Mindmaps for Marketers

The Introduction

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What You'll Learn

Whether you've used mindmaps before ot not, I think everyone will find some useful ideas, tips, and techniques in this course.

If you're one of the people who never quite "grokked" mindmaps, you may be in for a treat. One of the things I hear most often from customers of my other mindmap products is, "I could never really get into these things before. They just didn't grab me. Now I get it!"

The reason for that is pretty simple. I'm not just handing you a flat PDF that you're just supposed to look at and learn from. Those can be very useful, but I've found that folks tend to get more out of a tool they can actually change and make their own. And once you start adding, moving, and deleting things, the concepts become more real and more relevant.

There's another benefit that most people who only offer "flattened" mindmaps to their prospects and customers don't consider. The simple act of getting your hands involved in moving through the map, opening and closing nodes and discovering the things the creator has included, can help solidify the mental connections between the various parts of whatever you're mapping. It takes the focus off the map, and puts it on the thing you're teaching.

It helps them to understand. It gives them the "AHA!" moment they're looking for.

You may have no intention of creating mindmaps to distribute to others. Most of the people who bought this won't, in all likelihood. The biggest value in the maps will come, for many, in the clarity and organization they can help you create for yourself, and the planning value of a well laid-out map.

Creating a mindmap is almost like seeing a thing in a whole new way. It can actually restructure your concepts and help you prioritize things automatically. We'll get into that a bit more later.

Along with those benefits, you'll learn ways to make money with them, generate new prospects and subscribers, and create new approaches to things you may have allowed to become stale and routine.

I wouldn't say they're going to revolutionize anything for you. That would probably be a little of an overstatement for most people.

I expect, though, that they will help you to provide yourself and your prospects and customers with an ongoing stream of insights and ideas that can have a profound effect on how you approach whatever it is you want to see or explain more clearly.

What is a Mindmap?

According to Wikipedia, *"A mind map is a diagram used to visually outline information. A mind map is often created around a single word or text, placed in the center, to which associated ideas, words and concepts are added. Major categories radiate from a central node, and lesser categories are sub-branches of larger branches.[1] Categories can represent words, ideas, tasks, or other items related to a central key word or idea."*

That's a nice summary. It starts to get at the thing, but, as with many definitions, it leaves out the essence.

The person most often credited with inventing mindmaps is Tony Buzan, author of "The Mind Map Book." If you want a more general understanding of the psychology of mindmapping, it's a worthwhile read. Buzan is an excellent teacher, and explains the broad and sometimes nebulous concepts in ways that are easy to grasp. It's available at most bookstores, or through Amazon.com.

It is not really a "how to" book, though.

For our purposes, the Wikipedia definition is a good start.

The essence of the thing, as we intend to use it, involves more than just the physical end product. It's more literal, in that it shows you how various ideas relate to each other in a way that increases your own understanding of the subject. And, unlike any other kind of map of which I'm aware, changing the map can actually change the terrain it depicts.

That's the power of the direct interaction of your eyes, hands, and mind in working with these wonderful critters.

I should note from the start that the way we're going to discuss mindmapping largely leaves out the graphic component that Mr Buzan and many others believe to be critical to the process. That's because of the way we're going to use them.

If you're graphically talented, don't hesitate to expand on what I'm going to show you and incorporate pictures, icons, and symbols within your maps.

Or, if it's strictly for your own private use and not for distribution, swipe the pictures from pretty much anywhere.

> Note: Yes, it is okay to use copyrighted pictures within documents you never distribute. Do not use them in anything you plan to release to anyone else, though, even if you're giving it away as a freebie.

As an example, Chris, a friend of mine, outlines his books using mindmaps. Among the elements he finds useful are photos that, for him, represent the characters in his novels. Sometimes they're pictures used as "placeholders" to attach the personas to. Other times they're characters from movies or books who closely enough resemble the denizens of his fictional world to act as anchors, keeping him true to the intended nature of his subjects.

For him, it's an effective tool. For others, using pictures of established characters might create limits, because of the associations they make with those existing roles. That highlights the very personal nature of a mindmap, and the need to experiment and find what works for you.

Some people use pictures in their goal-setting maps. The things they want to do or be or have are visually present in their mindmaps, so they get the very real benefit of seeing them objectively, within the context of their own life and circumstances.

Don't underestimate the value and impact of that kind of graphic imagery. It can add whole other dimensions to the process.

Always keep in mind that the primary function of a mindmap is to give an external visual representation of a mental construct. You should use whatever tools or techniques help you to deliver on that for your own situation.

Don't limit yourself.

How I Got Serious About Mindmaps

Back in the 80s and early 90s, I used to do something rather like mindmapping, but with my own personal approach. I would assign symbols to various elements, and used a set of "operators" to quantify and connect them, with a view to seeing possibilities. This was all done with pen and paper.

The things sometimes ended up being extremely complicated. They were also useless the next day, as I was making most of the symbols up as I went along. They served a practical purpose, but they had no value beyond that immediate clarification.

More a way of objective pondering than anything else. Not a useful tool for communicating with anyone else.

For years, I've used big sheets of blank paper or posterboard to outline projects. They ended up looking very much like what we currently see from mindmapping software, except a bit more linear and textual.

After hearing friends talk for ages about using computers for this stuff, I broke down and tried a few of the digital tools. I created a mindmap as a way to outline a project, using Freemind, and it sort of took on a life of its own. So, I went with it. That experiment eventually became my first commercial mindmap product. I called it "The Map."

I know. Real compelling name, right?

Here's the interesting thing: Despite a truly lame looking salesletter, and no real effort into the copy, it sold. And sold well. More to the point, the folks who bought it sent me very positive feedback, both on the understanding it helped them develop, and on specific results they got from having a clear picture of what they were doing.

There were a lot of interesting lessons that came from my little experiment.

Probably the biggest was that people found much more value in an editable mindmap than they did in a flat image or a PDF. Being able to tailor it to their own situations mattered. It made it uniquely theirs, which made it important and useful.

Having something to start with also took away the fear of a "blank canvas."

A lot of the folks who commented remarked on how easy it was to work with Freemind. It's simple software, at least on the surface, and it has a very easy learning curve. The linear and stair-step layout made it more comfortable for the left-brained folk, who are the ones who usually have trouble with more abstract and unstructured systems.

That opened the door to mindmapping for a fair number of customers who had previously been unable to catch the idea.

The fact that Freemind is no-cost software was a draw for people who were willing to give the idea a chance, but unlikely to buy an inexpensive product and then spend hundreds of dollars on additional software just to see if they could even benefit from it.

That's something to keep in mind when creating your own mindmaps for distribution. If you want slick looking PDFs to share or sell, or to use as promotional tools, you will want to invest in one of the higher-end products like MindManager from Mindjet. Freemind doesn't really produce appealing PDFs or graphics. But for a tool that's meant to be interactive, a free or low cost program may be the best way to go.

If they don't use it, it has no value. Make it easy for them to use.

So, inspired by the response to the first map product, I added a rather extensive and more focused mindmap to a later product, which also included hundreds of pages of training in PDF format. It was called "The Profit Map," which was more a reference to the planning the system included, rather than the mindmap itself.

Guess which part got the most effusive comments...

The manual on 162(ish) ways to build your audience.

No, it wasn't the mindmap, which I'm sure is what you expected me to say. That was number two on the list. However, the amount of strong positive feedback on that mindmap made it clear the thing added very real and appreciable value to the product for a lot of my customers.

It added perceived value before the sale, which meant more people buying it. It delivered real value after the sale, which meant happier customers getting more results.

That's what I call "THUD!" It's what proved to me that the popularity of the original "The Map" product wasn't just the result of curiosity or the uniqueness factor.

It also showed me that, even when it's not the main focus, people will gravitate to tools they can get their hands into.

A valuable lesson indeed.

A Note On The Software Used

In this product, you will find versions of the various mindmaps for Freemind and for XMind. Both programs are available at no charge, and each has a slightly different appeal.

While I personally prefer Freemind, the majority of people should probably go with XMind, for a few reasons. The first is that it has a more visually appealing interface, which can be a big factor.

The second is that the notes feature (the ability to attach text to a node and display it on demand within the map itself) is slightly more intuitive and easily customizable in XMind than in Freemind. If you plan to use your maps for personal research, or for providing training or detail beyond the basics, that will be a significant benefit.

The third is simpler, but a pretty big deal: Freemind is a bit twitchy about backward compatibility. Depending on what version of Java you have installed, the program can find itself unable to properly update or display maps from previous versions for use in the latest revision.

XMind is, for most purposes, a superior product. It has a lot of other benefits over Freemind, including options for collaborative development online. The Pro upgrade extends those even further.

Why do I still use Freemind for my own maps? It's a "look and feel" thing, by a slight margin. Nothing more than that. Still, I end up distributing enough of them that I'll probably switch entirely to XMind at some point just to avoid teaching people how to work around the version problems.

I highly recommend that you start with XMind. It will save you hassles down the road. But install Freemind also, if only for purposes of following the examples given in the course.

The links are in the quick start guides.

Keys to Creating Mindmaps Quickly

One of the things that seems to intimidate people when they think of mindmapping is the complexity of the end result. It's sort of like putting together a puzzle with 1000 pieces. It looks harder than it is.

The trick is letting go of the mechanics and focusing on the solutions. It's a visual thing, not a software thing. That's another reason I originally stuck with Freemind for beginners.

> Creating a Mindmap in Freemind: The Easy Way
>
> The main steps are easy. Open the program and go to the file menu and select "New." Click on the first "node" it automatically creates and edit the name.
>
> To add a node, tap Insert. Type in the label and hit return. To add a new node at the same distance from the center (a 'sibling"), hit Enter. To add one branching off the node you just created (a "child"), tap Insert. Use the arrow keys to move around and add or delete nodes as needed. Use F2 to edit the label on an existing node. Click "Save" once in a while.

That's all you need to know in order to get started. It's that easy.

In XMind you use the Tab key to create a child node, rather than Insert. Beyond that, it's nearly the same process.

The second time you use Insert to add a node to the central point of a Freemind map, it will always be on the left side of the central node. If you don't plan on using both sides and you happen to do that, just delete the left-side node.

You can create basic or advanced mindmaps with Freemind using nothing but the instructions you just read. Sure, there are other things you can do that add value, but you really can get started that quickly and easily.

The simple learning curve lets you stop worrying about the technology and focus on the ideas you're capturing or developing. After a few minutes, the process becomes so automatic that it doesn't require any conscious attention.

When you get to that point, looking at the more advanced features will be minor interruptions, rather than stressful technological endeavors. More like learning than work.

Going to a more high-end mindmapping program will be much easier, too, once you've got the concepts down. That assumes you ever need one, which many people won't.

Organizing Your Mindmap

The approach I use for laying out mindmaps is called "chunking." It's a little more structured than many freeform maps, which makes it easy for people to look at and use intuitively.

It's straight forward. As an example, look at SocialSitesSetup.mm (the Freemind version) that's included with this product. On the left are two main nodes: Goals and Audience. These are the general factors in developing a network online. What do you want to achieve, and who do you need to work with to get it done?

On the right are the specific sites and systems that make up the most important parts of social networking for most people.

On the left is preparation. Execution went on the right.

That can be changed to fit the topic and the factors involved, of course. The important thing to keep in mind is to group the main headings in some logical order. For instructional maps, or process-based systems, you will want to stick to a chronological sequence whenever possible. The stuff that needs to be considered before starting should go to the left, because that's where people start reading. The things that involve the action steps follow, so they would go to the right.

> Note: This is an area where Freemind beats XMind, hands down. You can control which side of the central node each topics appears on. That takes some fiddling around with XMind, and isn't always easy.

There will be some overlap, to be sure. Planning is, in itself, a form of action. And some research and planning will usually be involved in the execution of most tasks more involved than boiling water. Still, as you start to work with maps, you'll see why this layout is used by so many people. It follows the way most people in western cultures read.

For each of the major topics, you will be adding sub-topics. Significant categories within a major topic will appear as sibling nodes. (Branches off the same previous node.)

The term 'chunking' refers to the idea that each topic consists of concepts or actions that are related, and themselves often composed of further groups of related topics. Just as each node other than the central one can be both a parent, child, and sibling, so each node can be part of a larger chunk, and can include smaller chunks and elements of them.

An example is probably called for here. Let's say you have a map about developing a

blog. You might have a heading called Promotions. Underneath it, you could have headings for email, an RSS feed, and a related Twitter account. Those headings would make up the 'chunk' called Promotions. Each of them would include more focused topics, and would be chunks in themselves.

The value of chunking is that it lets you isolate individual tasks and concepts while simultaneously clarifying and seeing how they fit into the larger picture. The visual component of mindmapping makes this a concrete process, as opposed to the less defined way most knowledge is stored and used.

That can offer a huge advantage in terms of focus. It can also be dangerous, if you let it become too static. A mindmap should always be considered more of a snapshot than a fixed landscape.

This is why I offer (and recommend you offer) editable mindmap files, if you are using these as tools. For strictly promotional maps, or as teaching aids, the static PDF or flat graphic map can be a very valuable document. For anything more individualized, though, the ability to make changes is a big plus.

Never assume the other guy has the same goals, preferences, or resources as you.

Chunking can be as easily applied to concepts as to concretes. Anything which can be grouped by relationships and broken down into component elements and sub-elements can be mapped using this approach. There's actually very little that can't.

XMind inserts new nodeas in a more controlled (and less adaptable) fashion. Clockwise, starting at 12. For this layout, you can easily change the visual cues of chunking by assigning differtent colors to the major nodes in each group.

> More random or stream-of-consciousness maps can be handy for personal brainstorming or just as a way to get ideas out of your head so you can view them objectively. They're not often much use to anyone else. In fact, you may find that, like the odd system I mentioned earlier, they may not even make any sense to you the next day.

> That doesn't mean you shouldn't give them a try at times. They can be handy for breaking up stale patterns and frozen ideas. They just don't usually retain any intrinsic value once they're done.

In all the mindmaps that come with this course, you'll see chunking in every part of the layout. It may seem obvious, but being aware of it on a conscious level will have a definite impact on how you design your own mindmaps.

Won't take long for it to become a habit.

Grouping for Visual Clarity

In some of the versions of the maps that came with this course, you'll notice that categories or broad topics have been moved from their default positions into visually separate groups. This very simple trick adds to the organizational value of the maps.

Doing this in Freemind is easy. Just click on the line leading to the node you want to reposition, right next to the node you're moving, and drag it.

Simple things like this are important to break up the monotony of a linear, black and white structure like the maps Freemind creates.

XMind offers more visual variety, but less location control. For thse, it's easier to group by changing the color and/or shape of the main nodes in each group.

Go with whichever you prefer in that regard.

What you will gain from using and creating mindmaps, and how to profit from them

One of the strange things about mindmaps happens almost without being noticed. Because of that, most people miss the opportunity it presents.

The simple description is that it helps you to find out what you already know. Once you start with those bigger 'chunk' labels, you almost automatically start to dig down and connect related pieces of information you have stored away that you may not even be aware of. This can be a surprise for many. Most people know far more than they think, and this process is one way of bringing that information and experience to the surface, where you can more easily access and use it.

Organizing it in a mindmap, with the links you create between the various elements also has the interesting effect of refreshing the information, making it feel more like recent experience than vague memory. When that happens, it's worth taking time to think about. Let that old knowledge come back to you, and consider ways you can update it, or apply it in new ways in your current situation.

This can be a very useful exercise all by itself.

Context is a powerful thing. Random bits of isolated knowledge aren't nearly as useful as those same bits organized into a structure, and given a purpose. If you keep your main purpose in mind while creating the map, a lot of those things you know, but have forgotten you know, will fit themselves in automatically.

That's how the mind works, yes? You give it a question and it does its best to give you answers. This process just offers a more flexible way than usual for it to do its job.

Along the way, you will also start to see the gaps in your knowledge. That can be as valuable as regaining what was misplaced. If you're creating a plan, and you chunk down to the details, you'll quickly start to see which things you don't know as well as you'll need to in order to accomplish the thing.

If you're creating the map for your own use, it's helpful to add an icon to each label that represents an important bit of information you need to learn.

It's a good idea here to distinguish between data and skills. Data would describe things like "How big is this market" and "What prices are people used to paying for products of this type?" Skills are things like "How do I set up an effective opt-in form" and "How do I make attractive screen capture videos that will keep my audience's attention?"

How you label those within your own maps is a personal preference. Just be consistent. In Freemind, you'll see a column of icons to choose from on the left side of the program screen. I use the question mark for data and the yellow triangle with the exclamation point in it for needed skills.

You might choose to use color coding as your way of doing it. That has the advantage of being obvious without cluttering up the visuals, and it's easy to change the colors after you've gotten the needed data or learned the required skill(s).

If you're inclined to hire out things you don't feel you need to do yourself, you can use a separate icon or color for those labels. This process is flexible, and you should take full advantage of that to make it work the way you want.

You may find that this is a powerful self-teaching tool, when used with a deliberate awareness of its potential.

How Do You Recognize the Gaps?

One of the traps that people often set for themselves when they start a project or process is assuming they know things they don't. They have what appears to be a clear and complete outline, and get tripped up when they hit the gaps.

The trick is to see where those voids in your knowledge are in advance. There's no 100% foolproof way to do that, since you don't know what you don't know. But there is a simple trick that can help you spot the action steps you haven't considered before you get to them.

To do this, get the plan in front of you and picture yourself moving through the process, one step at a time. Ask yourself, at each step:

What needs to exist or have happened in order to do this?

Here's a basic example, set around the idea of running an ad on Facebook's PPC system:

Decide what you want people to buy or do.
Determine the demographics of your target market.
Create and fund FB advertising account.
Create campaign.
Set demographics.
Set budget.
Post ad.

There are a number of places where this could break down. The most obvious is the last step in the list. It misses things like "Determine what makes an effective ad graphic for Facebook," and "create the graphic."

If you just start making lists, you could easily miss those. Basing any schedule on a plan that's missing such critical steps is just begging for frustration, disruption and hassle.

If you create a mindmap and actually picture the process, and ask what you need to have learned or done just before each step, you'll usually see it. You'll avoid that gap in the plan, and the problems finding it at the last minute can cause.

Knowing all the elements can also help you to make more realistic decisions about which plans to pursue, and when to outsource which parts of them.

Doing this with a mindmap is much easier and more effective than doing it with a more standard written list. With a list, you will tend to continue forward from the current "last item." They aren't conducive to seeing or filling in gaps. Mindmaps,

especially ones created using software, encourage expansion of ideas. Combine that functionality with an active awareness of the process you're outlining and you have a much better chance of coming up with a complete system as the end product.

That can make things run much more smoothly.

Maps as Brainstorming

We often think of brainstorming as a group process. We've been trained to look at it that way, but it doesn't have to be.

Once you've got the simple mechanics down that I described earlier, it's good to set aside some time each week and just go nuts with a "What if...?" session. Create labels with questions, and let the ideas flow. Just hammer out every thought that occurs to you.

The reason brainstorming works in groups is that the ideas of others spark connections in your mind that you then contribute to the group, who see further connections and possibilities based on your input. It's a self-feeding process.

While mindmapping doesn't totally replace the value of group sessions, it provides significant parts of it, and does so any time you want to access them. Those parts are externalization and openness to connections.

Externalization, in this usage, simply means "getting it out of your head and into the world." That removes the idea or element from the vague cloud of things you may have associated it with in your mind and allows you to see it for what it really is.

For an example of this, think of the last time you told someone something in a conversation and thought "That sounds really dumb, when you say it out loud." Or, on a more positive note, when you or someone else said something and it sparked an idea that you found brilliant, even if it seemed obvious at the time.

That's the "Eureka moment" you're looking for in the brainstorming process.

The problem with just sitting and thinking about something is that the things you need may be muddled in with a lot of unrelated ideas and associations that aren't objectively based. Isolating them in the small space of a label on a mindmap can sometimes free them from those unconscious limitations and let you see them in a new way.

That openness to seeing connections is built into the mindmapping process. You're physically locating ideas in relation to other ideas, and the map itself shows some connections and suggests others.

The only problem some people experience with this, other than locking up because they're focused on the mechanics rather than the ideas, is letting their internal editors have too much control. The trick to beating that is simple: Remember that no-one else has to ever see the map, or at least the first draft. So, who cares if it looks or sounds silly? Enter it into the thing and let it stand or fall on its own.

You're looking for ideas, not perfection. You can add, move, and remove things as needed later.

If this is starting to sound exactly like the process of brainstorming in a group setting, you're getting the point. First, get the ideas. No judgement. Apply critical analysis only after you've exhausted the creative side.

In the central node of the map you're using for any given brainstorming session, place a question. Unlike most other maps, you don't need to define things based on hierarchies and categories. Follow idea threads. Add child or sibling nodes where they occur to you, and just keep going with whatever relevant notions and ideas pop into your head.

Those can be new questions, too. If you find yourself straying too far from the original idea, you should ask yourself if the new direction is more important right now than the original. Answer that qiuickly, and go with your gut response. If it is, keep on the new track. If not, get back to the point you started with.

If you find enough useful ideas, you may want to format this into a more structured and practical map later.

Mindmaps for Problem Solving

This is a lot like the brainstorming function of mindmapping. The difference is that, in this mode, you are going to be a bit more structured. Your central node will be the problem itself, phrased either as a question to answer or a goal to achieve.

On the left side (if you're using Freemind), create two nodes: Resources available and resources needed. On the right, create two more nodes. "What do I gain?," which will list the benefits of achieving the goal, and "What's stopping me?," which seems obvious. A trick I find useful is to state the thing that's stopping you with a question mark after it.

That one little adjustment can sometimes make a huge difference. It removes the thing from the realm of absolute and puts your brain in solution/answer mode. That can reduce or eliminate your fear of the problem, and put you into a more productive, and often fun, challenge mode.

For a real world example, consider: Have you ever told something to another person and had them reply, "Really?" Has that simple question ever made you stop and realize that things weren't quite as cut and dried as you had thought? From a conversation I overheard recently:

Person 1: "What's with you two?"

Person 2: "I hate him, that's what."

Person 1: "Really?"

Person 2: "No, but he annoys me."

Person 1: "Why?"

Person 2: "The way he constantly talks about [topic] gets old."

Person 1: "So, you'd prefer he talk about something else?"

Person 2: "Yeah."

Person 1: "That ain't hate."

Person 2: [chuckling] "It really isn't, is it?"

A few minutes later the guy they were talking about walked up and started in on the same old subject. 'Person 2' grinned and asked, "Do you ever talk about anything else?" The guy replied, "I'm doing it again, aren't I?"

If he'd walked up 10 minutes earlier, the result would have been totally different. It could have been a lot of things, but openly friendly would not have been among them.

Different perspective, different result. And getting the idea out of your head and into the world is a great way to get new perspectives.

That's one aspect of the problem solving mode. Another is the options factor. By listing the things holding you back as questions, rather than facts, you can start to list ways to change the situation. You give yourself options, and list the things needed to make them real at the same time.

You turn the obstacles into rocks in a field, rather than walls across a corridor. You can walk around them, break them down, or even use them to build something.

If you want to try a somewhat different approach, create a map with the current default choice listed as the central node, and branch out by listing alternatives. The key is to start with, "Instead of..." in front of the default option.

For a proven system you want to improve, the 'chunks' might be Bigger, Smaller, Faster, and Slower. Then list choices other than the current default that fit each of those descriptions.

You may want to use different words, depending on the situation, but the first group of main cetagories should be labeled as adjectives. That will both suggest alternatives and take some of the limitations off your internal editor.

If you're in a teaching or consulting business, these can serve as templates for creating worksheet-style maps for your customers and clients, or even as the bases for introductory products in your sales funnel.

If you have the problem, there's a good chance a lot of other people do, too. And they haven't all read this course.

Maps as Research Summaries or Resource Lists

Mindmaps can be useful for very simple things, too. Resource lists that are categorised and easy to browse. Links to articles or software, grouped by topic and level of expertise involved. Directories of sites you use for specific business systems. Data gathered in the process of research.

You can add notes to each item, if needed or appropriate. Rankings, or special considerations related to them. Pretty much anything the end user might need to know, or that you want to remember for later.

Both Freemind and XMind offer notes features that are relatively easy to use. The main difference is that XMind opens an immediately editable pop-up window when you hover the mouse over the note icon. Freemind pops up a text box, but editing it requires using a different function.

Either way, this adds a whole other dimension to mindmaps as a training tool.

This kind of map can put a lot of data and resources at your fingertips in an easy to use way. It's also a very different kind of bonus for a product, or a giveaway that will hold higher perceived value than the same info in a harder-to-navigate text document.

Later in the course, we'll talk about using mindmaps to outline products. The fun part of this is that the same outline you used to create the product can often be used as a summary to help people use it, or a sales piece to help show its value to potential customers.

Think about that. You can create a very useful bonus before you create the product itself.

Mindmaps are a very different animal.

Some Uses for Mindmaps, and Benefits From Them

The biggest has already been covered: Creating a mindmap on a topic tends to give you a lot more clarity and organization for your thoughts on it.

This is partly psychological, and partly physical. The latter is due to something so simple I've never seen it mentioned. Consider: You can have a dozen thoughts whirling in your head at once. You can only focus your eyes on one thing at a time.

When you're looking at a mindmap, you're physically LOOKING at it. Your eyes can only focus on a single node. The overall context remains, but you're thinking about that one thing that's right in front of you, with its own existence outside the dozen ideas demanding your attention.

When you're typing in the label or adding connected nodes, you're following a physical path. You have to give each node a place in relation to all the others.

That's a powerful exercise in focus.

Systematizing processes: It's easy to start on something you haven't defined a system for and end up spending ten times the number of hours on it that were needed. By chunking things into a clearly laid out order, you make it easier to not only get through them faster, but to get them all done. You don't forget step 3 when you're done with step 2.

This is also handy if you have any intention of ever moving those tasks off your plate and handing them to someone else to do. Having a well defined process already established and laid out will make training and tracking those employees or contractors much easier.

Managing projects: This is one for you folks who work with teams.

Create the map of all the things that need done. Store it in a public folder at Dropbox or Google Drive. Assign tasks to people or let them pick which they'll do. Tag each node with a number for the person who's going to handle it, or let them put their own number on each one as they pick it.

When it's done, you (or they) add a checkmark to the node for that task.

Creating dashboards: These are much like resource lists or process systems, except that they're intended to be front ends for anyone to use. They would include links to the resources needed to complete a project, in the order you or your customers would use them.

These can be course modules, actual tools, tracking spreadsheets, contact databases, relevant videos or PDFs, and anything else that fit the needs of the end user.

And yes, they can be saleable products in their own right.

Marlon Sanders, "The King of Step by Step Marketing," has a whole series of dashboard products that are very good at showing newer people to the business how to move from one part of a process to another. While they are laid out in a grid, they could just as easily be done in a mindmap format.

This is a very flexible system for pretty much any sort of training.

As you've seen, mindmaps are great ways to get more from existing resources, mine your own knowledge more effectively, improve creativity, and generally just be more productive and profitable.

They will also help you to make better decisions.

The simple process of getting ideas outside your head and into the world will, as we already mentioned, help you to see them more objectively. Placing various elements in their proper relationship to others will give you a better idea of their importance. And looking at them in the context of the bigger picture will help you to better choose which options you should pursue.

More Mindmapping Software

In addition to Freemind and XMind, there is a ton of other software out there you may want to look at.

One that may be of interest to folks who use iPads is MindMaple. It's available for the PC and the Mac also, and has options that allow you to work with the same map on any of them at any given time.

It's the best mindmapping app I've seen yet for the iPad. Keep in mind, though, that any such statement is purely a personal preference.

The pro version of MindMaple is only $10 a year.

Mindjet has an impressive suite of mindmapping products, including software for PCs, Macs, iOS, and Android systems. Their flagship product, MindManager, is generally considered the powerhouse in the industry. It has more power than most people will ever use, frankly.

The biggest advantage, other than the tight integration among the tools for various platforms, is its rendering of exported PDFs.

If you want a less structured system for fluid note-taking on an iPad, you may also want to take a look at NoteTable. It's not precisely a mindmapper, but it's handy for some things that are similar in nature.

For Android tablets, you may find iMindmap HD fun. It gives you a lot more flexibility in placement and appearance than most tablet apps for this sort of work.

If none of those appeal to you, fear not. There are dozens of applications for any platform you like. Play around with a few, and you're sure to find one you like.

If you prefer pen and paper, there are two very useful options, especially for product planning.

The first is ye old "big sheet of blank paper." Doesn't take much explaining...

The second is a stack of blank index cards. I find this more useful for planning projects that could be large and involve more complex concepts or where I want to have more room for "labels" than you get in a standard mindmap.

They're especially good for laying out a book or series of reports. Put the title of each chapter or separate report on a separate index card. Then just put each main idea on a separate card, and line them up under the related chapter or report name. Add ideas and place them where appropriate. Move things around as needed, and, when

you're done, put them in a stack in the order they'll appear in the product.

You've got the whole index card to list the idea. If you can't sum it up on a single card, there's a good chance it's more than one idea.

It's a really simple process, with a very different feel than mindmapping software. You can translate it to a map later if you like, but I find this approach sometimes yields ideas I'd have missed sitting at a keyboard.

And when you're done, you've got a book-like stack that can make the finished product seem more "real."

The Next Step

Normally, I'd have a concrete recommendation here. This time around, it really depends on what you want to do.

If you haven't gone through one of the quick start guides and created a mindmap yet, that's probably the first thing to do. A lot of what you've just read will make much more sense when you actually work with a map.

If you bought this for one or more of the marketing maps that are part of the product, fire up your preferred software and get to it. They're pretty powerful tools for planning and tracking your efforts. And they can give you a lot of ideas you may not have encountered before.

If you're looking for ways to make money with mindmaps, go to the monetization guide. There are some ideas in there that will be familiar, and some that may surprise you.

Lots of options for you. Just do me one favor... When you've chosen one and actually done something with it, drop me an email and let me know how it went.

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