

Survey Results

February 2007

This is the second in a series of surveys of users of mind mapping software. My objectives in conducting this ongoing research are to find out how executives are using mind mapping software, and to shed some light on the challenges of increasing its acceptance in corporate settings.

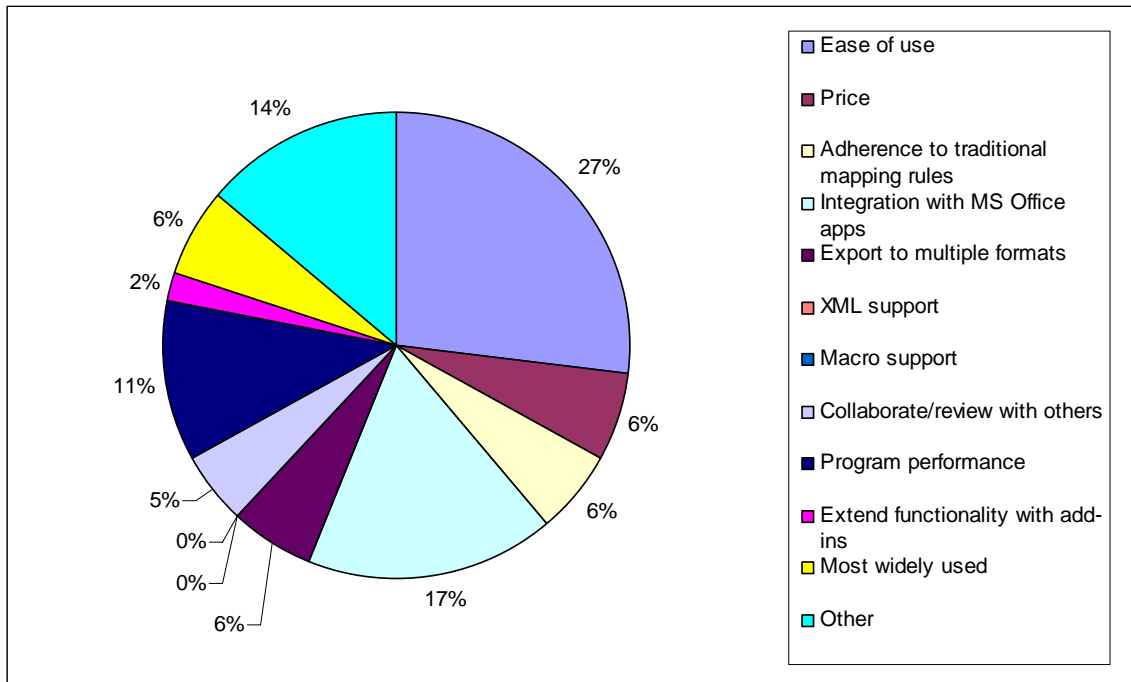
During the month of February 2007, just over 500 people participated in this online survey. Thanks to those of you who participated in this important research project, as well as the bloggers who helped to promote it! This survey reveals how users got started using mind mapping software, and the biggest benefit they're getting from it. We also learn what users of mind mapping software are currently struggling with, and the future functionality they would like to see in mind mapping software.

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 chuck@innovationtools.com. I look forward to your feedback!

Visually yours,

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Author, [Power Tools & Strategies for Mind Mapping Software](#) (e-book)

1. What factor was most important when you purchased the mind mapping software that you are now using?



Not surprisingly, just over one-fourth of survey respondents said ease-of-use (26.8%) was the number one factor they considered. The next most popular factor was integration with Microsoft Office applications (Word, Outlook, PowerPoint and Project – 17.1%). Only 5.8% of respondents said that adherence to traditional mind mapping rules was important to them. Chances are, most business users of mind mapping software have never heard of Tony Buzan!

Among the “other” responses to this question were these:

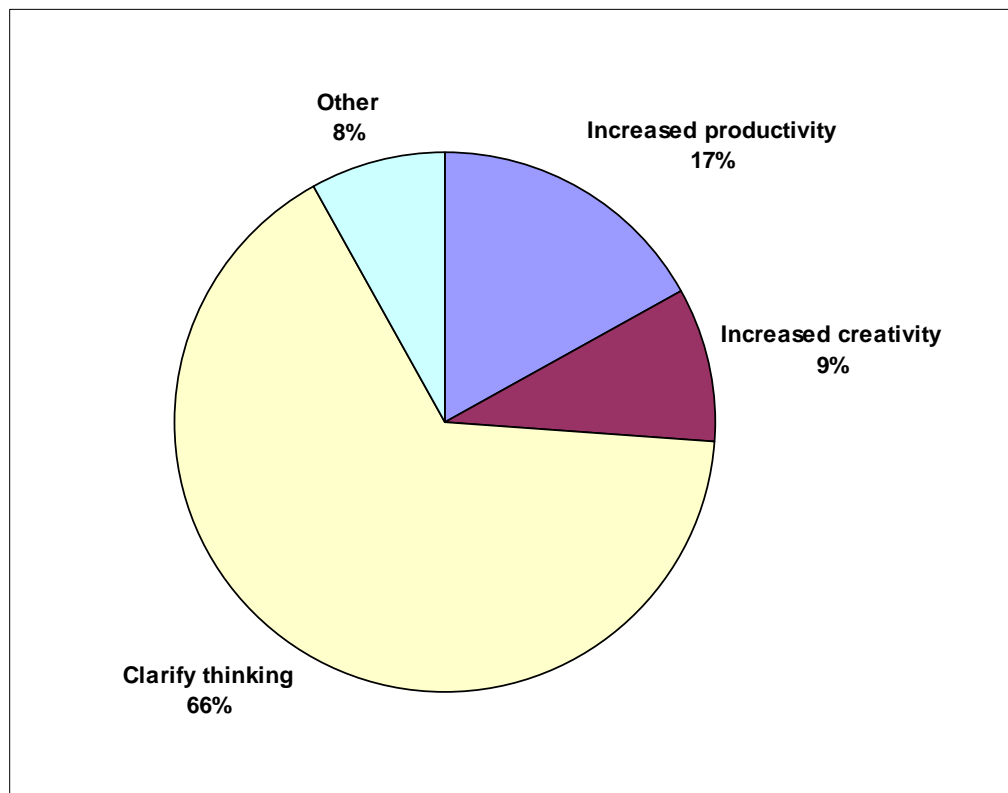
- Intuitive fit with the way I think and represent things and their relationships.
- Tablet PC support.
- Level of functionality and feature set. Also, the way the program worked was intuitive, so I could start working without having to read manuals.
- Ability to generate web pages with maps linking to pages.
- Ability to map URLs and content on my hard drive to make a "knowledge map."
- A very robust feature set - which permits the highest degree of flexibility.
- Ability to collaborate/review with others.
- Flexibility in formatting and determining the layout of the final output.

2. How and where did you first learn about mind mapping software?

Respondents cited a large variety of sources where they first learned about mind mapping software. The most common responses were blogs and colleagues/coworkers. Here is a sampling of the replies to this question:

- I read an article about mind mapping.
- I read about it on some web sites.
- I started looking for something that could replicate digitally what I was doing with paper and pen.
- In a creativity book.
- On Innovationtools.com.
- After reading Tony Buzan's book, I Googled mind mapping and came across a bunch of listings.
- GTD David Allen book.
- From a colleague at work.
- The blogosphere.
- One of my clients was using it.
- In a seminar.

3. What's most important to you when using your mind mapping software?

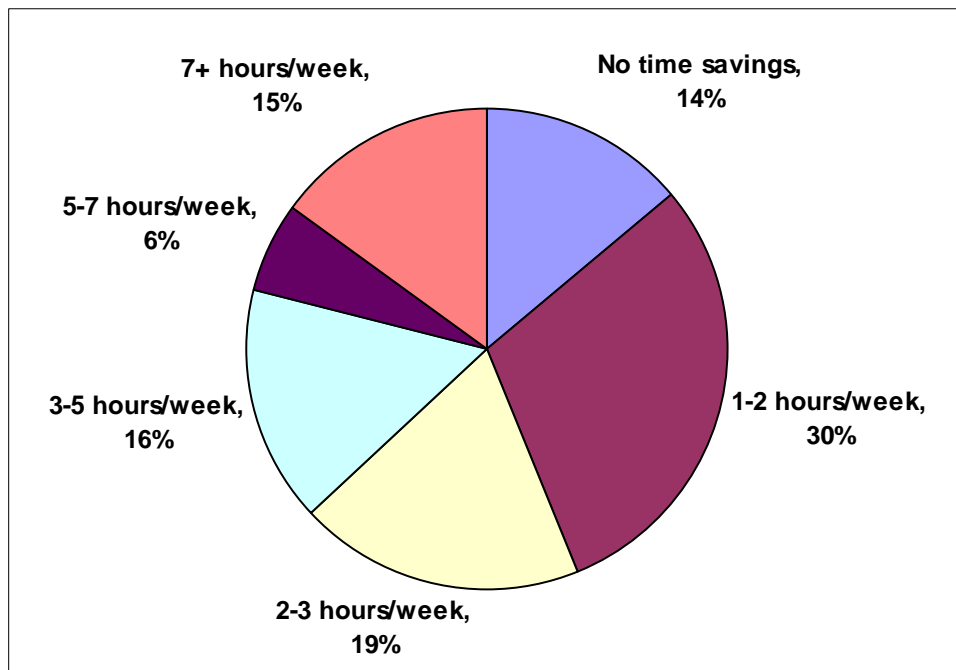


Respondents clearly stated, by a large margin (3-to-1) that what's most important to them when using their mind mapping software is to clarify their thinking (66.3%). Considering the strength of mind mapping software in enabling users to quickly capture their thoughts, view the relationships between them and rearrange them with almost complete freedom, this data isn't surprising. Increasing their productivity was a distant second, at 16.9%. And increasing creativity only received 9% of the responses. Apparently the majority of users don't consider their mind mapping software to be primarily a creative tool.

Some of the most interesting "other" responses to this question were these:

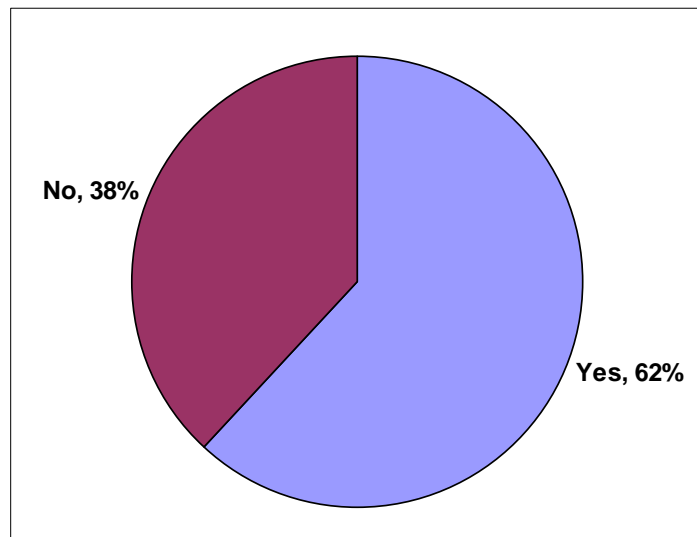
- Encapsulate multiple, diverse thoughts.
- I can clarify my thoughts in a systematic order, I can increase my productivity and (it) allows me to be more creative. Just by looking at a mind map I can see different approaches to the problem.
- Organize thoughts, collect information in an easily comprehended visual manner. It increases productivity, as one can return to add things to a map at a later moment.
- I use the software in two modes. One, for development of ideas and plans (and capturing information in a succinct way that ordinary notes can never hope to describe). I also use the software while studying (I am taking an MBA). I use it to capture lecture information (as a note-taking tool) – to tidy up my hand drawn maps, and as a revision tool (to ensure that I understand the material prior to exams).

4. Approximately how much time per week does utilizing your mind mapping software save you, compared to conventional methods of planning and brainstorming?



The largest group of respondents (30%) said that their mind mapping software only saves them one to two hours a week. Another two large segments of respondents (35%) indicated that it saves them between 2-5 hours per week. Another 15% said they're saving 7 or more hours a week. Note the nearly even distribution of time savings on the pie chart on the previous page. If you consider that some respondents are fairly new users of mind mapping software, while others are more experienced and still others could be considered "power users," then this data would seem to make sense.

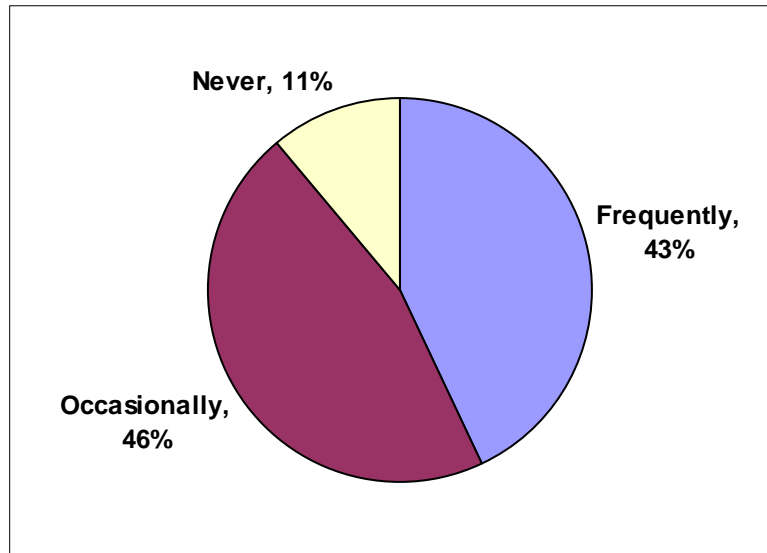
5. In addition to creating software produced visual maps, do you also create hand-drawn maps?



Nearly two thirds of respondents (61.9%) said yes, they do create both software produced and hand-drawn maps. This shouldn't be surprising, because a significant number of people say they started out learning how to create hand-drawn mind maps, and then "graduated" to mind mapping software.

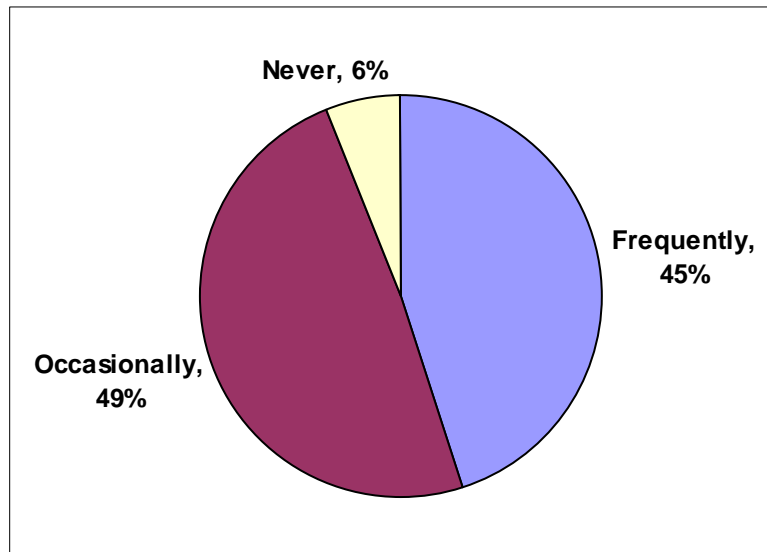
Also, there are times and places where pulling out a laptop or Tablet PC and creating a mind map to capture notes or ideas just isn't practical. In those situations, all you need is a paper and pen, and you can quickly capture your ideas in paper form. Clearly, both forms of mapping are important to business people.

I had assumed that there would be a larger percentage of users who jumped immediately into creating software-produced mind maps, but never put pen to paper to hand draw them. But that wasn't the case.

6. How often do you share your mind maps with colleagues or workers?

Sharing mind maps with others appears to be remarkably common. The vast majority of respondents either do so frequently (43%) or occasionally (46%). Only 11% of respondents said they never share their maps with colleagues or coworkers.

Whether you're sharing your mind maps in native form, as an image file, web page or another format, the need to do so is apparently nearly universal. But when you read the answers to the question 9, you will discover that a significant number of respondents find it challenging to actually do so. Interesting...

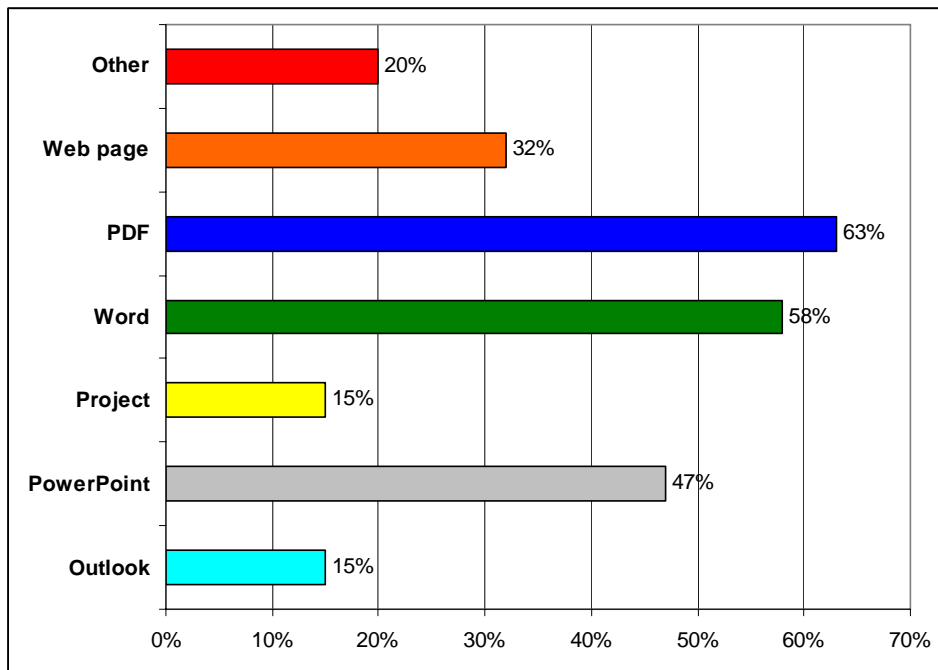
7. How often do you export data from your mind maps to other data formats?

Nearly half of the respondents to this survey said that they export their maps to other formats frequently (45%), while another 48% do so only occasionally. Hardly anyone (6%) views the native mind map format as the final destination for their information and

ideas. I thought this number would be higher, because mind mapping software is a fairly young technology. But because the typical business user or organization is one of the few who actually have this type of software, they are literally forced to export their maps to other formats (such as PDF files) in order to share them with their coworkers and colleagues.

As I noted earlier, however, this is still an area that many respondents feel challenged by. The process of exporting their maps to other data formats just isn't as easy as it needs to be.

8. What formats do you usually export your mind maps into?



The number one format that respondents utilize is PDF (63%). “Printing” your map to a PDF file creates a read-only version of your mind map (less any interactivity, such as links and notes, of course) that others can easily view, without the need for a special map viewer. Also, the PDF file format is ubiquitous today; nearly every computer is equipped to view this universal document format. So it’s not surprising that this file format was ranked number one. PDF was closely followed by Microsoft Word (58%), another very common file format. Nearly half of respondents (47%) also export their maps to Microsoft PowerPoint.

“Other” responses included these:

- Visio
- Microsoft OneNote
- Open Office Writer
- XML
- GanttProject
- Plain text
- OPML

9. What is most confusing about your mind mapping program?

Responses to this question clustered around a number of common issues:

Export to/Integration with other applications (37 comments): The most common responses were integration with Microsoft Word, PowerPoint and Outlook. Some specific problems identified by respondents included these (generalized from the verbatim responses received):

- The way in which mind mapping programs export to Word. Usually, topics and sub-topics are exported as different heading types in Microsoft Word, which respondents said they had to spend a lot of time reformatting to plain text. Also, some programs indented topics based on where they were in the map hierarchy. Cleaning up this formatting in Word was also considered to be time consuming.
- Synchronization with tasks in Microsoft Outlook was deemed to be troublesome by a number of respondents.
- Several people weren't happy with their program's ability to generate clickable maps when doing HTML exports, but they didn't provide details on the specific problems or limitations they encountered. Apparently the HTML output options of many mind mapping software programs isn't flexible enough to meet users' needs.
- Exporting to PowerPoint creates a slide deck that requires far too much tweaking.

Printing large maps so that they are readable: A number of respondents said that it is difficult to figure out the correct font size to use for large maps, so when printed the words are as small as possible, but still readable. One person described this as a trial-and-error process.

Repositioning the branches relative to each other: Many respondents said they were frustrated that they couldn't arrange and rearrange their maps branches in a way that was pleasing to them. Often, the program they used restricted their ability to freely rearrange topics and branches.

Linking to RSS: For several of the leading mind mapping software programs, this is a fairly new capability. So it wasn't surprising to see that a number of respondents cited it as an area of confusion.

Inadequate symbols: Several respondents indicated that the symbols and icons that came with their program were too cartoonish and were inadequate for their business needs.

Templates: Several respondents found the default templates that came with their mind mapping software to be inadequate; they struggled to create new templates that would more closely meet their needs.

Collaboration: Several respondents found it difficult to collaborate with others using the mind maps they have created in their software program. This issue was also cited in the last mind mapping software survey, conducted September 2006.

Other interesting responses to this question included:

- Introducing the concept of mind mapping to others.
- The lack of filtering for large maps.
- Formatting/changing the appearance of branches.
- Creating, linking and navigating multilevel maps.
- Assigning resources is clumsy.
- The rigidity of the drawing program of when compared with a hand-drawn one.
- Organizing my maps the way I want them to look.
- Difficult to see it on one page.
- Formatting the mind map.
- It is so powerful now that it is difficult to grasp the whole range of its functionality.
- Managing large maps.
- Formatting a map is complex, in my opinion. I'd like to easily make organic, flowing maps, but it seems like I have to re-learn how to do it each time. It's not intuitive.
- Control and optimization of page layout.
- The notes function is not WYSIWYG.
- Confusing how to best set up multiple maps from the same topic. Should I just keep making one huge map, or break off sub-topics into their own maps? How to show which items are changed on a new version of a map? How to best store/access my maps in the library (in folders or not, folders within folders)?
- Fitting the visuals to the screen in a view that contains as much information as possible. For clients, having them learn to navigate the maps in a clockwise direction (believe it or not) and get the same impact as I get from each map.
- Overcoming program defaults to make the map look like what I want.
- Very different than what others are used to, and the biggest hurdle is how do you change your organizational culture to accept the mind mapping paradigm shift?
- Navigation, toolbars are too cluttered -- need a light mode for adding content and a full set of toolbars when going back to refine your map.
- Template and style modification.
- Why can't it make the results more attractive?
- The "how do you do that again" issue. What usually happens is that I like to use some feature of the software that graphically captures my thoughts in a specific way, but it's a feature that I don't use often enough and thus forget exactly how to activate (it). While I'm scanning through the menus or online help, it breaks the flow of my brainstorming.
- Incorporating it into a personal organizing system (so many options).
- There's so much functionality that new users get lost. I have trouble remembering how to perform a lesser-used task.
- How to set up the default settings for a map.

10. What is on your wish list of functionality for mind mapping software? What do wish you could do?

- I would like to include floating graphics and background images with more flexibility.
- I want Adobe Illustrator plus MindManager. I wish I could go freestyle and draw directly on the map... sometimes (actually often), I want to draw a diagram of something on the map. Currently there is not a way to do this, other than to draw the diagram in another program, save it as a JPEG and insert it into one of the branches. That's just looks ugly, and lacks finesse.
- Easy to embed in a web page (as) flash output.
- I wish I could make the mind maps look better in presentations.
- (I want to be) able to mind map on a whiteboard both solo and in a group setting. With a group to allow people to have personal tablets that are in sync with a whiteboard.
- A little more flexibility in spacing and moving the topics around.
- It would be great if I could export my mind maps directly to my blogger account, maintaining the maps clickable and showing added notes, links and the like.
- Link to databases and display query results organized in map format.
- I'd like a sketching style with pencil lines and a clean, easily read "pencil" architectural font, like Graphite/Tekton.
- A more organic visual appearance. It currently still looks very hard edged.
- More creativity.
- Prompt me with questions. Such as in a planning type mind map, what are the five most important steps you need to take? Does one have to be done first? This would be like having a little mental coach to ask questions that would be suited to the type of map you are setting out to create.
- Integrate with Act as well as Outlook.
- Easily assign resources to tasks; some programs do a great job at this, (but) MindManager is weak in this area.
- I wish maps could be RSS enabled so that others could subscribe to my maps, and when I changed them, they would be notified of the changes.
- ODBC link so I can pull data in from an external database.
- (An) easy way to extend its functionality, e.g. through Python or PERL, i.e. without having to go through a full-fledged VBA programming exercise.
- Automatic updating of the summary maps with the detail maps so I can see all my maps updated on one page.
- I wish that it had more control over the branch lines and the orientation of each node. Likewise, flexible branches (i.e., NovaMind) would be very cool. This would allow for more organic compositions. However, I also like the structured layout of MindManager. I just want to be able to do both.
- Be more concise, use the available space on a paper more efficiently. Mind maps tend to grow big quickly in every direction. Therefore the space should be used as efficiently as possible without too much white space in between

branches. One way of solving this is using flexible branches of that can go in every direction (i.e., not only horizontal as in many programs).

- As an alternative GUI for all my information.
- To me it is crucial to have the possibility of starting with two to three central ideas.
- There are times when I want to draw something in my map, and I have to jump elsewhere which ruins the thought process.
- Export to do tasks to Lotus Notes.
- I would like to be able to integrate mind mapping software with a voice-recognition software. Currently, support for this feature is very limited.
- Ability to leverage freehand drawing and freeform branching.
- The ability to integrate with Microsoft OneNote.

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.
- [Mind Mapping Software: How to Select the Perfect Program for Your Needs](#) - How can you select the right program for your needs, when there are over 20 visual mapping software programs available today? This new e-book is a practical roadmap, a guide that separates the wheat from the chaff and that teaches you what you need to know to make an informed decision.
- [Mind Mapping Resources page on Squidoo](#) – A comprehensive collection of links to the best information about mind mapping software on the web.

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