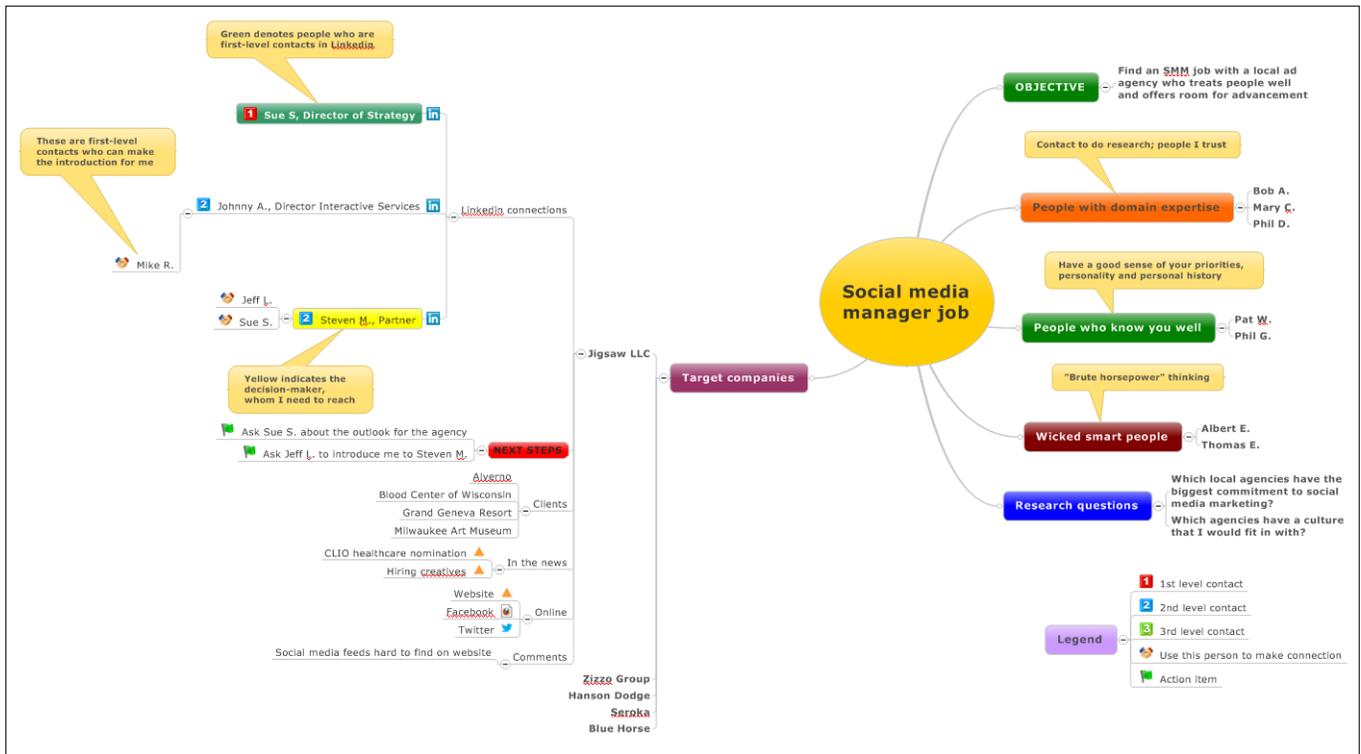


How to create a network intelligence mind map for your career



In today's world it's hard to be an expert on everything - especially when it comes to deciding upon a future direction for your career. Whether you decide to make an incremental change or "pivot" to something entirely new, you need to rely upon your network of contacts for advice, information and intelligence. That's one of the key takeaways I got from Reid Hoffman's new book, [The Start-up of You: Adapt to the Future, Invest in Yourself and Transform Your Career](#). Hoffman is the co-founder of LinkedIn.

Acquaintances in your professional network can connect you with people and companies, help you understand and address your shortcomings, recommend companies that have cultures that would be a good fit with your personality and alert you to new articles, news and other

developments from your target companies. In short, if they have a clear picture of what you're looking for, they can do a better job of helping you.

Hoffman compares your professional network to a network of sensors, each providing you with discreet bits of data on an ongoing basis. Viewed in isolation, the data from one sensor is next to useless. But when synthesized with the data from multiple sensors in different locations, you can get a more complete picture of what's going on. The same goes with planning your career trajectory:

“Your coworkers, business colleagues, allies, and acquaintances are each like a unique sensor that can relay different bits of information. They work at different companies, maintain different interests, live in different cities. In the same way that one sensor alone can't tell you very much about the trajectory of a tsunami, one person's feedback or advice or tip isn't enough to inform a decision about your career trajectory. But combine and compare multiple streams of information as the analysts who monitor tsunamis in Hawaii do, and their blended perspectives produce rich intelligence,” Hoffman promises.

But gathering, organizing and making sense of all this input can quickly overwhelm you. Fortunately, mind mapping software is up to the task. In this Mind Mapping insider report we'll look at a way to utilize a mind map to organize your contacts, formulate your questions and capture all of the information that results from your conversations with members of your network.

As I walk you through the process of creating such a network intelligence map, I will also show you how we'll use several mind map elements in unique ways to make this an even stronger and more powerful tool.

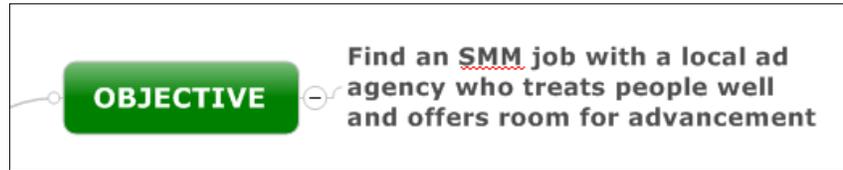
Toward the end of this report, I will provide links where you can download this mind map in various formats. I encourage you to do so. Be sure to delete the sample information and comments I have included in it and to start populating it with your own network and career development information.

Even if you're not actively seeking a new position, I'm confident that this analysis will give you an important sense of where you are now – and where you could go in the future, as opportunities present themselves. As Hoffman points out:

“Network intelligence isn't useful only in times of trouble. We need it in good times and bad, which is why we should be constantly tapping our networks for multiple streams of information about everything from job opportunities to market trends to changes in office dynamics.”

Objective

We start the production of our network intelligence map by focusing on your objective: Is there a specific



type of job you're looking for? What is it you want to change about your life's work to make it more fulfilling, profitable or influential? Try to state this as clearly as possible because it will drive the rest of your network intelligence campaign.

For the purpose of this report, I'm using myself as an example. I'm making the assumption that I'm trying to find a hypothetical social media management position with a local advertising or public relations agency.

Contacts

The next several topics have to do with organizing your contacts into meaningful classifications. You will be contacting these people for different types of information, and then evaluating and synthesizing it to help you create a clear career strategy. In the book, Hoffman explains why this kind of analysis is necessary:

"Once you have gathered information, the next step is to analyze the validity, helpfulness, and relevance of what each person has said. Remember that everyone has biases—even your parents or best friend. It's not that they are trying to manipulate you. It's just the nature of being a human with personal experiences and self-interests.

"As you pull information and advice from various sources, think about how the person's personal goals, ambitions, and experience might have colored their position. Bias is not reason to dismiss information or advice altogether; just account for it in your analysis."

Following analysis, the next step is synthesis, where you develop a cohesive picture of everything you have learned:

"Synthesizing what you learn involves reconciling contradictory advice and information (which is inevitable if you're pulling multiple streams from diverse people), ignoring information you believe is completely off base, and weighing each person's information differently," Hoffman explains.

A mind map is ideal for this type of synthesis.

Domain expertise

The first type of contact you should focus upon is people with relevant domain expertise. These are people whom you can contact to learn more about industry trends, the culture at the companies are considering reaching out to

and what you need to know in order to make your desired career move. Contact these people with specific questions that will help you to learn what you need to know.



People who know you well

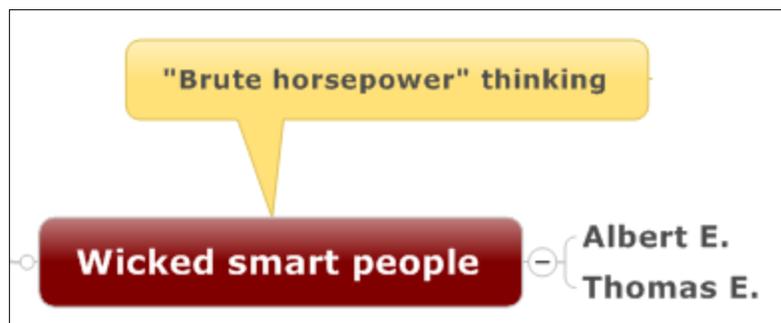
According to Hoffman, these are family members and close friends who have a strong sense of your priorities, personality and personal history. They understand what your core values are, and usually aren't afraid to wave a

red flag if it looks like a career decision you're about to make could put you in conflict with your beliefs and values. In this sense, they are excellent sounding boards. *"They can help you unpack feelings of confusion and sometimes even intuit how you'll likely feel about various outcomes of your decision,"* Hoffman points out.



Wicked smart people

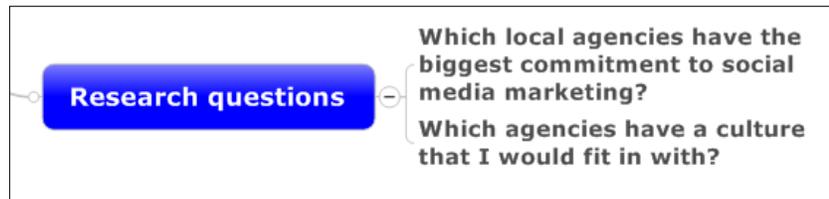
These are friends, acquaintances and networking contacts who are super smart. *"These people may not be domain experts in the specific topic area and may not know you well. But occasionally sheer analytical horsepower can be*



useful. At the least, whatever a really smart outsider says stands a chance of being completely different from anything else you'll hear."

Research questions

According to Hoffman, there are two main ways you can use questions to power your research:



1. Ask targeted questions of specific people
2. Cast your net more broadly and ask more general questions to larger segments of your network. This can be done via forums like LinkedIn Groups, surveys or polls. Using this strategy can result in a wide range of feedback to your questions.

For both types of questions, Hoffman recommends formulating your questions to be open-ended. That is, they should invite conversation, and shouldn't be easily answered with a simple "yes" or "no."

One other key point: I have placed the questions in a separate topic for this report. But if you have targeted questions, feel free to position them as child topics to that person's name. This topic is more intended for general career development questions, like the two I have created for my hypothetical social media manager position.

Target companies

You can use this part of your network intelligence mind map to capture detailed information about each of the target companies you have decided would be a good match for your skills and personality. You can literally create a detailed dossier for each firm, capturing information and links from web searches, LinkedIn profiles, social media posts and other sources.

Many of these sub-topics contain hypertext links to the full information, but could also contain notes and other additional information.



In the case of my hypothetical social media manager position, I'm tracking information such as new clients, recent news, online points of presence (and some notes on where I think that may be lacking) and action steps for my planned contacts at each company. The companies listed on the previous page are actual advertising, PR and social media shops in the Milwaukee area, the metro area where I live.

If you collect a large quantity of information about each company and find it challenging to navigate your network intelligence map, you can easily “break off” each company into a separate, linked sub-map. That will reduce the “clutter” in this mind map, while still enabling you to drill down to the details in a single mouse click.

Linkedin contacts



Most importantly, this section of the mind map is where I capture information about key contacts at each firm. LinkedIn not only shows you who you're directly connected to, but also others who are two and three degrees away from you (two degrees would be a contact of one of your contacts, for example). Noted the small, blue LinkedIn symbol to the right of each name. That indicates that I have created hypertext links directly to their LinkedIn profiles. If I want to know more about Steven M.'s background, all I have to do is click on the link.

One of the people I've listed here, Sue S., is someone who is already a first-level contact of mine in LinkedIn. I've highlighted this visually by coloring her topic green. I've also used the “1” marker in MindManager to indicate that she is a first-level contact. In other words, I am using numerical icons designed to indicate the priority of tasks, and have repurposed them to depict the level of relationship you have with each person.

I found the names of Johnny A. and Steven M. by doing a company search on LinkedIn. These are second-level contacts – in other words, contacts of people in my network who I have no relationship with. Accordingly, I have used the “2” marker to denote that both of these people

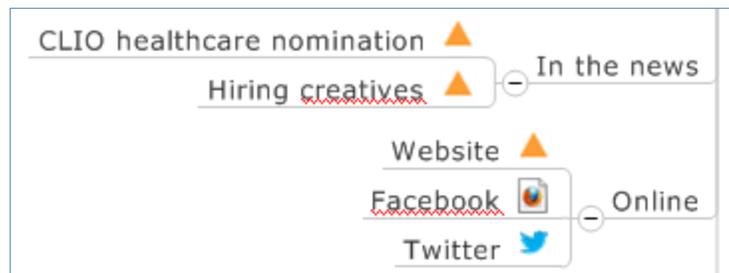
are second-level contacts in LinkedIn. That means I cannot contact them directly, but I need to be introduced by a mutual contact. LinkedIn displays who these mutual contacts are.

Because Steven M. is a partner with Jigsaw LLC, he is a decision-maker who I would like to get to know. So I colored his topic yellow to make it stand out. I also created sub-topics for the two first-level contacts in my network who know him. I've given each of them a symbol that shows a pair of shaking hands – to remind me that I want to try to get an introduction to Steven from either Sue or Mike.

As you can see, I've used a combination of colors, symbols and icons/markers to visually classify the contact information for each company. Using a program like MindManager, you can also use many of these attributes to filter the contents of your mind map, to help you focus on specific types of information – such as displaying only first-level contacts or only action items you need to follow-up on.

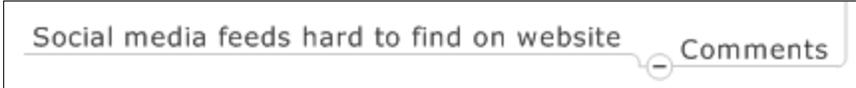
Link everything

When in doubt, link to the information you're collecting about each firm. As you can see in this example, I have linked to two news releases from the "in the news" section of Jigsaw LLC's website, plus their social media "points of presence." If I'm planning to meet someone from the agency for an informal networking lunch, I'm going to want to "get smart" about what the firm has been working on lately. I can find that out by clicking on the links I've created to their news and Facebook pages and their Twitter feed.



By reviewing these resources prior to your meeting, you can go into it very well prepared. You can use the information you've gleaned from reviewing these sources as fodder for questions during your meeting, making you look very smart and well-informed. *"I see you're hiring creatives. Business must be good! Where are you seeing the most activity in recent months? What accounts would these creatives be working on?"*

Comments

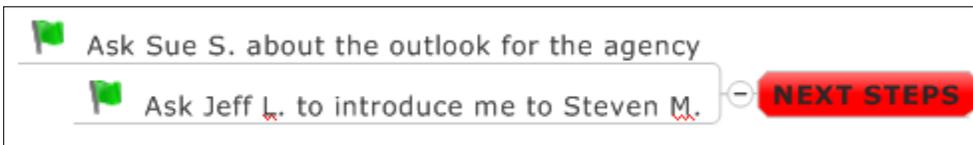


Social media feeds hard to find on website - Comments

As I was gathering information about Jigsaw LLC, I realized that their website doesn't contain a Twitter feed. Nor does it contain a link to one. Perhaps this is a case of "the shoemaker's children" – in other words, the agency is so busy doing work for clients that it has neglected to flesh out its own social media strategy. That strikes me as odd, so I created a topic called "comments" to note that. I'm going to want to ask the people I talk to at Jigsaw about that. It may have been a conscious decision not to create one, or perhaps it's just an oversight. In any case, because I seek a social media manager position with the firm, this is an important piece of intelligence I've uncovered, and I should record it in my mind map.

I know Sue S. fairly well, and have been following her on Twitter for several years, but the firm doesn't seem to have its own Twitter account.

Next steps



Ask Sue S. about the outlook for the agency
Ask Jeff L. to introduce me to Steven M. - **NEXT STEPS**

Of course, as you capture information about each target company, you're going to want to DO something with it. So I created a "next steps" topic and colored it red and gave it bold text, to make it really "pop" on screen. Within that topic are two action items, which I have given green flags to denote that they are action items.

Downloadable templates

Here are links to download this mind map in a number of popular formats. Please feel free to delete my sample data and comments, and make these templates your own. Customize them to work with the information you need to collect as part of your network outreach efforts and career ambitions.

[MindManager 9/2012](#)

[iMindMap](#)

[NovaMind](#)

[XMind](#)

[MindGenius](#)

[FreeMind](#)

Conclusion

You are now armed with a powerful tool that will help you to utilize your LinkedIn contacts to gather an ongoing stream of news, intelligence and knowledge you need to get things done. Whether you're thinking about making a career change or are simply trying to strengthen your social business relationships, this mind map is an excellent platform where you can outline your needs, identify the people who have the knowledge you require. Just as importantly, the flexibility of your mind mapping software will help you to do a better job of analyzing and synthesizing the data you gathered.

Good luck with your network intelligence mind map!

Questions?

Please contact Chuck Frey at chuck@innovationtools.com.

Please [visit the Mind Mapping Software Blog](#) for all of the latest news, trends and resources related to visual mapping.

You can also [follow Chuck Frey on Twitter](#) for even more insights and ideas.