**Survey Results**
**September 2006**

Mind mapping software is a relatively young category of business applications.  As a result, little research has been done to find out how people utilize it and the specific value it provides. My objectives in conducting this survey were to find out how, specifically, executives are using mind mapping software, and to shed some light on the challenges of increasing its acceptance in corporate settings.

During the month of August 2006, just over 500 people participated in this online survey, which apparently makes it the largest survey ever conducted about this genre of software. Thanks to those of you who participated in this important research project, as well as the bloggers who helped to promote it!

If you have any questions, comments or suggestions for questions that you would like to see in future surveys, please send me an e-mail at mindmap@innovationtools.com. I look forward to your feedback!
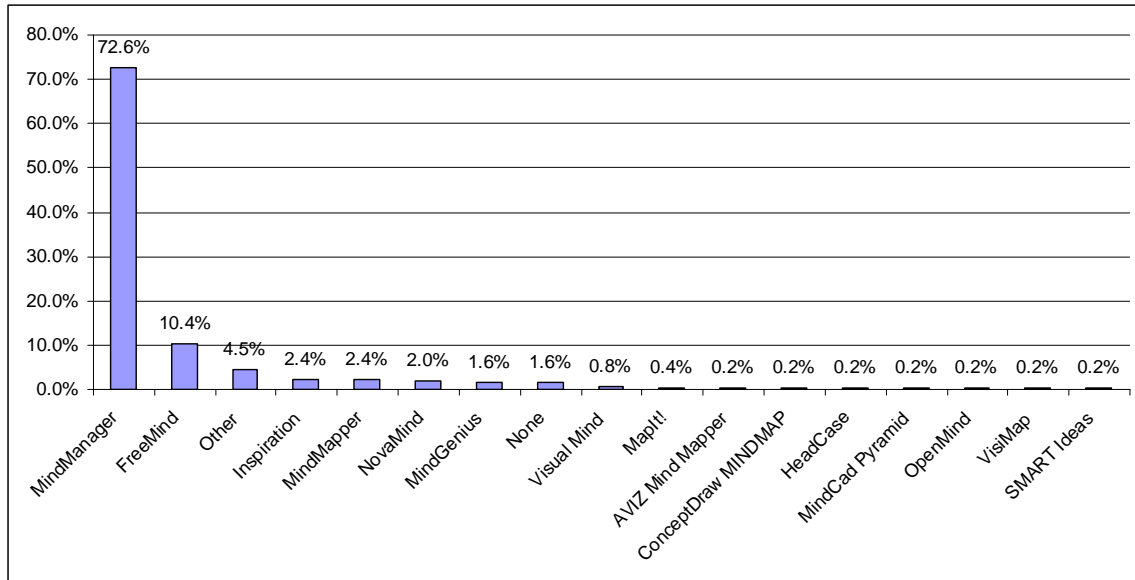
Visually yours,

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**1. What is the primary mind mapping software program you use in your work?**



MindManager was clearly the most popular program, with nearly 73% of respondents saying that they utilize it. The second most popular program was FreeMind, with 10.4% of the responses.  This isn't too surprising, because FreeMind is an open-source program that is – like its name implies – free. And that means that many people who are thinking about buying a mind mapping software will first try out FreeMind before purchasing another program. The third-largest response (4.5%) was for other mind mapping software programs than those listed in the survey. Several of these "other" responses were for programs already listed here, as well as several "I don't use any mind mapping software responses." From there, responses drop off sharply, with only a handful of participants using other programs listed in the survey.

**2. What applications are you currently using mind mapping software for?**
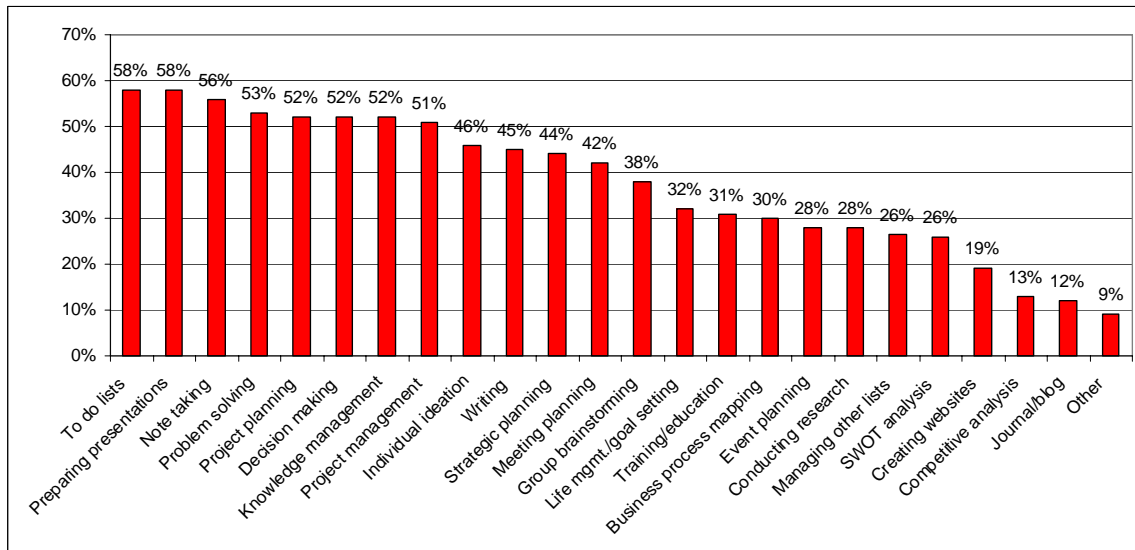
The survey contained a long list of applications of mind mapping software; respondents were asked to check all applications for which they are currently using it.  Not surprisingly, participants ranked project-related applications very highly: 71.4% said that they currently use mind mapping software for project planning.  Nearly 51% also use it for project management.  Also ranked highly were preparing presentations (57.6%), note taking (55.8%), decision making (52.1%), problem solving (52.9%) and knowledge management (51.9%), in descending order of popularity.

Most types of mind mapping applications received at least a 20% response, which points to the impressive flexibility of these programs.

This question also gave respondents the option to specify other applications for which they are using mind mapping software. Here are some of the "other" responses to this question:

- Documenting software requirements
- Software development and modeling
- Writing reports
- Knowledge elicitation
- "Signposting" – creating diagrams that display links to documents that are a part of a management system (such as quality or environmental systems)
- Designing investment strategies
- Document management
- Prioritizing issues for team management
- Visual project reporting
- Creating indexes to documents
- Comparative analysis
- Legal hearings and motions
- Business planning and contract management
- Medical case management
- Negotiation planning
- TOC (Theory of Constraints) thinking processes
- Meeting minutes
- Managing committee roles and out-of-committee networks
- Gap analysis

As you can see from the survey data and the "other" responses, the applications of mind mapping software are quite varied. These programs help business users to solve many different types of information, knowledge and data visualization challenges, and the survey results appear to reflect that.

**3. How many hours a day do you utilize mind mapping software in your job?**
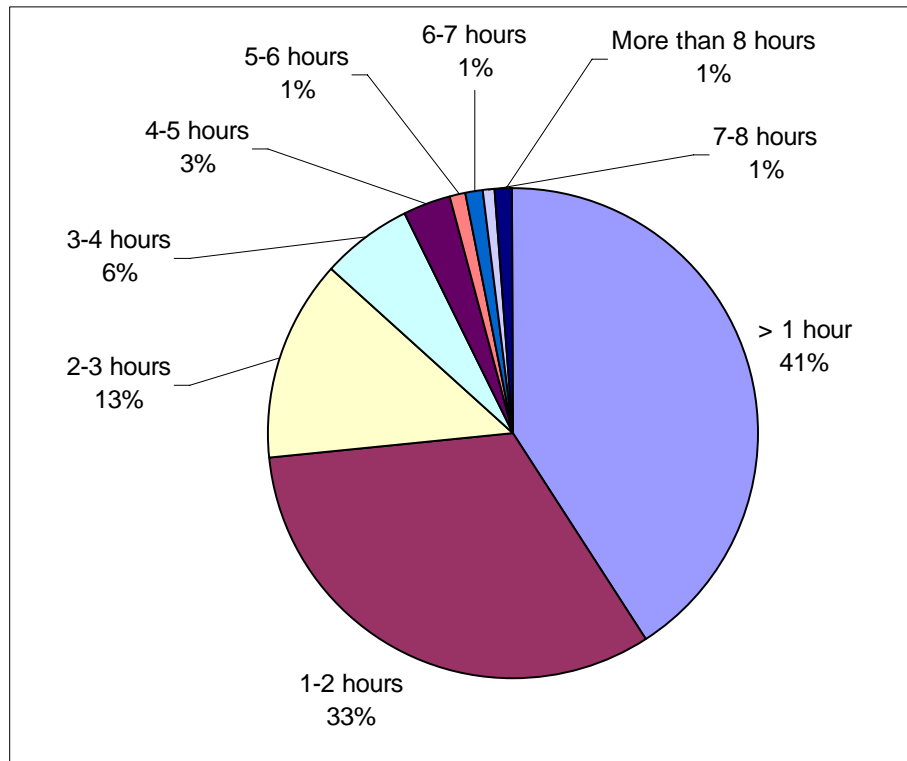


The largest number of respondents, 40.4%, said they use mind mapping software less than one hour a day.  Another 32.4% use it one to two hours a day.  This could lead to several possible conclusions:

- It may be pointing to the fact that people are utilizing mind mapping software in a support role in their work.  In other words, they use it to capture and organize their ideas, and then transfer them to another application for further development.

- It may also have something to do with the types of jobs that respondents have, and how much those roles lend themselves to mind mapping software.  For example, a new product development manager or R&D professional, who has a strong need to develop, capture and refine new product ideas and effectively manage multiple projects, would probably use mind mapping software more hours a day than a salesperson.

**4. What is the single biggest benefit you've experienced from using mind mapping software?**
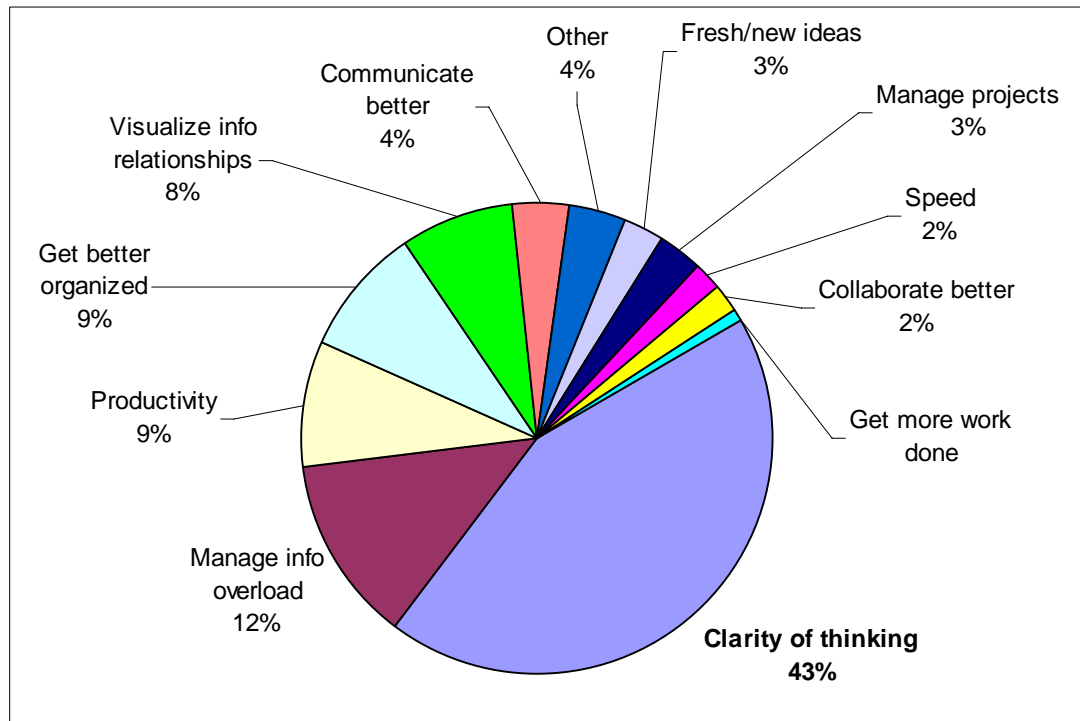


The runaway favorite, with 44.6% of the responses, was "improved clarity of thinking." The second most popular response was "manage information overload better" at 12.7%. These first two responses are definitely related: Most of us are inundated by information, knowledge and data, and we need a tool like mind mapping software to help us make sense of it. Rounding out the top five, were "make me better organized" at 8.7%, "productivity" with 8.5% of the responses, and "see relationships between different aspects of a situation," 8.3%..

The answers to this question point to the primary value of mind mapping software: no other type of program enables you to record your ideas, thoughts and knowledge and rearrange them up with the flexibility that mind mapping software enables.

Several responses that I thought would get fairly high ratings, didn't.  For example, only five respondents (1%) said that mind mapping software helps them to get more work done.  And only 2.8% said that this type of software helps them to manage projects more effectively.

This question also resulted in a number of interesting "other" responses, including these:

- (Create) links among previously isolated data islands
- It's neater when using with other. I usually mind map on paper and it's hard to read.
- Helps me deal with my dyslexia
- Omit fewer things
- Holistic view

- Longer retention of newly learned material
- Manage and share information and concepts
- Concise note taking

**5. If you had to quantify the productivity increases that mind mapping software has enabled in your work, how much would that be?**
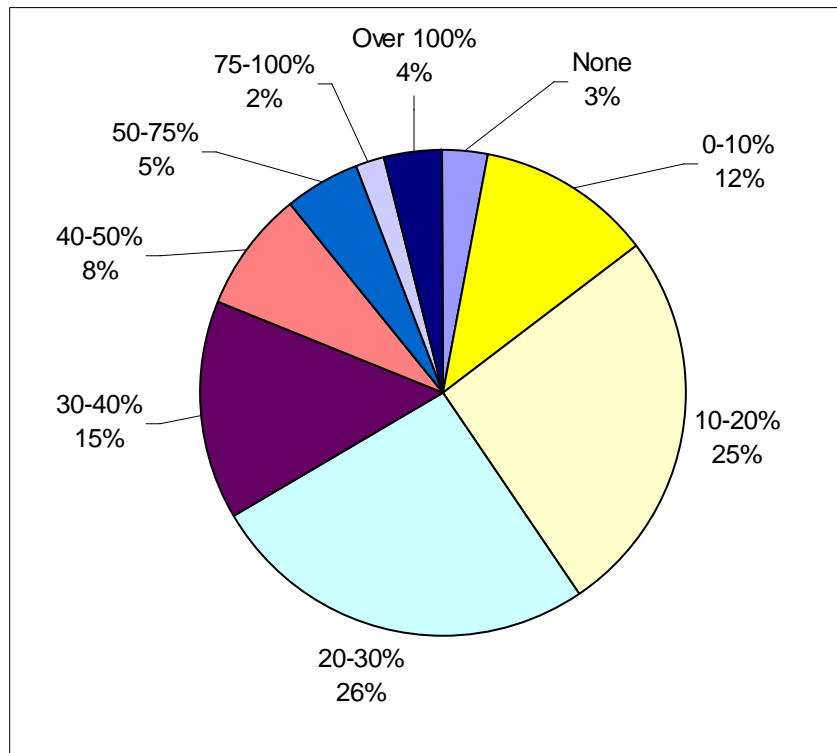


Two responses nearly tied in the results for this question: 26.1% of respondents said that mind mapping software helps them increase their productivity by 10 to 20%, while 25.9% said that it increases their productivity by 20 to 30%.

If you consider the number of responses for each choice and the ranges of productivity increases covered, you could conclude that mind mapping software increases the productivity of executives by an average of 20%.

**6. What is holding mind mapping software back from becoming more widely accepted in business?**
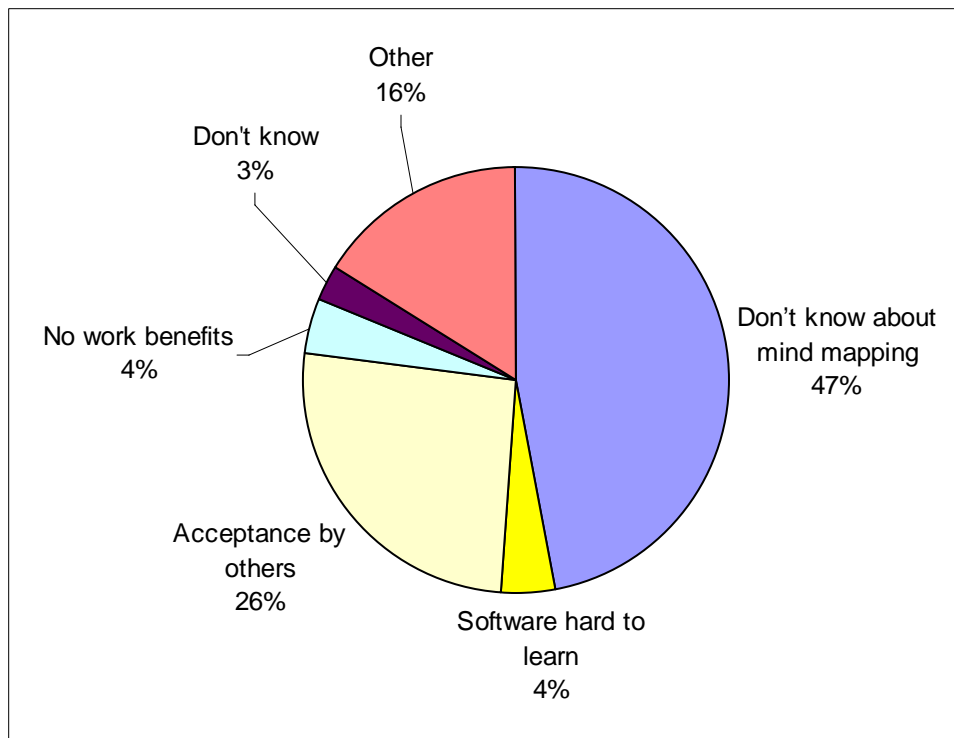


This is a very important question, because mind mapping software tends to be adopted by individuals or small teams within an organization. But often it spreads no further than these isolated users.

The biggest response to this question by a two-to-one margin was that "people don't know about mind mapping," which received 47.2% of the responses. In second place 26.2% of respondents agreed that "lack of acceptance of visual maps by managers and coworkers" was the problem.

This question had a surprisingly large number of "other" responses (78). Apparently, this is an issue that a lot of respondents feel strongly about! Here's a sampling of what people had to say:

- Not everybody is comfortable with 'radiant thinking' possibilities, and it is not always appropriate to use it.
- Difficulty overcoming preference for traditional methods of managing information
- Two things - investment of money and investment of time. People are so time pressured they won't invest the time to try it.
- Mind mapping is more about the approach than the software. People trying out mind mapping software don't see the benefit because they don't understand the foundation - the theory of mind mapping.
- The openness to try and explore new things is holding a lot of people back. People also think that (mind mapping) programs…are hard to learn.
- Currently it offers only very limited advantages over outliners

- Internal bureaucracy in getting new applications added to approved software list
- Cost
- Hasn't caught on with the right high level, high visibility manager.
- Corporate policies make it very hard to load viewer software and thus almost impossible to distribute maps
- Some people are visual, some are not.
- Visual mapping of information appeals hugely to those it works for but not for others who are used to/prefer linear processes.
- I suspect the mind map format lacks 'gravitas' with some people because any perceived individuality and lack of rigor in the mapping process will lead to mistrust in the outputs of that process.
- Not being able to integrate with calendars and note taking software, e-mail, etc. Also most of the commercial products are overpriced.
- Size of maps too limited for large projects
- Hard to deal with multiple, interrelated maps managed by different people
- Requires change in the way people work - that might put them off
- Getting the software approved by the IT dept
- People visualize issues (and) problems in different ways, so my map is a personal view
- Effective map creators are visual; many people are not.
- No compelling need to switch from current methods
- People with little graphic comprehension find mapping of little value
- It's a Swiss army knife; it needs a few dedicated uses with guidelines on how to use it
- When others see mind maps, they are confused.
- Managers don't understand the real benefits in mind mapping
- Software is easy (to use) - but changing the way you think about information and relationships may be hard
- Only appeals to people with visual, rather than other forms of learning/thinking

These responses seemed to be concentrated around a few specific issues: Lack of time to promote the use of mind mapping software to managers and coworkers, lack of awareness of the benefits that mind mapping software can provide, and restrictive corporate IT policies, which make it hard to implement a new piece of software.

Clearly, this is a complex issue that needs to be better understood by mind mapping software developers and executives within organizations who want to broaden the acceptance of it.

**7. Do you share the maps you create with team members or colleagues?**
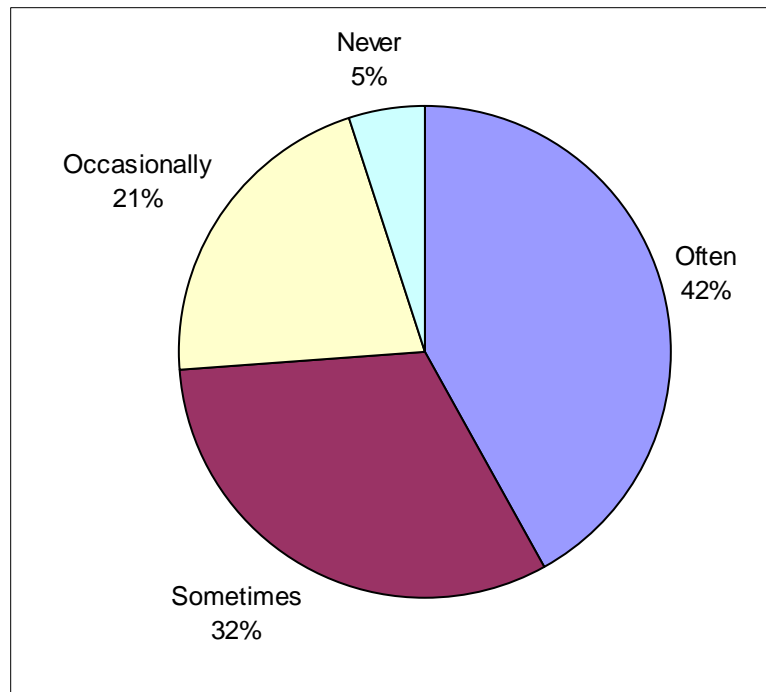


Considering the responses to the last question, one could assume that the majority out of users of mind mapping software are only creating visual maps for their personal use. But the responses to this question appear to contradict that: 41.6% of respondents said that they often share their maps with others, while another 32.3% do it sometimes.  Only 5.1% never share their maps with others.

**8. If you don't share your maps with others, why not?**

This was an open-ended question, related to question 7, which gathered nearly  100 responses.  Apparently this is an issue that respondents felt passionately about! Here's a sampling of the responses to this question:

- If you haven't worked with a "less linear" knowledge tool, it appears to be hard/er to synthesize the information comfortably.

- Others tend to prefer to receive word documents or excel spreadsheets.

- They are uncomfortable with the organic layout. The printing and presentation output… are still rather clumsy making quality presentations and printouts. Their integration with Word for printing is still not what I need to translate the map into presentable material efficiently.

- Maps can be very personal things - its easy to become evangelical. In situations where few people us maps, I rarely see maps that I wasn't involved in generating - when I do, it can be surprisingly difficult to see the inherent relationships in the structure. I remember this when I present to others.

- Others don't immediately see value, and they seem more receptive to traditional methods of presenting information

- Unlike MS Word, you can't assume that everyone has software to open your mindmap. (They) need a common exchange format like PDF.

- I selected "Lack of acceptance of visual maps by managers and co-workers" but that is too broad of a category. The real question is *why* is there a lack of acceptance. I think one is that it's difficult to read most maps unless you are involved in the creation (small maps work OK). Also, I don't think companies are willing to invest $300 per employee to get mind mapping software for everyone so that shared maps are as transportable and editable as Word, Excel, or PowerPoint documents. Now, if Microsoft included "MS Map" with every standard copy of MS Office, I think maps would be much more commonplace (and it would solve the first issue because people would get used to seeing the format). Face it, the cost of quality mind mapping software is insane compared to most other office productivity software (cost/functionality)... it will take many years to "evolve" to where mapping is commonplace because of the cost barriers. (not to mention a lack of a standard file format).

- They represent my way of thinking and are not necessarily easy for others to understand.

- I'd really like to use a high end mind mapper application…but it is too expensive. Others of my colleagues also think so and have not purchased it. It costs only about $10 less than the (Microsoft) Office Pro license. Since they don't have the software I can only share the results via PDF or another Office document, which means updates don't make it back to the actual file unless I do it manually.

- It takes too long to explain the process and benefits, in most cases.

- I am still hesitant to show maps to suppliers and others who are not well versed in technology. Many people these days are desperately afraid of change. Mind Mapping requires a change in how information is read...while it is a very easy change to make not everyone is willing to make it.

- Most of the time they would contain more information than could possibly be useful for communication. They are a terrible communication tool apart from when used to illustrate the amount of detail covered in a project. They are much better used as a practical knowledge management tool and would therefore only be of interest to those most closely involved in the work.

- The process of sharing maps and thereafter working collaboratively with them is not well enough established by the existing vendors.

- If you are familiar with the Myers-Brigg Type Index (MBTI), this explanation is easy. The Myers-Briggs "sensors" have significant difficulty using abstract models (such as hierarchical mind maps) or reasoning using abstract models, or making decisions about the future using abstract models. It is easy to identify these people by watching them trace a mind map using their index finger. The MBTI sensors start at the root and follow one branch all the way down to a leaf. Then they stop and argue about the leaf and its contents. They rarely ever get back up to the root or to other first level nodes. These people routinely request a Microsoft Word document without all the confusing pictures. I comply by delivering them Word documents or PDF documents without any embedded maps. The abstract reasoners start at the root and begin tracing circles around the root, tracing first all the first level nodes, then tracing all the second level nodes, and so on outward in widening circles. These people not only love maps, they almost immediately begin suggesting corrections or additions to the maps. For these people I supply printed maps or Microsoft Word documents with embedded map fragments.

- Lack of visual thinkers in other areas of the company. Unfamiliarity with "mapping" concept.
- Needs more work, not ready for presentation, hard to understand, not interactive, usually needs simplification
- They want the information in a format they can update and don't have the software

**10. What additional information do you need to know about mind mapping software?**

- (A) toolkit of XSL transforms application to Quality Function Deployment and other six sigma techniques in a non-manufacturing environment
- Usefulness with other applications
- How to work on maps in a collaborative environment. (more than one person working on the same map in a distributed environment - over the internet)
- I'm interested in how to link maps to organizers other than Outlook. Outlook's task list organization is too limited and linear.
- Is there an application that is web-based so colleagues can access it on a per-needed basis? Plus web-based means virtual teams can more easily work together.
- 1. More examples of potential uses 2. Quantifiable ROI data to sell value internally 3. Examples/testimonials from IT professionals to break down barriers within our own IT environment
- I believe that we need XML Standards so that Mind Maps can be shared between applications. In addition, Mind maps can drive automation and productivity leveraging IT systems.
- Ideas on applications
- I would like to consume data such as white papers and sales copy in the form of maps. I am always interested to learn of different ways others use Mind Maps.
- More on the process of entering different types information instead of reinventing the wheel every time.
- Good disciplines in managing information. Getting the best out of it.
- Has any product got a wiki-type base that allows multiple updaters and backout of changes if necessary? (note: most wikis maintain a change history, which enables an administrator to "undo" a change that has been made)
- Further Integration of sending e-mails directly from MindManager maps. Using Sharepoint effectively integrated with MindManager.
- Most of the issues I am having relate to how to extend the use of this process to integrate key staff members and live data. I would welcome the opportunity to speak with someone with regards to how others are doing this.
- Would welcome greater ability to transfer data between mind maps and other software, especially Outlook, GANTT charts etc.
- More examples of MindManager macros. More information on developing add-ins.
- Ways of explaining and/or promoting mind mapping as the ultimate tool to manage work of any kind including your personal needs.

- How (are mind maps) best integrated with the Internet?

- I am not a programmer nor do I have time to be, yet I would like an easy, visual way to integrate web resources into my maps, other than a hyperlink.

- I am now exploring techniques of map linking to create my own methodology of strategy and Balanced Scorecard development

- More SPECIFIC ways of applying in business for personal/group productivity

- It is often great to hear how other companies are using it, but it would be great to see real life applications.

- Are the leading mind mapping software manufacturers working toward the use of XML or other technologies to link in databases for real-time information analysis? (e.g., MindManager 6 links Excel spreadsheets and/or sections of worksheets. Will Access or SQL databases be next on linkage plans?)

- I think there's a whole lot OTHERS need to know about organizing info. It's my impression that most people using any kind of hierarchical representation of information only scratch the surface of the potential that exists. I learned the most useful theory from DOS MaxThink's manual (and related programs from Neil Larson, though I can't recommend his Win version of MaxThink, in beta for years!).

- I would like to know more about using MindManager to generate web documents - mainly the technical side of it.

- I need to know more about integration with other applications (eg., MS Office & Project), one-way/two-way info sync. Universal sharing and collaboration of maps.

- More samples and examples of how people are using it. Something I want to do with my blog eventually.

- Short case studies on how individuals are using mind mapping software to be more effective at work. Cases should include what they were doing before, what they're doing now with mind maps, what the maps look like, and how they've benefited from the change.

- Better techniques for sharing and having multiple people contribute to a project using the maps.

- To learn more about what others have done to sell the concept of mind mapping and how they have dealt with the resistance from the "linears."

- I need to better understand how best to organize/structure the map and how to recognize what information lends itself to mapping and what doesn't - it isn't a software issue, its a "softbrain" issue. Then, I will need to become more facile at putting and pulling information in maps in a way for easiest retrieval and comprehension.

- Plenty of examples to illustrate what you can do with the existing software. There are many features that one has not even tried but these features need to be illustrated with a simple example, most of us are not programmers and do not write macros....etc

- I'm impressed by the list of alternative products at the start of the survey. I would like to know which, if any, are capable of recording and playback of embedded sound, without recourse to an external media player. I also need the product to fully support Unicode multi-byte character sets (for the Cyrillic alphabet); some of the products I've found with sound support fall down on Unicode.

- Information about advanced uses and add-ons that is rookie-friendly. Why do I want these add-ons? Am I being left behind/out?
- Is there or will there be a standard viewing format for software generated mind maps? Is there or will there be a standard software file format for mind maps?
- Interested in extending business process mapping capabilities
- I would like to use mind mapping for preparing and updating websites. Also full indexing would be fine and a combination with wiki for hyperlinking.

## Recommended resources

- The Mind Mapping Software Blog - news and updates on mind mapping tools and resources.
- The Mind Mapping Resource Center - a collection of software reviews and links to programs and articles about mind mapping software.
- Power Tips & Strategies for Mind Mapping Software - a best-selling e-book that will help you to increase your productivity with this type of software.

## For more information, please contact:

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