



Effective Mind Maps

Analyses of business mind maps by Chuck Frey, author of the Mind Mapping Software Blog

Type of map: Year planner mind map

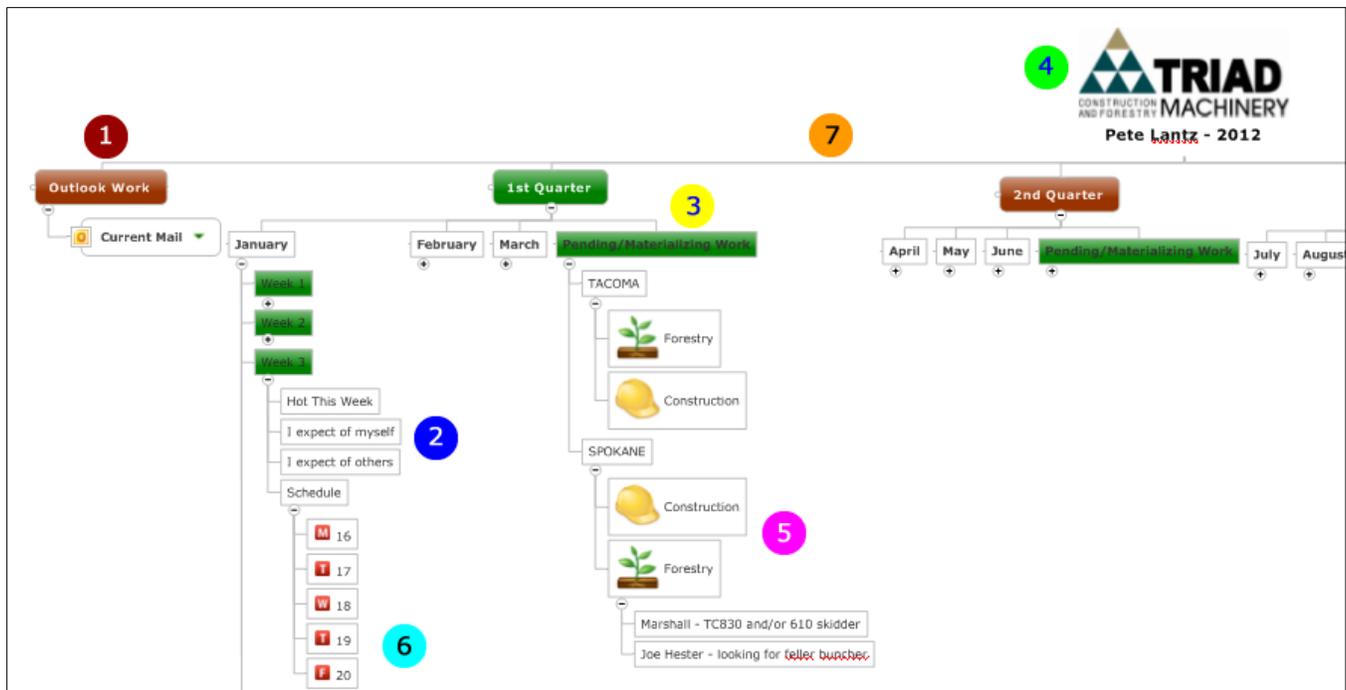
Software used to create: MindManager

Source: MapsForThat! map gallery

URL: <https://www.mapsforthat.com/map.php?m=2135>

Overview

One of the real advantages of running the Mind Mapping Insider program and doing analyses of mind maps is that I get to encounter some really intriguing visual maps – ones that help me expand my perception of what's possible with mind mapping software, and ideas I plan to use in future maps that I will create.

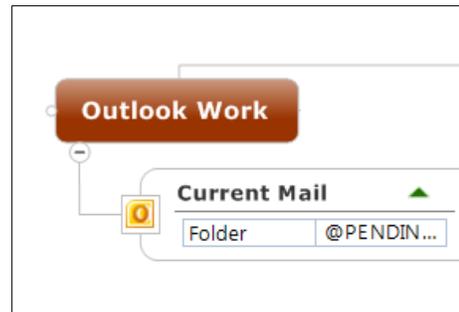




That is definitely the case with this yearly planner mind map. It incorporates some innovative elements that are very intriguing, and that you should consider adapting to your visual mapping needs. In this analysis, we'll take a closer look at what this map author has designed, and I'll share with you my thoughts on why this is one of the most effective mind maps I've seen in some time.

1 Excellent e-mail integration

Today, a lot of project communication is done via e-mail. So it makes a lot of sense that this author has created a topic in his mind map to pull in one folder from his Microsoft Outlook program that contains pending project information. This allows him to work on this information within one program, instead of having to jump back and forth between his planning map and Outlook.



What's also very smart is its placement on the left side of the mind map. Once the e-mails from this folder are imported into the map, they can be "processed" by dragging and dropping them to appropriate topics within each of the four yearly quarter topics. In addition, supporting information and ideas can be added to these e-mails, giving the author a comprehensive visual overview of what he needs to focus upon.

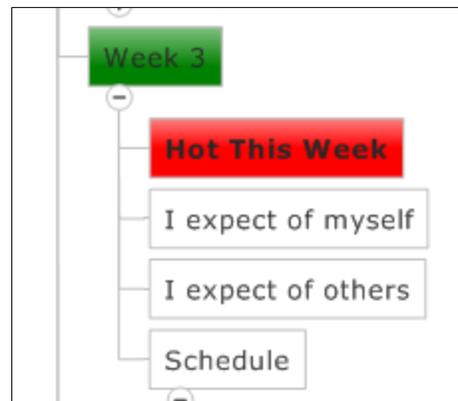
2 Weekly focus includes some intriguing elements

In the years that I have been writing the Mind Mapping Software Blog, I have seen many goal setting and personal planning maps. Most contain the same basic elements – one’s life is divided into different roles, which become first-level topics. Projects and priorities within those roles are added as sub-topics, and priorities are assigned to each of them. From there, the map branches out into specific actions needed to accomplish each of those priorities.



The author of this map incorporates several topics in his planning map that really caught my attention, namely those entitled “I expect of myself” and “I expect of others.” The author is obviously a leader or manager, whose performance is judged not only based upon his own work, but upon those who report to him. Having these topics in his planning map ensures that he is staying true to the commitments he has made to himself, as well as those for which his direct reports are responsible.

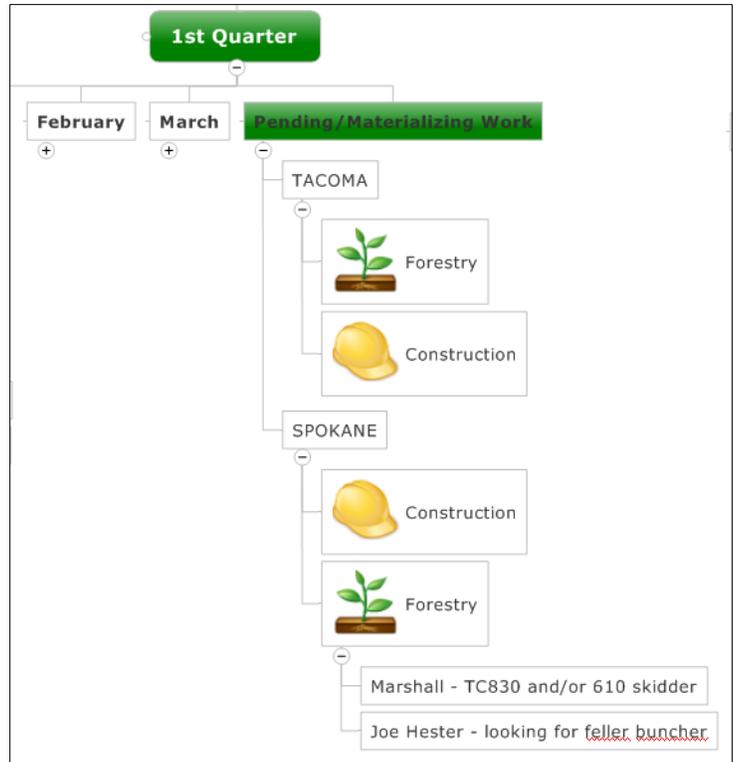
“Hot this week” is also notable. It calls attention to the tasks that are most important for him to focus upon. Without a topic like this, the most important tasks could easily get lost in all the background noise of the merely urgent, but not necessarily important, items. One suggestion, however: I’d recommend coloring this topic red and making the topic text bold, to make sure it stands out from the rest of this map’s content, like the example at right.



3 Nice use of a “pending” area for bigger projects

Some projects in our workload aren't tied to a specific start date, especially if you're dealing with customers or clients. A major project may be pending for months, as the client organizes their resources and lines up the approval of key decision-makers. Then, suddenly, the stars align and they want you to begin working on their project immediately. You need to be aware of what projects may materialize during the next quarter, so you can plan accordingly.

This topic is a terrific place to “park” these items – so you are reminded that they are waiting in the wings each time you look at your map, and as a reminder to follow-up periodically with the client or prospective customer for a status update.



Based upon the content in this section of the mind map, it appears that our map author is the sales manager for an equipment dealer, with responsibility for the sales staff at several branch locations. Two pending projects can be seen at the bottom of the screen shot at right. Although there are no details attached to them in this map, I could easily picture tasks, documents and other supporting information being attached here – even Outlook e-mails that are relevant to each pending equipment deal.

4 Effective branding

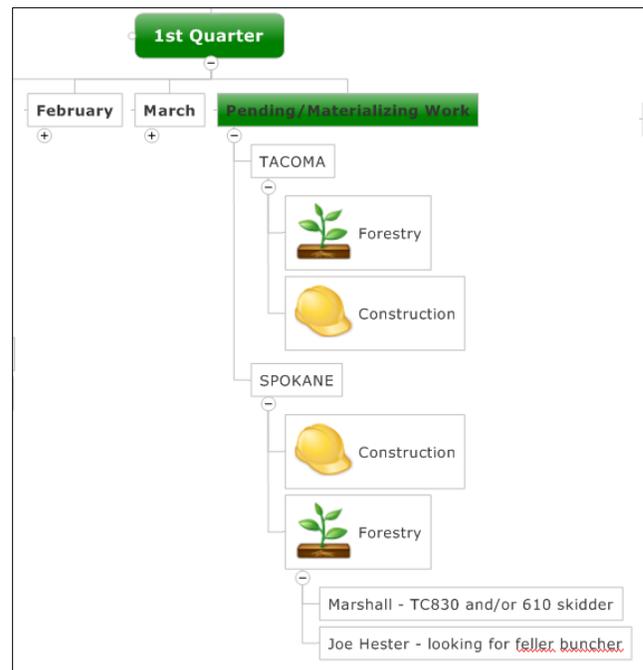
This mind map incorporates clear branding, in the form of the Triad Machinery logo, which is formatted as the map's central topic. An alternative would be to place in the bottom right or left corner of the mind map.



5 Effective use of icons

Triad Machinery's territory covers the U.S. states of Oregon and Washington, located in the Pacific Northwest region of the company. The product lines it carries cover both the construction and forestry industries. That's why the topics for the Tacoma and Spokane branches have sub-topics for equipment sales from each industry.

Forestry is depicted with a sapling, a young tree sprouting from the ground, while construction is denoted with a yellow hard hat – a standard piece of protective equipment in that industry. Both icons are clear and easy to understand. Anyone who looks at this mind map can differentiate between these two important industry segments, and the deals pending within each one.

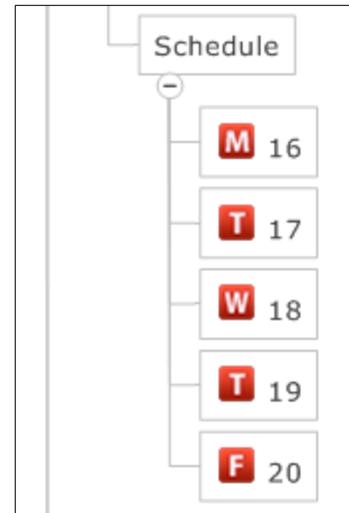


Two examples can be seen within Spokane forestry opportunities. These are just simple sub-topics in this map, but you can easily imagine how more details about these pending deals could easily be added to the names of these prospective customers, including contact information, tasks to be done with appropriate follow-up dates, attached files – such as contracts, spreadsheets and other important information – and much more.

6 Compact, easy-to-understand weekly calendar format

The author of this mind map has created a compact weekly calendar format that I love. It doesn't take up much space, yet clearly communicates the type of content it contains. The key is a set of simple MTWTF icons that he uses to depict the five weekdays. Seen in the context of each other, it's easy to see that these icons represent the days of the week. This clever visual technique also means that the map author only has to place the numerical date next to the icon, instead of the longer "Monday, April 16," for example. Another advantage of this clever approach is the reduction of visual clutter. This format is the ultimate in simplicity, in my opinion.

The next time I need to add a weekly calendar to one of my mind maps, I'm going to use this style. In fact, as I'm writing this report, I just selected the topic "schedule" in this map, selected MindManager's "Map Parts" panel and used the "Add Selected Topic(s)" command to add this map fragment to my library of map parts. This will make it easy for me to re-use it in the future!



I can only see one minor way to improve this weekly calendar, but it's a relatively minor point. If there was some way to make the icon for Thursday into a "Th," that would be nice. Right now, the week contains two "T's" – one each for Tuesday and Thursday. But this would require creating a custom icon – it would take some effort to get it to match the size and style of the other days of the week, but it would help people to differentiate between these two days.

Again, it's not worth worrying much about. This is a very effective weekly calendar format – pure and simple!

7 Capture your ideas!

When I saw that this map author created a topic just for "Big Ideas / Think Tank," I was extremely pleased, because this is something that most people overlook. Think about your work week, and the types of tasks you must do. At least once or twice a week, you



probably encounter potentially useful bits of information and ideas that may be useful to you. What do you do with them? If you're like most people, nothing! They are quickly forgotten about.

The savvy business person, on the other hand, knows that ideas are like diamonds in the rough. With some shaping and shining, they could be worth a lot of money to you. That's why it pays to have a place reserved in your mind map to capture them. In the case of our equipment dealer sales manager, these ideas could take the form of an unmet customer needs, a clever solution to a jobsite problem that he encountered when visiting with one of his sales prospects, or something he read in an industry trade magazine that may have some application to a number of his customers.

In your industry or profession, you encounter similar types of inspiration. Ideas don't have to be completely new to the world. In many cases, they are techniques, tools and solutions that someone has creatively used in another arena that you can adapt to your needs. My point is you need a system to capture these ideas when they occur to you, which you can then review and process later. This map author has devised an elegant way to do this!

Once again, I urge you to use your imagination. This topic doesn't contain any content in our subject map, but you could capture all manner of information here, including:

- The web page address of an article that inspired you
- A photograph you shot at the client's jobsite that captures the essence of the idea
- An e-mail message that contains a basic overview of the solution

Think for a moment about how you would use a personal planning mind map like this. Chances are, you would have it open for most of the day, because he would be using it to stay focused upon your key priorities. That makes it especially appropriate as a place to capture your ideas.

I have studied, tested and reported on tools that can be used to capture ideas for many years. I can tell you that if it is easy and convenient, you are more likely to use it to capture ideas. On the other hand if it takes too many steps to record the idea, you probably won't exercise the discipline to do so. It's that simple. That's what makes this planner such an ideal place to capture your ideas – because you're "living" in it for most of your work day.

To further enhance this mind map, one final item you ought to add is a regular follow-up date and time to review the ideas you have captured. If you simply record them and forget about them, they will never have any value. If you develop a system to evaluate them on a regular basis and decide which ones you want to implement, that's where you could create significant value for your employer and your customers.

Questions?

Got questions about this report? Please contact me at chuck@innovationtools.com.

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