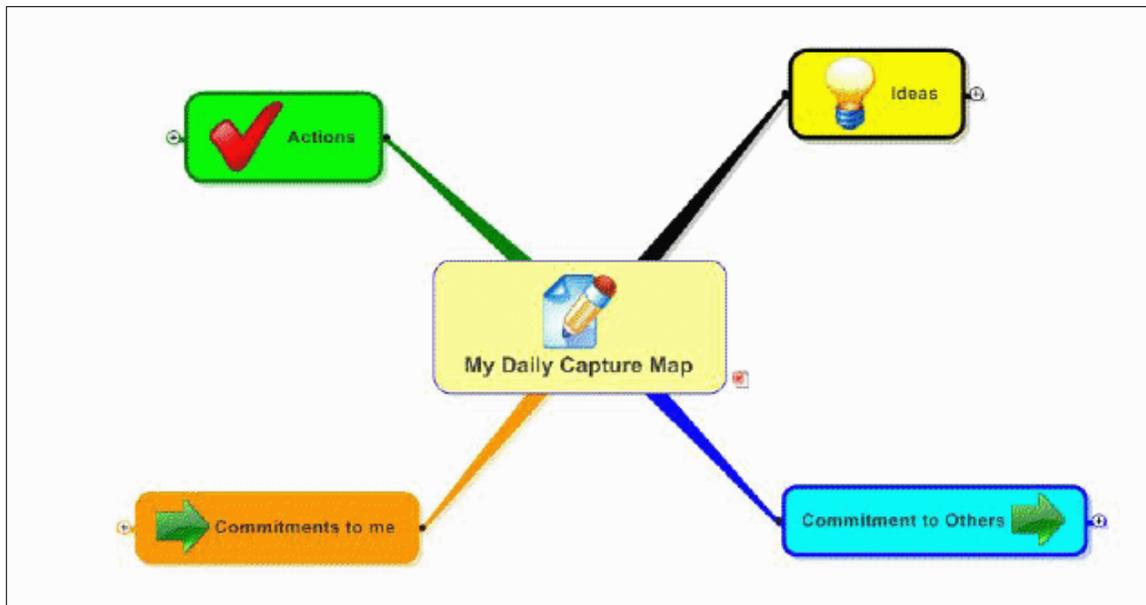
The Weekly Review

Once you have captured ideas, action items and commitments in your daily capture map, you must employ a closed-loop system to ensure that all of them get handled. Otherwise, they will continue to be a drain on your mental energy

Michael Tipper recommends reviewing your daily capture map on a weekly basis. During this review session, your job is to review all of the ideas it contains and decide what needs to happen with each one. Your goal at the end of this process is to completely clear your daily capture map at the end of each week. Here's how to do it, using an example:

One of your captured ideas might be to work on a new project related to

your business or profession. You could either create a new map where you store all of your "parked" professional projects, or you could take that particular idea and use a map to begin brainstorming and planning how you are going to implement and manage it.



Either way, what has happened is that you have given your mind a sense of completion on that original thought because you have taken it to the next stage. Even moving it to a "parked projects" map gives your mind a sense of completion.

Another example could be that one of your actions was for you to design, document and share with your colleagues a new process or procedure. You could then create a new map and use that to put together the new process and share it with your colleagues.

Why not give the daily capture map and the weekly review a try in your work and life?

New in this edition

Scenario Planning

Scenario planning is a popular form of strategic planning that explores plausible views of possible futures for a business, based on a combination of known factors and potential trends. It is frequently used with other tools in the formation of business strategy. It works by sketching out a small number of stories about how the future may unfold, which gives you a clearer picture of the decisions you must make today to prepare for these eventualities.

Scenario planning is an excellent application of mind mapping, according to Tony Buzan and Chris Griffiths, co-authors of the book, [*Mind Maps for Business: Revolutionise Your*](#)

[Business Thinking and Practice](#), because it gives you a rich, visual medium upon which you can map out future scenarios, identify potential risks and opportunities, and generate ideas to prepare for them.

To create a future scenario mind map, start with a central topic related to your area of strategic focus, and then add first-level branches entitled external forces, scenarios, patterns, strategies and signals. Next, let's take a closer look at each of these factors as we add details about them to our mind map:

External forces: What external forces may affect your business in the near future (e.g., changes in technology, regulations and the demographics of your customers)? Add them as sub-topics to the main topic, external forces. Next, add any relevant details about these changes to your map. Finally, prioritize them with icons or symbols, based upon which ones are most relevant to your organization.

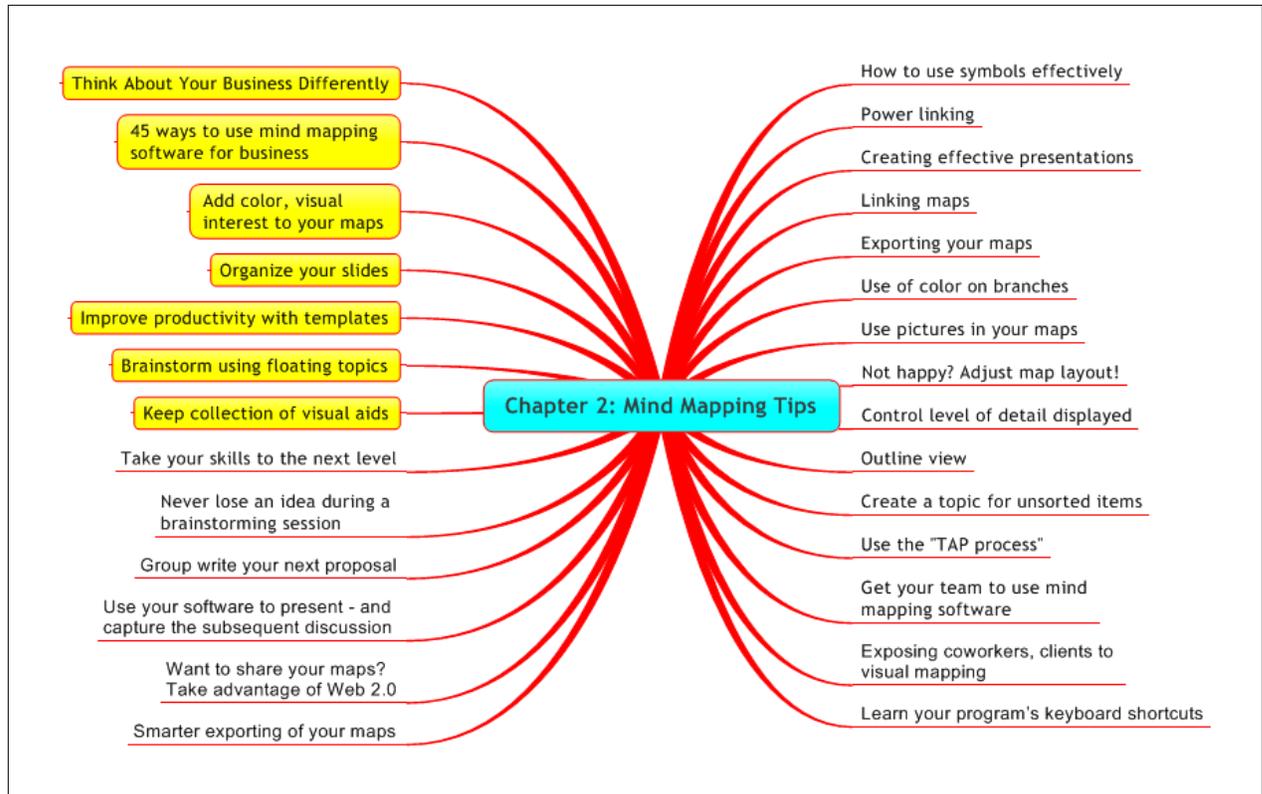
Scenarios: For each of the major changes you predicted in external forces, explore 3 different future impact scenarios on your organization if they were to come to pass: best case, worst case and status quo. Highlight the scenarios that are most likely to affect your organization.

Patterns: Based upon the external forces and scenarios that you have mapped out, it should now be easier to see patterns emerging – common considerations that you ought to be aware of and prepare for, regardless of which future scenario actually occurs. Make a special note of these patterns on this map branch, to call attention to them.

Strategies: Use this branch to explore potential future strategies that your company may pursue, based upon the scenarios and patterns you have explored. This is one of the strengths of mind mapping, of course: enabling you to compare and contrast different elements within your visual map, and identifying related pieces of information. This non-linear planning format also makes it easier to see “white space” opportunities – ideas that may exist in areas between or outside of your company's current markets and industry segments. Highlight the most reasonable strategies you can follow for each scenario.

Signals: Identify the early warning signals – the things, if they should occur, that may give you an early indication that one of the scenarios you have explored is starting to unfold.

The future is unpredictable and frustratingly non-linear, of course. But working through some likely future scenarios in a visual mapping format can help you to think ahead and better prepare your organization for the future, no matter what form it takes.



Here are some tips on how to get more productivity out of your mind mapping software:

How to Use Symbols Effectively

You've probably heard the expression, "a picture is worth a thousand words." According to mind mapping instructor Arjen Ter Hoeve, a mind map that incorporates symbols says more than a thousand pictures can.

Symbols – small, iconic illustrations attached to your map's branches – add meaning and context to your visual diagrams. Like a topographical map, symbols (or map markers) communicate important information in a very compact format. They also stimulate the right side of your brain more than a map containing only words and branches, Ter Hoeve explains. It's the difference between reading a written, step-by-step set of driving directions and viewing a map that visually depicts how to get there, with streets and landmarks communicated using (what else?) – symbols!

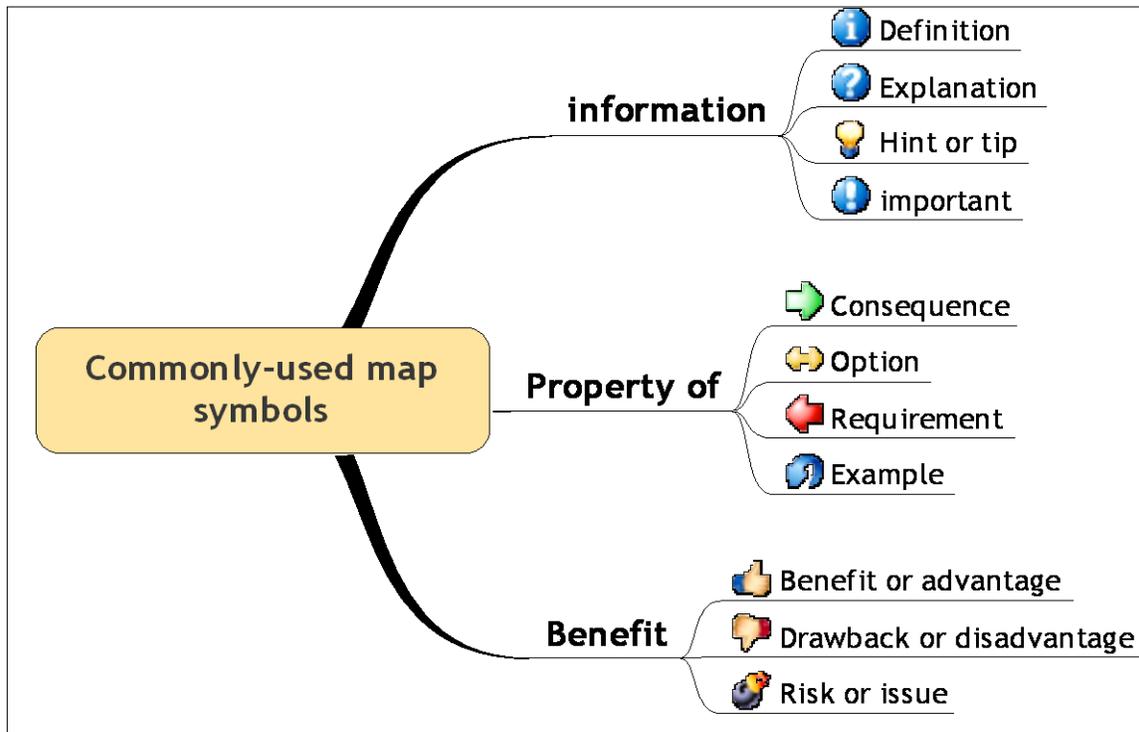
Usually, mind maps that contain symbols also include a legend to help the reader understand what each symbol means. Symbols can be used to denote:

- Priorities of topics
- Whether an item is informational or an action item

- Those topics that are ideas

According to mind mapping expert Nick Duffill, be sure to use symbols consistently in all of your maps. This will make it easier for your colleagues to understand what they mean when you share your maps with them, and will make it easier for you to recall their meaning when you look at your maps at a later date.

This illustration depicts some symbol conventions developed by Nick, which you can adapt to your needs.



Power Linking

Many types of work today involve a significant amount of research. As you gather large quantities of information, it can quickly become a jumble of confusing facts, figures and notes. A mind map enables you to create time-saving "pointers" to all of these bits of information and help you to keep them better organized – just a click or two away.

Here are some of the types of links supported by mind mapping software, and some tips on when and how to utilize them:

Links to e-mails: An increasing amount of the knowledge and information we must work with is embedded in e-mail messages. Accordingly, several mind mapping programs

enable you to import the content of individual e-mail messages from Microsoft Outlook into your map, or point to external representations of them.

Links to files: Using this feature, you can easily keep track of many types of information that is related to the project you're working on, including, documents, spreadsheets, presentations and any other type of file. These links function much like a desktop shortcut: when you click on the link icon, the file will open. Use this feature to save time when you must keep track of key documents or files.

Links to web sites: Often, the information or knowledge you need to gather is located on external web sites. Using the URL linking feature of your mind mapping program, you can easily create bookmarks to these key resources and organize them along with the rest of your research.

Links to applications: If you want to take linking to its logical extreme, you can even create links within your map to frequently-used programs. This could be especially useful if you start your day by opening a master map.

Links to other mind maps: Of course, you can also embed links to other mind maps in the map you're working on. This can come in useful if you need to divide a large, complex map into several smaller, linked ones, or if you're using a master map (an index of all of the maps you have created).

Creating Effective Presentations

Most people, when they are preparing a presentation in PowerPoint, immediately open up the program's slide view and begin creating slides. But this is often counterproductive, because the slide view doesn't allow you to see the structure of your information. Looking at your slides, how do you know if the information is complete and well-organized? It's almost impossible to do this kind of critical analysis while you're looking at slides filled with bullet points and text.

A more effective approach is to begin by outlining your presentation in a mind mapping program. Because a mind map provides you with a more skeletal, structural view of your presentation, it is much easier to see what information is missing, what should be added or consolidated, what topics should be moved to a different location within your map, and what elements are extraneous and should be eliminated. Once your presentation is complete and well organized, you can export it to a presentation program like Microsoft PowerPoint to "add meat to the bones."

Several mind mapping programs, such as MindManager, also offer a presentation mode, where you can utilize them as the presentation medium. In presentation mode, these programs enable you to automatically expand your map, one branch at a time, as you utilize the topics as talking points. This presentation medium has several advantages:

- It helps your audience to visualize how your current topic fits into the overall theme of your presentation – something that is much harder to do in a PowerPoint presentation.
- You can provide your audience with a high-level overview of a topic by viewing it and its immediate sub-topics. Then, if they want to know more, you can open up lower-level topics to “drill down” and provide them with a greater depth of information on that topic.
- You can easily utilize your program’s linking capabilities to open web pages, multimedia clips and other files, just like PowerPoint.
- Supporting your presentation with a mind map adds visual emphasis and impact to it, and differentiates you from other presenters with their “old school” PowerPoints. It should also help your audience to retain the key points of your presentation better, because your map will appeal to both sides of their brains!

Just remember: your map must be very well organized before you can consider presenting it to others. Your audience must be able to clearly understand your logical progression of topics and sub-topics. For best results, I recommend that you preview your presentation map with a co-worker, who can provide you with valuable feedback before you make the actual presentation. Or, if your audience isn’t accustomed to viewing mind maps, you may want to make your presentation in PowerPoint, and include a few maps as supporting visuals.

Additional resources

- Article: [Mind Map Your Next Presentation](#) – Illumine.co.uk (PDF)
- Article: [6 Tips to Make a Great Presentation](#) – Rediff.com

Linking Maps

Linking your mind maps is a great way to keep them manageable and well-organized. Experts recommend that you create a “master map” – a single map that contains links to all of your other mind maps. This helps to ensure that you can always find the fruits of your labor. It’s also essential when using a program like ResultsManager (an organizational program from Gyronix that works with MindManager), which is designed to use your master map as a “jumping off point” to scan all of your maps for projects and next action items.

Another benefit of this strategy is that you can then arrange links to your maps just as you would in any other mind map, clustering related items together on specific branches, and enforcing an effective visual organization on your work.

Making this strategy work requires a certain amount of discipline, because in order for your master map to be complete, you need to add new maps to your master map every time you create one.

Additional resources

- Blog post: [“Mapping Your Maps”](#)

Exporting Your Maps to Other Applications

In many cases, the diagrams that you create in your mind mapping program are not ends unto themselves. Often, you'll need to transfer the information and ideas that you have created into another application, or share them with your colleagues and team members.

To get the most out of your mind mapping program, it's important that you understand how to export the contents of your maps to other applications. Many mind mapping programs enable you to export your maps to Microsoft Word in a hierarchical outline format, while retaining some level of text formatting. In fact, this e-book began life as a mind map. When I had collected enough raw material to begin writing it, I simply exported my map to a Word outline.

Other common export formats include Microsoft PowerPoint, Microsoft Project (mind mapping serves as a great “front end” for planning your projects), HTML web pages, and a variety of image formats. In the latter case, your entire map is converted to an image file. This makes it easy to insert it as an illustration in a Word document or to use it as an illustration on a web page.

Use of Color on Branches

Whether you're hand drawing a mind map or creating it in a software program, one basic strategy recommended by mind mapping experts is to add color to it. Colors create visual interest, and engages your brain in ways that a simple black-and-white map cannot. In most mind mapping programs, the colors of branches and topics can easily be customized, to help you to create a very colorful map.

According to Arjen Ter Hoeve, writing in his mind mapping course, using color in your maps also helps to clarify their structure and organization.

From a practical standpoint, color can help others to understand the contents of your map more quickly. Coloring each major branch a different color, for example, can help to differentiate major topics from each other. Another way you can use color is to denote different types of content within your maps. For example, a green topic could represent an action item.

Software-produced mind maps tend to look the same after a while. Dressing them up with colors, symbols and other flourishes can help to make them more visually stimulating. But don't overdo it, or you may confuse the people with whom you share your maps.

Finally, please note that there are no strict rules for using color in your mind maps. Use whatever methodology makes the most sense to you.

Use of Pictures in Your Mind Maps

One of the principles of creating hand-drawn mind maps is to incorporate pictures into them. Pictures and color help your right brain to make powerful associations between the items in your map. But, according to mind mapping expert Arjen ter Hoeve, it is easy to fall into the habit of creating computer-generated mind maps that only contain words. This definitely reduces the impact of your maps!

To combat this tendency, you have many resources at your disposal. You can:

- Incorporate images from the content library that came with your mind mapping program.
- Import images from any clip art collections stored on your computer's hard drive.
- Search for pictures using any of the image search functions of the major web search engines (if an image is copyrighted, please respect the owner's intellectual property!).

For best results, ter Hoeve recommends that you create your own library of pictures, rather than utilizing the ones that came with your mind mapping program. These may be pictures you have shot with your digital camera, images you've found intriguing while surfing the Web that you have saved for possible future use, or personal drawings and doodles that you have scanned into your computer. Why is this important? Because utilizing your own pictures will give your maps more emotional impact, because these images are more relevant to you!

William Reed, Mind Mapping Master Trainer, Director of Buzan Japan and author of the Mind Mapping Strategies e-newsletter, also warns against over-reliance on the clip art that came with your mind mapping program. Using the same clip art for different ideas reinforces similarity, and using cloned rather than original images trains your mind to either ignore the images as insignificant, or to treat them as mere visual clichés. Ideally, images should be used in mind maps as a compact form of communication, not as decorations.

Not Happy with the Layout of Your Map? Adjust It!

One of the primary advantages of computer-based mind mapping is that your maps are infinitely malleable. Here's why: when you create a hand-drawn mind map, your keywords, branches and pictures are anchored to their present locations. The only way to move a branch or keyword from one location to another is to erase it (if you're working in pencil) and re-draw it at its new location. This can be time-consuming, and may interrupt your creative "flow."

In contrast, with mind mapping software, you can easily experiment with rearranging elements of your mind map until you're happy with them. If you don't like the way an element looks in its new location, use your program's "undo" command to return it to its previous state. What if you don't like the image you placed into your map? Delete it, and replace it with more appropriate picture. Similarly, most mind mapping programs enable you to easily adjust branch shape, color and thickness, text font, size and color, and even the pattern in which branches are arranged around the central topic.

This incredible freedom also gives you the power to "refactor" the contents of your map. For more information on this mind mapping strategy, be sure to read the advanced mind mapping strategies tip on refactoring.

Control the Level of Detail Displayed

As you add content to a mind map it can quickly fill your screen with a lot of visual clutter, affecting your ability to focus on the part you're working on. Remember that you don't have to view all of your map's contents at once. All mind mapping programs enable you to open or close individual branches – showing or hiding the detail below that level – or to show only a certain level of detail. For example, selecting a command to only show topics down to level two would only display the central topic and its immediate subtopics, while hiding all of the sub-branches below that level.

For best results, collapse the contents of all of the primary branches except for the one that you are working on. This enables you to focus on that specific branch and keep your creative "flow" going, with fewer distractions. Once you are done brainstorming a particular topic, collapse that branch and begin work on the next one.

Some mind mapping programs also enable you to do keyword filtering on the contents of your mind map, displaying only those topics that meet your keyword search criteria. This can come in very handy if you are searching for something specific within a very large, complex map.

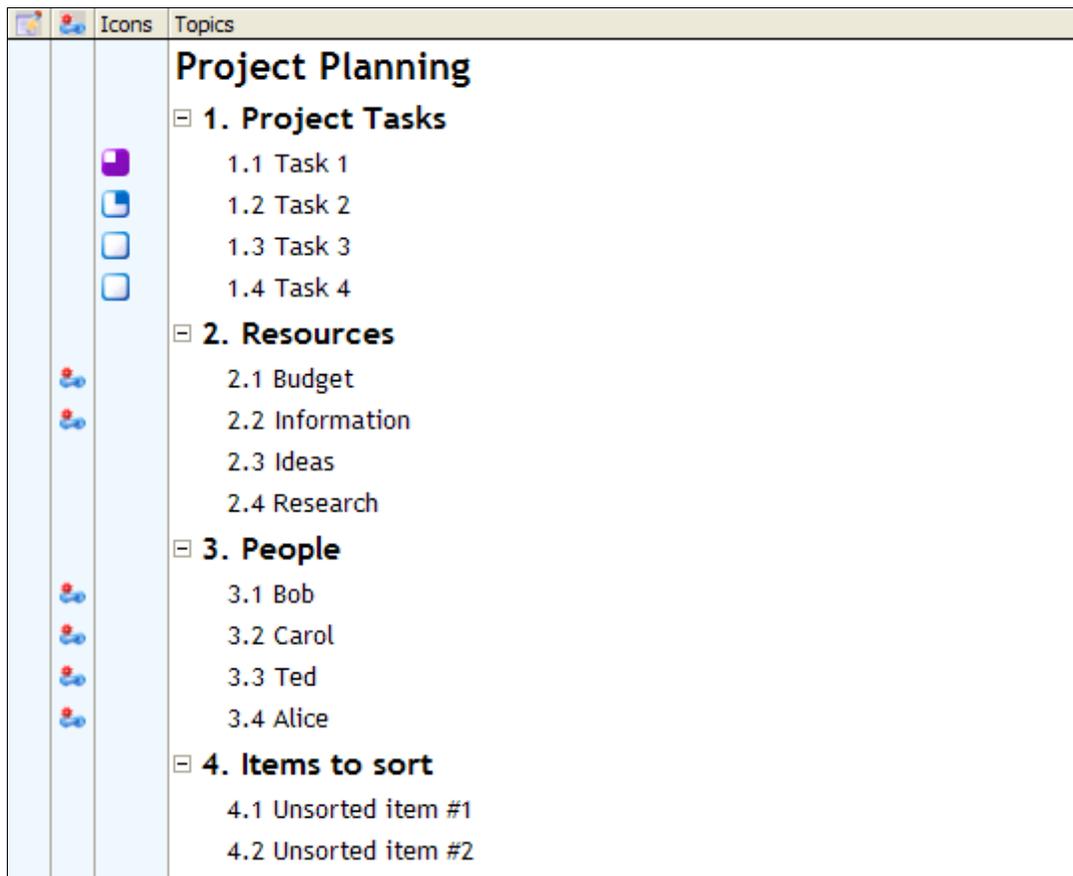
So remember: when you are mind mapping, don't be a victim of information overload! Use your program's built-in tools to control the amount of detail you view at any given time.

Outline View

Remember in grade school, when your English teacher made you create outlines? It wasn't much fun, was it? Well, despite any traumatic memories of outlining you may have from your youth, this method of organizing information is quite useful today. Like mind maps, outlines enable you to see the structure underlying your information. Once the structure is laid bare, you can more easily see what information needs to be added, what needs to be moved to a different location and what is superfluous and may be eliminated. An outline is, in effect, a skeletal representation of your information.

What does this mean to you as a user of mind mapping software? Most mind mapping programs provide an outline view, where you can see the topics and subtopics of your map in a more linear format. You may find that it helps to illuminate new relationships and connections between the elements of your map.

With most programs, you can easily switch back and forth between map view and outline view. Plus, some of them enable you to export your file as an outline to Microsoft Word, where you can continue to refine and add details to your ideas.

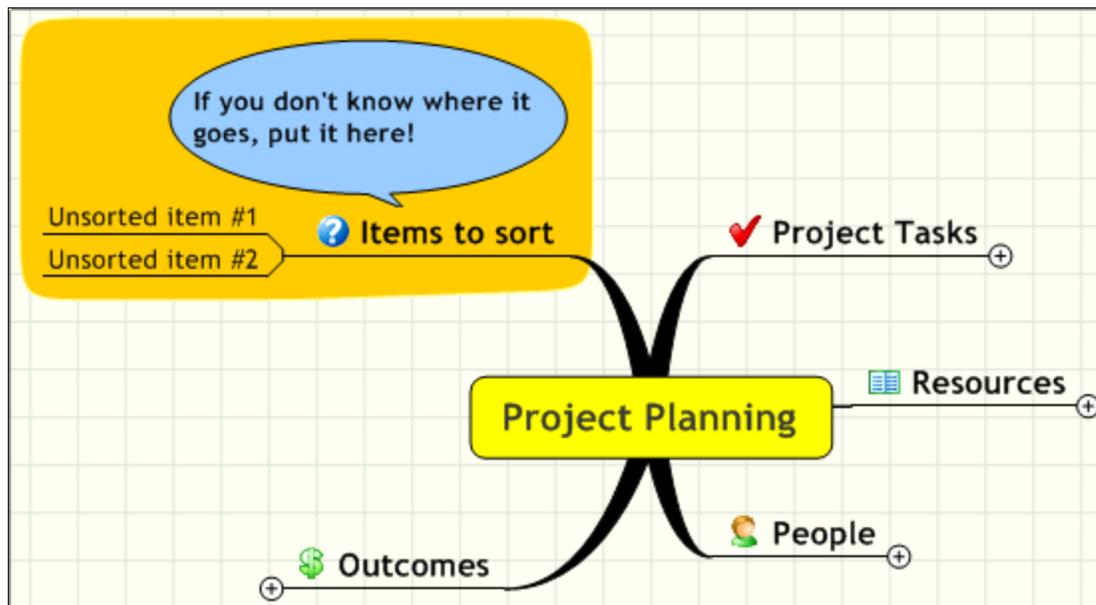


Create a Topic for Unsorted Items

As you're creating your mind map, you may think of topics or items that don't logically fit into the hierarchy of topics and sub-topics that you have created. This tip from Nick Duffill is ideal for these situations.

When you don't know where to put an idea or a piece of information, Nick's strategy is to create a special topic – which he calls “To Be Sorted” or something similar – which he uses as a placeholder for these unclassified items. Remember, you can always move these ideas to more appropriate locations later. The important thing is to record them as you think of them.

Your goal when creating a mind map is to record everything that you think of, no matter how outlandish. If you start to hold back items because you're not quite sure where to put them, you start to fill up what personal effectiveness expert David Allen calls your “psychic RAM” – the part of your brain where you tell it to pay attention to and remember things. Adding unclassified items to a catch-all topic helps you to keep a better mental “flow” going, preventing “constipation” in your psychic RAM.



Use the “TAP Process” to Create Effective Maps

To create effective business mind maps, Wallace Tait recommends a three-step process, which he calls “TAP.” Here’s how it works:

1. **T:** Tap into your thought processes, capturing your ideas and transferring them into a visible, non-linear format in your mind map. At this stage, neatness doesn’t count. Just record your thoughts and ideas, quickly and randomly.
2. **A:** Arrange, group, add, delete, rearrange and clarify the content of your mind map until it is complete and well organized. At this stage, you need to look at your thoughts and ideas with a logical mindset. This is also the step where you can add images to enhance your map, plus links to documents, files, web pages and other resources, to help clarify the points in your map.
3. **P:** Present and share your ideas in a format that suits you and the recipients of them. During this final stage, you may want to present the map itself to your target audience. But more often, when you are making presentations to logical, left-brained thinkers, Wallace recommends that you export your map into a linear format, for use in other applications like Microsoft Word or PowerPoint. Most mind mapping programs also enable you to convert your map into an image file. Wallace has had excellent success with printing his maps onto poster-sized paper, which he then uses to present his ideas to his audiences.

Get Your Team to Use Mind Mapping Software

Here’s a tip from visual mapper Mark Halvorsen, who has come up with a common-sense way to get your team to use mind mapping software, without overwhelming them:

A great tip for using mind maps in business is to use them often and keep maps simple. When I first tried to introduce mind mapping software to my team I put too much effort on advocating use for all the complex things that mind mapping can make simpler. However, we didn't do complicated things that often so people didn't get into the habit of using mind maps.

A better approach was to set low expectations for each mapping exercise, but to set high expectations for using maps often – as a part of their regular work. For example, I would get my team to send me regular every day reports and proposals as mind maps. This got my team using the software all the time and it made it easy for me to cut and paste topics and topic trees into the more complex maps and then send these back to team as a whole to keep them aware of big picture issues. The result of this strategy was a change of team culture, where people started to see mindmaps as a way to communicate more and write less.

A Trojan Horse Approach to Exposing Coworkers and Clients to Visual Mapping

Too often, people who haven't been exposed to visual maps go into "map shock" – they see a complex map, and can't make sense of it (especially people who are rigid, linear thinkers!). As a result, they quickly get overwhelmed, and turned off by the idea of information presented in a non-linear format.

Two of my survey respondents have come up with clever ways to integrate visual maps into their presentations, without making them the star of the show:

"I often include a graphic of the map as the table of contents for presenting research to people as a first step."

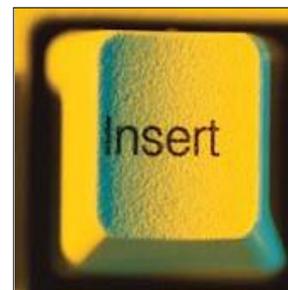
-- A. Raspa

"I like to include a mind-map (hand-drawn) as an exhibit in each proposal I write to a client and then highlight the nodes that we will be attacking in the current phase. This does a couple things: it shows the scope of what we can do, how we're thinking holistically about their situation beyond just the task they asked us to complete and how our current phase of development represents only a sliver of what we can do for that client. It's both bait to earn future work with that client and a credibility-building brain dump we can expose to the client, so they can see our line of thinking."

-- Unidentified survey respondent

Learn Your Program's Keyboard Shortcuts

Many times, when you're working with a mind map, you're trying to do a "brain dump" – to capture ideas before they get away. Or if you're trying to capture notes in a mind map during a meeting or a lecture, speed is critical. Using your computer's keyboard and mouse usually isn't the most efficient way to add content to your map. To help you to keep your creative "flow" going, I recommend that you learn your program's keyboard shortcuts. Many programs now support using the "insert" key as a shortcut to add a new branch to your map. Others offer separate shortcuts for adding new topics and the current level of your map or at the child level. In any case, they enable you to build your map without taking your hands off of the keyboard.



Smarter Exporting of Your Maps

What if you're working on a mind map in your favorite program, and you only want to export some of its content to Microsoft Word or another text-based program? One way to do this, which should work with many mind mapping programs, is to assign an icon or marker to those topics you don't want to export, and filter the map to hide them. Then perform your export on the remaining content. One other possible way would be to convert your map's unwanted topics into floating topics, which may eliminate them from the export process.

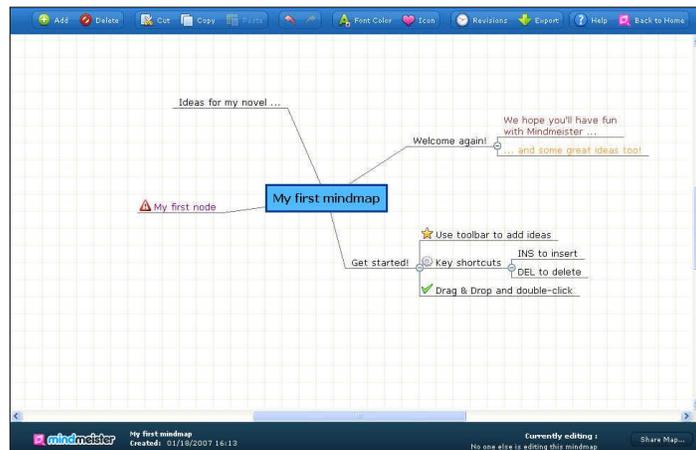
Another scenario encountered by many users of mind mapping software (based upon survey responses I have received) is that many programs are set up by default to rather odd text styles when they export their maps to Microsoft Word. As a result, they spend too much time in Word, cleaning up text formatting and converting it to their preferred heading and body copy styles. If your program allows you some freedom in formatting topics and notes, here's a clever work-around that may work for you:

1. Decide, in Microsoft Word, what you want your report to look like. In other words, what text styles (font, font size, text style, etc.) you plan to use in your finished document.
2. Capture these text styles in a branch of your mind map (called a legend).
3. Create new text styles in your mind mapping program that are the equivalents of each of those Word styles (for example, a subheading may be 12 point Arial bold).
4. Note in your legend which styles in your diagram map over to which Word text styles.
5. When you export your visual map to Word, your mind mapping program should utilize the styles you have created.

This may not work with all mind mapping programs, but it does work with MindManager.

Want to Share Your Maps? Take Advantage of Web 2.0

If you're using FreeMind or MindManager and want to enable your colleagues to share and edit your maps, there's a new option, enabled by a new class of web-based mind mapping tools. [MindMeister](#) enables you to import MindManager or FreeMind maps, share them with others



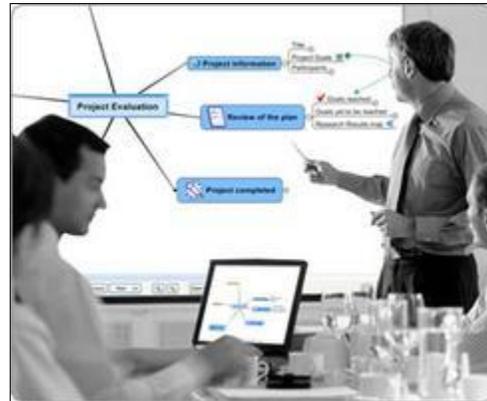
and enable them to make edits, and then you can export them back to MindManager or FreeMind.

This is an ideal situation if your colleagues or coworkers don't own a licensed copy of your favorite mind mapping application!

Use Your Software to Present – and Capture the Subsequent Discussion

Here's another tip from another anonymous mind mapping survey respondent:

“Use MindManager instead of PowerPoint for much more interactive presentations that have the added benefit of preserving information from the meeting. In other words, as you get feedback from the group you're presenting to, you can add that to the map.”

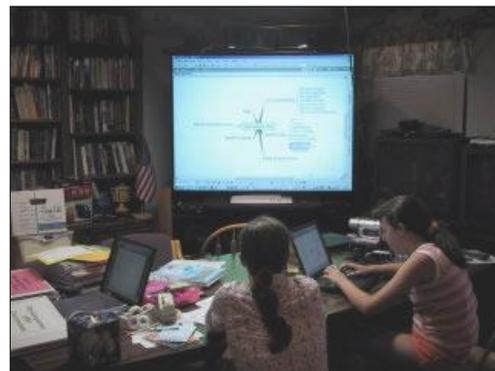


I think this is a brilliant idea. Often, you may be presenting the results of some research you have conducted, an outline of a project implementation plan, or other important knowledge and information that results in a group discussion of what was presented. To use this technique, create one or more new branches that can be used to capture the results of this discussion, the decisions reached by the group and next action steps. This can be a powerful way to archive the information presented and the discussion notes, all in one highly integrated form.

Group Write Your Next Proposal

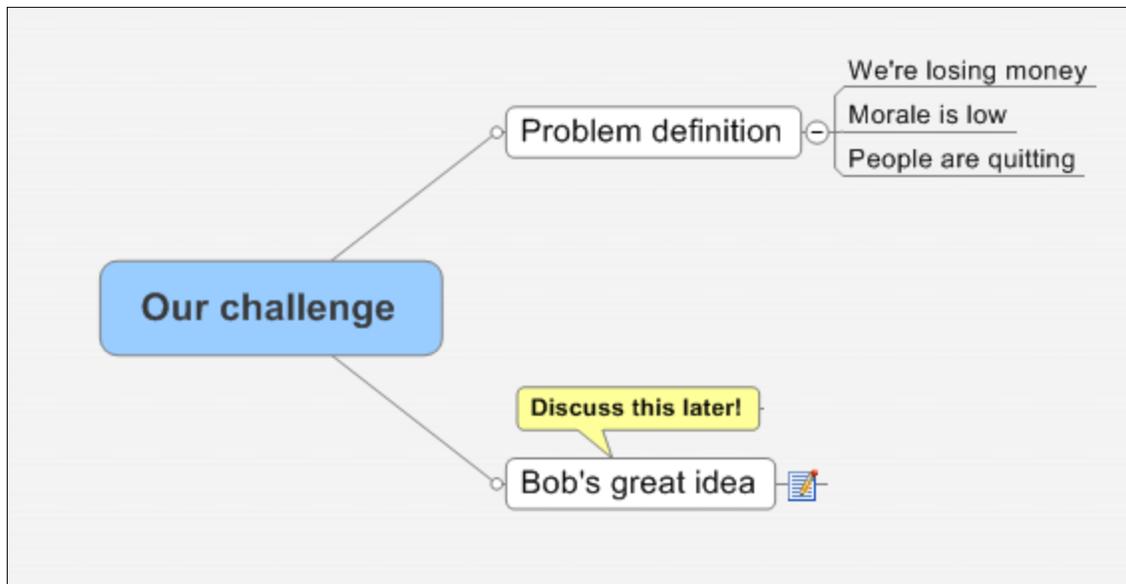
This is a powerful technique recommended by another survey respondent:

“We get 2-3 people around a table with a 19-inch monitor so everyone can see. I will work on a laptop and we will create a mind map of the scope of work, then use the notes tool in MindManager to write the text (of the proposal). Following this method we are able to get much more done in a shorter amount of time.”



-- Dean Grey

Never Lose an Idea During a Brainstorming Session



During group brainstorming sessions, the facilitator usually starts by walking the group through a problem definition exercise. After all, a problem well stated is already half solved. But what if one of the participants blurts out an idea before the challenge is fully defined? In the typical brainstorming session, the person would be urged to hold on to their idea, and present it at the proper time. But, inevitably, the conversation never returns to that point, and the idea is lost.

If you're using mind mapping software to record your group brainstorming session, this doesn't have to be the case. Simply create a new topic entitled "ideas," and add the person's great idea as a subtopic. Then return to the discussion of the problem definition, and you can easily return to that idea later, during the ideation section of the brainstorming session.

Thanks to Stephen Orr, one of our case history authors, for sharing this practical tip!

Take Your Mind Mapping Skills to the Next Level

Mind mapping is a rich medium for recording, organizing, recalling and communicating information and ideas. To get a fuller sense of the possibilities that this visual medium offers, William Reed recommends that you learn more about creating hand-drawn mind maps. Read books by Tony Buzan, the inventor of mind mapping, to learn more about its basic principles. You can also learn more how to mind map and the basic rules of mind mapping by [visiting the Buzan website](#).

Will also suggests that you look at your mind maps in terms of how well they connect with people: “Does your mind map make sense to other people, or at least arouse their interest? Is it linked, associated, and connected well enough to other people and the world around you to be worth talking about? Does it inspire questions? What is its purpose? Think of your Mind Map as a window on your thoughts, and ask yourself if this is what you want to say? Is this what you want people to hear?”

Clearly, you can learn a lot about mind mapping on your computer by studying the principles of hand-drawn mind mapping!

[New in this edition](#)

Keep a Collection of Visual Aids to Use in Your Mind Maps

Making your mind maps visually appealing is using backgrounds, icons, images and other embellishments is one way to capture the reader’s interest, according to mind mapping expert Matthew Lang, author of the [MindMapSwitch blog](#). A mind map that uses any of these visual aids, increases the information it can convey to the reader and also appears to be more attractive.

Many of today's mind mapping applications give you the ability to either use the program’s built-in library of icons, images and background images - or import your own. By maintaining your own collection of map embellishments, you'll never be stuck for images to increase the attractiveness of your mind maps.

Also, Matthew cautions, don’t assume that these images will be costly. The web design community is a treasure trove of free visuals that can you can use in your mind maps. From icon sets to textured backgrounds, web designers often create these image assets for special projects of their own, but release them through a free license that allows everyone to use them, including you!

Using these extra visual aids in your mind maps will mean you'll be able to create more distinctive and attractive mind maps that will really engage the reader, whether it's yourself, a team or a community.

So what are you waiting for? Start building your own collection of visual aids for your mind maps and use them to improve the visual appeal of your mind maps – and give them a distinctive visual edge!

New in this edition

Brainstorm Using Floating Topics at Lightning Speed!

A brainstorming session is a great time to generate ideas, but what if those ideas don't fall under one category? Perhaps you don't know which ideas you're going to use and which ones you should keep. Fortunately, according to Matthew Lang, there's a simple solution to this challenge built into your mind mapping software program.

Many of these visual mapping applications enable you to create floating topics. These are essentially separate branches from the mind map that don't fall under any of the basic ordering ideas. Using floating topics instead of normal branches for your ideas means that when your brainstorming session is finished, you can categorize your ideas after they have been generated.

Brainstorming using floating topics is a great way to crank out ideas without losing your focus and worrying about how they should be categorized. You can do that later.

For even greater efficiency during your brainstorming sessions, determine if you can use a shortcut key to insert a floating topic into your mind map. Using this shortcut will enable you to capture more ideas, faster, and maintain your creative flow.

New in this edition

Improve Your Productivity with Mind Map Templates

Most of us have activities that we do on a regular basis – meetings, plans, reports and more – where we need to quickly organize, distill and utilize information in a productive way. Why not speed these repetitive tasks by creating mind map templates to “automate” their production and improve your productivity?

A well-designed template gives you a “starting point” or framework with the major topics already created, which spurs your associative brain into action. It also saves you time, because you're not creating the same map from scratch each time you do that activity.

If you're not convinced that mind map templates will save you time, simply multiply the number of times you do a given task during an average week by the amount of time that it takes you to create such a mind map. Let's look at an example: you have 10 meetings a week; on average, it takes you 30 minutes to create a meeting map that incorporates the meeting objectives, participants, agenda, support materials and meeting room arrangements. That's a savings of 5 hours in a week – pretty impressive!

Types of maps that lend themselves to a templated approach include:

- To do lists

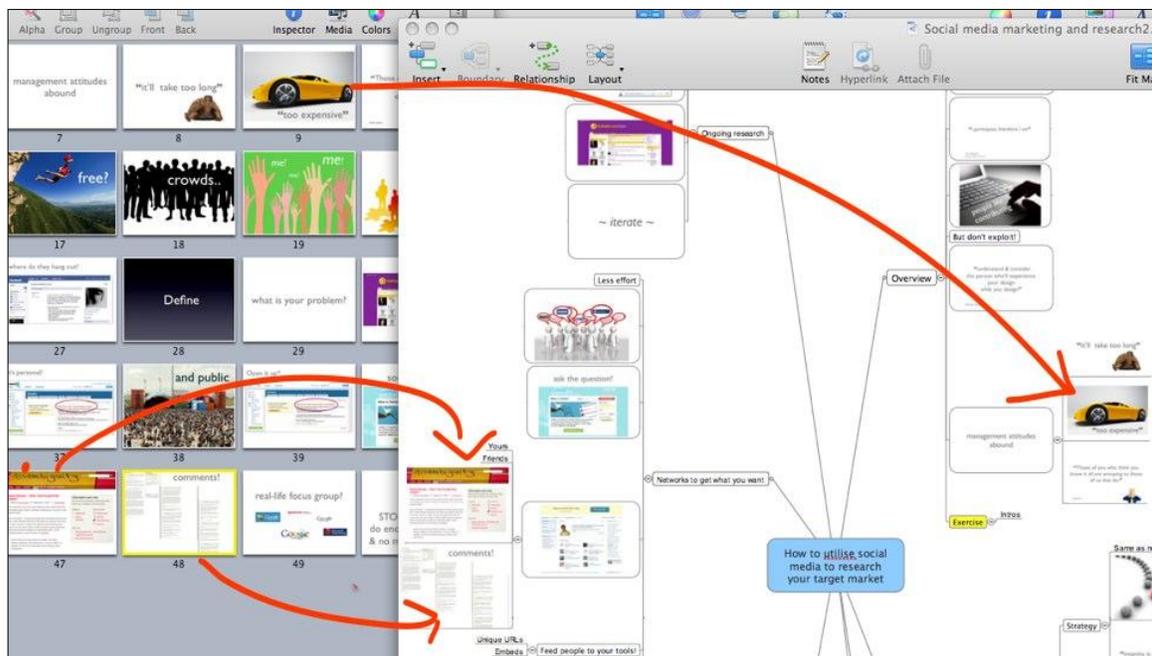
- Meeting planning and management
- Project management
- Group brainstorming (using methodologies like Edward de Bono's Six Thinking Hats)
- Decision making
- Job descriptions
- Performance reviews
- Packing list for business trips

Most mind mapping programs enable you to create a map and then designate it as a template, so you can re-use it later. But a few programs go farther than that. They enable you to create and store collections of commonly-used branches and sub-branches that you can add to an existing map at any time. MindManager calls them “custom map parts,” while Visual Mind calls them “structures” – I call them incredibly useful!

New in this edition

Organize Your Slides Using a Mind Map

Many people utilize mind mapping software as a “front end” tool for organizing the content of their presentations. You first create a visual outline, and then export it to PowerPoint for further refinement. But James Breeze, author of the Usable World Blog, has figured out how to take this one step further:

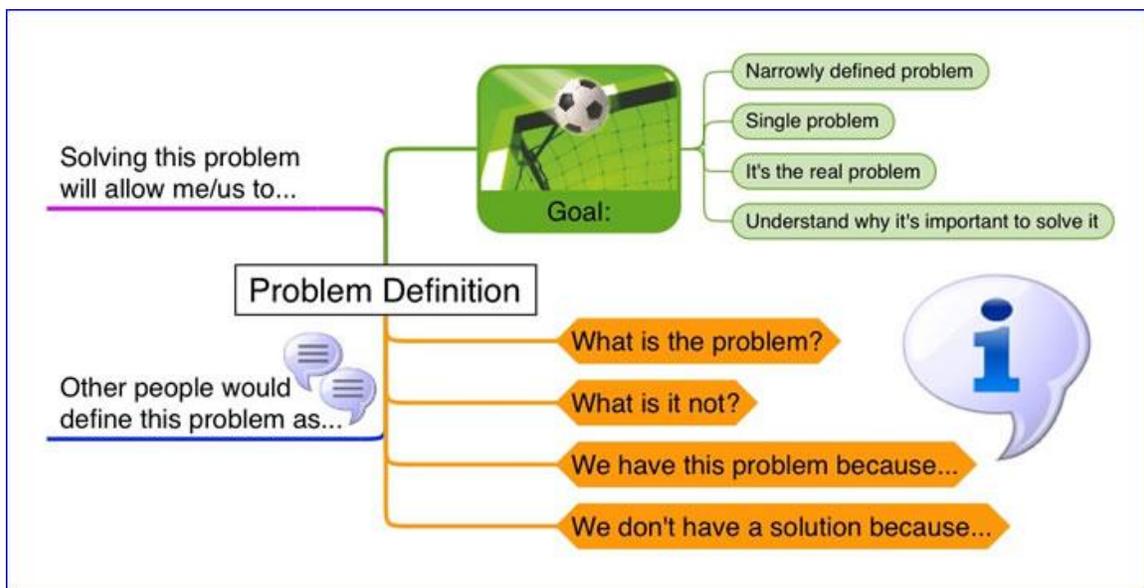


He discovered that he could drag a slide from Keynote's Light Table on his Mac into MindManager, and attach these thumbnail images to map topics. This enables him to not only use his mind mapping software as a cool visual slide sorter, but also to annotate his topics and images with notes.

Check out a larger version of his slide sorting map [on his UsableWorld blog](#).

[New in this edition](#)

5 quick ways to add color and visual interest to your mind maps



One of the fastest ways in which you can improve your software-produced mind maps is to move beyond the default settings of your program.

“Out of the box,” many mind mapping software produces black-and-white, text-focused maps that just aren’t very interesting. A few create randomly-colored branches automatically, but most don’t. A lot of the mind maps I see online are, how can I put this delicately... BORING!

How can you add color and visual interest to your mind maps? Here are five suggestions:

- Change the topic text or shape color
- Change the color or shape of the lines used to connect topics and subtopics
- Add a background image to your map

- Add an image or modify the text, shape or color settings of the central topic
- Add images to individual map topics

Please keep in mind that I do not advocate doing this randomly. Color, shape and other elements should be used to convey or enhance the meaning of your map. I like the simple example above, especially the use of the soccer ball image to depict goals, and the way in which the questions are colored orange. This naturally draws your eye to the most important part of the map – the questions that you should consider when you're engaged in problem solving.

New in this edition

45 Ways to Use Mind Mapping Software for Business

Mind mapping software gives business executives a set of visual modeling tools that enable them to manipulate information, knowledge and ideas with a freedom that is unprecedented. As a result, a savvy businesspeople are utilizing this type of productivity software for an amazing number of applications, including these:



1. Conduct a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis.
2. Plan and manage a project.
3. Plan a meeting – including outlining the agenda, meeting room requirements and invitees.
4. Capture ideas from a group brainstorming meeting.
5. Maintain an idea database.
6. Develop an information “dashboard” for fast access to key metrics and resources.
7. Take notes during meetings.
8. Creative problem solving.
9. Maintain a to-do list.
10. Formulate a plan for the launch of a new business or for an acquisition.

11. Make better-informed business decisions.
12. Business process improvement.
13. Knowledge management.
14. Develop job descriptions for key employees and positions within your organization.
15. Manage performance reviews.
16. Outline and organize the content of a business report or technical paper.
17. Develop and give a presentation.
18. Map the services that “surround” your company’s products and brainstorm ways to improve customer experience.
19. Do scenario planning.
20. Business continuity planning.
21. Create detailed customer personas for marketing planning.
22. Analyze and improve your company’s business model.
23. Brainstorm potential partnering opportunities.
24. Sales account planning and management.
25. Risk assessment and management.
26. Develop a business plan.
27. Identify strategic opportunities using a “PEST” template – detailing political, environmental, social and technological trends.
28. Develop a strategic plan for your business.
29. Plan and outline content for a training session.
30. Create a “force field” map to better understand the forces that are influencing a business situation, positively and negatively.
31. Conduct research for new projects and use a mind map to capture and organize your findings.
32. Use David Allen’s Getting Things Done (GTD) methodology to manage your workload more effectively.
33. Develop and organize the content for a new website.
34. Optimize your website’s ranking in the web search engines.
35. Map out and optimize your organizational structure.
36. Set and track your team’s progress toward departmental and organizational goals.

37. Summarize the key ideas contained in business books into maps for future reference.
38. Collaborate with others more effectively through shared mind maps.
39. Map out new product features and development timelines.
40. Capture a detailed profile of a customer's needs during a sales or consulting call.
41. Develop a marketing plan.
42. Create a personal development plan to help you to advance your career and improve your work performance.
43. Document work procedures and policies.
44. Capture key learnings at the conclusion of a major project.
45. Match the skills and capabilities of team members with the requirements of a project.

New in this edition

17 Ways to Use Mind Mapping Software to Think About Your Business Differently

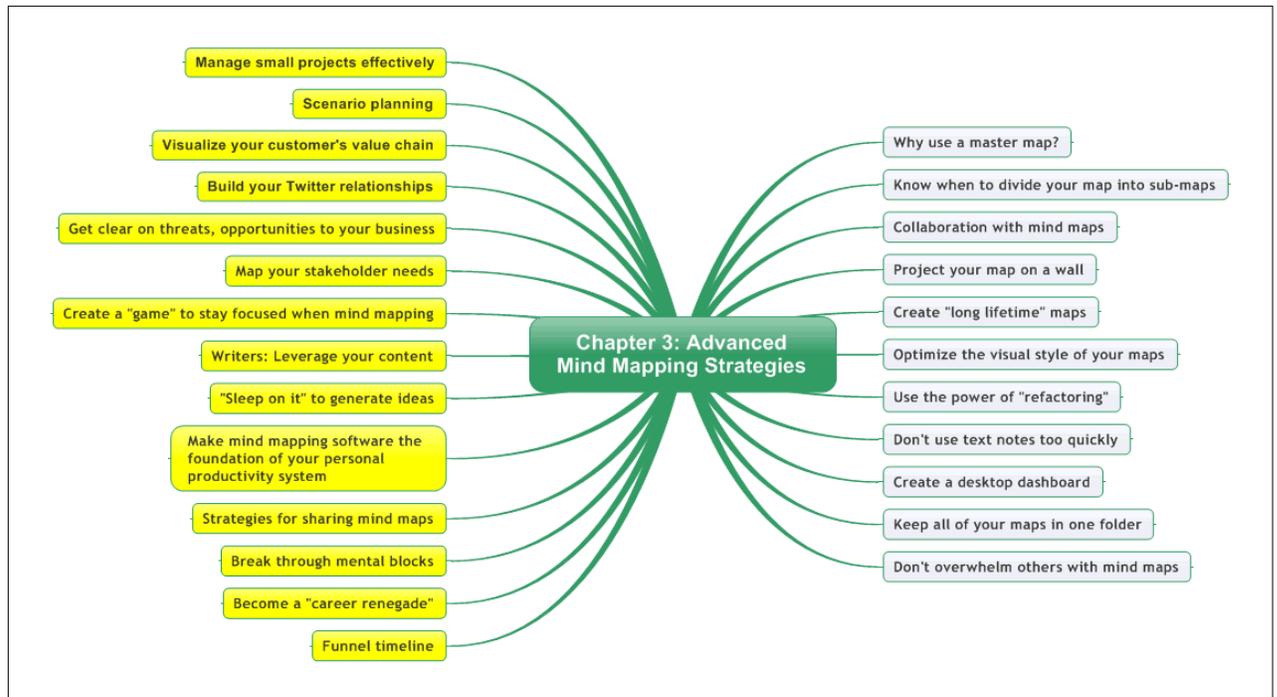
Mind mapping software is an excellent tool to help you to think about your business differently.

Here are 17 ways in which you can utilize mind mapping software to rethink your business, leap ahead of your competitors and delight your customers:

1. Map out ideas to improve or extend your existing products and services.
2. Map your customer segments, including the development of personas, to zero in on how their needs have changed; identify the most promising ones for targeted sales campaigns and look for those that may be under-served by your competitors.
3. Map your current market segments, and identify adjacent ones with similar needs into which you can expand your marketing and sales.
4. Do a competitive analysis, and use your mind map to identify gaps you can fill in areas that matter to your most attractive prospective customers.
5. Use it to perform a SWOT (strengths/weaknesses/opportunities/threats) analysis, with a particular emphasis on potential disruptive threats. Which emerging firms are you not taking seriously today? What if they suddenly got much better? Mind maps are great for outlining future scenarios like this one.

6. Look for opportunities to reduce waste and streamline business processes. The savings you uncover will go right to your bottom line!
7. Analyze and improve your business model. How are companies in other industries or markets creating sustainable value? What lessons can you adapt or learn from what they have accomplished?
8. Conduct research into emerging industry trends and “weak signals,” and use a mind map to capture, organize and analyze your findings for new insights and opportunities.
9. Brainstorm potential partnering opportunities – the more unusual, the better. Don’t forget your local universities, who can help you with market research and business planning!
10. Ask thought-provoking questions to generate new insights into your business, its challenges and opportunities. Record both the questions and your answers in a mind map.
11. Map out your employees, their positions and their responsibilities – sort of like an organization chart on steroids. Visualizing this information will make it easier for you to see who is overloaded, who may not have enough work and where you may be able to streamline departments and job functions.
12. Prune your innovation portfolio: Map out the projects in your company’s new product development (NPD) portfolio and use your mind mapping software to classify them as short/medium/long term and low/medium/high risk. Zero in on those projects that are relatively low risk and can be accomplished in a fairly short time horizon.
13. Map out the existing services that “surround” your company’s products. Brainstorm new services that you can use to complement existing products and provide more valuable customer experiences – which will help you to increase customer loyalty.
14. Take a fresh look at your key customers from the standpoint of their “jobs to be done” – a core concept from Clayton Christensen’s landmark book, *The Innovator’s Solution*. In other words, what are they trying to accomplish? What is the end result they seek? And how can you enable it? Map out these jobs, and list the needs and implications that each implies in separate branches of your map.
15. Use your mind mapping software to do scenario planning.
16. Identify areas of waste and inefficiency: map out your business processes, teams and operations using your mind mapping software. Look for steps that don’t add any value, or that offer insufficient value. Look for new ways to extract more horsepower from your intelligence, people, knowledge and clients and put that to new innovative use.
17. Do business continuity planning: what if a catastrophe was to strike your business? What would happen? How soon would you be able to get up and

running again? A mind map is the perfect tool to visually think about the natural disasters you ought to prepare for (flooding, fire, tornado, earthquake, etc.) and flesh out plans to get back up and running with the minimum of disruption of services to your customers and clients. When business is slow, is a perfect time to do this!



As I did the research for this e-book, I came across some truly remarkable strategies that you ought to know to supercharge your mind mapping skills. Here they are.

Why Use a Master Map?

A master map is a map of all of your mind maps. In other words, it's a single mind map that enables you to organize and quickly access all of the visual diagrams you have created with your mind mapping software.

Whenever you need to create a new mind map, don't use your program's "create a new file" function. Instead, create a topic in your master map, and then create the new file from that node.

Why use a master map?

- You're organizing your knowledge and projects in a way that makes the most sense to you – in a sense, you are creating a visual representation of the way you work.
- Compared to the "file cabinet" metaphor, which users of both PCs and Macs have been struggling with for years, this personalized, organic repository of links to your mind maps (and other files) can provide you with a quantum leap in productivity.

Making this strategy work requires a certain amount of discipline, because in order for your master map to be complete, you need to add any new maps you create to your master map. But the rewards are worth it. Writing in the Mindjet Blog, Hobart Swan describes it as an “organic” strategy for organizing your information. Each new map becomes like a new shoot or growth, “sprouting” from your master map.

Know When to Divide Your Map into Sub-Maps

When you’re adding details to a mind map, it can quickly become cluttered. Fortunately, most mind mapping software programs enable you to divide a large map into several smaller, linked ones. According to Nick Duffill, you should consider dividing a large map into several smaller, linked maps only under these circumstances:

- When you want to print a map, you will probably find that smaller maps are easier to format within the layout of a single page.
- When a section of your map is complete enough that it is self-contained, and could be understandable if viewed on its own.
- If you want to share a map with your co-workers or clients, but don’t want to share the thinking that went into it, you can break those sections of your map off into sub-maps. When you’re ready to send your map to your colleagues, don’t send those “private” sections.

Collaborating with Mind Maps

One of the most powerful but underutilized applications of mind mapping software is to utilize it to capture ideas, decisions and other important information during small group meetings. By projecting the meeting map on a wall, everyone shares a visual representation of the ideas being discussed and how they relate to each other. Even if some members of the group haven’t used mind mapping before, most of them should quickly “get it” and begin to contribute to the meeting at a deeper level. This strategy can significantly increase the productivity of your meetings!

A shared mind map also creates several very positive dynamics in meetings, according to Nick Duffill. In a typical meeting, people often aren’t sure how their ideas are being treated, what issues are being debated and why, and what decisions have been made. A shared mind map makes this important information explicit, and helps groups to reach consensus faster. He says it also tends to de-personalize sensitive issues, reducing the tendency of people to defend their ideas or positions, and enabling the group to consider them more openly.

Project Your Map on a Wall

When working with a mind map, most users add thoughts and ideas only until their workspace is full. If you are using a PC with an average-sized screen, you may be short-changing yourself.

According to Nick Duffill of Gyronix, the more of your field of vision something occupies, the more involved you tend to be in it. He's found this to be especially true of mind maps. If you give yourself a larger workspace, you will tend to produce maps that are more complete. One solution is to buy a larger screen for your computer. But what Nick does is quite clever: when he's working on a major mind map, he projects it onto a wall in his office – effectively giving him a huge workspace!

Seize Opportunities to Create “Long-Lifetime” Maps

According to Nick Duffill, many users of mind mapping programs only use them to meet short-term needs – to brainstorm ideas or outline the agenda for a meeting, for example. But he believes one of the most powerful ways you can use them is for what he calls “long-lifetime” applications. That is, maps that you return to again and again to update the information contained within them.

Typically, many users of mind mapping software use them for a few days to get them through an event, such as a brainstorming session or an upcoming meeting. Because of this short-term perspective, Duffill says they may be missing an opportunity to get even more value out of their favorite visual diagramming application.

In contrast, long-lifetime mind maps are focused on strategies or projects – assignments that take a longer timeframe to develop. Often, connections between related pieces of information in our maps aren't immediately evident at the time you record them. It's often only after days or weeks of perspective that you may get hit by the legendary “a-ha!” and see where something fits. Long-lifetime maps, therefore, are works in progress, which you continue to refine as your project evolves.

Optimize the Visual Style of Your Maps

In his work, Nick Duffill sees many software-produced mind maps. Often, they're disorganized – and therefore don't communicate as clearly as they should. If you're planning to utilize your mind maps to communicate information to others, you must review them with a critical eye. Do they communicate clearly and unambiguously? If I was someone seeing your map for the first time, would I be able to make sense of the hierarchy of topics and sub-topics? Would the wording and placement of each topic and sub-topic make sense to me?

Neatness is also important. Like it or not, people make judgments based on the visual appeal of what you're trying to communicate to them. You wouldn't dream of presenting a speech with a PowerPoint presentation that contains slides with different backgrounds, varying headline colors and sizes, and inconsistent text styles, would you? The same rules of visual "fit and finish" apply to your mind maps. A neatly laid out mind map, with consistent use of styles and colors, sets others' expectations of the quality of its contents. Like it or not, people will first judge your map on its visual impact. Make sure that it's a good first impression!

Here are some tips for making the best visual impact with your software-produced mind maps:

- Don't leave stray topics scattered around your map. Make sure that all of the primary and secondary topics are arranged neatly.
- Consider the order in which your primary topics appear. Do they follow each other in a logical sequence? If not, rearrange them until they are in a more explicit sequence that will make sense to others who may be seeing your map for the first time.
- Are all of the topics and sub-topics where they should be within your map? Or are there items that seem out of place? Often, important items may be buried deep within the hierarchy of your maps. Spend time rearranging the elements of your map until it is a cohesive package of primary and supporting elements.
- Don't just use the default map style that came with your program. Spend some time learning how to customize the look of your mind maps.
- Personalize your maps with your organization's logo or brand.
- Collapse your map until only the first-level topics are visible, and then look critically at your map's central theme and first-level topics. Ideally, your map should be self-explanatory at this first level.
- As you refine your map, look for opportunities to strengthen how your topics and sub-topics will communicate to others. Are they headings, which provide some navigational clues but convey little meaningful information, or headlines, which communicate a lot of meaning in a very concise format? Ideally, your topics should be summarizing statements, like brief, persuasive headlines. Writing headlines isn't easy; it's actually hard work. But your map will be stronger because of it, and others who must read and understand it will appreciate the extra effort you put into optimizing how its contents communicate effectively.

Use the Power of “Refactoring”

Mind mapping software is an awesome tool for supporting your thinking in a highly visual way. One of its unique capabilities, according to Nick Duffill, is its exceptional support of “refactoring.” Simply put, refactoring is the process of moving topics from one part of your map to another and, in so doing, re-evaluating and reconsidering the relationship between that parent topic and its new sibling. When you move a topic to another location within a mind map, get in the habit of asking yourself questions like these:

- *“What meaning does this topic have within its new context?”*
- *“What’s missing?”*
- *“What still needs to be added to make it more complete?”*

Often, questions like these will trigger additional insights, which you can add to this part of your mind map. Rearranging topics within a mind map can provide up to 80 percent of its value, Duffill says.

Creating an effective mind map, he further explains, is an iterative process of adding content, then refactoring it, adding more items to it (suggested by your analysis of the topics you’ve moved within their new contexts), and so on. This process may take days or weeks to complete. And that’s OK, because when you re-visit a map you’re working on after a few days, you’re doing so with a fresh perspective – which tends to lead to new insights and fresh ideas. This multi-step process tends to yield maps that are more coherent, meaningful and complete.

What makes mind mapping a very powerful refactoring tool is the speed with which you can rearrange and regroup topics into powerful new combinations. With every mind mapping tool I’ve ever used, it’s as simple as drag and drop!

So the next time you’re moving topics around a mind map, remember that there’s a deeper level you should be thinking about: the power of refactoring!

Don’t Use Text Notes Too Quickly

One bad habit that users of mind mapping software get into, according to Nick Duffill, is to hide important information in topic notes. Unless the reader of your map clicks on a topic’s notes icon, he or she may never realize that it contains additional information.

Whenever possible, he recommends keeping as much information in the topics and sub-topics of your map, and limit your use of notes to supporting or secondary information.

Add a Multimedia Clip to Your Map

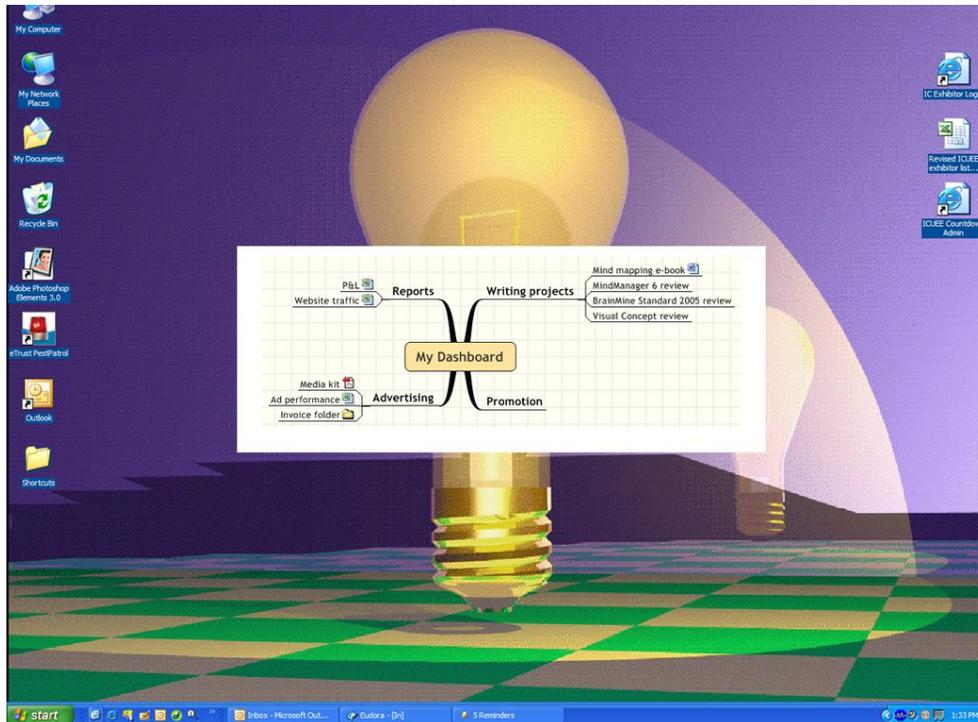
You probably realize by now that you can embed or link numerous types of files to your computer-generated mind maps. But did you ever consider adding an audio clip or sound file to one of your maps? According to Arjen ter Hoeve, adding music to your map can be a unique way to personalize it. This tip got me to thinking: why not record your own voice as an audio file, explaining the meaning and organization of your mind map, and then attach it to your map? This would be a marvelous way to enhance the value of the maps you share with others!

You can also add video files to your maps. This could be particularly useful when you're giving a presentation using your mind mapping software. Just double-click the attachment icon and your video clip appears on screen. This can be a great way to enhance your next presentation!

Create a Desktop Dashboard

Here's a great tip that I discovered on the Mindjet discussion forum: you can use the "export to web" feature of your mind mapping software to create a "desktop dashboard" – in other words, a tool on your PC's desktop that gives you immediate access to your most important files, applications and resources. Here's how to do it:

1. Create a map with your main areas of interest as the primary topics.
2. Create links from these main topics to the folders on your PC where you keep your files corresponding to each area of interest.
3. Add sub-topics and links to specific maps, files, sub-folders and websites that you access often.
4. Export your map to an HTML web page, making sure that your program preserves the links you have created.
5. Open this web page in your browser, and copy the link in the address bar to the windows clipboard.
6. Go to the Windows desktop, right-click and select the properties command. Browse to the tab where you can configure the "active desktop."
7. Paste the URL you copied as the address for your active desktop, save it and finally resize your active desktop as needed to fit your screen.
8. Whenever you want to update your personal "dashboard," simply double-click on the central topic on your desktop to open your map in your favorite mind mapping software. You can then edit it and export it again.



Using this strategy, you can replace dozens of desktop icons with a simple, intuitive map that puts you only one or two clicks away from your most important resources – a real time-saver.

Keep All of Your Mind Maps in One Folder

Mind mapping expert Arjen ter Hoeve recommends that you store all of your computer-generated mind maps in one folder or directory on your computer. This will not only make it easier for you to find them, it also makes it much easier for you to link maps to each other.

You may also want to consider storing print-outs of all of your mind maps in a physical binder or folder, making it easy for you to find them, if you need to refer to them in the future.

Don't Overwhelm Others with Mind Maps

If you're like many users of mind mapping software, you'll probably become enthusiastic about your new power tool, and you'll want to share the maps you've created with others in your organization. But Wallace Tait recommends that you curb your enthusiasm and proceed carefully. Why? Because most businesspeople are left-brained thinkers, accustomed to seeing information and ideas presented to them in a linear format. Linear-focused business software like Microsoft Word and PowerPoint only serve to

reinforce this mindset. If you present non-linear mind maps to them, you may quickly overwhelm them, Wallace warns.

A better approach is to begin incorporating a few mind maps into your linear documents and presentations in a supporting role. Then, as your colleagues become accustomed to viewing and understanding information in non-linear mind maps, you can move your presentations and information sharing in this direction.

What if your coworkers and colleagues don't have mind mapping software? How can they view your maps? A growing number of mind mapping software vendors offer free map viewer applications which you can distribute to them.

Funnel Timeline: A Visual Approach to Project Planning

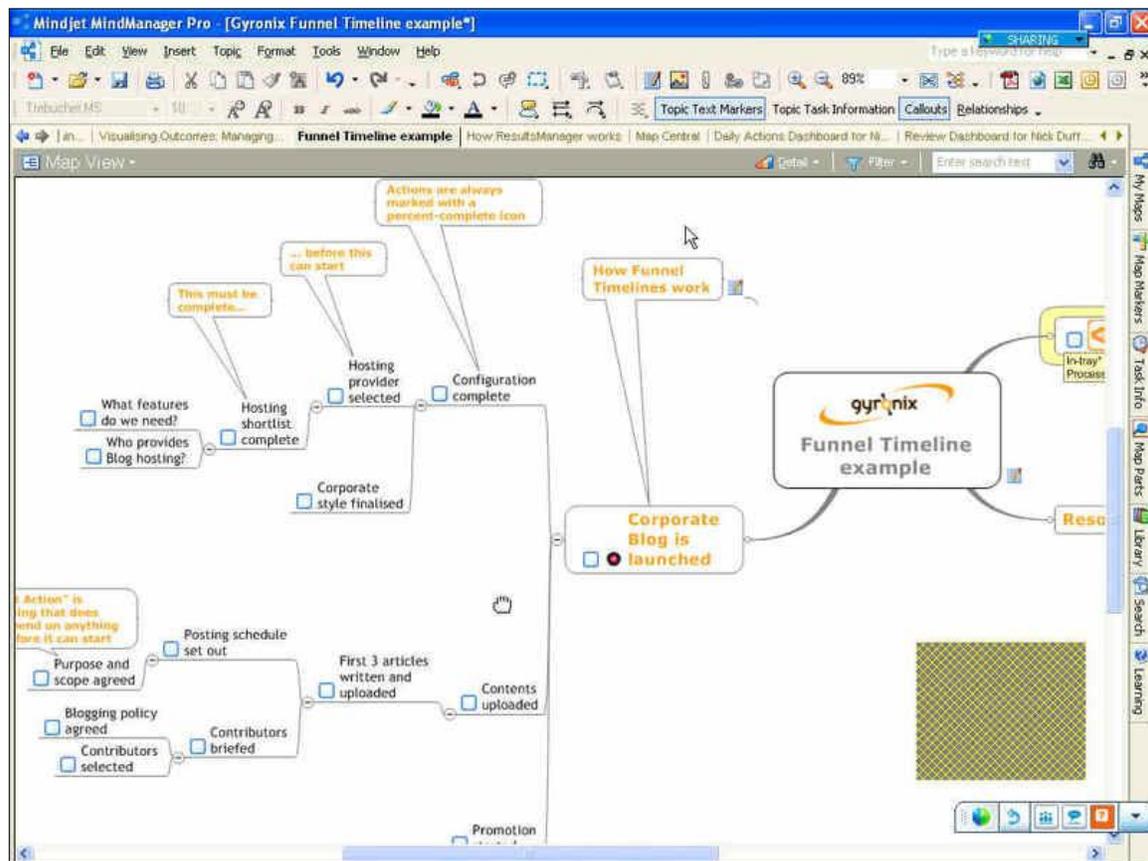
Nick Duffill, CTO of Gyronix and mind mapping strategist extraordinaire, was featured on a Mindjet webcast entitled *How to Use ResultsManager to Visualize Outcomes*. During his informative presentation, he shared a simple technique for visual planning that he calls the "funnel timeline." Although he demonstrated it using MindManager, it can be done using almost any mind mapping software. You don't need ResultsManager to create this type of visual map, either. Here's how to create a funnel timeline, and why it's superior to creating multiple linear lists for project planning and management.

Most people plan by starting from where they are now. That seems to make sense intuitively, but it's actually hard to decide where you need to go, and how to get there. Outcome-based planning takes the opposite approach, by beginning with the end in mind. In other words, it starts with your desired end state or objective, and then works backwards through time to what you need to do now. Using this methodology, Nick explains, you can more easily evaluate different routes or options to help you to reach your objective. Nick further explained that to-do lists, commonly used by most businesspeople, are less than ideal because they're not outcome based. In other words, they don't show you what success (your final outcome) looks like, so they often result in false starts and wasted effort. Plus, conventional, linear lists tend to mix together things that are actions with those that are not.

Nick developed a visual mapping technique he calls a "funnel timeline" to help project managers to focus and communicate more effectively than they can with conventional, linear lists.

Here's a step-by-step summary of how to create one:

1. Enter into your map a brief statement of your outcome, as if it has already been accomplished. For example, "Product X is launched."
2. Next, think of all of the things that will need to be true in order for that objective or end result to happen, and place each of them in a sub-topic to the left of your objective.
3. For each of those subtopics, brainstorm action steps for them. Useful questions to ask at this level of your map, according to Nick, are "What does this mean?" and "What has to be done?" Each of those action steps should also be placed in your visual map to the left of the subtopics you brainstormed in step #2. Continue breaking down each subtopic into more and more finite steps.
4. Add any relationships or dependencies between action steps to your map, using your program's relationship or connector lines.



What you end up with is a very rough timeline, which can be "read" from left to right. The items farthest to the left are those that need to be done first (or now), the items to their right must be done next, and so forth. What makes this model a "funnel," according to Nick, is that most projects start at multiple points and work their way down to a single end point or objective. In short, he says a funnel timeline gives you a concise view of

how your project "looks," capturing its action steps, the sequence in which they need to be accomplished and your ideal project objective.

New in this edition

How Mind Mapping Software Can Enable You to Be a “Career Renegade”

I was inspired by reading Jonathan Fields’ excellent [Firefly Manifesto: Remix](#) on ChangeThis.com. Field is the author of the book *Career Renegade* and the author of several blogs on entrepreneurship and marketing.

In the *Firefly Manifesto: Remix*, Fields talks about how the global recession is an ideal time to rethink what you want to do to make a living. Yawning chasms of opportunity and new ways of working are opening on every side, if we only have eyes to see them. Today’s powerful online tools make it relatively easy and inexpensive to research gaps in service, information, education, product, community and access that have been created or broadened by the economic downturn.

Smart people are recasting what they know and what they’re passionate about into blogs, information products, consulting and other forms of thought leadership. And they’re positioning themselves to be massively successful as the economy rebounds in the next several years. He explains in this excerpt from his manifesto:

“I wonder what might happen if, instead of holding up money, merchandise and the illusion of security as the currency of success, you valued relationships, purpose and impact instead. What might unfold if you identified what you loved to do first, then tapped the wealth of tools, strategies and technologies that have only come onto the scene in the last few years to build a substantial living around what makes your entire life smile?”

Consider what’s now possible, given the 21st-century tools at our disposal:

- You can acquire massive amounts of knowledge in the blink of an eye.
- You can test and research ideas online for free or very little money.
- You can establish yourself as the go-to person in your area of passion and begin to build a following — a community.
- You can build a business plan based on the proven demand of your community, rather than best-guess assumptions, and then...
- Give people what they want, when they want it, in the way they want it, at a price they can afford.

A key enabler of this revolution is mind mapping software.

Why? Because it helps you to do the following types of career renegade tasks:

- Research what you'd love to do, and the pain points of people in that profession, industry or other pursuit.
- Brainstorm and capture ideas for all the ways in which you will add value and create thought leadership.
- Keep track of people who are already doing what you envision and web sites that contain the knowledge you need – learn from them, and adapt their winning ideas to your needs.
- Get clarity on your action plan to make it happen.
- Monitor your progress and make course corrections.

As Jonathan explains: *“While the pundits scream about the sky falling, most people are running for cover, ducking into doorways and buying umbrellas. But, a small group of savvy entrepreneurs and career renegades are out there with buckets waiting to catch it, bottle it, and sell it. They’re finding, tapping and exploiting gaps, and creating opportunities that will set the stage for the next great wave of passion-driven, massively prosperous entrepreneurship.”*

So if you're trying to figure out what to do next in your career – whether you've been laid off or are stuck in a dead-end J.O.B. that you loathe – now's the time to fire up your mind mapping software and get to work capturing insights and ideas, and crafting a new career, a new direction that is better aligned with your interests and passions.

And if you want to learn more about Jonathan Fields' career renegade tips and strategies, I highly recommend his lifestyle blog, [Awake at the Wheel](#).

New in this edition

How to Break Through Mental Blocks When You're Mind Mapping

Sometimes, when you're in the middle of developing a mind map, you may come face to face with a mental block that prevents you from thinking through the problem, challenge or situation any further. When this happens, there are a number of techniques that you can use to smash through these mental barriers and re-energize your thinking in fresh, creative directions.

Here are some blockbusting tips culled from the writings of mind mapping expert Tony Buzan and my own experience:

Add blank topics: This will challenge your brain to complete what is unfinished and will tap into its powerful associative capabilities. These blank lines in essence become “hooks” upon which you can hang fresh ideas. It's a curious fact about our powerful

brains: they don't like to view pictures that are incomplete; our subconscious minds instinctively try to complete the picture, catalyzing your thinking in the process.

Ask questions: Questions are the main tool that the brain uses to accumulate knowledge. By asking questions, you challenge your brain to come up with block-breaking responses.

Add images to your map: Images represent powerful triggers for creative association and recall, and can take your thinking in fresh new directions. Review your program's image library for inspiration, or conduct a Google image search on the topic or challenge at hand. Whatever strikes you or appears to have meaning to you, add it to your map, and spend some time thinking about its relevance to your map's topic.

Take an incubation break: Walk away from your mind map for several hours or several days. While you are away from your map, your subconscious mind will continue to mull over your situation or challenge, generating fresh insights, associations and ideas, which you can then add to your mind map.

[New in this edition](#)

11 Effective Strategies for Sharing Mind Maps

Recently, I asked readers of the Mind Mapping Software Blog to share their thoughts on effective strategies for sharing mind maps and avoiding "map shock." This was a lively discussion, with many excellent insights. It generated so much interest that it actually spilled over into the [MindManager Yahoo discussion list](#). Based on their input, here is a summary of the best strategies for sharing mind maps:

- 1. Manage expectations:** Prepare your audience for the journey. Tell your group that they are going to see something that will be initially confusing to some of them but that by the end of the exercise it will make sense to them.
- 2. Explain the idea behind your mind map,** its implied structure and how to read it to your audience. Don't assume that because they have used a map before, they know how to use them. If there is an implied structure and way to read the map, share that info with your audience.
- 3. A hybrid approach:** Put a mindmap on one side of a page and the linear list on the other side. That way, each person can choose what works best for them. This approach works particularly well if you're making a presentation to a group that has both linear and visual thinkers. Another approach that works well is to provide your audience with a traditional written report, but which utilizes mind maps as supporting elements. This allows you to ease them into the world of visual mapping, without overwhelming them, and gives them some valuable context for the map's contents.

4. Consider alternate map structures to convey information: Rather than using a radial layout for a mind map – which is confusing to some people – select a right or left facing map style, where all the branches come out on one side and stack above each other in the proper order. It has the visual appeal of a traditional mind map but also provides a linear experience similar to an outline that may be more palatable to some of the people you're trying to communicate with. Let the content of your map drive its structure. A timeline, for example, is better expressed from left to right (in an org chart type of map) or top to bottom (right or left facing branches) than in a radial map.

5. Don't fight the dominant thinking preferences of your audience. Several readers referred to the Herrmann Brain Dominance Instrument (HBDI), which shows thinking preferences in a quantitative way. About half the world prefers information in a linear style – it's the way their brains are wired, and you need to take that into consideration when sharing your maps with others. For best results, deliver the contents of your map in the manner which the recipient prefers.

6. Co-create maps with your audience: Getting your audience engaged in building the map as a group will increase their buy-in and understanding of the map's meaning. This can be done face-to-face or via a collaboration environment like GoToMeeting or Mindjet Connect. Begin your conversation with your customer or prospect with a map containing a number of main topics, focused on key questions or points to be addressed. This shows that you're well prepared for the meeting. As you ask the questions and discuss the issues, add their responses or priorities to the map. Chances are, they'll be amazed as they see their thoughts, ideas and concerns displayed on screen.

7. Good map organization is essential: Placing too many main topics around the central topic tends to overwhelm people. Keep it as simple as possible; 4 to 6 main topics is a good guideline.

8. Number your topics: If you're sending a map to someone, to whom you won't have an opportunity to explain the implied order of its topics, numbering them will help others understand how to "read" the map – in which order they should view its topics.

9. Minimize topic text and use high-impact words: Too much topic text tends to make mind maps difficult to read and causes your audience's to glaze over – just like they do when they see a PowerPoint slide that contains a large number of words or bullet points. It's information overload! For best results, use meaningful, concise words or phrases. This takes some work. Consider having a thesaurus by your side or on screen, so you can select words that convey the maximum amount of meaning in the minimum amount of space. Place details into topic notes or sub-topics, once again to "hide" them from your easily-overwhelmed audience.

10. Contract your map's topics before presenting it: When presenting a mind map, make sure the map is fully collapsed initially. If you open a branch, only one level should show at a time. Expose the contents of your map incrementally, through the expansion and contraction of the various sections. This gives you the ability to control how much

information is on screen at any given time, and reduces the possibility of information overload.

11. Minimize visual distractions in your maps: Hide extraneous elements – task info, images, markers, text tags, links, labels and comments – before presenting your mind map. This will make the map easier for your audience to digest. If it's not relevant to your audience, don't show it. You may even want to have two versions of your mind map: one that contains all of the background information and your thinking process – which you can use for your reference – and a simplified version that you present to others.

New in this edition

10 Reasons Why Mind Mapping Software Should Be the Foundation of Your Personal Productivity System

Mind mapping software can significantly improve your effectiveness, so much so that you really ought to consider making it a key tool in your personal productivity arsenal. Here are 10 reasons why you should incorporate this technology into your workflow:

1. It's unbelievably flexible. The number one benefit of mind mapping software, hands down, is this: no other type of program lets you manipulate ideas, knowledge and information with as much freedom and flexibility as mind mapping software. That's because it encapsulates ideas and knowledge in "containers" that can hold various types of content and data and can be rearranged at will.

2. It can make you more productive. Mind mapping software can increase your productivity by an average of 20%, according to two independent research studies conducted by me and Mindjet. That's the equivalent of saving one day a week. What you could accomplish in your job if you could save that kind of time? What could that magnitude of productivity increase do to your reputation as a "can do" worker?

3. It can help you become a better creative problem solver. Mind mapping software can help you to make connections and become a better creative problem solver. Because your brain works by association, mapping information visually makes it easier to see connections between seemingly unrelated bits of information. Also, your brain hates to see things in an unfinished state. So when it sees a map branch with information that hasn't been fully developed, your brain kicks into gear and delivers the thoughts and ideas needed to complete it.

4. It helps you to identify gaps in your information. Your brain works visually, and it works by association. So when you start to visually record your ideas and knowledge, it enables you to more easily see where gaps exist in your information – additional facts or knowledge you need to gather, new "white space" ideas that you couldn't see before.

5. It gives you a powerful set of tools to think about your thinking. When you move a topic in a mind map, you change its context – you “reframe” its meaning. That’s powerful, because it gives you a unique ability to “think about your thinking” – to look at ideas and information from a higher level of abstraction and rethink and rearrange your ideas until they make sense to you. To the best of my knowledge, mind mapping software is the only type of business software that enables this capability.

6. You can reach clarity faster on key issues. In a survey that I conducted, this was the number one benefit that users of mind mapping software cited when asked to define the value that it provides to them. You can quickly do a “brain dump” in your favorite mind mapping software, and then rearrange your ideas and topics until they make the most sense to you. Each time you do so, you have the opportunity to view them in a different context, which is very powerful.

Mind mapping expert Kyle McFarlin put it this way: *“Mind mapping is the fastest way to get clarity on confusing issues, hands down. No other medium allows you to brainstorm about a subject and quickly rearrange topics, like notes on a desk. And with mind mapping, you get to create knowledge centers for important topics you are working on, all in an easy to see, hub-and-spokes format. It can literally convey what used to take hundreds of pages in one visually engaging document.”*

7. It helps you to make better decisions. Mind maps give you a highly visual way to record a detailed description of the challenge or opportunity you face, brainstorm potential solutions, explore the pros and cons of each one, envision potential future problems more clearly, assign weights to each factor and reach a more balanced, well thought out decision – often in less time than other methods of decision making. It’s also very helpful when you’re facing an ambiguous situation, or where you don’t have enough information to make an accurate business decision.

8. It helps you to become better organized. You can use mind maps as a very efficient front-end process for your new projects, to create meeting agendas, to do lists and other valuable time-savers. Your maps can also contain links to files, web pages, notes and individual e-mails. This means you’ll spend less time looking for key documents and information, and more time accomplishing great things. In addition, several mind mapping tools enable you to capture ideas on the fly, so you don’t lose any of them.

9. You can see the forest and the trees. The expandable/contractible format of a mind map enables you to see both the 50,000 foot overview and “drill down” to a detailed view, both in the same document. When you’re developing a complex business or project plan, this capability is incredibly useful!

10. It helps you to identify, prioritize and track key project tasks. Nearly all mind mapping software programs enable you to attach detailed task information to map topics – including start and end dates, percentage complete and even to whom you delegated a task. You can also create a personal dashboard to track items you have delegated to

others and those you must accomplish. In addition, if you utilize the Getting Things Done (GTD) methodology, you'll find that certain programs can help you to easily manage your next actions and "someday maybe" items quickly and easily.

If you're not utilizing mind mapping software today as part of your personal productivity system, you really ought to consider doing so.

New in this edition

Generate more ideas: "Sleep on it"

Roger C. Parker, a widely acknowledged expert on book writing and publishing – and a devoted mind mapper – recommends a unique approach to generate more ideas. First, outline your challenge and record any initial ideas you think of in a mind map. Then, just before bed, print out your map and review it. If you think of any new ideas at that time, record them. The visual map format makes it easy for you to add new branches to your existing map printout, using pen and paper.

Your goal is to fill your mind with your current challenge, as defined in your mind map, just before you go to sleep. While you're sleeping, your subconscious brain will continue to work on it. When you wake up in the morning, be prepared to add to your mind map any new ideas or hunches that may pop into your mind.

Roger points out that one aspect of mind mapping that people tend to forget about is that it can be used in multiple forms – on your computer screen, as well as in printed form. This ideation technique makes the most of both media!

New in this edition

Leverage your content using a mind map

Roger C. Parker, in a recent audio interview, lamented the fact that most bloggers have great ideas, but that they woefully underutilize them:

"Writers need to plan their writing, to track what they've written about and what they are going to write about. So many bloggers have great ideas that they have addressed only once, and now they are buried somewhere in the archives of their blogs. They need to have some way of surfacing those great ideas so they can explore them further."

Roger practices what he preaches: He uses a number of linked "dashboard" maps to manage his writing and consulting business. These maps include a list of topics he has covered in the past in his Published & Profitable blog, as well as those he plans to cover in the future. He is always looking for ways to re-use, repurpose and refocus existing

topics to generate new content – not only for his blog and guest posts and 10 other blogs, but also for new e-books, special reports and other information products. In fact, Roger encourages bloggers to develop a list of the top 20, 50 or 100 topics or issues they're going to focus on, and to continue generating ideas around them. A periodic review of past topics – in a mind map, of course – will often generate new ideas or new angles on old topics.

Roger believes that this content development strategy is the key for success in today's crowded blogging market (when anyone can publish, that's both good AND bad...):

"It's not enough to be a good writer. That doesn't necessarily make you successful. The world is filled with good writers. It's those who can harness what they've written - who know how to republish it and repurpose it - they're the ones who are ultimately successful."

Mind mapping software is the key to making that happen!

[New in this edition](#)

Use whatever works to help you stay focused

One of the problems that mind mappers sometimes face is distraction. As a mind map grows in size, it tends to draw our attention away from the parts of it that we should be developing, and into other areas. The result is that our maps aren't as well thought-out as they should be.

Roger C. Parker, a writing, publishing and content management expert, uses two simple techniques to help him stay focused as he is developing ideas for a new book or other information product:

First, he plays what he calls "a little game" with himself to keep him focused on the topics and sections of his book that still need to be written and prevent him from being distracted by those he has already finished. When he finishes writing about a topic, he changes its background color from white to gray. This makes the unwritten topics, which are still white, stand out more. He can then filter the map to not show any topics colored gray.

The other technique, which he has recently discovered, is MindManager's "show branch alone" feature, which displays only the currently-selected topic and its sub-topics. This removes a lot of visual clutter from the screen, so he can focus on completely developing that section of his map. When he's done, he can then toggle this setting off, which once again displays the entire map. Inspiration has offered such a feature for years; XMind and MindView also offer similar functionality.

New in this edition

Improve your problem solving abilities by mapping stakeholder needs

It's been stated that a problem well defined is a problem half solved. A key step in accurate problem definition is identifying the stakeholders in the current situation – those people or groups who are affected by the problem and who stand to gain if it is solved.

Unfortunately, outlining and understanding their needs are steps that are often overlooked during the creative problem-solving process.



In addition, we often tend to look at problems through our own point of view – our unique and often idiosyncratic “lens” onto the world. As a result, we tend to project our own perceptions and beliefs onto the problem, without even realizing that we’re doing so. That tends to lead us to an inaccurate and incomplete view of the problem, which hinders our ability to generate creative ideas that actually solve the problem.

Fortunately, mind mapping gives you an ideal way to visually outline and understand this important information. Chic Thompson, in his new book, [*What a Great Idea 2.0: Unlocking Your Creativity in Business and in Life*](#), recommends the following strategy for uncovering and understanding the needs of stakeholders:

1. Who is the stakeholder or group?
2. What is their point of view of the current problem or situation?
3. Why do they have a different point of view?

Once you have added the insights generated by asking these questions to your mind map, Thompson recommends that you look carefully at your problem outline and, incorporating these different points of view, write a carefully worded description of the precise problem that needs great ideas for its solution.

I especially like the fact that Thompson recommends that you drill down beyond the surface-level needs of stakeholders, not only articulating their points of view but also

why they hold them. This will help you to uncover beliefs, biases, motivations and other important insights that are essential to arriving at an accurate description of the problem.

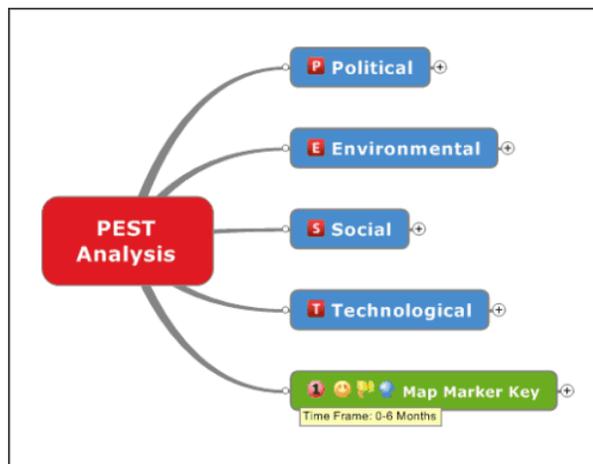
Using mind mapping in concert with this problem definition technique should help you to generate high-value ideas to solve the problems and challenges you face in your work and life. Why not give it a try?

New in this edition

Getting a Clear Picture of the Threats and Opportunities That May Impact Your Business

PEST analysis is a valuable tool for understanding the external macro-environment in which your business operates. It can help you to better understand the range of trends, influences and forces that may represent either threats or opportunities to your firm.

PEST stands for Political, Economic, Social and Technological. PEST analysis is an excellent forecasting tool that can help you to forecast key trends and developments in your industry or profession. Typically, the results of a PEST analysis are integrated into an organization's strategic planning process, to help ensure that it is aligned with these forces. This planning is especially well-suited to mind mapping because it gives you a valuable "at a glance" look at the trends and forces affecting your business environment.



To create a PEST mind map, simply place each of the four major forces – political, economic, social and technological, each on its own first-level branch. Then, spend some time brainstorming around the mega-trends that are occurring in each area. For example, some of the predominant economic forces may include unemployment, consumer confidence, energy costs and taxation. Technological forces may include automation, shrinking product life cycles, production technology and the growth of social networking as a communication tool.

As you identify trends for each major topic, add them to your map, and explore them in depth. Next, identify which of them are likely to have the greatest impact on your

business and highlight them for emphasis. Also, consider any connections between any of these forces, and use relationship lines to depict them.

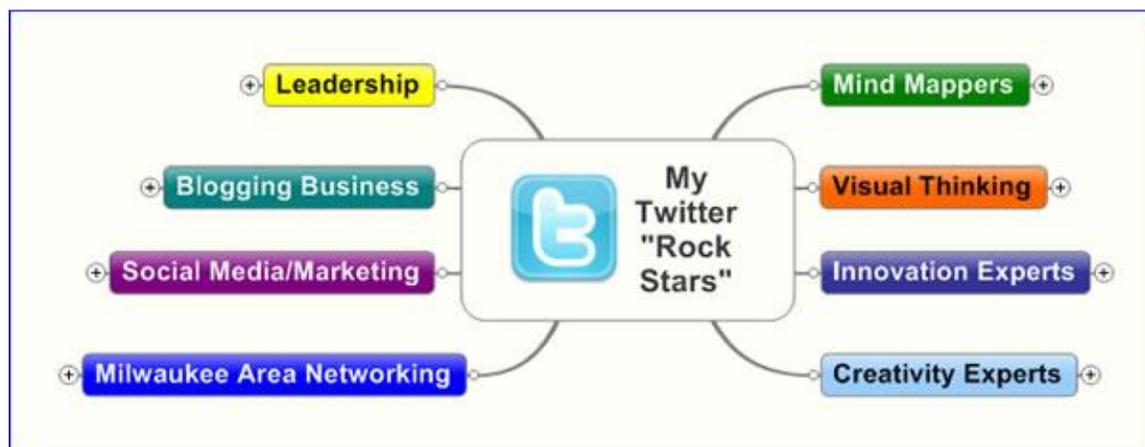
Many businesses spend too little time trying to understand the forces that impact them. At best, a handful may look at the threats and get really nervous. But imagine the opportunities you could uncover using this method – the “distant early warning” signs of emerging trends that, if you capitalize upon them in their early stages, could really pay off for you in the years ahead. So why not use your mind mapping program to perform a PEST analysis on your organization today?

New in this edition

How to use mind mapping software to build your Twitter relationships

Here’s a simple but powerful way to use mind mapping software to help you build more effective Twitter relationships.

Social media, as best-selling author and speaker [Chris Brogan is fond of telling us](#), is all about building relationships – about bringing a human element to business. If we can connect as people and build trust, then we can more easily understand others’ needs and serve them better.



Twitter is a great place to build a network of people who share common interests, to help each other find answers to pressing questions, commiserate or simply chat about life. So when I read Susan Percy’s entry in my “amazing mind mapping stories” initiative, I was blown away by her simple but profound application of mind mapping software:

Susan has used MindManager to create a mind map of the people she wants to keep track of on Twitter, along with details about what their interests are and what's going on in their lives – ideal fodder for chatting with them. Here's how it works, in her words:

"I write the name of the person on a branch and hyperlink that branch to the person's Twitter page. I create main branches to organize the users by groups, for example: clients, prospects, friends. I create sub-branches from each user to add information about them, such as "likes sushi." This helps me to easily organize who I want to stay in touch with and also information about subjects which to chat."

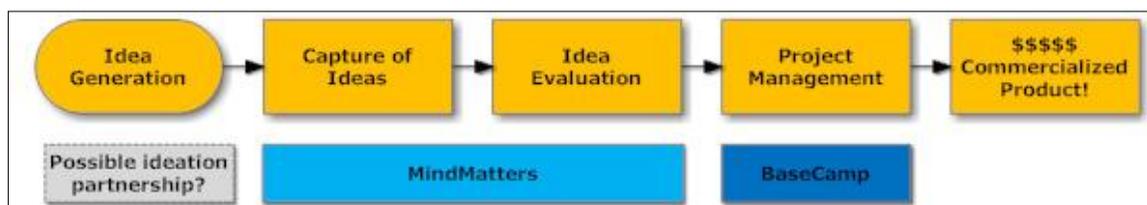
Above is my attempt to re-create this concept with some of the key people I follow on Twitter (please click on the image to view an expanded version of this map with clickable links to each person and Twitter account).

Twitter mind mapAt right is a close-up of one branch, where I have added details about several of them. These sub-branches are the key to this map's value, because they help us to build more valuable relationships and greater trust. If you can refer to this "mini-dossier" when you're chatting with someone on Twitter, doesn't it make sense that your actions will create a higher level of trust? You cared enough to remember something about that person, and they will undoubtedly appreciate you for that.

Thanks for sharing this brilliant idea, Susan!

[New in this edition](#)

How to visualize your customer's value chain and discover new opportunities



One way to envision new products and services your company can offer to its key customers is to visualize their value chain – the steps from raw material to finished product from their perspective. As a supplier to these key customers, your firm represents one step in their value chain – the process from raw materials to finished product.

The problem is that many firms operate with too-rigid definitions of what their mission is. They may say “we’re in the widget business, and that’s all we do” – an approach that is you-centric, rather than customer-centric. As a result, you may be missing major

opportunities. If you take a look at your customer's value chain from their point of view, you can often see new opportunities for partnerships and cooperative agreements with suppliers involved in adjacent steps to the one that you perform. Visual thinking can help you to map out that process.

You can use a business diagramming program like SmartDraw to map out the value chain and visualize where opportunities may exist.

Here are some questions you should ask as you consider these opportunities:

- What process does your customer follow to get work done? Where do you fit on that value chain?
- Look at adjoining steps to you. Who could you partner with to add more value to your customer?
- What are the inputs and outputs at each step? Add them to your process map. Knowing what these are will help you to brainstorm new partnership opportunities and product ideas.

The flow chart above is an example of a customer value chain map. MindMatters develops and markets enterprise software for idea management. Recently, the company launched Flagpole, a web-based crowdsourcing tool that enables companies to deploy web portals for soliciting ideas from the public.

Recently, MindMatters announced that it will integrate Flagpole with 37Signals' popular BaseCamp web-based project management tool, which will enable firms to take the most promising ideas they have gathered and implement them in BaseCamp. In the process map above, you can easily see how partnering with a project management supplier adds significant value to MindMatters' customers – by providing them with more of an end-to-end solution.

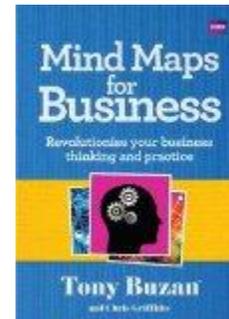
Note, too, there's another opportunity farther upstream, at the idea generation stage. MindMatters may want to think about who they can partner with to help Flagpole users to generate more and better ideas!

Why not give this technique a try in your business?

New in this edition

How to Use Mind Mapping Software for Scenario Planning

Scenario planning is a popular form of strategic planning that explores plausible views of possible futures for a business, based on a combination of known factors and potential trends. It is frequently used with other tools in the formation of business strategy. It works by sketching out a small number of stories about how the future may unfold, which gives you a clearer picture of the decisions you must make today to prepare for these eventualities.



Scenario planning is an excellent application of mind mapping, according to Tony Buzan and Chris Griffiths, co-authors of the new book, [*Mind Maps for Business: Revolutionise Your Business Thinking and Practice*](#), because it gives you a rich, visual medium upon which you can map out future scenarios, identify potential risks and opportunities, and generate ideas to prepare for them.

To create a future scenario mind map, start with a central topic related to your area of strategic focus, and then add first-level branches entitled external forces, scenarios, patterns, strategies and signals. Next, let's take a closer look at each of these factors as we add details about them to our mind map:

External forces: What external forces may affect your business in the near future (e.g., changes in technology, regulations and the demographics of your customers)? Add them as sub-topics to the main topic, external forces. Next, add any relevant details about these changes to your map. Finally, prioritize them with icons or symbols, based upon which ones are most relevant to your organization.

Scenarios: For each of the major changes you predicted in external forces, explore 3 different future impact scenarios on your organization if they were to come to pass: best case, worst case and status quo. Highlight the scenarios that are most likely to affect your organization.

Patterns: Based upon the external forces and scenarios that you have mapped out, it should now be easier to see patterns emerging – common considerations that you ought to be aware of and prepare for, regardless of which future scenario actually occurs. Make a special note of these patterns on this map branch, to call attention to them.

Strategies: Use this branch to explore potential future strategies that your company may pursue, based upon the scenarios and patterns you have explored. This is one of the strengths of mind mapping, of course: Enabling you to compare and contrast different elements within your visual map, and identifying related pieces of information. This non-linear planning format also makes it easier to see “white space” opportunities – ideas

that may exist in areas between or outside of your company's current markets and industry segments. Highlight the most reasonable strategies you can follow for each scenario.

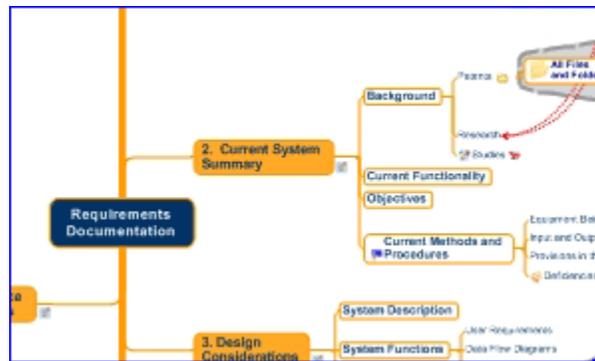
Signals: Identify the early warning signals – the things, if they should occur, that may give you an early indication that one of the scenarios you have explored is starting to unfold.

The future is unpredictable and frustratingly non-linear, of course. But working through some likely future scenarios in a visual mapping format can help you to think ahead and better prepare your organization for the future, no matter what form it takes.

New in this edition

10 Steps to Manage a Small Project Using a Mind Map

Many mind mapping software programs give you the ability to manage the “front end” of your project, defining its scope, resources needed, people involved and so forth, and then export this data to a project management tool like Microsoft Project or Primavera to create a Work Breakdown structure (WBS).



But not every project needs to be handled in this way. Less complex projects can be completely managed within your mind mapping software program. Here's how:

1. Get started: Create a topic in the center of the map that describes your project in 1-3 words.

2. Do a brain dump: Create sub-topics for each of the major areas or sections of your project plan. Don't mentally edit yourself at this time – this is just a “brain dump” of anything you can think of related to your needs for this project. Include such things as information needed, budgetary issues, timetable, people, resources required, implementation steps and the like. As you add these first-level topics to your map, additional ideas may pop into your head. Record them, without any regard for their organization.

3. Organize what you've brainstormed: Now look over the content that you've added to your map and begin rationalizing it, by grouping related topics together. Mind maps give you much more freedom to “refactor” your information than other types of software, which is one of its most powerful but little understood advantages. Refactoring is the

process of moving topics from one part of your map to another and, in so doing, re-evaluating and reconsidering the relationship between that parent topic and its new sibling. Think of it as a visual “what if” process.

4. Review for completeness: Review each major topic and its “child” sub-topics in turn. Ask yourself questions such as “Is this section of my map complete? Are there any other details I should add?” If anything pops into your head, record it in your map.

5. Create a place for uncategorized items: As you consider and tweak the content of your map, you may find that some topics and sub-topics don’t fit neatly with the rest. You may want to create an “uncategorized” or “to be categorized” topic where you can drag and drop these items for later consideration. Don’t be afraid to walk away from your map for a few hours or even a few days – when you return to it, your mind will be in totally different place, and that will suggest additional edits, additions and deletions to further refine your map.

6. Add links to supporting information: Once you’re satisfied with the structure of your mind map, it’s time to add supporting information – links to files, web pages, e-mail messages and other resources that are related to your map’s content. This step transforms your visual project plan into a “visual database” that encompasses everything related to your project.

7. Add project tasks and assignments to your map: If your map contains “to-do” items, you can utilize your mind mapping program’s task management tools to assign people to tasks, indicate their priority, and assign start and end dates to them. If your mapping program includes an integrated Gantt chart view (OpenMind 2, MindManager with the IntelliGANTT add-in and iMindMap 3 offer this functionality), then you can visualize all of your tasks and their timetable in one concise, tabular view.

8. Add group key milestones and deadlines into a timeline: If you format your map with all branches facing to the right or left, it’s easy to arrange tasks in time sequence, from top to bottom. This enables you to create an easily understandable visual timeline.

9. Group tasks and information visually: Don’t forget that you can visually “group” items utilizing your mapping program’s symbols or icons. For example, you can use an image of a phone to designate calls that you need to make. This isn’t just adding pictures to your map for the sake of adding visual interest – it actually makes it possible to filter your map’s content to show only the phone calls you must make, or only the tasks that are assigned to one of your team members.

10. Manage the progress of your project: Remember that your mind map is not just a “front end” tool for setting up the structure of your project. It can also be a management tool during project implementation, enabling you to track your progress, tasks to be performed and milestone dates to be reached. At the close of a project, you can use it to capture lessons learned, so your team members won’t make the same mistakes and

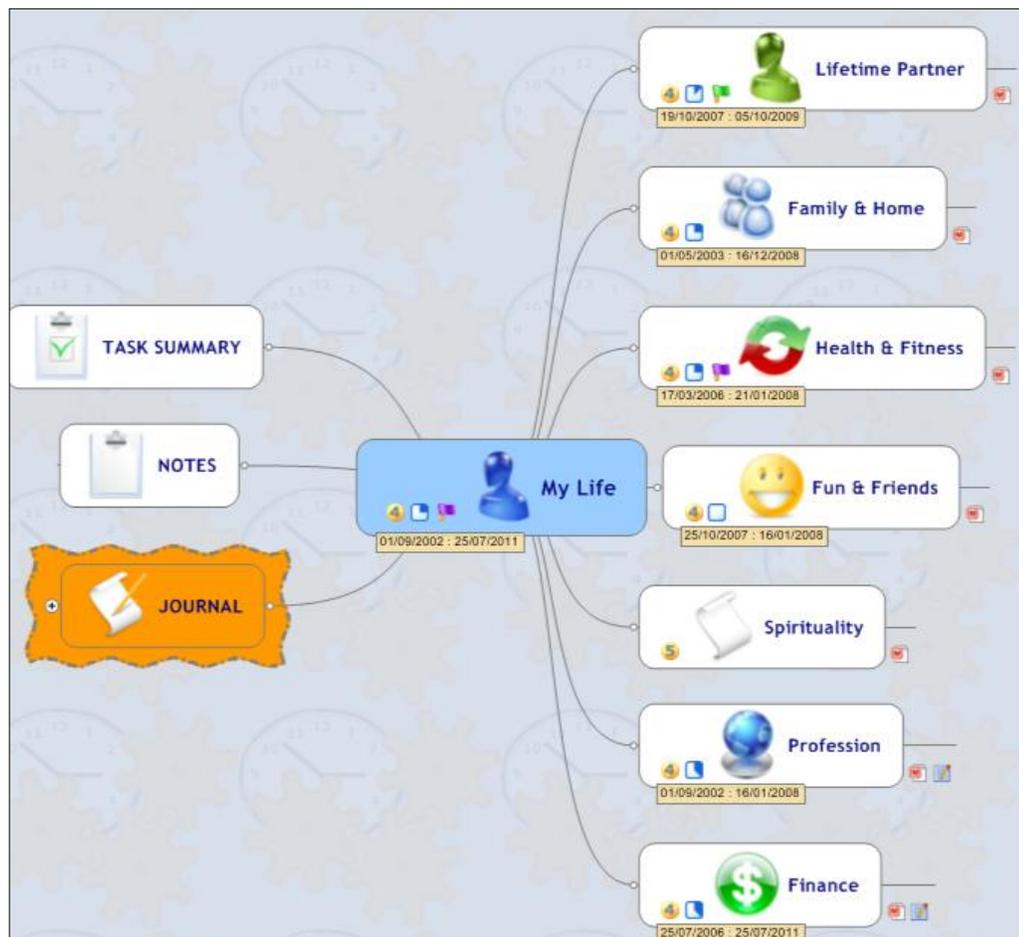
missteps next time. In short, a mind map can be a “birth to death” project management tool.

[New in this edition](#)

Building a Life Management Dashboard

Mind mapping software is very useful for building all kinds of information management dashboards, especially when you link other maps and content directly to your maps. Brad Allen from TP Assist offers the following tips to help you develop a life management dashboard map:

- Use one master map to see the core aspects of your life. Use pictures or symbol to encapsulate what that aspect means to you.
- This master map should have 5 to 7 aspects, any larger and it more difficult to easily review you priorities.
- Each aspect should be built around a sub map which is then linked to the master map. In this way you can easily navigate from your consolidated view into a specific area of focus.

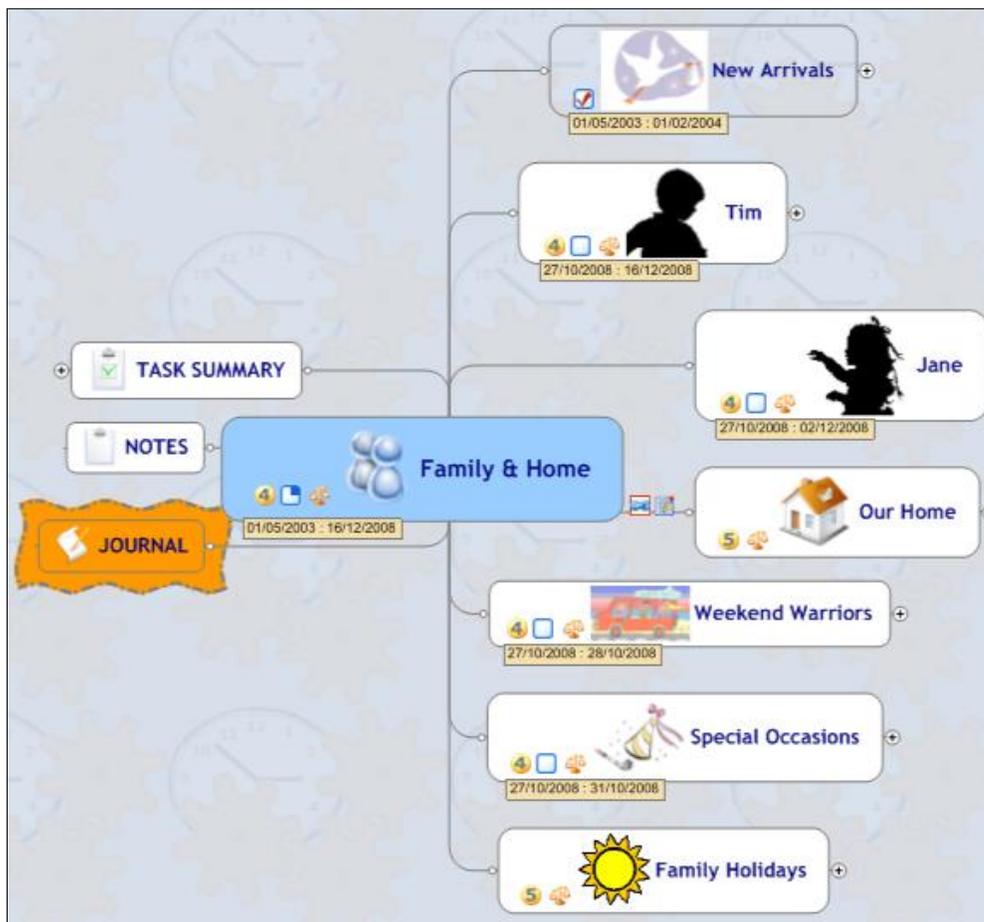


- Manage tasks and mini-projects with-in your sub maps, splitting larger and more complex projects into further linked sub maps.

For example, your life map may contain the following focus areas:

- Lifetime partner
- Family and home
- Health asnd fitness
- Fun and friends
- Spirituality
- Profession
- Finance

Here is a sub-map, based upon the Family & Home branch of the top-level dashboard map:



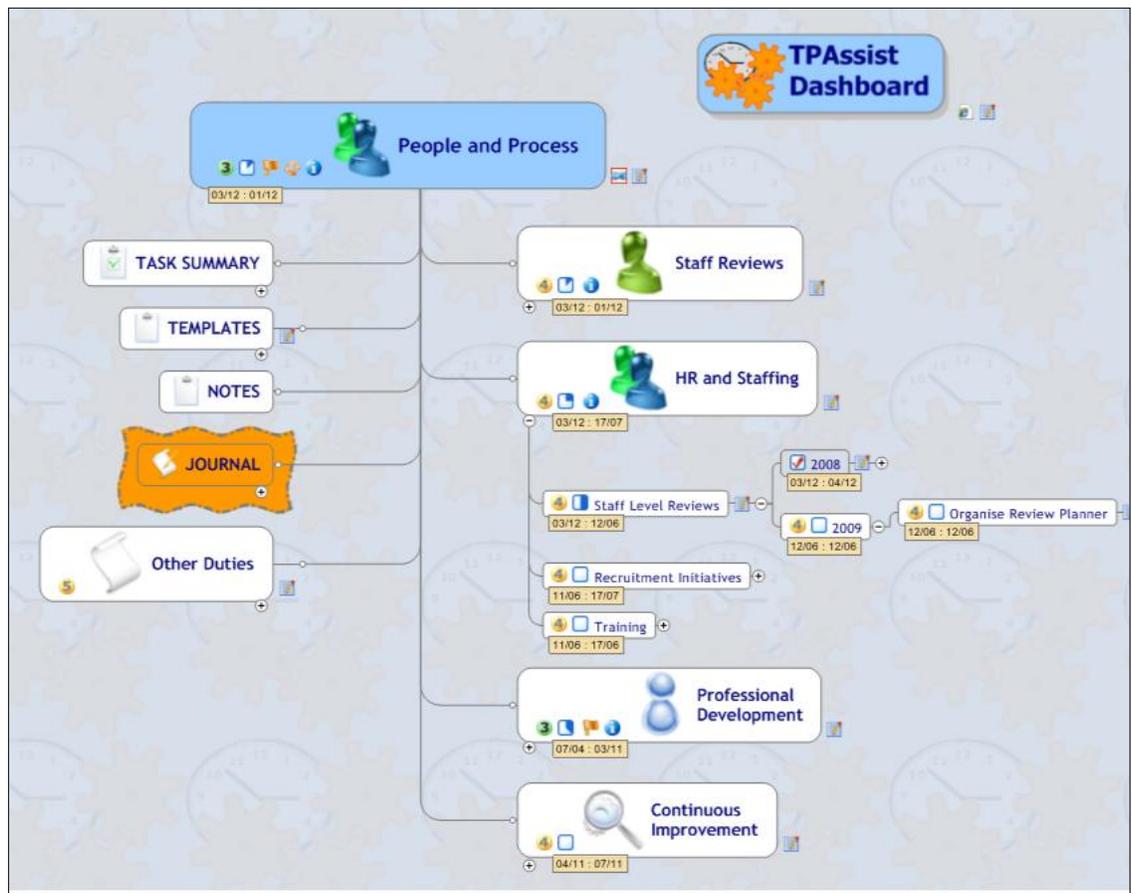
A good way to test if you have the right structure is to take your goals and/or current projects and test if they "fit" into the structure you have created.

New in this edition

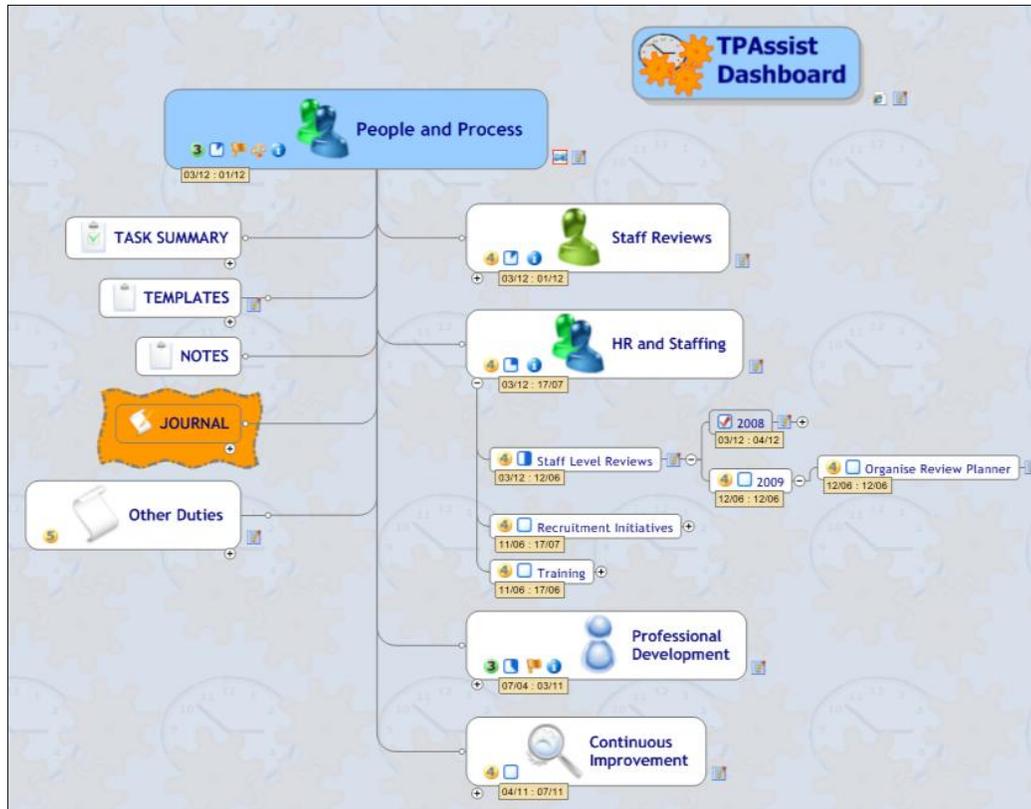
Tips for Building a Dashboard Map for the Workplace

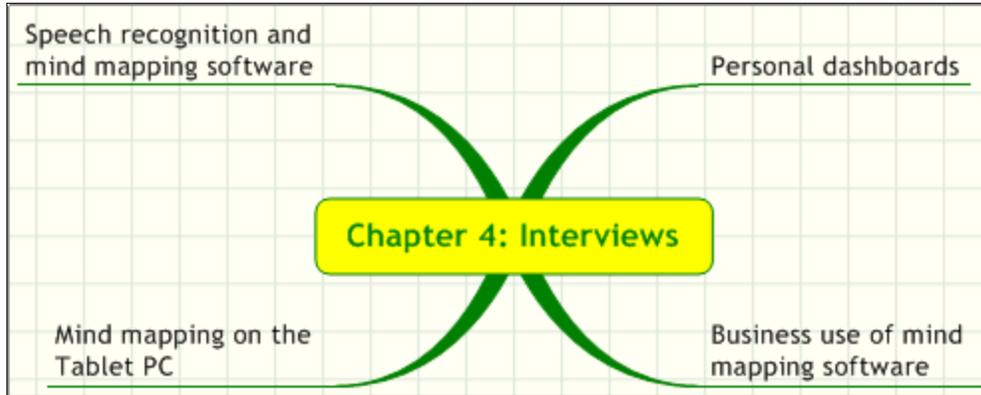
Brad Allen from TP Assist also offers the following tips to help you develop a dashboard map for managing your work:

- Use a Master Map that is roughly based on your job role responsibilities. It should be structured in away that makes sense to you and represents the context within which you operate.
- This master map should have 5 to 7 aspects, any larger and it more difficult to easily review you priorities.
- Each specific responsibility or focus area should be built around a sub map which is then linked to the master map. In this way you can easily navigate from your consolidated view into a specific area of focus.
- Manage tasks and mini-projects with-in your sub maps, splitting larger and more complex projects into further linked sub maps.



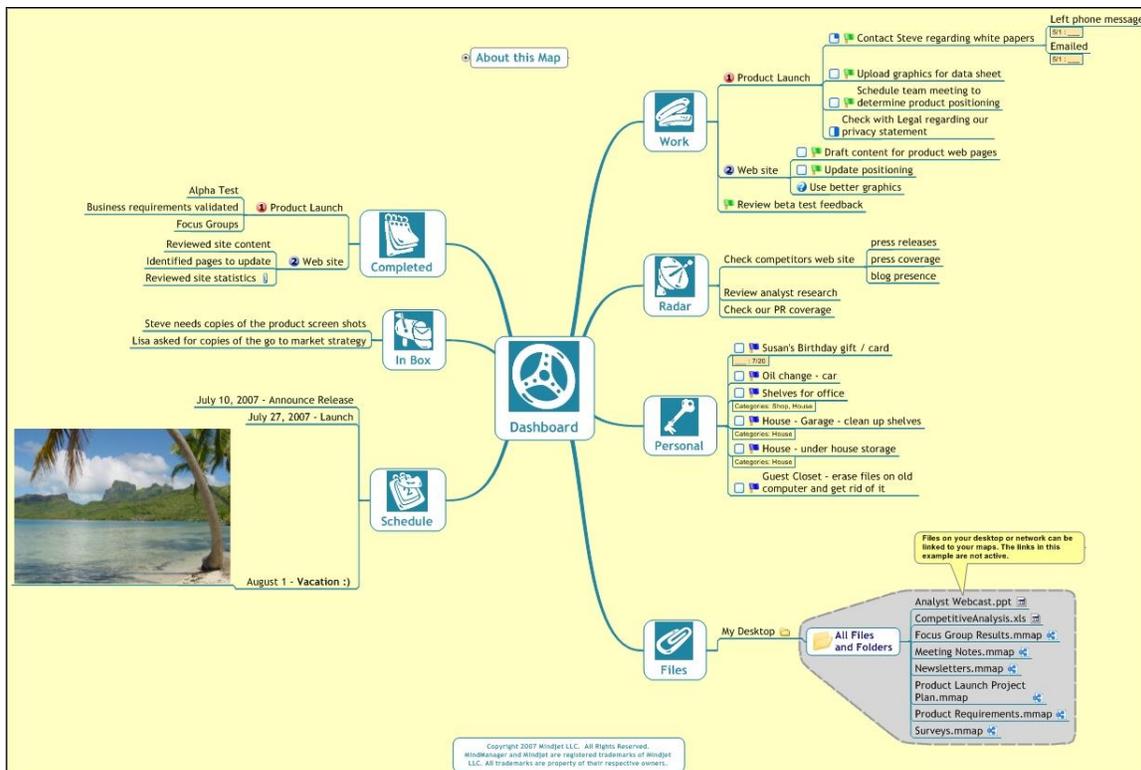
Here is a sample sub-map, focused upon the areas of people and process:





Personal Dashboards – A Powerful Productivity Tool

An interview with Kyle McFarlin, VisualStrategist.com



(An example of a personal dashboard from the Mindjet Map Gallery. [Click here to download it \(PDF\)](#).)

Frey: What is a personal dashboard map? What is its purpose and function?

McFarlin: A personal dashboard map is a mind map whose function is to consolidate information from multiple places. Its purpose then, is to show the user a streamlined

view of information from many places in one map in a visually pleasing, engaging manner.

Frey: Why should I create one? What benefits can it provide me with?

McFarlin: If you've ever had data in 100 different places, and then someone told you it was possible to see it all in one view, is that something you would want to experience? If so, you want to create a dashboard. A key benefit of using a dashboard is seeing information from various sources in view, allowing you to connect the dots between previously disparate pieces of information, leading to better decision making. Further, a dashboard will help your thinking not just when you're in front of it, but also when you're away from it as you can meditate on important topics with the peace of mind that you have consolidation and centralization of key data streams on your side.

Frey: What elements should it contain?

McFarlin: A personal dashboard can sufficiently contain tasks and personally satisfying elements such as a family portrait. Depending on the person, it may also link to personal finance management software and an external task management system. A professional dashboard will contain lists of projects, tasks and information from various spreadsheets in graph form. Also, a project GANTT chart may be used for complex project dashboards.

Frey: How can I use a personal dashboard map to manage my day-to-day activities?

McFarlin: The key, first and foremost, is to get in the discipline of getting it out every day, no matter how good the content is you're going to encounter. With the discipline of knowing you're going to see it in place, you've got room to maneuver, slowing down the process of bringing task and project lists into the picture. Another key is to make a personal dashboard "personally" engaging by including some items that will guide you toward a more fulfilled life, not just a routine to-do list.

Frey: You also work with clients on a special kind of map called a project dashboard. Can you please explain how that works?

McFarlin: A ResultsManager dashboard is a single map containing consolidated project, sub-project and task information from one or multiple mind maps. Its purpose is to give you the most useful view of your world at the proper level of perspective, and allow you to take action and prioritize projects.

(Editor's note: [ResultsManager](#) is an add-in for MindManager from Gyronix that helps people to get their project and task information organized. It "sweeps" your maps looking for pending tasks that need to be completed in the current week, as well as giving you a picture of other open, uncompleted tasks.)

The dashboard map can give you perspective on scores of maps with the click of a button. Just think how long it would take to open all of those project maps up one-by-one! Often, people create to-do lists which are mental approximations of how to move a project forward. In fact, it's not uncommon to see people with 3 or 4 versions of the same task in an action list, because they are mentally blocked on how to move the project forward and are thinking in a negative, recurring loop. By creating a dashboard you get a list of actions taken from the actual project plan, not just a foggy mental image of the plan. What the dashboard gives you is peace of mind that the action lists you see are relevant.

Frey: What kinds of project dashboards does ResultsManager create?

McFarlin: If you want a high-level strategic view, you create a weekly review dashboard of projects by strategic area for prioritization and planning purposes. The next actions you see in a daily dashboard are more if you are committed to more projects and less if you have fewer active projects, so the weekly review is critical.

On the other hand, if you want to see a list of to-dos for the day, you create a daily actions dashboard, which contains deadlines, next actions and team management activities derived from your projects. This is where the rubber meets the road.

Frey: What can these project dashboards do for you? What are the benefits to busy managers and executives?

McFarlin: A daily actions dashboard will first tell you what you have to get done today. After all, if you miss those deadlines, you might lose the job which all other actions are connected to. The dashboard will also list next actions you can take to move your project initiatives forward. Lastly, the daily dashboard will give you a view of each person in your orbit and what they owe you, what you owe them and what you need to talk to them about. It's best to work through deadlines first and then move through next actions and relationship central as needed.

Perhaps the most critical aspect managing your day-to-day activities with dashboards is to make sure you create one every day!

Perspectives on the Business Use of Mind Mapping Software

An interview with Wallace Tait.

Wallace Tait is a seasoned developer and user of visual mapping software tools and techniques. He is Co-Founder of www.visualmapper.org, a consultancy and source of information about visual mapping. He has an impressive depth of knowledge of the needs of business users of mind mapping software. In this Q&A interview, Wallace shares his perspectives on how mind mapping software can benefit busy executives,

how it helps users to reach clarity and communicate information in a clear, compelling format, and what essential features business people should look for when selecting mind mapping software.

Frey: In your consulting and training work, what are the most common challenges that business people are struggling with, which mind mapping software can help them to solve? How, specifically, can it help them in these areas?

Tait: The most common issue for business people is “information/time management”. They simply don’t have enough time throughout the work day to gather, digest, and transform their information into dynamic formats that suit everyone. This is where visual mapping comes into play; its tools and techniques enable the business user to use the T.A.P. process (read on for more details about this visual mapping process) and quickly arrive at an acceptable format that suits their needs.

Visual mapping helps business users in three ways. First, it enables them to create information and knowledge associated with their particular environment in a non-linear format. It’s quick and enables clarity throughout this process. Secondly, it helps them to manage this information by manipulating, adding logic, identifying relationships and editing the content of knowledge and information. And finally, it enables them to distribute information and knowledge in a format that suits their environment of use, such as a visual map, a Word document, a text outline, a PowerPoint presentation, and so forth.

The bottom line for business people is the time and financial constraints associated with learning to create, manage and distribute relevant knowledge and information. An organization becomes more process and systematic in their approach to sharing clear and unambiguous information while using the tools and techniques of visual mapping.

Frey: What makes mind mapping software so well-suited to helping executives to reach clarity faster and make better informed decisions?

Tait: Visual mapping benefits executives by allowing a scattered and free flowing thought process to take place, when they are initially gathering and recording knowledge and information. By rearranging the elements in these non-linear maps in ways that make sense to them, they can quickly and easily add clarity and logic to them. Most executives who dare to try visual mapping software will find that they can exponentially enhance their abilities to manage information, especially in roles where clarity of communications is important.

Frey: What is it about visualizing information that is so powerful?

Tait: If you go to Buzan.com, you’ll get all the best information about the benefits of traditional mind mapping. But visual mapping software has actually evolved beyond the constraints of the traditional world of hand-drawn maps and into the fluid world of mapping on computers. Mind mapping software enables users to drag and drop topics

and include external links to other maps, documents, web pages and other resources. It can also replace PowerPoint as a medium for presenting information and knowledge. And software-generated visual maps can pack an incredible amount of information into a very compact format.

Frey: In what ways does mind mapping software help to improve collaboration on projects?

Tait: Sharing visual maps with colleagues or business partners is a powerful catalyst for effective communication. The best mind mapping programs make it easy for you to share maps with others, and for them to make changes, comments or mark-ups for you to review. It's also a powerful way to communicate with business partners and co-workers in other locations, because you can share a map, take turns adding content to it and refining it via a web conference, and reach a shared understanding faster than using other means of collaboration. I've done long-distance collaboration with mind maps many times, and I think it's one of the most powerful uses of mind mapping software.

Frey: How can mind mapping software enable systems thinking? Why is this important to businesses?

Tait: Every organization has a standardized way of doing things. They usually call this business standards or a Business Management System. Many of these standards or systems are formalized and accredited through a quality system registrar. Regardless of being registered or not, organizational efficacy is measured by the proficiency of information management at all levels. Deming and others taught that organizations need to create an internal system of knowledge and information management based on systems thinking that supports continuous improvement.

Frey: So what's the connection with mind mapping software?

Tait: Visual mapping provides executives with the tools they need to become excellent information managers. This enables them to take a process approach to their jobs that is based on systems thinking, and that, in turn positions them to become innovators within the organization.

When an individual is introduced to visual mapping software, they are often overwhelmed. They may see the program as some kind of esoteric format for communication. When they start to create visual maps, they tend to use it for making linear lists. As they learn more about how to use it, they begin to realize that the non-linear format of visually mapping supports their needs for manipulating knowledge and information. Adding branches, processes and sub-processes, the user begins to see a framework appearing as a system of information that can be manipulated, edited and shared in formats that meet their own needs and those of their organization. It's been one of my goals to help executives make that progression from new user to next-generation information manager.

Frey: You have developed a visual mapping process that you call T-A-P. Can you briefly explain what that is, and how it benefits users of this type of software?

Tait: T-A-P is an easy-to-use, logical process that standardizes the flow of creating, managing and sharing information in visual maps. Here's how it works.

First, Tap into your thought processes by scattering your thoughts and ideas in a visual map, using a mind mapping software program. At this stage there are no restrictions, structure or logic. What you see on the screen may look like illogical nonsense at this stage, but disregard those feelings for now. The whole point of this part of the process is to do a mind dump of information into your visual map. I recommend that you work on an oversized screen or project your map onto a wall or other white space, because that gives you greater freedom to add all of your thoughts to your map.

Next, Arrange your map and add logic to it by dragging and dropping information from one part of your map to another, grouping related ideas together. This will help you to make sense of your map, for your own use and for any people you plan to share it with. Also at this stage you are managing information by reviewing and editing, re-arranging, changing, correcting and checking for proper spelling and grammar. At this stage, you should also insert any images, documents, web page links, contact information such as e-mail addresses and profiles of clients, and links to other maps.

Finally, Present the information contained within your map by saving and exporting it into a suitable format. At this stage, you're bringing all of your information together as a complete, finished package. At this stage, you must decide if the final format you want to share it in should be a visual map, Word document, PowerPoint presentation, Visio diagram or other format. Many programs also give you the option of saving a map as an image file, which enables you to display it or present it to others. Converting your map into an image also enables you to share it with others who may not have your mapping program. Converting your map to a web page is another excellent format for sharing and publishing it. Finally, if you must share your maps with a group of colleagues, a digital video projector does a great job of that.

Frey: If an executive is thinking about purchasing a mind mapping software program, what features should they be looking for? Why?

Tait: First, when choosing a program, you should be confident that it is fully supported and continually developed. This is very important because, many developers come and go, and only the financially strong will be around for the long term.

Ease of use, or a short learning curve, is also important. Every company today is faced with constraints on time and financial constraints for training. The software chosen must be quickly understood by employees, and should require minimal training to integrate it into the work of the organization.

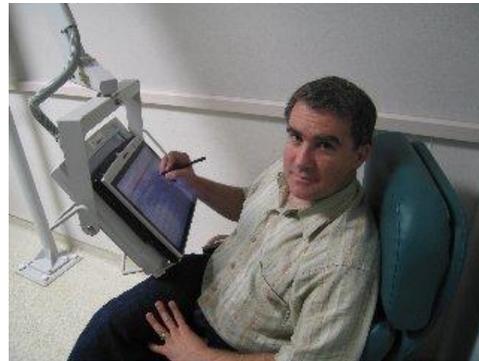
The ability to embed attachments into a map is also a must for business users. What I'm

talking about here isn't just linking these resources to a visual map, but actually embedding them into the file, so maps can be shared with others, complete with all of their associated files and resources.

Finally, executives should look for programs that will enable them to share and distribute maps in formats that suits their needs. Visual maps, because they are non-linear, may overwhelm some people at first. So it's very important that the program should support exports to other popular file formats, such as Microsoft Word, image files, web pages and other formats.

Mind Mapping on the Tablet PC with Eric Mack

Eric Mack is a personal and workgroup productivity specialist, who systematically applies information, communication, and action technologies to help business executives and teams to become more efficient at what they do. He also writes an engaging blog that is focused on the Tablet PC, business productivity tools and more. He's a big fan of mind mapping software and is quite the evangelist for the Tablet PC platform. In this interview, I asked Eric some wide-ranging questions about mind mapping on the Tablet PC.



Frey: What make and model of Tablet PC do you use? Slate or convertible?

Mack: I presently use a Toshiba Tecra M4 Convertible Tablet PC.

Frey: What kind of work do you do?

Mack: As an eProductivity Specialist, I show people how to use technology to increase their productivity. This includes hardware, such as the Tablet PC, or software, like Lotus Notes and MindManager. I do much of this in the context of the GTD (David Allen's Getting Things Done) methodology.

Frey: How, specifically, do you use mind mapping software in your work?

Mack: I use mind mapping software to capture notes during meetings, brainstorm with others, organize my research and planning into knowledge maps, and to do project planning.

Frey: What benefits or advantages does it provide you with?

Mack: I love the freedom of not being tied to a linear structure. If I have an idea while

taking notes or brainstorming I simply add a new node to my map. If I want to create a new map from a branch of an existing map, I can do that, too. I love being able to rearrange nodes on a map at any time - something I could not do with pen and paper. I often use mind maps as project dashboards for my activities.

Frey: How has the combination of mind mapping and mobility been an advantage for you?

Mack: I used to do my mind mapping with colored markers and 11x17 paper. Copying and reproduction was difficult. I actually purchased an 11x17 copier for this purpose. This meant that, in addition to carrying my laptop, I had to bring paper and supplies. With mind maps on the Tablet PC, I can take my mapping tools anywhere and I can retrieve my maps to show and share with others at any time. I have since purchased a wide-format color printer to allow me to print out my maps to share with others. In fact, for my business degree, I actually turned in several assignment as maps alone!

Frey: Can you give me one or two examples of how utilizing mind mapping software on your Tablet PC has helped you on specific projects?

Mack: As an experiment, I challenged myself to "go paperless" for eight weeks without using pen, pencil, or paper, relying completely upon my Tablet PC. I used MindManager and Windows Journal as my two primary ink-enabled applications. I also used Acrobat to read the books and documents that I had scanned in. The mind mapping software allow me to create maps to plan the challenge, use my pen to click-launch related documents and applications. This was a big plus, as I kept my Tablet in slate mode much of this time. I created a map for each course and exercise, with links to all of my research. It worked very well. Check out this link and this one for examples of my work from this experiment.

Frey: Do you convert the digital ink in your maps to text, or just store it as digital ink?

Mack: Initially I converted all of my digital ink maps to text; as I became more confident with ink, maps, and the searchability of the notes I had taken, I often leave many of my maps in ink, probably about 25%.

Frey: How often do you use your M4 in tablet vs. conventional laptop mode?

Mack: I find that I use my Tablet in slate mode when I study - I like the large screen of the M4 because I can keep the document I am reading open on the left and then have MindManager in a window on the right. What I really want, of course, is an ultra wide-screen tablet PC. When I'm at my desk, I use my tablet in laptop mode but that's only because I've not found an optimal solution for external monitor. I actually built a custom stand for my tablet docking station that allows me to leave my tablet in slate mode and use it as a tablet in conjunction with a USB IBM ThinkPad keyboard. I like this combination and plan to use it more often.

Frey: I've heard that some users of mind mapping software on the Tablet PC have found that it's particularly advantageous for taking notes in small meetings - something about the Tablet PC being less invasive than a laptop. Have you found that to be true?

Mack: Absolutely. I used my Tablet PC for two years while I worked on a business degree. When my colleagues opened their laptops - I call it "setting up their fortresses" - they put up a barrier between them and the professor. Meanwhile, working with my Tablet in slate mode, I had no artificial barrier between me and the professor. I found that the professor invested more time talking with me and The Tablet PC allowed me to maintain better eye contact with my professors; as a result, I think I received more from the courses.

Frey: How did you used to work before you got the Tablet PC and mind mapping software?

Mack: I've used various forms of mind mapping and diagramming for 20+ years. During that times, I tried various drawing tools, always returning to paper and colored pen for ease of use and editing. For professional purposes, I used to draw my maps on paper and then, when necessary, redraw the final version in Visio or a similar tool. When I worked in my office, I used a digital white board - I don't think I've used it once since I got my Tablet PC and MindManager.

Frey: What new capabilities does this combination of hardware and software give you?

Mack: I can diagram anywhere. I now produce more maps, sometimes several a day, than I would ever have created on pencil and paper. I no longer hesitate to create a map, even for something simple or for something that I might discard. The Tablet PC and mind mapping software have removed the barriers to mind mapping while working with my computer.

Frey: What can you do better or more efficiently than before?

Mack: Create maps, find, organize and share my maps, use maps as digital dashboards with links to Lotus Notes, Documents, and web pages – very valuable!

Frey: In summary, what are the biggest advantages of the Tablet PC version of your mind mapping software?

Mack: I've found that there are 3 main advantages:

1. Integration with the Windows file system and awareness of third party programs via doclinks - with Lotus Notes and Internet Explorer for example - and file types,

- such as Acrobat, Word, etc.
2. Capture tools like GyroQ for rapid idea capture from anywhere
 3. Digital Ink. There's something enjoyable about taking notes and creating a map with a pen. It's also less intrusive when mapping in public, such as a seminar.

Using Speech Recognition and Mind Mapping Software Together

Recently, Peter Maddern, Founder of Speech Empowered Computing, posted a comment to my blog about his use of Dragon NaturallySpeaking speech recognition software to create visual maps in MindGenius. Because I'm a long-time fan and user of both technologies, I just had to know more! Peter graciously consented to be featured in an e-mail interview about this productive strategy for creating mind maps.

Frey: What kinds of services does Speech Empowered Computing provide?

Maddern: For 30 years I was a Product Development Scientist, most recently with a well known multi-national company. Because of decreasing secretarial support, I latched onto Nuance's Dragon NaturallySpeaking (version 5) about 6 or 7 years ago to create technical reports and to get through my e-mail mountain! My corporate job made me realize the pressures faced by knowledge workers in the workplace and the need to get more done with fewer resources. I soon realized that speech recognition was an excellent productivity tool.

In January, 2005, I left the corporate world to set up Speech Empowered Computing and now I offer advice to many users from different sectors on getting into speech recognition on the PC using Dragon NaturallySpeaking. I am a reseller of Nuance Dragon NaturallySpeaking software and I also supply the optimum microphone and digital dictation equipment and I provide training in the software so that users can start utilizing the power of the software early on.

Frey: How did you first get the idea to use these Dragon NaturallySpeaking with MindGenius?

Maddern: It just came naturally, I suppose. Some years ago I got interested in the concept of mind mapping after listening to a cassette about Tony Buzan mind mapping in the car during a long journey. Mind maps are "personal" to the individual and if you want to create a mind map, it's not something you take to your secretary to type up for you. Rather it's something that you are likely to create on-the-fly on your computer yourself. So being an advocate of speech recognition and having discovered the power of mind mapping, I started using speech recognition to create my mind maps in the office and for personal use at home.

Frey: How, specifically, do you use them together? For adding topics to your maps? Notes? Map edits? Other uses (navigating menus, etc.)?

Maddern: I use speech recognition for adding branches and note edits. Unfortunately, Dragon NaturallySpeaking doesn't work in terms of controlling the menus of the mind mapping software that I use. I haven't used it with other mind mapping software yet, so I don't know if NaturallySpeaking is able to interface and control the menu system of other mind mapping software.

The only slight difficulty is that with Microsoft Word. For example, you have what is called "select and say" functionality with Dragon NaturallySpeaking. This means that you can select words and phrases by voice and re-dictate them, correct them and format them (e.g. change font, make bold, underline and italicize etc). You don't have this functionality in "non-standard" programs such as MindGenius. A way around this in Dragon NaturallySpeaking is to use a feature called "Dictation Box." By saying "show dictation box", the software brings up an editing box with a degree of "select and say" functionality in any non-standard Windows program. This dictation box feature is available in versions 8 and 9. I can't recall right now if it was present in version 7 or not though.

Frey: I don't recall seeing it in version 7, which is what I use. Does MindGenius offer any specific integration with Dragon NaturallySpeaking?

Maddern: No, there is no specific built-in integration between MindGenius and Dragon NaturallySpeaking as such. For this to happen, I imagine that the makers of Dragon NaturallySpeaking (Nuance Communications Inc.) would have to work on making them compatible. The existing compatibility is mainly with standard Windows programs, particularly the Microsoft Office suite of programs. I suppose if mind mapping became a universally accepted tool, then the integration work would happen naturally. But right now, I have found that you just have to rely on the capability to add branches, text boxes and notes by voice.

Frey: Can this technique be used with any mind mapping program?

Maddern: I imagine it can but I can't say for sure. Having said that, I would bet that you could use Dragon NaturallySpeaking to create branches, text boxes and notes in most mind mapping programs.

Frey: Can you give me an example of a specific recent project where you used NaturallySpeaking to help you to create and manipulate a visual map?

Maddern: Yes, of course. I'll tell you about my latest mind map. As well as being interested in computers, I am interested in alternative medicine. As a hobby, I am currently studying for a diploma in Clinical Aromatherapy and when qualified, hope to work as a volunteer in hospitals, senior citizen centers and hospices. I find it a challenge to revise by memorizing information from lists. I have to learn 40 essential oils in depth including Latin name, countries of origin, type of fragrance note, whether it is stimulating,

regulating, euphoric or sedative, herbal family, chemical components, therapeutic action and precautions.

With the recent release of version 2, I thought MindGenius Business would give me an ideal tool to display the 40 essential oils in a way that I could select categories and just display the oils in those categories. Or create map filters for showing the information in different ways. So I created a mind map. For each oil I added the above categories. Because there was so much information on each essential oil, I created a separate Microsoft Word index card for each oil with all the information about that oil on it. I then linked each mind map branch entry to the relevant index card.

The map is missing a visual element at the moment. What I would like to do is to scan in photographs of each flower, herb, tree, root or seed from which the oil originates so that each branch has an image in it. When I do this, I think that then I will have the perfect mind map to help me revise for my examination later this year!

Frey: What impact has using these programs together had on your productivity?

Maddern: Well as we all know, mind maps are a great productivity tool. Using speech recognition enables me to create a map more quickly compared to using the keyboard. But not only that, I find it kind of allows me to "sit back" and let the creative process come to the fore because I'm not concentrating on keying in the map information.

Frey: I actually tried this technique with NaturallySpeaking 7 and MindManager last year. It worked pretty good, but I gave up on it after I found that, in the notes view, I couldn't use any of the voice editing commands that I've come to depend upon when dictating in Microsoft Word - such as correcting words. Has Nuance improved the voice editing in version 9 so you can correct words and perform other voice commands in programs other than MS Office applications?

Maddern: See my previous point about using the "dictation box" feature in Dragon NaturallySpeaking. But your question has made me think about a related point. The Professional version of the software (but unfortunately not the Preferred version) allows you to create scripting macros. As an example, say in Microsoft Word that you want to bring up a frequently called up template (e.g. your monthly report template). You can "program" the "Command Browser" function in the software to automatically call up that template by voice. This saves you having to remember where the template is filed (is it on my hard drive, or is it on the server and if so where?) And then go through lots of keystrokes to open it! It should be possible to set up some macros for controlling the menu items in mind mapping software. This could be tedious to set up for each menu item and tedious to have to recall the individual voice commands to each menu item and sub-menu item but it could perhaps be worth doing for some of the more frequently accessed menu items.

Frey: Do you have any other advice for those who may be considering using dictation software with their favorite mind mapping program?

Maddern: Only to reinforce the benefits of using dictation software, namely the speed, convenience and liberation of the creative thinking process that goes into creating a mind map. Just bear in mind the fact that the dictation software can only help create the branches, text boxes and notes and not control the menu and sub-menu items. In short, I'd say give it a go!

New in this edition

Visual Mapping: An Essential Tool for 21st Executives

An interview with Dave Gray, founder of XPLANE, the visual thinking company

Q: Why is visual thinking an essential skill for 21st-century executives?

Dave Gray: It used to be that you could block competitors by outspending them. By investing in factories, trucks, ships, etc. you could keep competitors out of the market because they couldn't afford to compete for shelf space in the retail markets. But in a digital world the costs of making and distributing products is minimal, and the shelf space is unlimited. So in order to win you need to do more than block competitors – you need to innovate. That's where visual thinking comes in. Innovation requires creativity, imagination and design thinking, and visual thinking is a great tool for that kind of work.

Q: How does visual thinking enable people to make better, faster and more informed decisions?

Gray: When people don't understand things, they're at a crossroads – they don't know which way to go. This means they put off decisions, which has the net effect of slowing down everything else. When people understand, they make decisions and act more rapidly. Since visual thinking is a tool to increase clarity and understanding, especially related to complex or potentially confusing information, it can help people make better, faster decisions, leading to better results and better business performance.



Q: Has there been a fundamental change in the nature of the business problems that need to be solved today? Why is this need for visual thinking just emerging now?

Gray: Yes, as I said I think that the transition to a digital economy has leveled the playing field. Small, creative companies can now compete with global giants. Many of today's technology giants – Apple, Microsoft, Google, Oracle, to name a few – were started by small teams with little to no capital. Creativity counts more today than ever before. Today's business executive needs to be a creative, innovative thinker, and visual thinking can help.

Q: What kind of skills does visual thinking involve? Do you need to be able to draw to do it? Does everyone have this skill, or only certain types of people?

Gray: There will always be a need for specialists and technicians who perform unique, specific functions. But for the generalist, like the general manager for example, visual thinking is increasingly a necessary skill. Like every skill, people will differ in their natural aptitude and ability. But like reading, writing and arithmetic, . It's a skill that everyone can learn. If you can learn to read and write, you can learn visual thinking.

Q: What advantages does visual thinking provide to the executives who utilize it?

Gray: Visual thinking, like mathematics, is a language that you can use to create models of the world, which can help you think more effectively and make better decisions. And like math, it's a language both of analysis and of synthesis – breaking things down and weaving them together to find new patterns of meaning. Each language has its own inherent strengths and weaknesses. The more languages you can “think in” the better you can think, period.

Q: How does mind mapping fit into the overall scheme of visual thinking?

Gray: Mind mapping is a great place for executives to begin working on their visual thinking skills. It employs one of the most powerful traits of visual thinking – the power of seeing everything in one place, and how everything relates to everything else, in a single frame. Mind mapping can be used to break things down for analysis, or to brainstorm ideas. It's very flexible, easy to learn and it has broad business applications.

Q: How do you convince linear thinkers to become more visually oriented?

Gray: I think you need to start by making the whole thing less scary. I start by explaining how visual thinking works just like any other language: First you need to learn the alphabet, and then you start putting “letters” together to make words, then sentences and so on. When you break visual thinking down into its components and start with simple things, it becomes less intimidating.

Q: What do you think has to happen for visual thinking to get wider recognition as an essential business skill?

Gray: I'm convinced we need to do a better job of breaking it down into its components and teaching those "fundamentals" more widely and consistently. Written language and math have a very clear learning curve that starts simple and builds its way to complexity. We need to do the same for visual thinking. We need a curriculum.

Q: Tell us a little bit about Marks and Meaning. What inspired you to write this book?

Gray: Marks and Meaning is an "unbook" project – by which I mean, it's a set of ideas, a notebook of ideas really, that has accepted its "incompleteness." It's a document for sharing ideas when they are still fluid and, in a way, untamed, when they are in fact the most interesting.

Q: You've chosen a very unusual model for publishing it. Can you explain what's unique about the "unbook" format and how that will hopefully result in a better end product?

Gray: The unbook is simply something that's in between a blog and a book. It's more thoughtful and organized than a blog, but hasn't quite found its footing as a book yet. Like a blog, it's a platform for conversation with a community of people that share an interest. Like a conversation, it's fluid and shifting. The traditional book is a one-way affair: the author preaches at the pulpit and the readers listen. I wanted more – I wanted a conversation.

Q: How can the readers of this blog obtain Marks and Meaning?

Gray: They can buy it here: <http://www.lulu.com/content/6811202>

Q: How did you get started in the world of visual thinking, and what led you to the specialty of infographics?

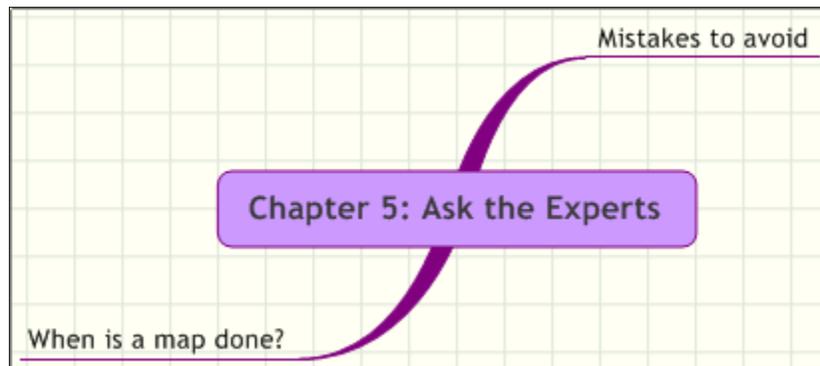
Gray: I've seen myself as an artist for all of my life, and I've always had a passion for learning and exploring new ideas. When you put those two things together, the path leads directly to infographics.

Q: What inspires you about visual thinking?

Gray: Like any language, it's a tool for exploration and discovery. Visual thinking is a tool for imagination, dreaming, thinking and playing. There's no aspect of life where it doesn't have something to offer. There's so much to explore, so much to do. It's a deep well that will never run dry.

Q: In closing, is there anything else about visual thinking that you think it's critical that people know?

Gray: I think visual thinking is a critical thinking skill, like math or logic. Those who spend the time to learn and use it will have an advantage over those who don't. They will be able to think more clearly and imagine more possibilities. The road ahead will be less foggy and opportunities will emerge that others won't see till later. And in an information age, that kind of advantage is significant.



One of my ongoing goals is to uncover best practices for visual mapping. What better place to get them than from some of the leading experts in this area. People like:

- Roger C. Parker, marketing expert and author
- Michael Scherotter, formerly with Mindjet
- Nick Duffill, Harport Consulting
- Kyle McFarlin, VisualStrategist.com
- Wallace Tait, business mapping expert
- Jamie Nast, author of the book *Idea Mapping*

This list reads like a who's who of the brightest minds in the world of mind mapping. So read on, as they reveal the answers to some common questions to you.

What common mistakes should people avoid when creating software-produced mind maps?

The biggest thing I have to guard against is the temptation to include too much detail in my maps, especially those I create for my weekly teleseminar interviews. It's too easy to create topics containing unnecessary levels of detail. It's too easy to write in complete sentences, than to restrict topics to keywords. When I see a complete subject, verb, noun sentence, my temptation is to read it with a different "voice" than questions I extemporaneous ask based on a keyword. It's also too easy to create maps based on a numerous individual questions, rather than grouping questions into categories, or segments.

The best advice I can give is to make extensive use of your mapping software's "notes" feature. Keep your maps as concise and simple as possible, but develop your ideas in the notes area. The act of creating the notes will help "brand" your ideas into your brain, so they'll appear of their own volition when you ask the questions.

-- Roger C. Parker

Rainbow colors that don't mean anything, distracting typefaces and inconsistent shape grammar – in other words, when you use shapes/colors/line style etc. to mean one thing in one part of a map and use it differently in another part of the map.

-- *Michael S. Scherotter*

A common mistake is to refer to your map as a "mind map" when showing it to other people. Emphasizing the form over the content fosters exclusivity and makes it an easy target for objections. Always call your map "the financial analysis" or "the business plan", or whatever its real purpose is. If you can't easily demonstrate how it is a financial analysis or business plan, then nothing is made clearer by explaining that it is a mind map. All that happens is that your colleagues learn that your "mind maps" are not very accessible. Often, you realize that your map doesn't actually have a clear purpose - it's just a "map about" something. It's better that you find this out before your colleagues do!

-- *Nick Duffill*

1. **Go with Jared Diamond's 'Guns, Germs and Steel' Approach.** Horizontal expansion is better than vertical. I recommend heavy use of the hierarchical structure to accomplish this. A key reason is that it's easier to draw lines between bodies of information when they are horizontally next to each other, as opposed to vertically separate as in a vertical-shaped map.
2. **Avoid the mistake of NOT using icons.** They give you a database-like functionality in your maps. Further, decide on your icon-set for the map upfront, as on-the-fly use of icons can produce haphazard results.
3. **Avoid creating a map for brushing your teeth.** Okay seriously, you can have too many worthless maps. They breed like rabbits: watch out!
4. **Avoid creating one map with everything in it and no more.** Seriously, I applaud the desire to rule your maps, but this just ends up being a giant, unmanageable empire.
5. **Avoid not using color in maps.** You'll be more engaged when it looks pleasing to the eye. Just watch out for using too much color. As usual, less is more.
6. **Avoid not using images in maps.** The topic text will engage the left brain, so why not get the right brain engaged with topic images? In a way, that's what mapping is: a way to get the whole brain engaged. There's a great ROI implied here, because most employers get employees' creativity or logic in whichever area employees are stronger. Mapping should get both sides of the brain involved without a change in compensation plans, so in a way it's double the brainpower for your money!
7. **Avoid not opening at least one map a day.** Relentlessness is key if you want mapping to become a habit and not just a fad.

8. **Avoid the conventional wisdom that mapping is simply about inspiration and creativity.** It is also about taking ground, holding it and expanding it.
9. **Avoid reinventing the wheel.** Look online and in books for best practices and habits.

-- Kyle McFarlin

1. **Avoid over-use of visual mapping.** While it's an excellent tool, you need to be realistic. You really don't need to map out your shopping list!
2. **Avoid "map shock."** An audience can be overwhelmed when viewing a complex visual map, and can experience "map shock." Consider presenting information in both mapped and linear formats to avoid overwhelming your audience.
3. **Avoid using too much color in your maps.** Depending upon your audience and the subject of your map, you may want to use prepared templates that are color balanced.
4. **Avoid using too much text in your topics.** Use specific keywords to draw your audience into the flow of your map.
5. **Avoid ambiguity.** Enable clarity by the logical arrangement of your mapped information.
6. **Avoid irrelevancy.** Stay focused on the map subject and let its content speak to the issue.

-- Wallace Tait

How can you tell when a map is "done?" This is something that seems to stymie many visual mappers.

Most mappers get stymied by this (even those drawing by hand) for a few reasons. I believe the number one reason is because they didn't clearly define their purpose to begin with. Therefore they don't know when they've met their objective. So my advice is always to make sure the purpose is clear. Then mappers just ask the question, "Does this amount of data meet my purpose?" until they can say, "Yes".

The second cause of MIS, Map Incompletion Syndrome, is this compulsion to put every detail into the map instead of those we truly need. If a few words can summarize all of my expert knowledge around a topic, why would I need to write out everything I know about the topic? Yet, I think people get caught in that trap.

The final cause of MIS is during the creative process. The creation of ideas and possibilities is a never-ending process and could go on forever. This is a very real issue. At some point in time you just have to make a decision to stop dreaming and take action.

Don't get rid of the ideas, but prioritize or make an action plan. Otherwise you could go on forever.

A map is done when it has met its purpose.

-- *Jamie Nast*

The map is "done" when you can actually fulfill the purpose that you set for creating it in the first place. The real question is not "When is the map done?", but "What is this map for?" Example objectives might be to take a decision, to plan and execute a project, to present a case for something, or to solve an issue. If the map is just a rolling brainstorm "about" something, then it can never be completed, but will just get left behind at some point.

-- *Nick Duffill*

My "standard operating procedure" is to print out maps and take them home for review in bed. I make changes or add new ideas in pencil on the print-out. Maps are "finished" when I take the map home two days in a row, and don't need to make any further changes.

Another perspective would be to consider it finished after I share it with a client, assimilate their input (using my program's review function), and share the revised file with them. This works great for proposals, by the way.

-- *Roger C. Parker*

If you're merely a casual personal user, your maps convey information on the fly (to do lists), so they'll always be incomplete yet acceptable for your on-the-fly purposes. Your maps are done when they have served their purpose for the here and now.

If you're an academic user, your maps are forever evolving. You'll be treating a visual map as a repository for knowledge and information. Always adding information to your "master map." Your maps are never done.

If you're a business user, you'll use visual mapping to "fast track" process and system information. Maps to you can be a systematic framework for improvement and effective communications that need a laser-like focus and enhanced clarity. Your maps have two purposes:

1. They allow you to create, manage and present (distribute) information quickly and clearly.
2. They enable you to develop a standardized "master map" database for your business operating system

-- *Wallace Tait*

A presentation map is done when it's gone through multiple drafts and you have that polished gem that conveys the original point brilliantly. Use the same discipline as you would with any other office document.

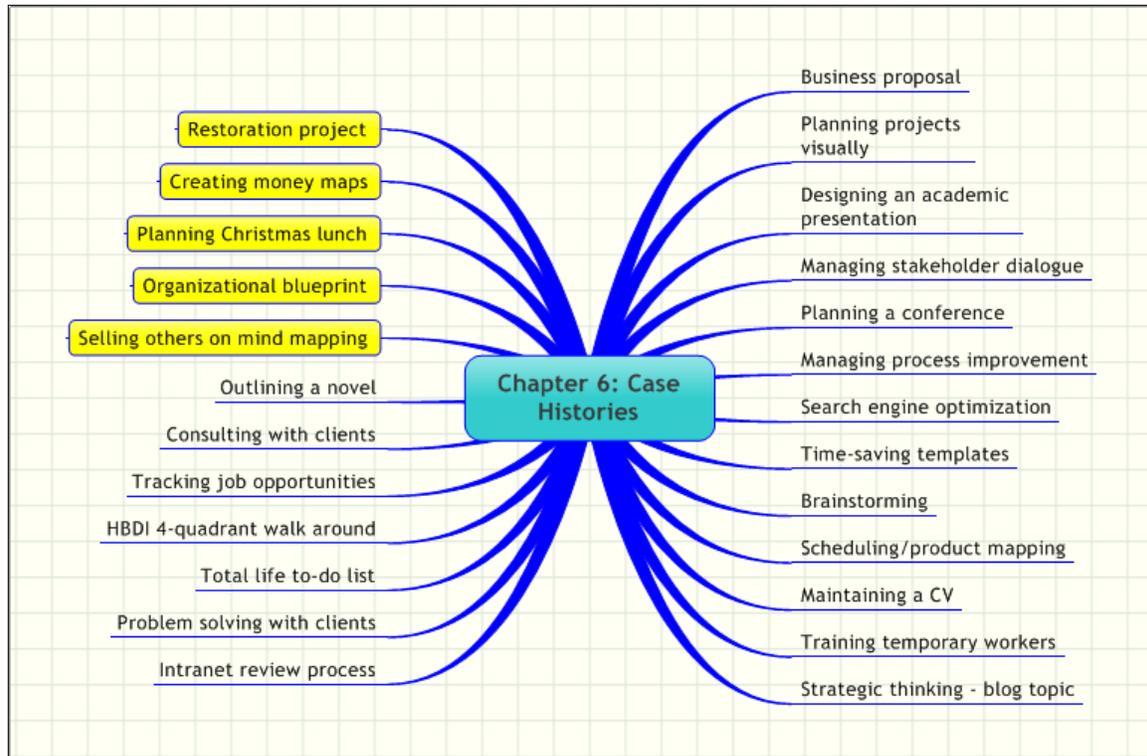
An information map is done when it houses the information currently available, with the understanding it is to be updated when new instances come up.

A project map is done when the project is completed, best practices from that instance have been added back to the template and support information has been archived.

An area core map is never done. (An area core map is a master map to manage a certain area of a person's business or personal life. For instance, if someone had a knowledge management core map, they would manage that part of their life from that master map.)

A life core map is never done. (A life core map is another term for a master map or map central. Also, in the Visual Strategist Solution, it is a visual overlay for the different areas of your personal and professional life arranged intuitively in a clockwise fashion.)

-- *Kyle McFarlin*



According to the surveys of users of mind mapping software that I have conducted, one of the biggest needs that many of you have is to see examples of successful software-produced mind maps, and to understand what makes them work. In other words, many of you are looking for case histories that illustrate some of the best practices of visual mapping.

To meet this need, I solicited case histories from users of mind mapping software. Many readers generously responded, providing me with details on the application where their mind mapping software is making a major difference in their work, and an image of the map they're describing in their case history. I also asked them to explain the benefits and advantages they've enjoyed from using this type of map.

Over time, I can envision this modest collection of mind mapping "how-to" examples growing into something much larger. If you're interested in contributing to a future collection of mind mapping case histories, [please send me an e-mail message](#).

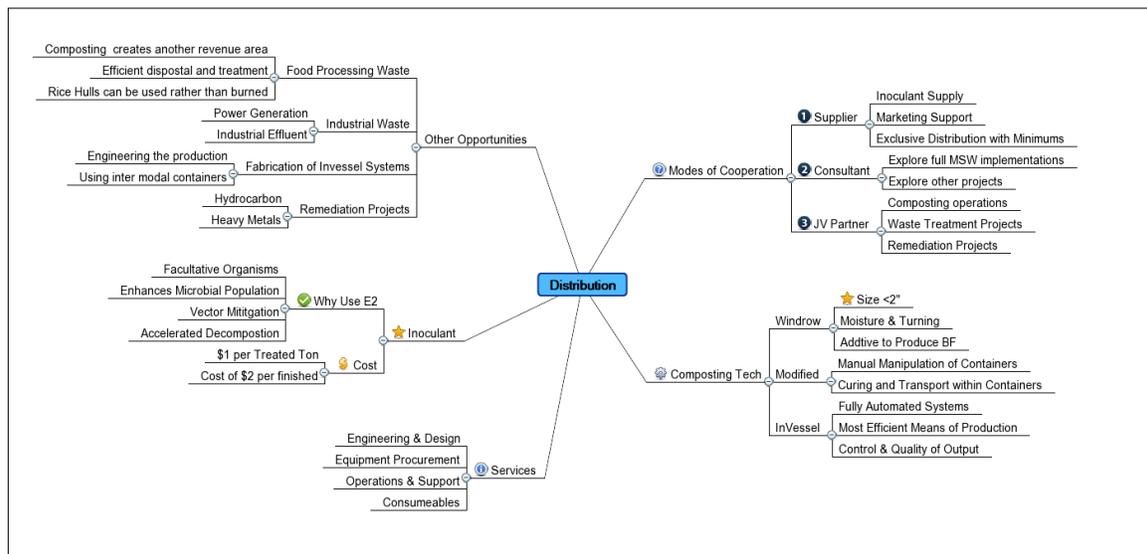
Business Proposal

Name: Alan Yoshioka

Company: Envirtrade Inc.

Job Title: CEO

Software Used: MindManager, MindMeister



I faced a sticky situation, because my Tablet PC needed to go back to Motion for motherboard repair. My files were all backed up to an external hard drive, but my programs, like MindManager, resided on the Tablet PC. The day I sent it back I was contacted from our web site with a new lead who was anxious to start a project with my firm, and I had to frame an appropriate response. I would normally produce my maps on MindManager, but in this case had to try a work around.

I recently started using MindMeister because anything I have done there can be imported to MindManager. By defining the main topics and then fleshing out each branch, I was able to appropriately frame the thought processes and focused effort could be put into each section at the appropriate stage. I first framed how we could cooperate and fleshed out what I thought would be a win-win for both of us. I also created bullet points that highlighted the why's and how's of the project. Finally I fleshed out what appeared to be viable projects of interest.

At that point, I exported this to a GIF file to circulate within our group for comment. It was a simple matter and feedback was done in a matter of hours. It was basically a good framing of the client opportunity, so the final step was to turn it into a document. Mindmeister has an export to RTF function, so I exported the map to that format, and then imported it into Google Docs, where I finalized the proposal.

The end result was that we got the business and have signed an agreement with the client. This was a great learning experience, because I was at first panic stricken by not having my computer available. But as I worked through the exercise, it became

immediately clear to me that that viable work could be done using one of the web-based mind mapping applications now available.

Advantages & Efficiencies

I rely on mind mapping to crystallize the structure and content of most all of my work, anything that is more than a simple e-mail reply. I use mind mapping to create proposals, papers, presentations and have even used it to create our company website. It is the tool I rely upon most in my business.

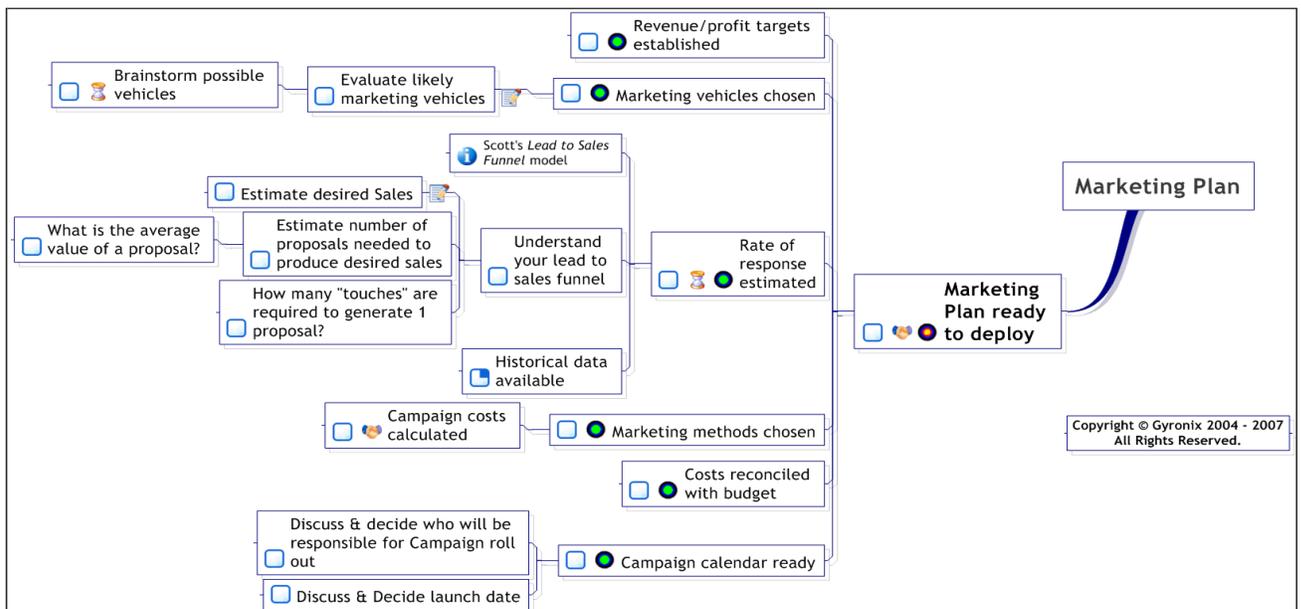
Planning Projects Visually

Name: Nick Duffill

Company: Gyronix

Job Title: CTO

Software Used: MindManager



The "funnel timeline" is outcome-based planning using mind mapping software. You begin by writing down the final outcome of your project, expressed as a status (e.g., "marketing plan ready to deploy" instead of just "marketing plan"). Then you ask yourself, "What needs to be done, or in place, for this to be a true statement?" Create a subtopic for each of the things that needs to be done, which when put together, make "marketing plan ready" a true statement. Then repeat the process for each of the subtopics, and keep working backwards until you reach actions that you can do now, and which don't require anything else to be in place before you can start them. These are where your project starts.

Advantages and Efficiencies

This is a very efficient way to show the structure of a project, and to develop rough ideas into specific actions. It is easy to see how a project starts in multiple places but ends at just one completion point.

Usually, you already have a few actions for your project in mind, but without any particular framework. You can “brainstorm” project actions first, then use the above technique to rearrange them into a coherent flow. This works especially well in a group environment where the project team takes part in structuring and discussing the project.

It is much easier to restructure and review your project this way than in fully-featured project management software. Mind mapping software is also much better suited to collaborative group work than project management software. You are not restricted to only capturing actions in this framework – you can also integrate information and ideas right in the context where they are used, distinguishing them from actions with visual labels. Lastly, if you work on the left of the central topic, you can read your project as a very crude timeline from left to right.

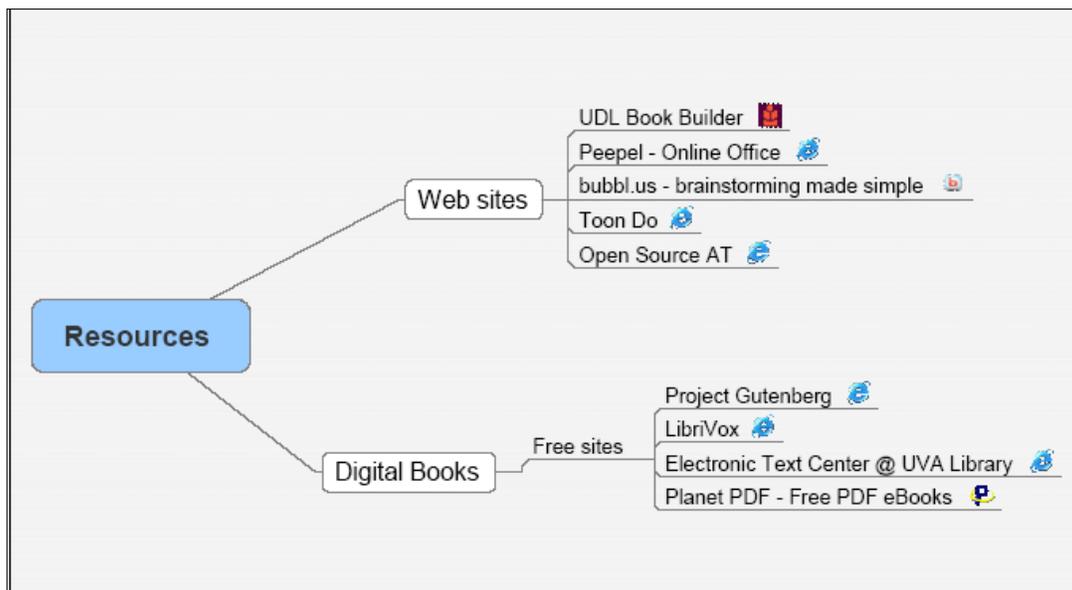
Designing an Academic Presentation

Name: Brian S. Friedlander, Ph.D.

Company: College of St. Elizabeth

Job Title: Assistant Professor of Education

Software Used: MindManager



I have been using MindManager to outline and highlight the content that I will be presenting in the graduate level courses that I teach in the area of assistive technology. I find that MindManager gives me the freedom to brainstorm ideas, as well as the content

that will be covered in my classes. Being able to graphically view the content of the class, I can easily visualize the material that will be covered. Having the ability to link notes and websites to the ideas that will be presented makes it an ideal platform for me. Likewise, having the ability to output my mind maps as PDF files makes it easy for me to share my handouts on the BlackBoard (a collaborative environment used in learning applications). There are times that I will open the PDF and make the links live in Adobe Acrobat Professional, so that my students can open the file and go directly to the websites that I am discussing, eliminating the need to type in long URLs.

Advantages & Efficiencies

MindManager has allowed me the freedom to play around with the content and then have a digital document that I can use in multiple ways in the classroom. It also allows me to model for my students – who are teachers themselves – best practices for using technology. Having the ability to use MindManager as a presentation tool helps my students to focus on the big ideas that I am communicating in my courses. Having all of my lectures and notes in a digital format really helps me to organize my classes from semester to semester.

Managing Stakeholder Dialogue During a Conference

Name: Cees van Halen

Company: aHa! Coaching/Partners for Innovation

Job Title: Managing Director

Software Used: MindManager

At the recent conference on Climate Change – “ Make Markets Work for Climate” – organized by Dutch Government, Shell, ABN-AMRO, World BANK, WBCSD and IETA, mind mapping was used as a supportive technology at the conference and in the preparatory meetings. Mind maps created using MindManager were projected on a large central screen where the panelists and conference attendees could view the unfolding discussion in real time, represented visually.

Stakeholder dialogue was a central theme of the conference. The work sessions gave ample opportunity for panel debate and interaction with conference attendees. By their interactive design, the sessions contributed to a better understanding of stakeholder perspectives, to exchange ideas, to stimulate engagement, to learn from best practices and to mobilize front-running market players.

Two key roles of mind mapping were defined:

1. To make the debate more transparent and to capture and organize the results of the stakeholder interaction. Creating a map of the dialogue in real time empowered panel debate, while also providing the audience with an unfolding visual summary of the discussion.
2. To disseminate the results of the stakeholder dialogue to the international community via the web.

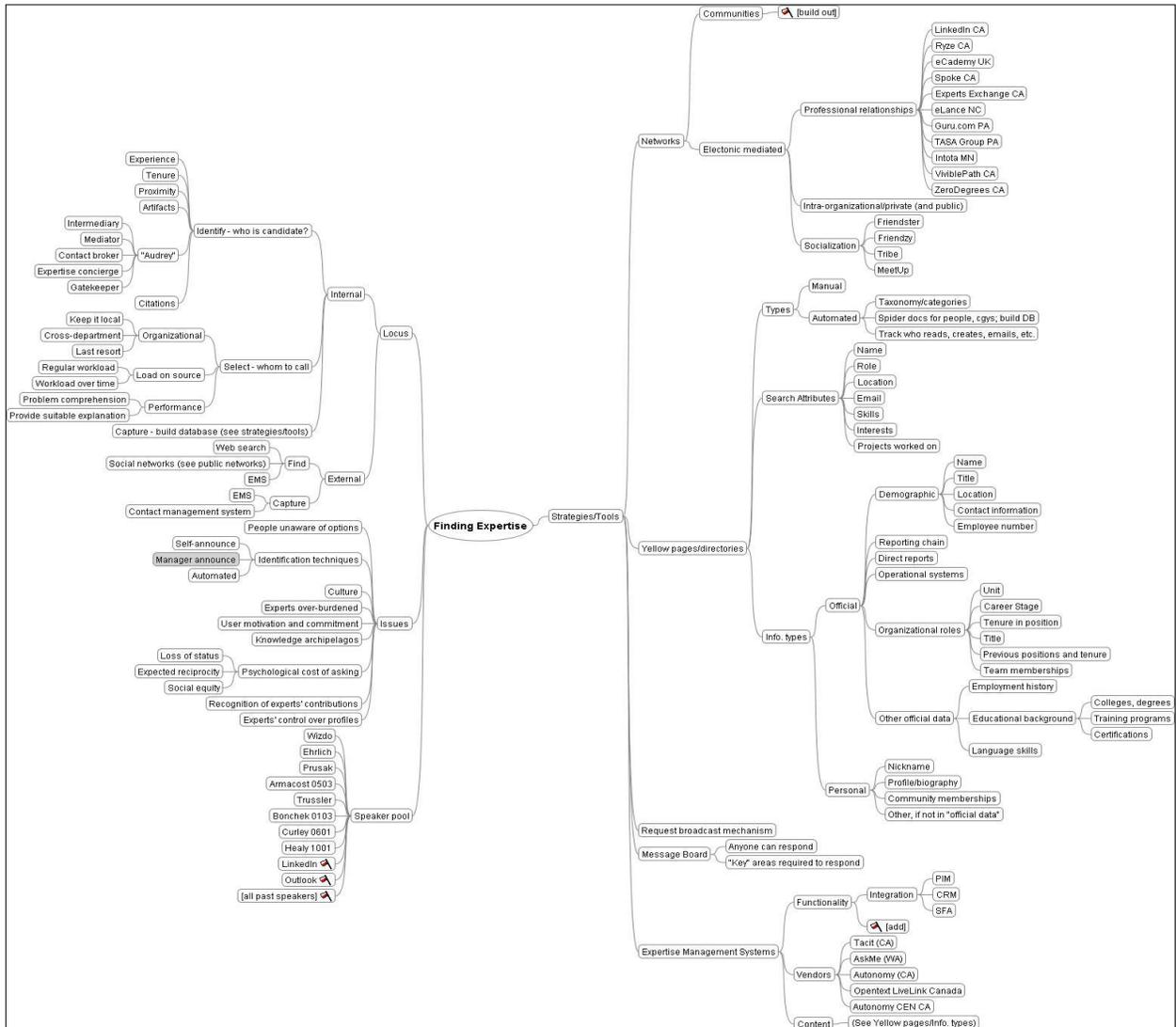
Advantages & Efficiencies

Mind mapping supported the plenary stakeholder processes at the conference. The plenary panel brought vivid and stimulating discussions between thought leaders and the audience. These discussions were registered in the mind maps. At the end of each session, the panelists were asked for their key messages to create momentum – which were presented for polling by the audience. Contributions of mind mapping to the debate included:

- Increased transparency. Stakeholders learned to appreciate the other perspectives and to bridge differences.
- Participants gained a better understanding the actual discussion points in the perspective of the bigger picture during panel and plenary discussions
- Mind mapping contributed to a better structure of the discussion – supporting decision making and making discussions more action based.
- Mind mapping stimulated the interaction between the participants of the conference and made the panel discussions more action oriented.
- Mind mapping helped participants to visualize ideas and translate them into concepts and projects. Stakeholders could then express their support for these concepts and ideas. This can be the start of action road maps.

Planning a Conference

Name: Larry Chait
Company: Chait and Associates, Inc.
Job Title: Managing Director
Software Used: FreeMind



I am President of the Boston KM Forum, a community of practice for people involved in knowledge management. We run 28 sessions a year, four of which are full-day symposia held at Bentley College in Waltham, MA (outside of Boston). To plan for these events – flesh out the topic, decide on speakers, create the slides for the moderator – I often use mind mapping software. The event for which the mind map above was created was on the topic of “finding expertise.”

I don't really have a process for the way in which I create these maps. I do them over a period of days, starting with the concept in the center (in this case, “finding expertise”),

and then adding categories and sub-categories around the periphery until I have covered the topic to the depth needed. I often end up cutting and pasting and re-linking as I go and “learn” more about the topic. When I have “enough,” I’m done. “Enough” is subjective, and is based upon the topic, the depth I feel I need to go in describing it, and my own expertise around the topic and the function that I am performing (jn this case, arranging a meeting) .

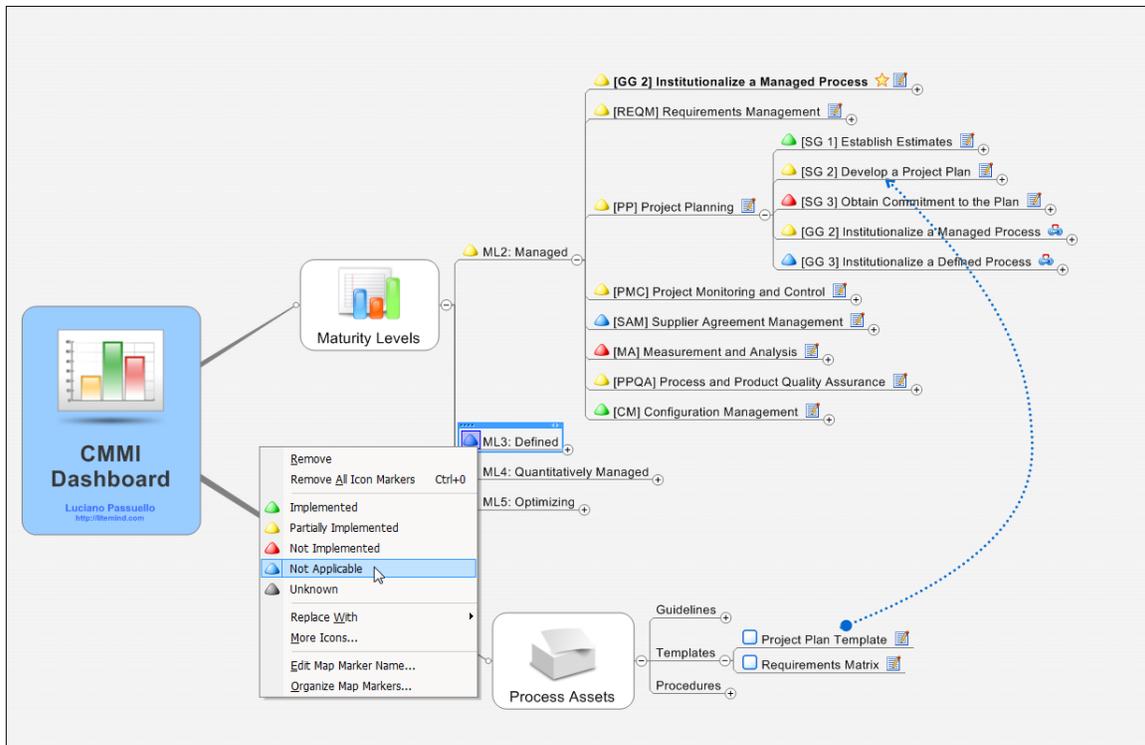
Advantages & Efficiencies

I have found significant advantages in using mapping tools. First, they help me to simply get thoughts out and start to structure them. Next, they allow me to truly arrange them in a logical structure. Finally, they let me see the whole universe of my topic on a single “page,” so I can see where I need to go further, and where I don’t.

Managing a Process Improvement Project

Name: Luciano Passuello

Software Used: MindManager



The scenario depicted in my mind map (above) is consulting for implementation of [CMMI®](#) Process Improvement Initiative in a software company. I used a mind map as a dashboard for the whole project.

CMMI is a process improvement framework and it is normally implemented in stages (starting in 2 going to 5 – indicated as “ML2-5” in the mind map; ML stands for “Maturity Levels”). Each stage has process areas (one level down in the map), and each process

area has specific and generic goals to be achieved (“SGs” and “GGs” in the map). The tree goes on to other concepts such as practices and other information, but for the sake of simplicity, I expanded just three levels down.

A very large and complex set of requirements have to be satisfied for a company to be approved in the official CGGI appraisal. The interpretation of each of these requirements is not always trivial. Sometimes several pages are required to explain what each item represents.

Each company starts a process improvement project with a certain initial situation and specific goals of its own. So it is necessary to evaluate all the existing procedures to try to leverage them in the new initiative. The items to be implemented are not isolated and there are many decisions that have to be made by the knowledge specialists and even the executives. That information has to be gathered all together since it is all interwoven and few (if any) people have the high-level view of where the company is and where exactly it wants to go.

In addition, a project like this normally takes 1 to 2 years to be completed (Maturity Level 2) and we need a central location to, at a glance, view the completion status. Since the project status needs to be reported to different audiences - such as top management - a visual representation such as mind map fits perfectly.

Steps:

1. First, I mapped the whole CMMI framework in the mind map. Then, I managed to find an online version of the book containing the whole explanation of each node and I copied and pasted each explanation directly into the text area of each map node. Now I had the entire book in the mind map. I was now able to focus on specific sections of the book without being distracted by the others. The mind map was already useful as a reference tool from this point, independently of the specific process improvement initiative (i.e., I could reuse it later on similar projects).
2. As I was conducting the interviews to evaluate the initial situation of the company and where it was headed, I recorded the results in deeper levels of the map (not shown), with all this information properly associated with the correct items in the CMMI. Now I had both the CMMI model information and the specific company information mapped together in a single map.
3. With the data gathered in step 2, it was possible to know if each item was fully, partially or not implemented at all. So, I created an icon color code to indicate exactly its status (shown in the mind map). With that, it was possible to easily verify “where we were” in terms of completion in relation to the CMMI model.
4. Now it was time to evaluate what had to be done in each item in order for that item to be declared done. This normally translates to physical assets (or artifacts, as they say). So, I created a “Process Assets” node and listed there all the items that would have to be done. I used task indicators to indicate completion.

While the icon codes in step 3 indicated completion in relation to the model, these checkboxes were the actual tasks and indicated completion in terms of the project (as in traditional project management).

To make the relationship between tasks and CMMI model, I used arrows pointing to what items they implement (see the mind map for an example.).

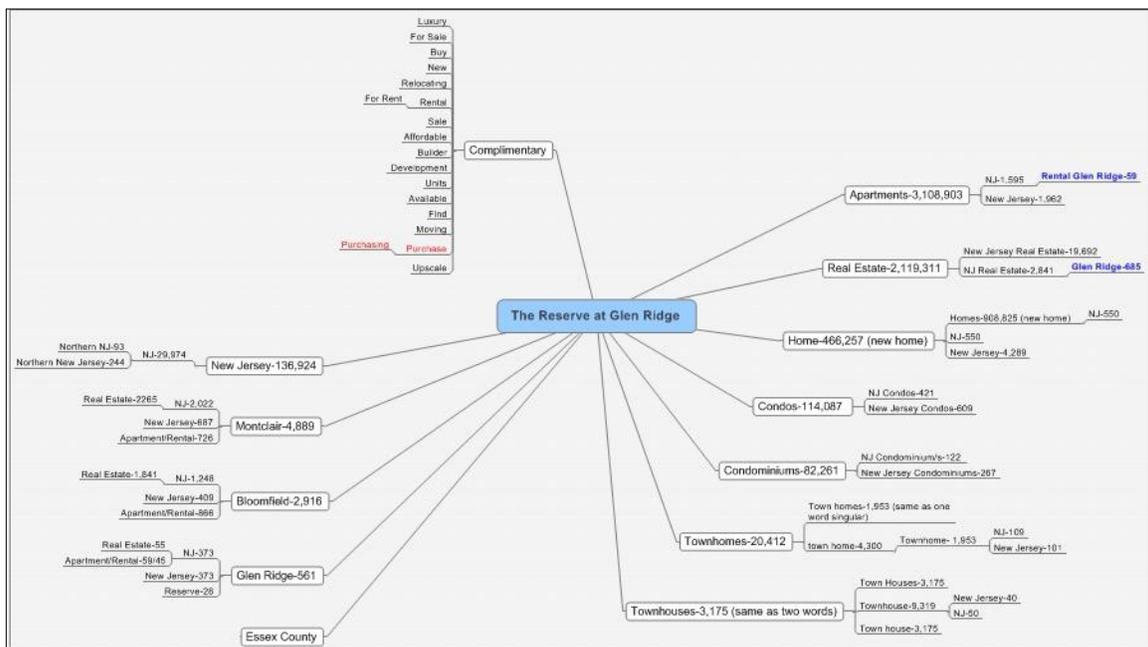
Once we established this initial structure, we had a complete dashboard that was very easy to use as a model reference and project status dashboard. As the project went on, filtering became very useful, enabling us to remove from view the parts already implemented so we could focus on the remaining work. Icons and filtering were critical to the usability and success of this map in the long run.

Advantages & Efficiencies

This map used many visual mapping concepts simultaneously, which no other tool could have provided. I used text notes extensively, icons, arrow relationships, filtering, hyperlinks and task check boxes. The map was so usable that almost everybody installed the free MindManager Viewer (we didn't have enough MindManager licenses for everyone) so they could check on the status of the project. This was another real plus, and contributed to the success of this large, complex project.

Website Search Engine Optimization

Name: Richard John Jenkins
Company: Web Search Engineer
Job Title: CEO
Software Used: MindManager



MindManager has become indispensable to me for brainstorming the keywords I use in my search engine optimization (SEO) and search engine marketing (SEM) work for clients. Whether for “organic” web page optimization or using it to discover valuable keywords for pay per click (PPC) systems like Google AdWords, MSN AdCenter or Yahoo Search Marketing, the mind mapping software pulls it all together for me so I can present my findings to clients in an Excel spreadsheet.

Steps:

1. Research client’s website to discover keywords for SEO and SEM
2. Research competitor sites for the keywords that they use.
3. Perform keyword searches in the major search engines to discover additional related keywords.
4. Use several keyword tools (KeyWord Tracker, KeyWord Discovery, Google and Yahoo’s keyword tools) for even more keywords.
5. Take all findings from above and create sections in MindManager.
6. Use major keywords in MindManager and use word “stemming” techniques to build keyword phrases, including singular and plural keywords.
7. Drill down into the keywords that are searched most often and which are relevant for use on the client’s web pages and inside pay-per-click ad campaigns.
8. Present all of the above to the client as a mind map or inside of an Excel spreadsheet.

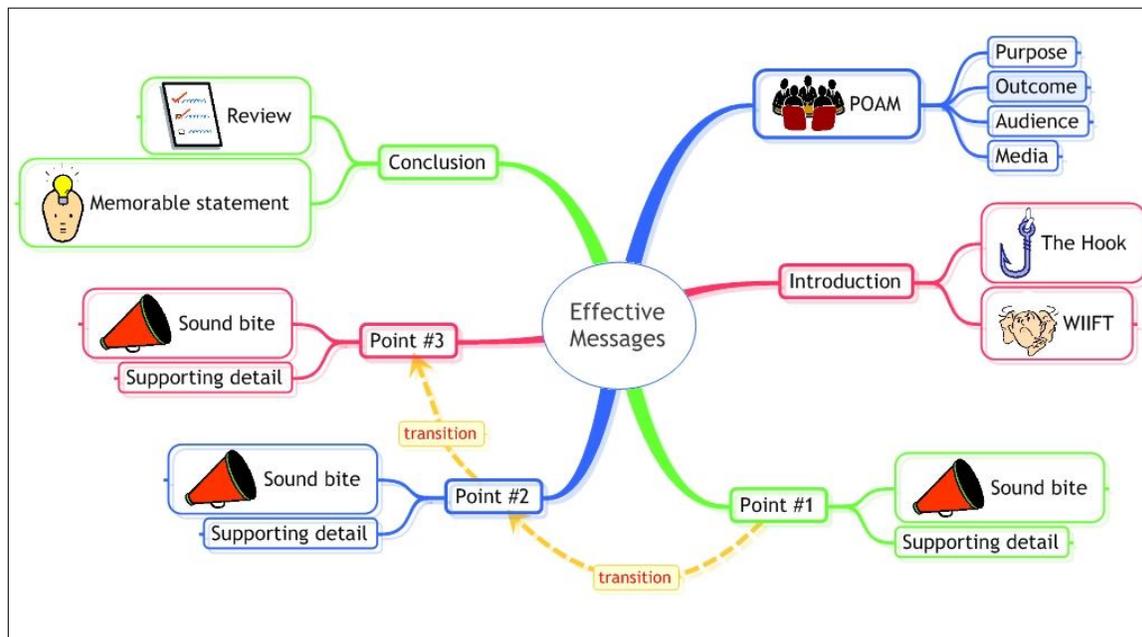
Advantages & Efficiencies

- Huge time savings!
- Quick visual feedback and visual relationships appear that I was not aware of before “seeing the keywords” on the map.
- It helps me to “flag” and prioritize the most promising keywords and phrases that are expected to deliver the most search traffic.
- Clients love the maps when they can “see” the keywords searchers will be using to find their websites, products and services.

Create Time-Saving Templates to Streamline Work

Name: Rob Homa

Software Used: MindManager



I like to have tools to help me get specific tasks accomplished. It is hard to sit down and be 100% effective at the drop of the hat because we are all too busy. Creating templates like the one above helps me to be more effective by approaching tasks in a systematic and creative way.

I use templates like this in a graduate-level course I developed. The key deliverable of the course is connecting technical professionals with their right brains. A secondary deliverable is a small library of my templates.

I use Tony Buzan's creativity process to create all my maps – including templates. The 5-step process calls for: (1) mind burst, (2) first revision and reconstruction, (3) incubation, (4) second revision and reconstruction, and (5) decide/conclude.

I find this process is universally applicable to just about any task. At times, I modify the process to meet my needs but I always follow this general framework.

Advantages & Efficiencies

For me (and many of my students), I find that mind maps make me particularly effective, and greatly reduce the amount of time it takes me to complete projects and tasks. Further, I find that I have better memory retention of the subject matter after going through this mind mapping process. As you will see on my template, literally every topic and subtopic can be mind mapped. The end result is a comprehensive treatment of the topic, in a shorter amount of time, in a way that is more fun and engaging than typical linear approaches.

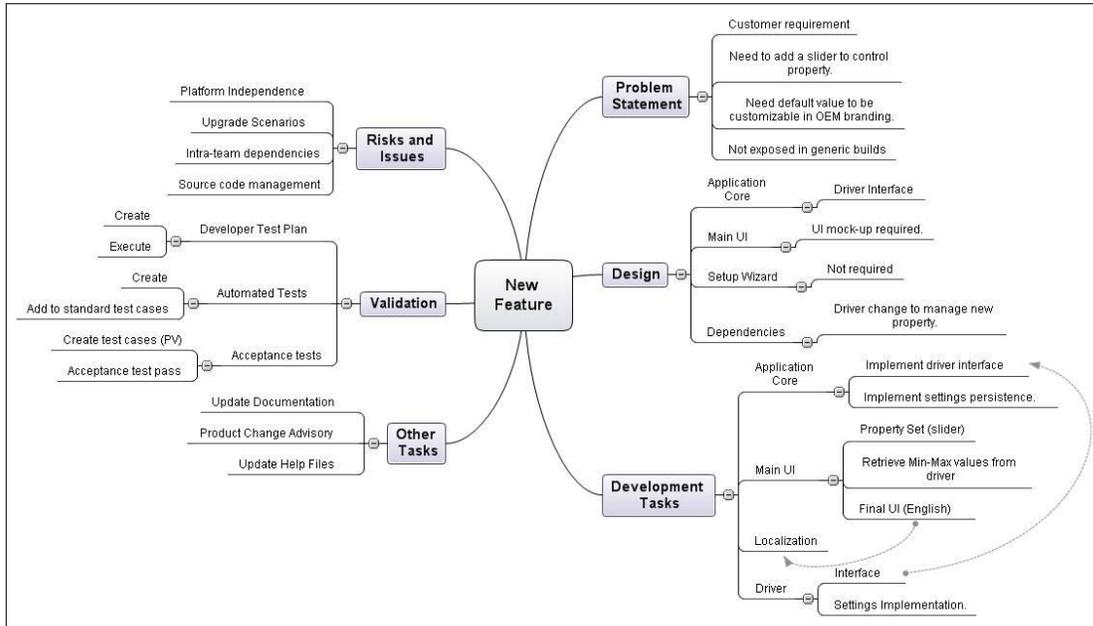
Brainstorming

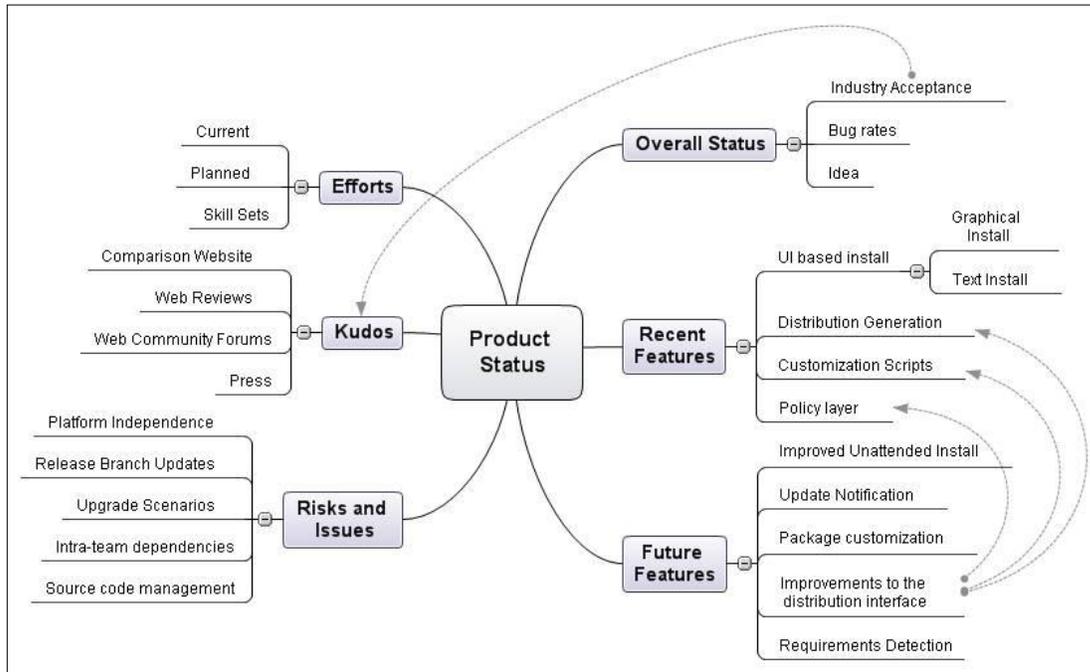
Name: Stephen Orr

Company: Advanced Micro Devices (AMD)

Job Title: Director, PC Software, User Experience Group

Software Used: OpenMind Business (now called MindView)





In a brainstorming meeting, a lot of information needs to be collected, organized and later disseminated. The organization of the information is often not entirely clear at the start of the meeting. OpenMind allows me to capture, organize, re-organize, and publish the information gathered in these kinds of meetings.

At the end of a brainstorming session for a development project, all of the key parts of managing a project (the work items, issues, risks and opportunities) have been captured in the mind map. From there it is a simple task in OpenMind to switch to the Gantt view and add effort estimates and order dependencies. Essentially, everything required to manage the project is in OpenMind.

As a last step, the ability to export the map to Microsoft Project allows the new tasks to be integrated into the bigger picture, where all active and planned projects are being managed and resources leveled.

When the brainstorming session is intended to identify a solution to a problem, the end result is often a set of tasks, risks and issues. By using the Gantt chart view in OpenMind, resources can be added along with effort estimates to create a draft project schedule.

The ability to filter in OpenMind as well as the ability to move between OpenMind Business, Microsoft Project and Microsoft PowerPoint is highly valuable.

Steps:

The starting point is typically a blank mind map with the issue in the center. I may start with a couple of leading concepts that are obvious aspects of the problem being solved, or I might start by asking for a problem definition. Because there are usually a variety of

stakeholders in the room, there are usually a range of viewpoints as to what the key issues are. All of these viewpoints and issues are captured and grouped in a mind map. The ability to visually move elements of the map allows for concepts to be organized and re-organized quickly.

In addition, there will often be people trying to propose solutions to all or parts of the problem before the entire problem definition is captured. In a more traditional, regimented approach to problem solving, these concepts would not be recorded until after the entire problem statement has been agreed upon. As a result, interim solutions are often parked and in some cases forgotten as the discussion moves in other directions. With OpenMind, it is easy to record the suggestion, link it to the relevant portion of the problem discussion and revisit it later. This means that the suggestion is not lost even if the meeting is stopped and reconvened at a later time or with a different audience.

After the meeting, it is quite simple to spend a little time “polishing” the organization and then export the results into Microsoft Word to be sent out as minutes. In cases where the entire team is familiar with the idea of a mind map, we often send out a JPG image of the map to communicate the meeting minutes.

In short, my managers rely on OpenMind mind maps in order to run efficient and productive meetings.

Advantages & Efficiencies

When collecting information in a room full of people who are discussing a problem, they all bring a unique and valuable viewpoint on the problem and as well as a different approach to solving the problem, either because they attack problems in a particular way, or because their viewpoint implies a specific kind of solution.

When I use OpenMind to collect information in this kind of meeting, it allows me to let people work through the issues in their own way and quickly collect similar thoughts into a single place in the map. Essentially, I can let everyone in the meeting work through the issue in their own way, and then synthesize the results. Also, as the mind map grows, especially if it is being displayed on a projector, concepts in the map will often trigger other ideas that may not have been otherwise raised.

By brainstorming in a mind map, valuable options are not missed and by the end of the meeting people have a more closely shared view of the problem and solution because they have seen how their viewpoint fits in with others.

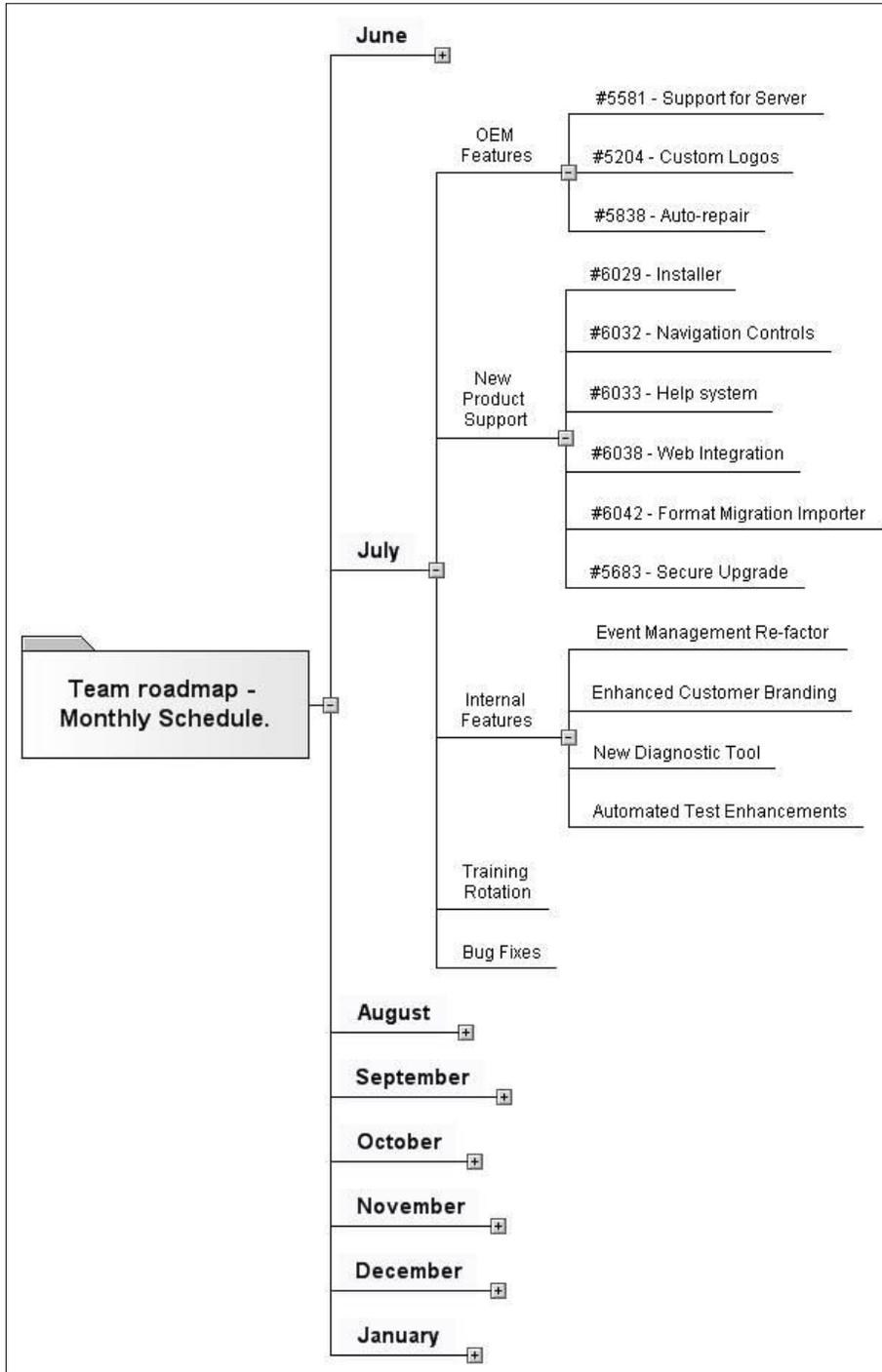
Scheduling & Product Mapping

Name: Stephen Orr

Company: Advanced Micro Devices (AMD)

Job Title: Director, PC Software, User Experience Group

Software Used: OpenMind Business (now called MindView)



When I'm working with schedules, OpenMind's ability to import and export Microsoft Project files is extremely powerful. A project in Microsoft Project is similar to a mind map in that it has a root concept (the subject of the schedule), a bunch of sections and sub-sections each with interdependencies. It is not, however, as flexible as a mind map in how it presents, organizes and allows me to manipulate the information. As a result, it is very useful to me to be able to move between OpenMind and Project.

With OpenMind, creating and interpreting schedules can be done in the mind map view or the Gantt chart view. When a schedule already exists in Project, importing it into OpenMind and switching to the mind map view (or left to right view) makes it possible to get a fast overview of the project and drill down into the details as needed. The ability to filter topics is also valuable, as is the ability to move between OpenMind, Microsoft Project and Microsoft PowerPoint.

Steps:

As mentioned earlier, we often brainstorm problems to solutions through mind mapping. At the end of a brainstorming session, in the case of a development project, we will have captured the work items, issues/risks and opportunities. These components are all key parts of managing a project, and from there it's a simple task in OpenMind to switch to the Gantt view and add effort estimates and order dependencies. Essentially, everything required to manage a project can be maintained within an OpenMind file.

Often, the end result of the brainstorming session is a mind map that includes a plan on how to address the problem and a schedule that covers the efforts involved. When this gets merged into the master team schedule and the resource leveling occurs, we get a better idea of when this particular set of tasks will be delivered relative to other planned work that is being done. This leads to the other use for OpenMind that I want to cover; using mind maps to interpret detailed schedules and converting them into roadmaps.

In situations where an entire team is working from a detailed schedule, which includes all planned activities over a large number of months, I can use OpenMind to quickly dig into what the team is doing.

Maintaining a schedule for the team is a typical task for a resource manager and we use standard tools (Microsoft Project) for schedule maintenance. Captured in those Project files is an abundance of data for work planned to be completed at a particular time (or in a particular software release).

By switching between OpenMind's Gantt chart view (essentially resource leveling) and mind map view, it is possible to see what tasks and times are planned without having to see all of the details. It is much easier to swap tasks around in a mind map than in a Gantt chart. The Gantt chart view is (as it should be) better for looking at an overall timeline and resource loading. When discussing changes to a schedule and possible trade-offs that can be made, I prefer OpenMind's mind map view as a way of managing from a high level without losing access to the deep details.

Another issue OpenMind solves is translating detailed schedules into plan of record roadmaps. By importing the Microsoft Project file into OpenMind 2.0 Business and using

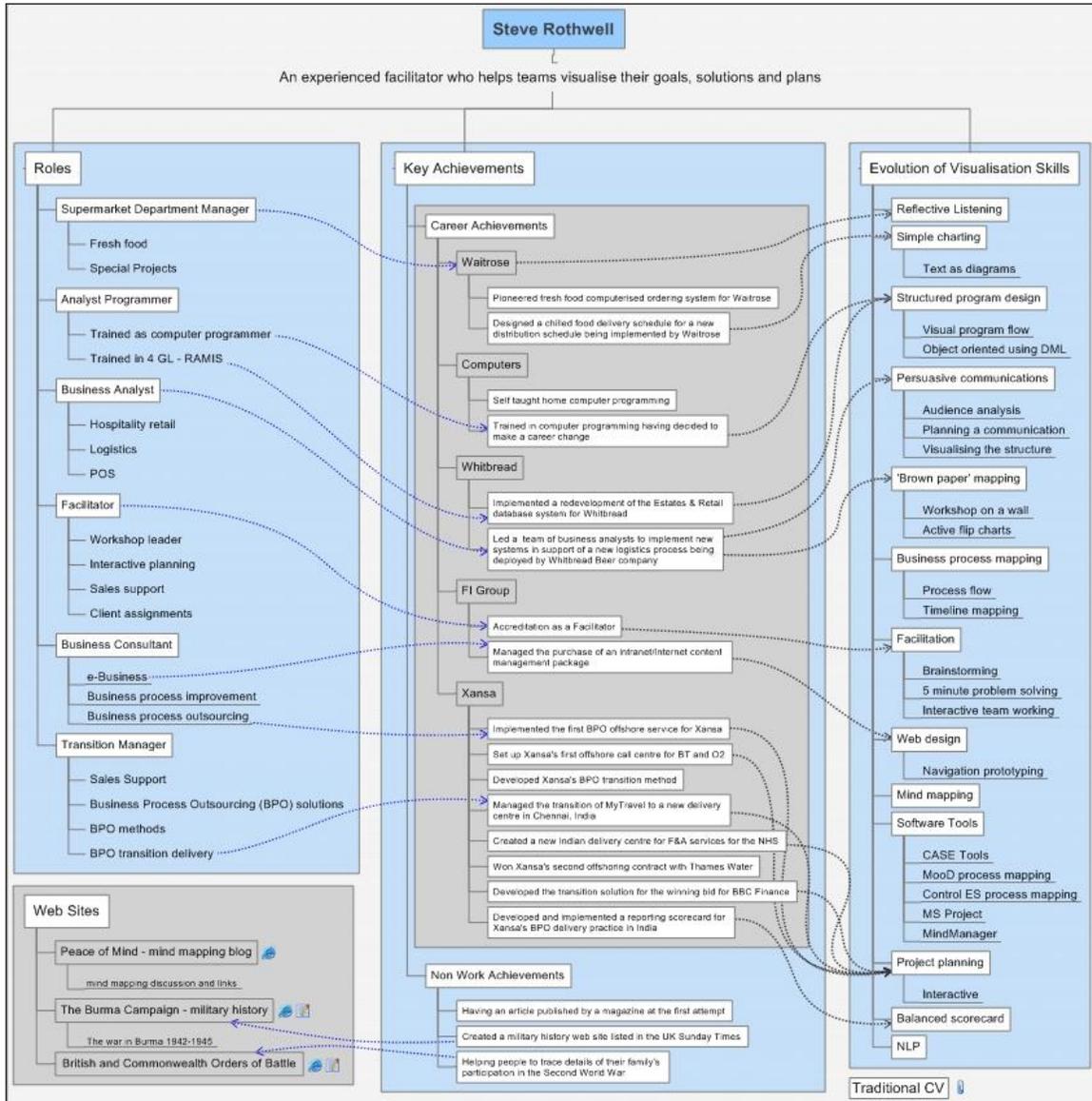
the filters, it is possible to quickly create a view that shows a release schedule which allows me to drill down release by release to see the planned features. By only drilling down into selective branches of the schedule I can quickly reveal (or hide) the information that I need. By deleting sections of the tree that are not relevant to the roadmap, but are relevant to a schedule (for example engineering reserves for bug fixing, vacations, etc.). I can quickly create a reduced map. This reduced map can then be exported to Microsoft PowerPoint as the starting point for a published roadmap presentation.

Advantages & Efficiencies

At a very basic level, the ability to use OpenMind as a Rosetta Stone to move between various applications and levels of detail is a big time saver. The ability to quickly summarize data in a high-level view and make trade-offs and adjustments without losing the details is also very useful. Further, I find the ability to start a project in an OpenMind mind map to capture the project phases, development methodology, work items, and effort estimations, and then convert that directly into a Gantt chart or Project file (schedule) to be incredibly powerful.

Maintaining a Curriculum Vitae (CV)

Name: Steve Rothwell
Job Title: Transition Manager
Software Used: MindManager



This map is a visual version of my CV designed to promote a specific aspect of my career and skills. I want to show how my experience and skills make me an excellent facilitator. I want to demonstrate how my approach helps to visualize information in different ways, leading to new insights and greater clarity of message. It was inspired by an example published by Michael Scherotter on the Mindjet Labs website.

Steps:

In this instance I visualized the overall design and layout on paper first. I wanted the end product to be a mind map. But I recognized that the audience may not be familiar with this approach so I decided upon a more traditional, tabular representation. I then drew a mind map by hand to identify the content.

Next I created each section of the map using the hierarchical organization chart mode of MindManager. The section on roles was a summary from my traditional CV. The section on key achievements was imported from another MindManager map, one I had created as input into a career review. The section on the evolution of visualization skills was new and created directly on the emerging map. Each section was highlighted using the borders function of MindManager.

Having listed the items, I then drew relationships to link achievements to roles and to link skills to where and when they had been acquired or deployed. I wanted to achieve an effect that draws the reader across the page, leaving a strong impression of the range and depth of my experience. I decided not to include any icons or images as these would only act as 'chart junk' and distract the reader from following the flow of my career.

Finally I included the list of websites I maintain, mainly to balance the overall map and leave no empty spaces. I also added a floating topic to hold a link to my traditional CV.

Advantages & Efficiencies

I wanted to demonstrate a particular aspect of my career and to do so using relevant techniques and tools. It forms part of my overall collateral. Feedback received to date confirms that people find it easier to understand my CV and retain the key details. Traditional CVs are in linear form and spread over two or more pages making it difficult to follow themes and ideas during discussion. Using this visual approach, people can see all the relevant career details on a single page and are better able to track the relationships between them.

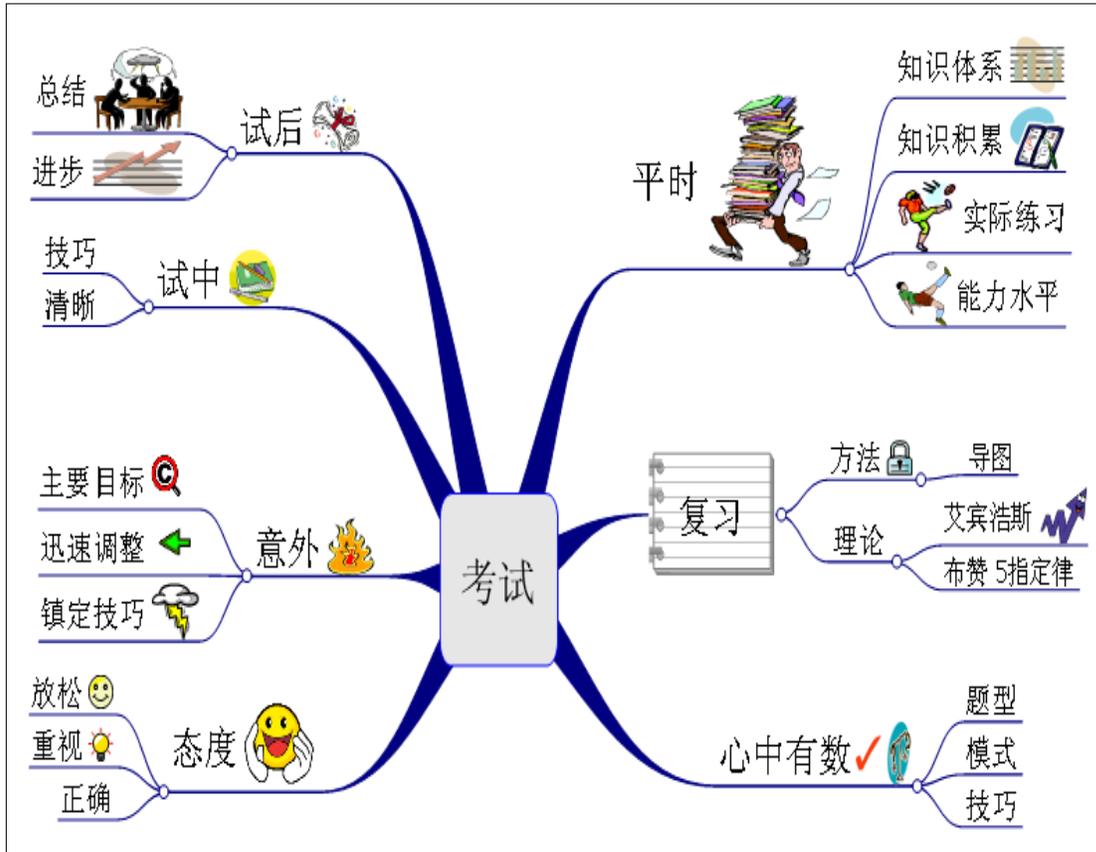
Training Temporary Workers

Name: Grant Yan

Company: Shenyang Botong Electronic Co., China

Job Title: Chief Engineer

Software Used: MindMapper



Two years ago I learned about the mind mapping concept when I watched TV. From then on I bought many mind map books and downloaded three types of mind mapping software. After I practiced the map drawing I had a training course. Then I started my mapping career.

I work for a taxi meter company. We have many customers. When the service is busy we must hire temporary workers. It is very difficult to make temporary workers to instantly satisfy our requirements. When I use a mind map in training the temporary workers, the company saves a lot of time and money. Above is a map that helps students to prepare for a test.

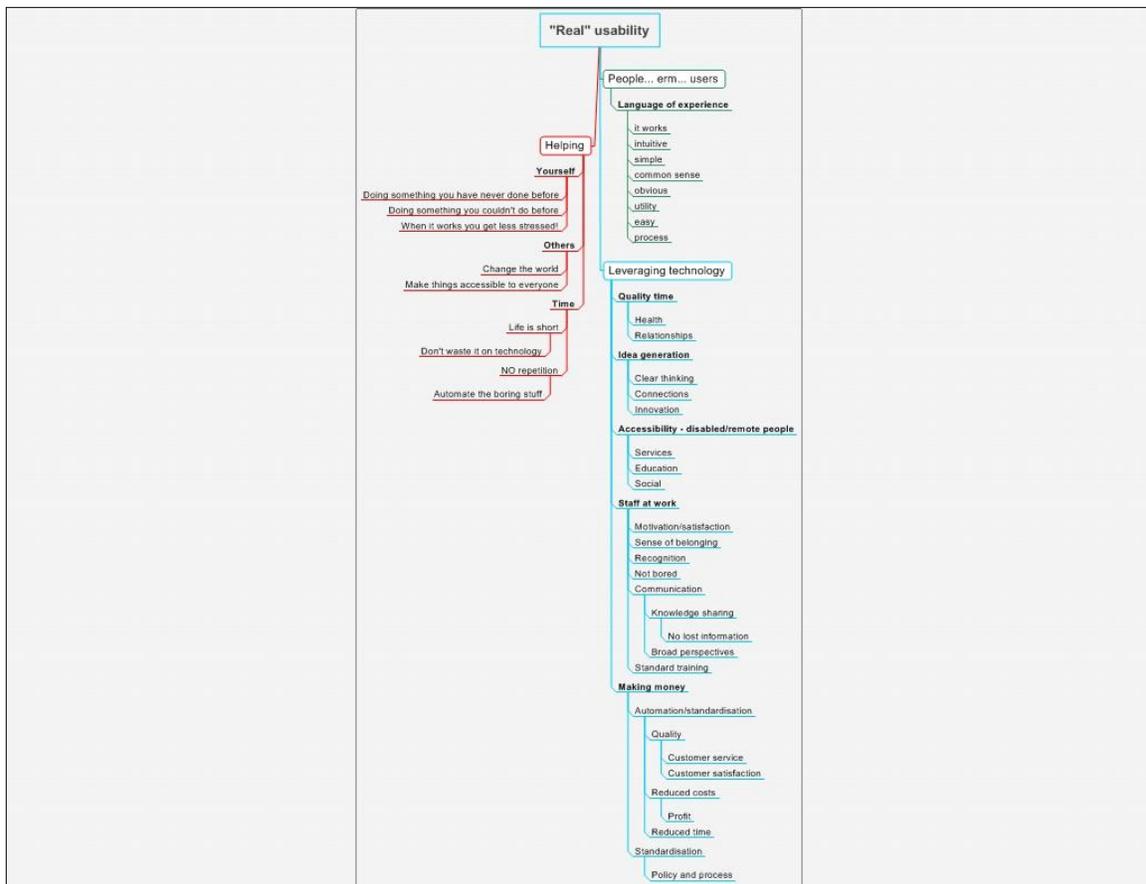
I have also taught my son to remember this map and discipline himself. Now he is a good test taker.

Advantages & Efficiencies

Using the mind map my life and work becomes more clearer. I think my son gains more, too. He is very happy when he comes back from school and he has more time to enjoy his childhood.

Strategic Thinking for a Blog Topic

Name: James Breeze
Company: Objective Digital
Job Title: Chief Experience Officer
Software Used: MindManager



I'm a usability expert and I hate writing prose. I get a real block trying to get started writing my ideas down, unless I use a mind map. I brainstorm the subject on the map to start with, putting anything down. I am pretty good at categorizing things, but I always make mistakes. I then immediately review it and organize things a bit better. Then I leave it for a day and get on with something else. When I come back to the map, more ideas have percolated and I can organize things even better. I try to limit the number of arms on the map at all times.

When I've finished I upload it to Mindmeister.com and ask a friend overseas to provide comment.

Advantages & Efficiencies

- Mind maps are easy and fun to create
- They are a very fast way to create, document and share ideas
- They are an easy way to organize your thoughts, which leads to massive idea generation.
- Clients love mind maps and can easily understand them with a few tips on reading them.

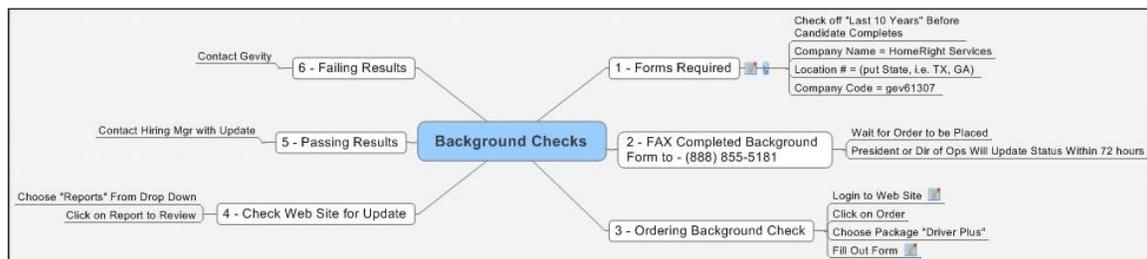
Developing a Process for Reviewing Intranet Web Pages

Name: Kevin Leger

Company: HomeRight Services

Job Title: Director of Operations

Software Used: MindManager



I am using mind mapping to develop a business process for reviewing internal web pages prior to publishing them for our employees to use as a reference source.

Here are the steps I follow:

- Brainstorm and allow ideas to flow.
- Refine the map into steps and do a dry run to verify that the process works.
- Attach notes and files to the branches, which are used to explain parts of the process or where form input is required.
- Have staff member try the process to see if it works correctly.
- Export the mind map as a web page and load it on the web server.

Advantages & Efficiencies

Using the visual map format, I can verify if the process is running efficiently or if it needs modification. We also verify if we can eliminate steps during the dry run.

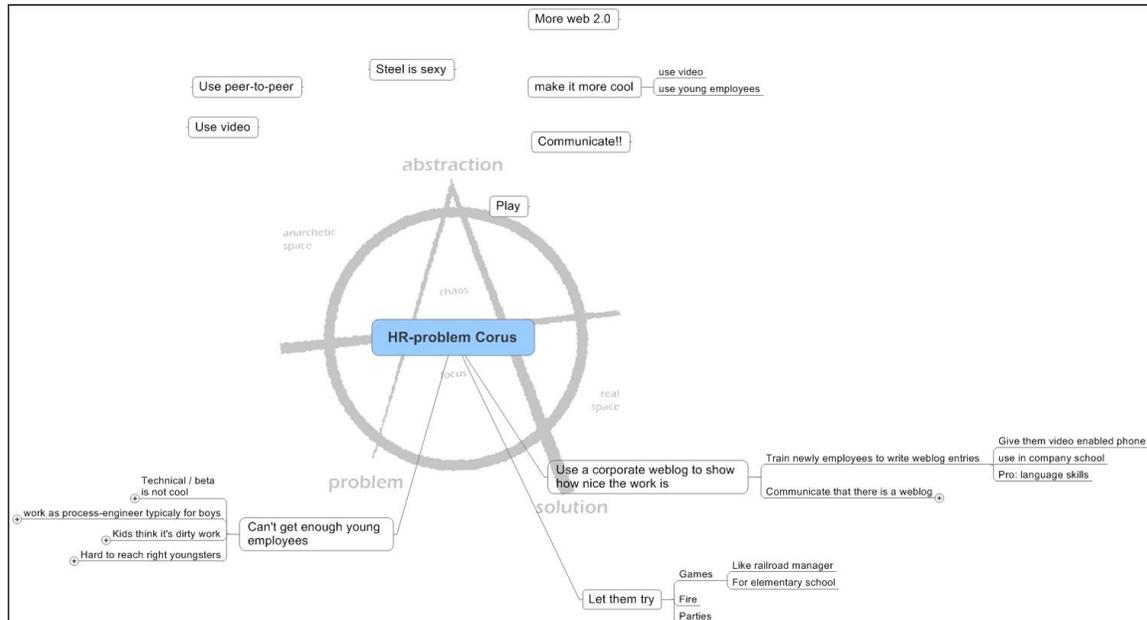
Problem Solving with Clients

Name: Mark Nieuwenhuizen

Company: Andersdenkers (Dutch for Differentthinkers)

Job Title: Owner

Software Used: MindManager



Andersdenkers is a company that helps companies think outside the box. We do brainstorming sessions with management where we don't go straight from problem to solution but first make problems more abstract. In the abstract space all kinds of ideas are right.

We do that in-company and use mind mapping as a way to take notes but we are now testing the idea of using MindManager in combination with WebEx to collaborate with clients online.

We start out with a blank mind map with a big anarchy sign from our Anarchy model where we go from problem to abstraction to solution. Through WebEx we communicate with the client by having all our thoughts as floating topics. Every once in a while we start rearranging the topics so we can have a clearer picture of what is happening. Some thoughts are directly a part of the problem, others are solutions but most stay in the abstract space. This way of mind mapping keeps us close to the Anarchy-model and keeps abstract thoughts in a very visual form.

Advantages & Efficiencies

Visual maps are an efficient way to communicate with clients on more abstract thoughts. It also gives them a better idea why we are thinking in the direction of a certain solution.

By doing that in collaboration online, we save a significant amount of time and can use freelancers with certain know-how from all over the world.

The mind map above is a cleaned-up version of a brainstorming session with human resources managers from a large Dutch steel mill. They are in great need for young people to join the internal company school to get trained as engineers.

At the end of the day, it was decided to set up a corporate weblog for these youngsters where young employees are trained (as part of their in-company training) to fill the weblog on a regular basis with writings and videos of what they do all day. This will give prospects an inside view of what a job at the company is really about.

Total Life To-Do List

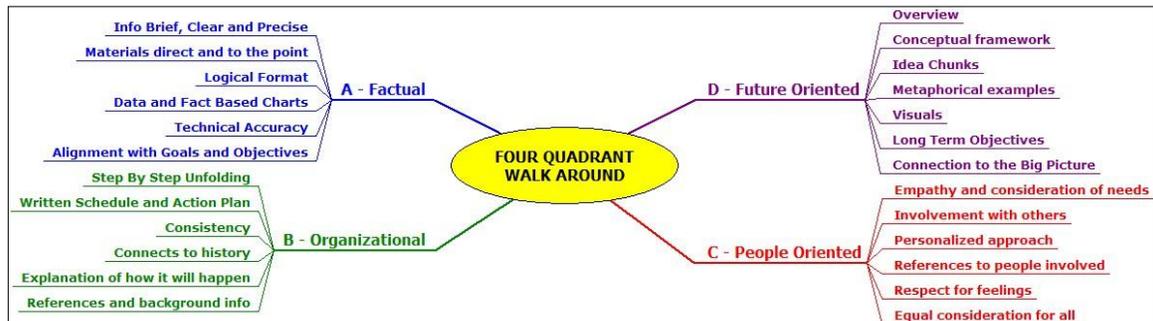
Name: Norah Bolton
Company: Dynamic Thinking
Job Title: President
Software Used: VisiMap



This map was inspired by the book, *Getting Things Done*, which I first read about in *Fast Company* and later acquired. David Allen points out that there is more than one level of a task list and we should keep all of them in progress at the same time. One of the advantages of having all the levels on the same page is to see my life more holistically rather than focusing too much on just one work aspect or project.

Herrmann Brain Dominance Instrument (HBDI) Four-Quadrant Walk Around

Name: Norah Bolton
Company: Dynamic Thinking
Job Title: President
Software Used: VisiMap



HBDI Stands for Herrmann Brain Dominance Instrument. Ned Herrmann was the manager of Management Education at General Electric and noted that many managers can be smart and dumb at the same time. We can get the numbers right and completely ignore the human aspect – or vice versa. His useful assessment of the way people prefer to think measures the degree that individuals and teams use all of their thinking capabilities. Since most of us prefer some styles more than others, he suggests that we walk our plans around the quadrants to see if we are missing any aspect. It's a simple way to keep things in balance, and it can be applied to projects, team membership, print reports and any number of other areas in the workplace.

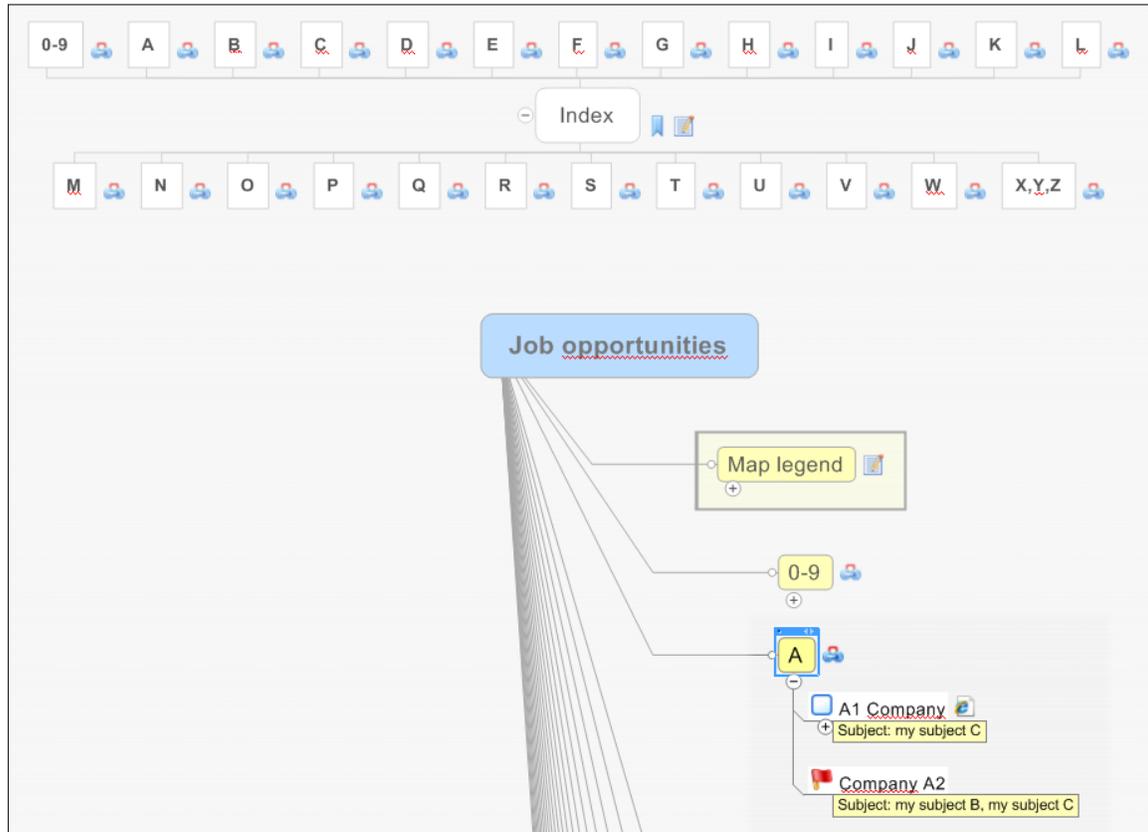
Tracking Job Opportunities

Name: Russell Green

Company: Green Communications

Job Title: Freelance Consultant

Software Used: MindManager



[Click here to download the entire map](#) in MindManager MMAP format (50 KB)

I use my map template for keeping an overview over my past, current and future job opportunities. After starting the job hunting campaign, loads of information snippets and activities pile up: job descriptions, company background and contact details, appointments, personal notes, etc.

I tried out different desktop office applications: Excel (too structured; not good for linkages and assigning notes) and Outlook (good for contact details, not feasible though for links and document attachments).

Only after using a mind map was I able to gain a complete view of all activities and information and query my opportunity pipeline with specific questions related to my campaign.

Advantages & Efficiencies

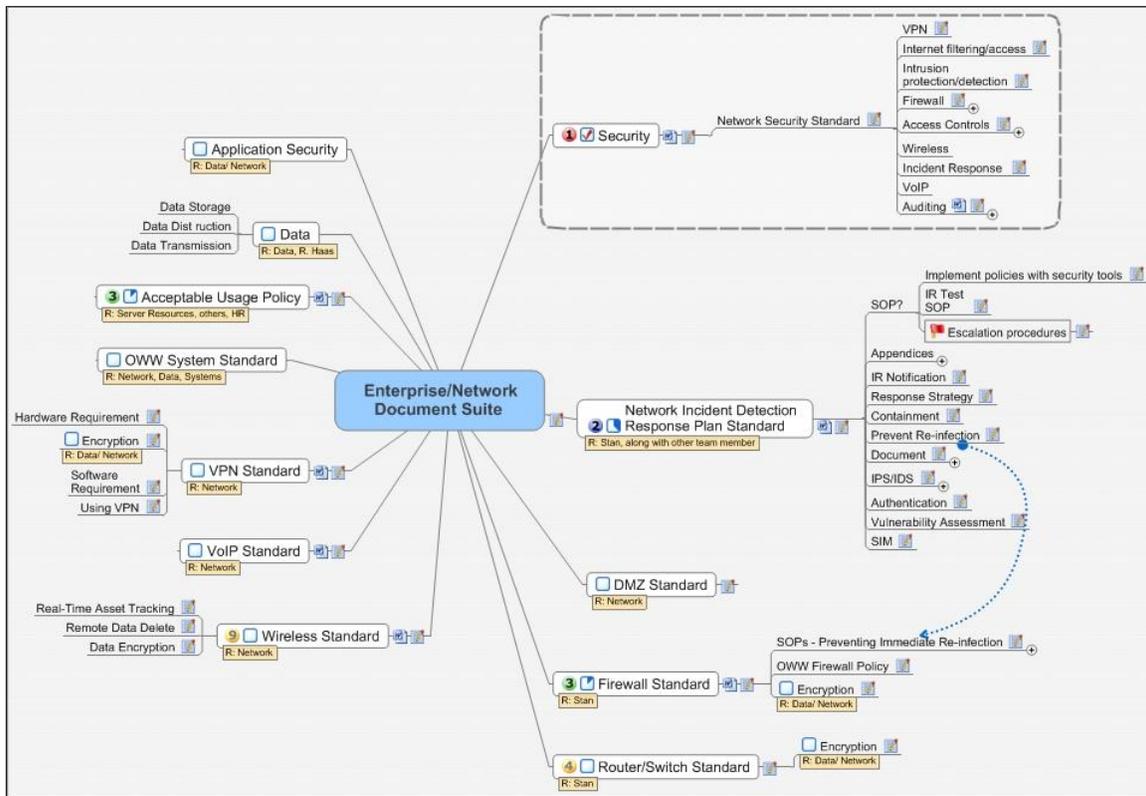
It started off as a small "thought" map and rapidly grew more and more structured. Now it is by far my largest and most significant map, responsible for holding job/project opportunity related information.

Consulting with Clients

Name: Karen Hansen

Job Title: Consultant

Software Used: MindManager



I am a business analyst/technical writer. I have used MindManager for several years and find I cannot do my job without it. Actually the strength and versatility of the application has changed my job description and skill level, and has made me a more marketable consultant.

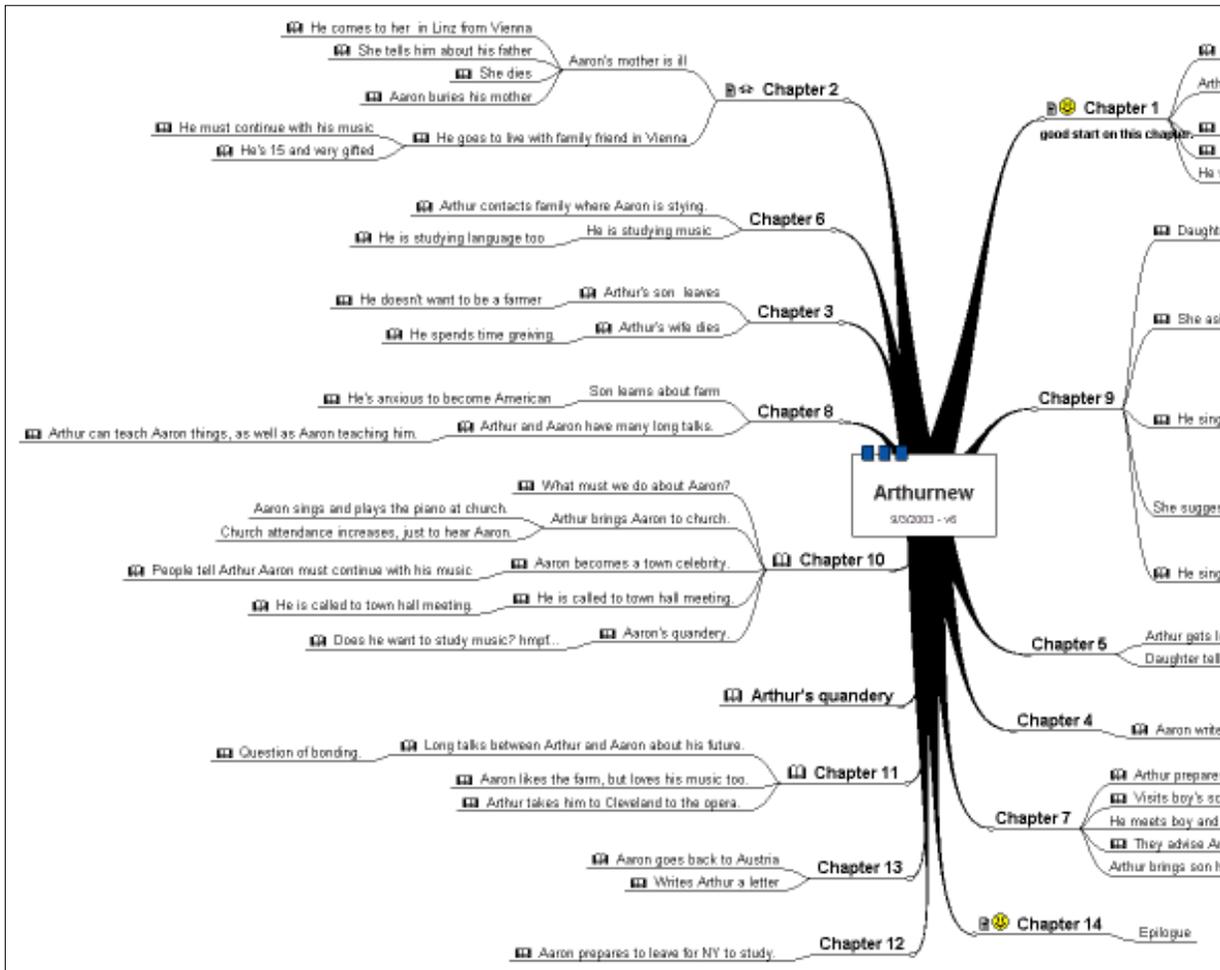
I am an independent consultant and with corporations scurrying to meet government compliance audits, what I do and how I do it have become an important requirement. I help make companies audit ready by scoping out their processes, determining where gaps exist, identifying those gaps and writing the procedures for them.

I begin by finding my subject matter experts and inviting them to a workshop with me. I manage the meeting with MindManager projected on the screen and we work together to

brainstorm their processes. They find this to be a very effective tool to help guide us through the process. The ability to assign action items to specific individuals or project teams while we are doing the scoping is another advantage, and helps to keep the momentum going. Before they return to their office, I have ported the map into a Word document, with a table of contents, and all the notes captured, and I have sent it to them as a review of the meeting. Above is a map the shows how we scoped out the network documentation suite in a company that is a current client.

Outlining a Novel

Name: Karen Hansen
Job Title: Writer
Software Used: MindManager



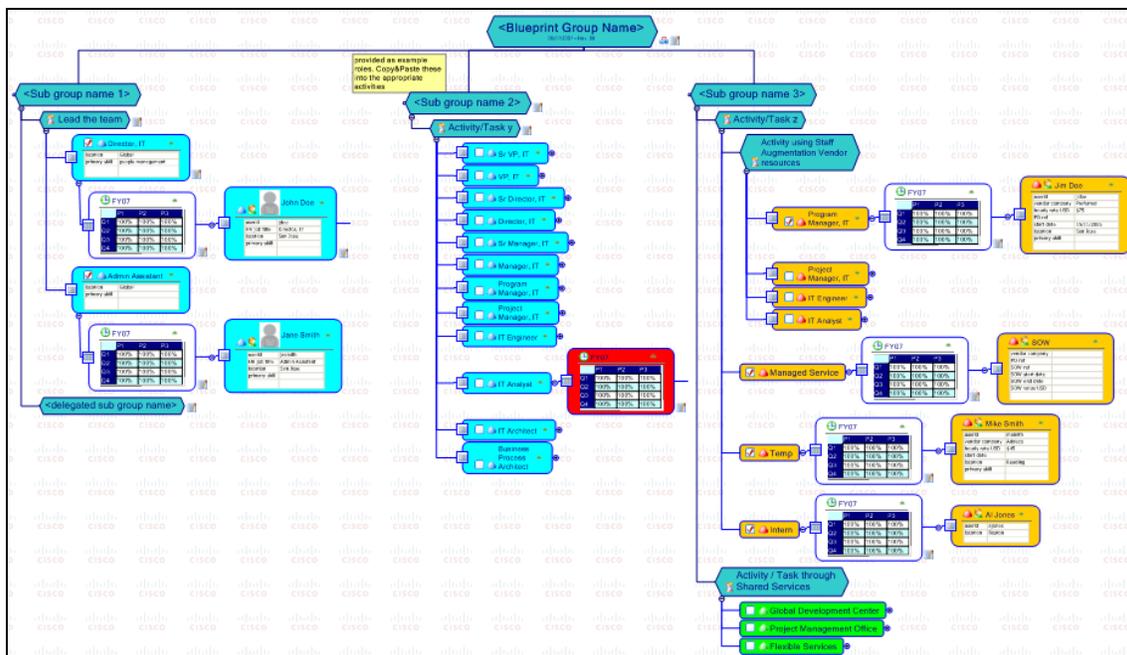
As a writer of both technical and non-technical documentation, I use my mind mapping software for sorting categories, chapters, subjects, and to-do lists. The map above shows how I began writing the outline for a novel. I brainstorm the story myself and keep adding more meat to it, as well as link Word documents to it; they become the

[Click here to download the zip file](#) (1.3 MB)

If you have any questions about these materials, please feel free to contact me via e-mail at wallace@visualmapper.org.

Building an Organizational Blueprint

Name: Peter Verhecken
Company: Cisco Systems
Job Title: Manager IT
Software Used: MindManager



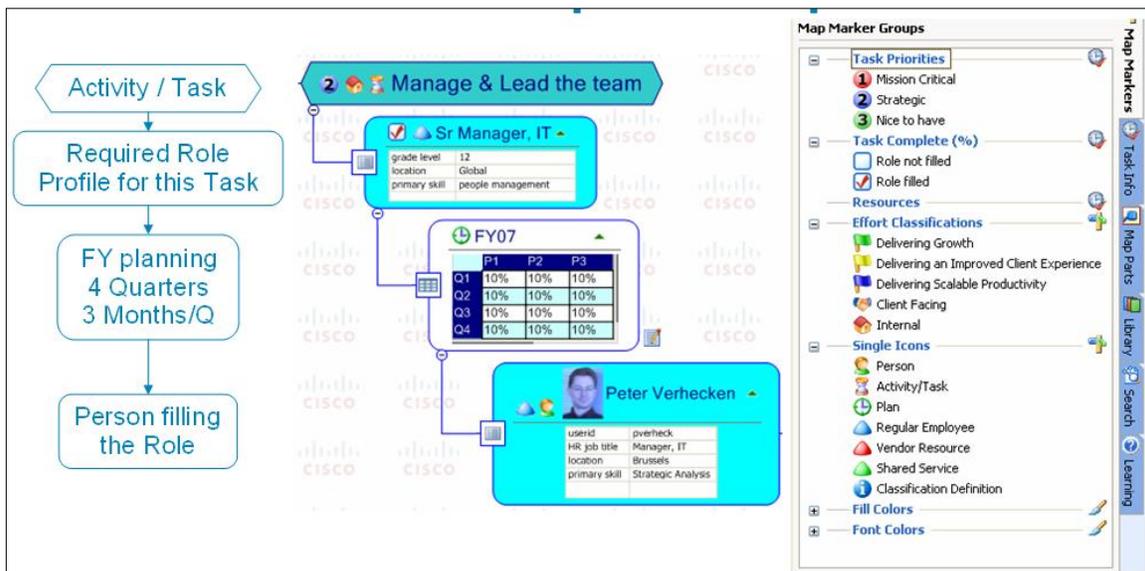
[Please click here](#) to download this template in the MindManager .mmap format

Implementation & Support Services, a department within Cisco Systems, has designed and implemented an "Organizational Blueprinting" process, based on a structure of hyperlinked MindManager maps that represent a complete organization with its resource allocations. Organizational Blueprints help the organization to develop the right organizational structure, because they trigger the right questions in managers' minds. They also provide a highly visual way for managers to understand who is doing what, and how they align to the bigger picture. In a sense, an organizational blueprint represents a virtual "walk through" of the organization, greatly enhancing the visibility and understanding of each of its components. In addition, they capture detailed resource allocation information in a format that is not only consistent but also re-usable.

The Blueprint helps to answer questions such as:

- What capabilities do we need to deliver as an organization?
- What type of people (role and level) do we need for what amount of time?
- Who do we actually have allocated to those roles?
- What percentage of our regular workforce is working on our top programs and initiatives?
- What are our resource and skill gaps?
- Where do we have vendors in core roles?

The Blueprint is much more than a traditional organization chart. It first of all describes what role profiles we need in order to deliver our business objectives, and then says who fills what role. Therefore, it can highlight skills and resource gaps and drive specific hiring or career development planning. In contrast, organizational charts typically only indicate who is doing what, but do not talk about skills match.



The Blueprint is completed by each manager, who uploads their part of it to an internal document management system. This ensures proper versioning and access control. A central operations person then uploads these blueprints to a central database for reporting. A MindManager macro creates an XML-formatted file with all the blueprint data in it. The XML format can be imported directly into an MS Access database or other relational database.

The Blueprint makes extensive use of MindManager's icons and filtering capabilities. Two types of map markers are used: specific icons, which differentiate between the main types of objects in the map (tasks, roles, plans and people) and custom icons, which are added to tasks and are used to add classification categories, mainly for MBO (management by objectives) alignment. These icons are translated in their corresponding classification description at XML conversion time. In the database, each task will include the specific MBO classifications for reporting purposes.

Advantages & Efficiencies

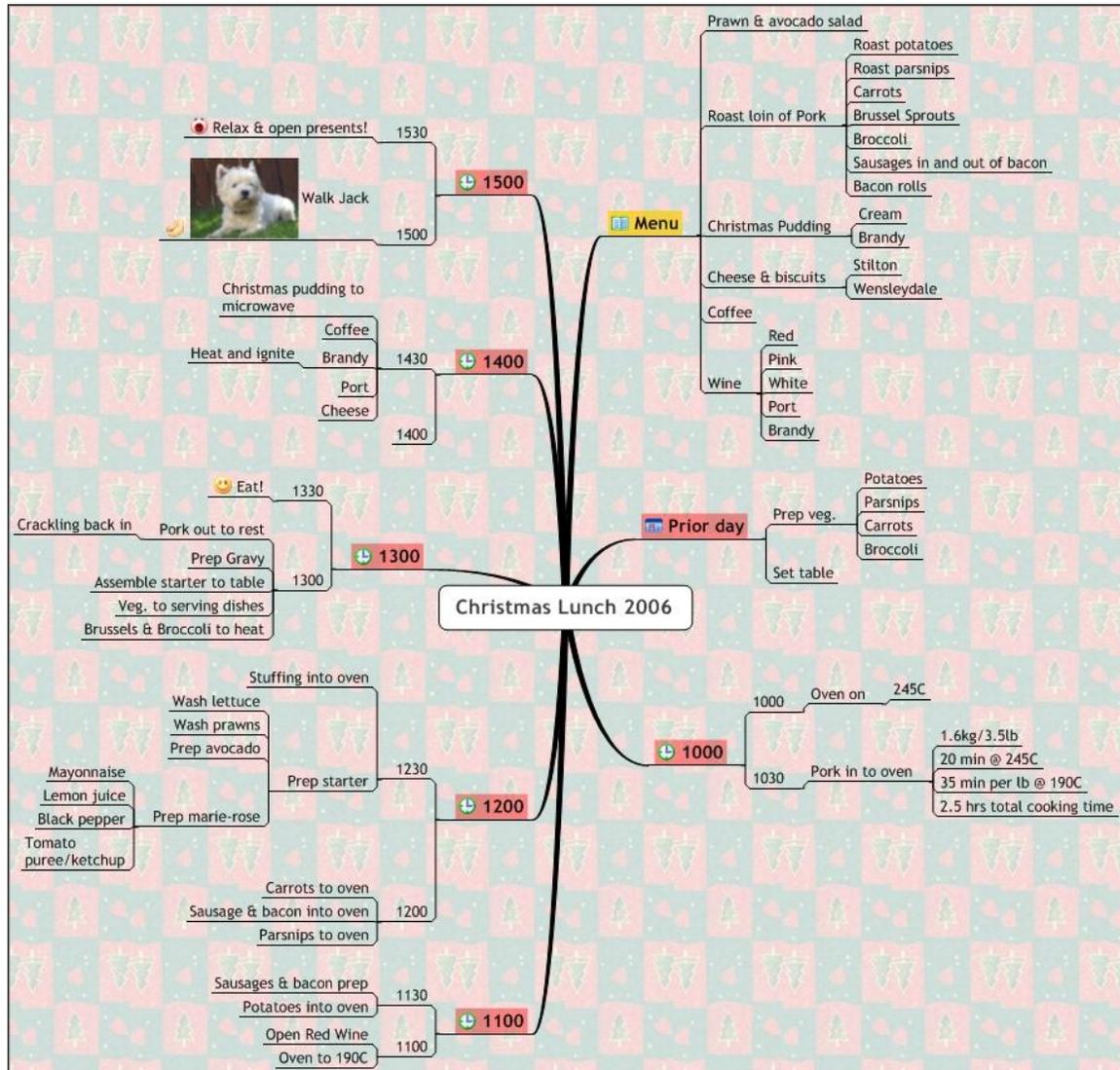
This is a fairly new process. It has been rolled-out in a part of the Cisco IT organization and covers approximately 120 regular IT employees. The total blueprint consists of about 10 sub-blueprints maintained by different managers. The main advantages are:

- Managers now have a common process and guidance on designing organizations
- Consistency in identifying skills and resource gaps, so hiring and development plans can be aligned towards closing and avoiding these gaps.
- This process is finally re-organization proof. Each time the org structure changes, it is a simple matter of dragging and dropping elements in the MindManager blueprints. After uploading the adjusted structures, all metrics and reports are adjusted to the new organizational structure.

For more information, please contact Peter Verhecken at pverheck@cisco.com or pverheck@hotmail.com.

Planning a Christmas Lunch

Name: Jeremy Griffin
Company: tiltgameover
Job Title: Proprietor
Software Used: MindManager



I use mapping all the time for work but thought that this example would be a bit different for your readers. This was how I planned to prepare and serve Christmas lunch 2006.

I find the real secret for all mapping hangs on the Basic Ordering Ideas (BOIs), a la Tony Buzan. These are the major topics which drive the structure and ensure completeness. So I:

- Tend to do some brainstorming to ensure that the BOI structure I come up with makes the best use of radiant presentation.

- Ensure that all aspects of the brainstorm are covered (completeness)
- Map out my first level branches (BOIs)
- Work each BOI in turn with a focus on speed and the 80/20 rule.
- Re-visit each BOI in turn to focus on the detail and to sense check the flow.
- Insert any relationships.
- Insert icons/graphics/images to assist with memory jogging and to enhance meaning. (depending upon the audience, or if to be used for presentations, I'll insert better quality images)

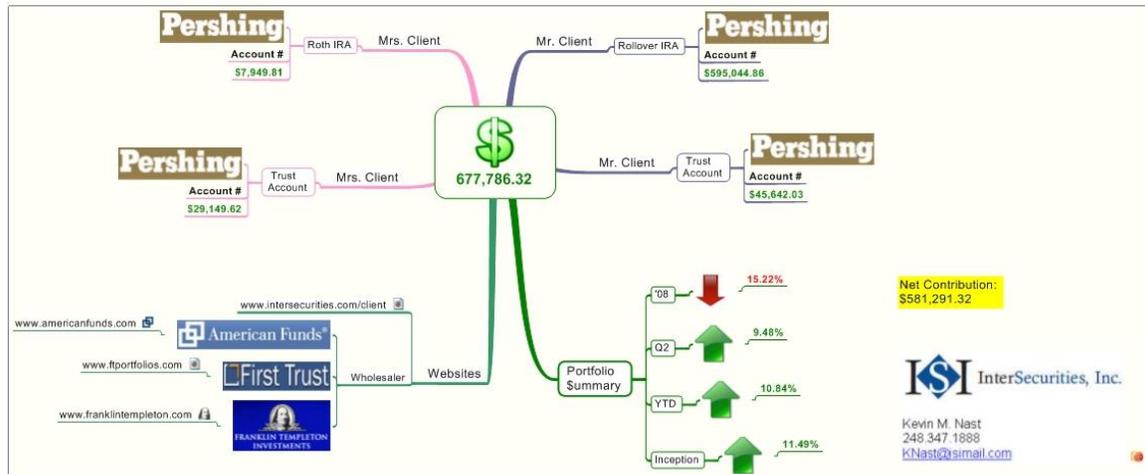
Advantages & Efficiencies

Using this particular map, the meal was produced and served on time, of was great quality (if I say so myself) and with very little stress. Mapping keeps the whole picture in front of you all of the time and aids in multi-tasking. Even my wife – who is a linear thinker – could appreciate the benefit!

Creating Money Maps

New in this edition

Name: Jamie Nast
Company: NastGroup, Inc.
Job Title: Co-Founder
Software Used: MindManager



My husband, Kevin Nast, is a graduate from Walsh College (Troy, MI) and has been in the financial industry since 1994. For years my workshop participants have asked if my husband uses idea mapping. The answer had always been “occasionally”. As a financial professional Kevin is a Series 7 Licensed Registered Representative with Transamerica Financial Advisors (parent company is Aegon).

Earlier this year Kevin was preparing for a portfolio review meeting with one of his clients. He wanted to be able to share a summary of all their accounts on a single sheet of paper. That's when it hit him that he could use an idea map. He cleverly calls them *Money Maps*. I loaded MindManager on his laptop and he started using it immediately. This is an example of what he provides his clients during each portfolio review meeting. Each *Money Map* is accompanied by a compliance approved statement that he accesses through Albridge Solutions.

The response from his clients has been tremendous and most of them have never been exposed to idea mapping. They comment that it is a very helpful and unique way of easily being able to see where they are at in each of their accounts. Now when people ask me if my husband uses idea mapping, I say "all the time".

I'm going to take this opportunity to brag about my husband. I admire how he puts the clients' interests above his own and his passion to help people. His broad range of licensing allows him to bring a wide array of products to help his clients reach their financial goals and dreams. If you would like a second opinion and someone to guide you through these tough economic times, I encourage you to drop him an email at [knast\(at\)tfamail\(dot\)com](mailto:knast(at)tfamail(dot)com) or call him at 248-347-1888.

For more information, please contact Jamie Nast at info@ideamappingsuccess.com.

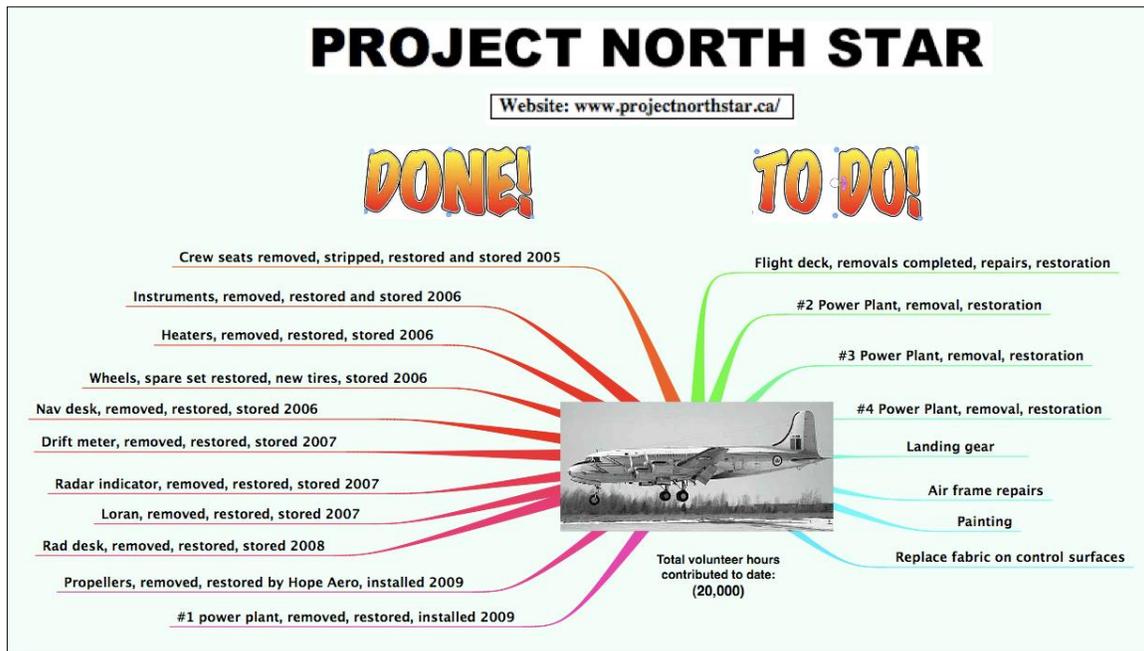
Tracking Progress On an Aviation Restoration Project

New in this edition

Name: Michael Lomas

Job Title: Retired Writer/Communications Consultant

Software Used: NovaMind Express



I am a retired marketing copywriter and magazine article writer.

I offer free writing/consulting services to non-profit organizations through the Ontario Provincial public television organization, TV Ontario (TVO). Through them I was approached by the Project North Star Association.

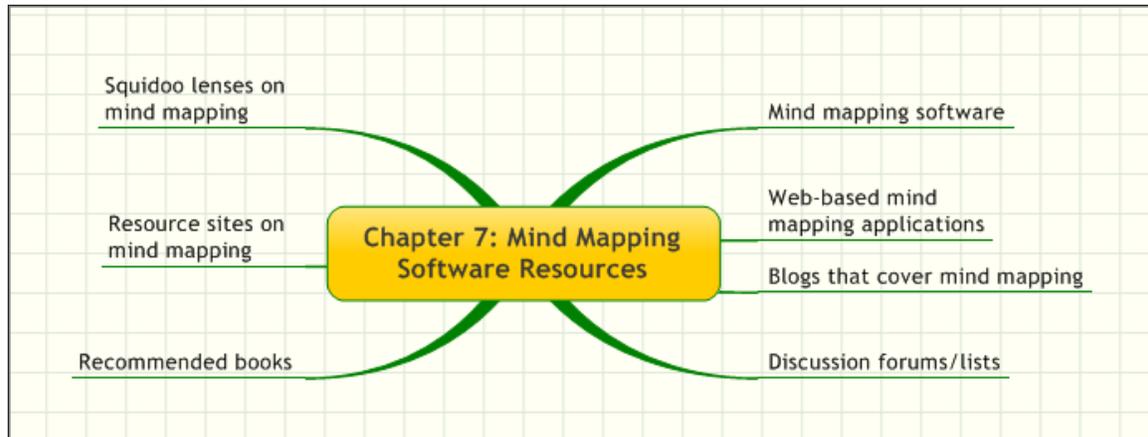
This is a volunteer group of aircraft enthusiasts that is helping the Canadian Aviation Museum in Ottawa, Ontario to restore the only existing specimen of its kind: the North Star transport aircraft which dates back to the early fifties. This military and commercial aircraft played an important role in development of intercontinental flight and in the Korean War.

I was given a text list of the restoration work that had been completed to date and what work was still to be done on the aircraft.

To make this list more attractive for use in presentations and meetings, I transformed it using NovaMind into a colorful mind map, which depicted the aircraft in the center.

I then delivered it as a PDF.

Feedback to date is that it is much appreciated as a way of conveying progress to date.



Here is a collection of mind-mapping software resources that will help you to learn more about this productivity-enhancing technology:

Mind Mapping Software

Here, in alphabetical order, is a listing of all of the current developers of mind mapping software for PCs and PDAs, plus a brief description of each one. If I'm missing any, please send me an e-mail message at chuck@innovationtools.com.

[Aviz Thought Mapper](#) - A newcomer to the world of mind-mapping software, Aviz is based in India. The company appears to have strengths in the world of process mapping, which it has extended into the mind mapping arena. It doesn't look like this program has been updated in some time.

[BrainMine](#) - This is a solid, no-frills mind mapping program that would be a great choice for beginners. It doesn't look like this program has been updated in some time.

[ClarIdeas](#) – A new “idea mapping” program that offers some basic features and functionality. Formerly called MindFull.

[Concept Draw Mindmap Professional](#) - This program has been around for a number of years, and it contains an impressive set of tools and functions. It's also fairly easy to use.

[DropMind](#) – A fairly new mind mapping program that is offered in desktop and web application versions, with some nice integration between them.

[Eminec MYmap](#) - This mind mapping program comes from a German developer, and is available in basic, standard and premium versions. It's a good basic mind mapping program.

[FreeMind](#) - FreeMind is an open-source mind mapping program written in Java. The website for FreeMind is remarkable, because it uses a wiki (a collaborative web

publishing tool) to provide reams of information on the program, instructions, applications and much more. Unfortunately, it suffers from some ongoing usability issues.

[FreePlane](#) – A new “fork” off of the FreeMind open source mind mapping program that offers improvements in the user interface, usability and other welcome enhancements.

[i2Brain](#) - This visual mapping tool adds some unique capabilities to the radial mapping model by enabling you to view your map's contents in new ways – such as a tabular structure. It doesn't look like this program has been updated in some time.

[iMindMap](#) - A mind mapping program for Windows, released by Tony Buzan's organization.

[Inspiration Software](#) - This is the program that started it all, and is still one of the best, in my opinion.

[Mind Pad](#) - A basic mind mapping application that may be well suited for new users. But it doesn't look like this program has been updated in some time.

[MindApp](#) - A mind mapping program for Windows users.

[MindCad Incubator](#) - A mind-mapping application developed specifically for the Mac OS X platform.

[MindChart](#) - Another recent entrant to the mind-mapping arena, MindChart appears to be targeted to business users.

[MindGenius](#) - The world's second leading program for creating business mind maps and radiant visual diagrams.

[MindManager](#) - The world's leading program for creating business mind maps and radiant visual diagrams.

[MindMapper](#) - Another business-oriented mind-mapping tool.

[MindNode](#) – A mind mapping program for the Mac OS X platform.

[MindView](#) (formerly OpenMind) - This mind-mapping program offers a powerful toolset for project managers and other business users.

[MindVisualizer](#) - A mind mapping program for Windows developed in China.

[MyThoughts](#) – A new mind mapping program for Mac OS X. It emphasizes ease of use.

[NovaMind](#) - A very polished mind-mapping tool for the Mac OS X and Windows operating systems that has many advanced capabilities.

[Personal Brain](#) - A useful tool for creating visually-oriented, linked collections of knowledge and information.

[VisiMap](#) - A mind mapping program designed for businesses.

[Visual Mind](#) - An impressive mind mapping program that is designed for business and educational use. [Click here to read my review of it.](#)

[XMind](#) - A new mind mapping program for Windows, developed in China. Since the last edition of this e-book, XMind has developed a free, open source version of its software that is superior in many ways to FreeMind.

Web-Based Mind Mapping Applications

Since the first edition of this e-book was published in 2005, this category of mind mapping tools has exploded. Here's a list of these browser-based tools as of March 2010:

[Bubbl.us](#)

[Comapping](#)

[DropMind](#)

[MAPMYself](#) (formerly Mapul)

[Mindomo](#)

[Mindmeister](#)

[Mind42](#)

[MindManager Catalyst](#)

[SpicyNodes](#)

[Spinscape](#)

[ThoughtMuse](#)

[Webspiration](#)

[Wisdomap](#)

[WiseMapping](#)

Blogs That Cover Mind Mapping

[The Mindjet Blog](#) - A team blog from the producers of MindManager. This blog isn't a relentless commercial for the program. In fact, it's often quite thought-provoking!

[Beyond Mind Mapping](#) - The blog of Nick Duffill from Gyronix. This guy is one of the deepest thinkers on mind mapping anywhere on the planet. His insights are an essential part of this e-book.

[The Mindmap Blog](#) – The excellent blog of Chance Brown.

[Hypershifters](#) – A relatively new group blog developed by Wallace Tait, Noël van Herrewegh and Alexis van Dam that is an excellent resource for visual mappers.

[The Visual Mapper](#) – The blog of Wallace Tait, one of the deep thinkers of the world of business mind mapping.

[The Idea Mapping Blog](#) - The blog of Jamie Nast, the author of the excellent book, *Idea Mapping*.

[Applications of MindManager](#) – The blog of MindManager trainer and expert Andrew Wilcox.

[Visual-Mapping.com](#) - Philippe Boukobza covers a variety of topics related to mind mapping, design and social media on this well-written blog.

[The Mind Mapping Blog](#) – An exhaustive reference to all of the visual mapping and diagramming programs that anyone, anywhere is developing. Vic Gee does a great job cataloging and organizing all of this data.

[Mindmapping Everywhere](#) – The blog of Alberto Martinez.

[Published & Profitable](#) – Roger C. Parker offers a wealth of resources here for writers who want advice on how to publish a book. He is also an accomplished user of MindManager. This is the mind mapping channel within his extensive and well-written blog.

[The Underlying Blog](#) - This is the blog of Kyle McFarlin, who is a “visual strategist” – a consultant who helps clients get organized and work effectively with visual maps.

There are many other blogs that touch on mind mapping software from time to time, but these are the main ones that I read on a regular basis.

Resource Sites on Mind Mapping

[Mind Mapping Alltop page](#) – A summary of RSS feeds from the world’s leading mind mapping blogs. An awesome resource!

[Mind Mapping Strategies](#) - Valuable background information and resources on using mind mapping for business.

[MindMapTutor.com](#) – A resource site devoted to teaching people how to mind map.

[Mind Mapping in 8 Easy Steps](#) - A very good “how-to” article.

[Mind Map Search](#) – A specialized search engine that only covers web pages that are focused on mind mapping.

[The Mind Mapping Resource Center](#) - A great collection of software reviews, articles, links and more.

[Tony Buzan](#) - The official website of the brilliant man who started the whole mind mapping revolution.

Squidoo “Lenses” on Mind Mapping

Squidoo enables ordinary people to create customized collections of information, resources, links and more – guides, if you will, to the best stuff on just about any topic you can think of. Naturally, mind mapping software is well represented:

[Mind Mapping Software Resources](#) - This is my lens!

[Idea Mapping Lens](#) - This lens was created by Jamie Nast, author of the book, *Idea Mapping*.

[Creating your first mind map](#) – A set of simple instructions for creating your first hand-drawn mind map.

[Guerilla Marketing with Mind Maps](#) - This is Roger C. Parker’s lens. Roger is the author of numerous marketing and desktop publishing resources, and he is an avid user of mind mapping software!

[The mind map as a creative thinking mechanism](#) – A well-written Squidoo page devoted to helping you to be more creative with visual mapping.

[Use Inspiration Software to Visually: Think, Plan, Organize, Design, & Learn](#) - This lens was created by Jerry Gasche, founder of mindServegroup, a services firm providing consulting and specialized business services related to the use of Inspiration Software.

Discussion Forums/Lists

[Yahoo Mind Manager listserv](#) - This is a private group of MindManager users, not affiliated with Mindjet. It's very active!

[MindManager Enthusiasts Network](#) – This Ning networking site is fairly active. If you're a MindManager user, it would be worthwhile for you to become a member of it.

[GTD MindManager](#) - A Yahoo discussion group dedicated to discussion of utilizing Gyrnix's ResultManager application for MindManager, following the principles of David Allen's Getting Things Done (GTD) methodology.

[Concept Mapping](#) - A Yahoo discussion group that focuses on a variety of software used for visually arranging concepts and ideas.

Recommended Books

[Mindmapping: Your Personal Guide to Exploring Creativity and Problem Solving](#) by Joyce Wycoff

[Mapping Inner Space: Learning and Teaching Visual Mapping](#) by Nancy Margulies

[Idea Mapping](#) by Jamie Nast

[Mind Maps for Business](#) by Tony Buzan (new)

[Mind Maps at Work](#) by Tony Buzan

[How to Mind Map](#) by Tony Buzan

[The Teacher's Guide to Mind Mapping](#) by Gideon King (developer of NovaMind)

Become a master mind mapper: Invest in the Mind Mapping Insider membership program

Since you have invested in this e-book, it's clear to me that you desire to have a deeper, more strategic knowledge of how to apply mind mapping in your business. To continue to help you along this path, I have created a new Mind Mapping Insider membership level within my Mind Mapping Software Blog.

It adds a new layer of tools, tips, best practices and resources on top of what I already offer there – so if you want to become a more effective project manager, creative problem solver, decision maker and manager using mind mapping software, now you can!

Here are some of the valuable resources included in the Mind Mapping Insider membership:

- Audio interviews with mind mapping experts and notable people who are using mind mapping software to make a difference.
- Special reports focused on the core needs of business people.
- My popular mind mapping software comparison sheet, which outlines the features and functionality of 22 mind mapping software programs – side by side! This table, too, will soon be updated to include all of the latest releases. This comparison sheet is not publicly available – only to purchasers of my Power Tips e-book and to Mind Mapping Insider members!
- 1-2 new mind map analyses per month. In these reports, I “deconstruct” a mind map based on best practices. I'll explain what I think works well, and what could be improved. These reports will help you to better understand the characteristics of world-class visual maps. If you want to see an example, please [click here](#).
- Video reports and reviews of mind mapping software.
- Free access to my new e-book, [Creativity Hacks: Shortcuts to Help You to Crush Your Challenges & Live a Kick-Ass Life](#). I have gathered the most effective and enduring ideas, tips and strategies about creative problem solving and ideation that I have employed and learned about, and have assembled them into a convenient, time-saving collection – to empower you to develop your creative problem solving skills and power through your challenges. This also gives you access to a series of video reviews of my favorite brainstorming and problem-solving tools. Some very cool stuff!

In short, there is a wealth of resources here for the committed mind mapper; new reports and resources will be added on a weekly basis.

[Please click here to sign up for the Mind Mapping Insider program today!](#)

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