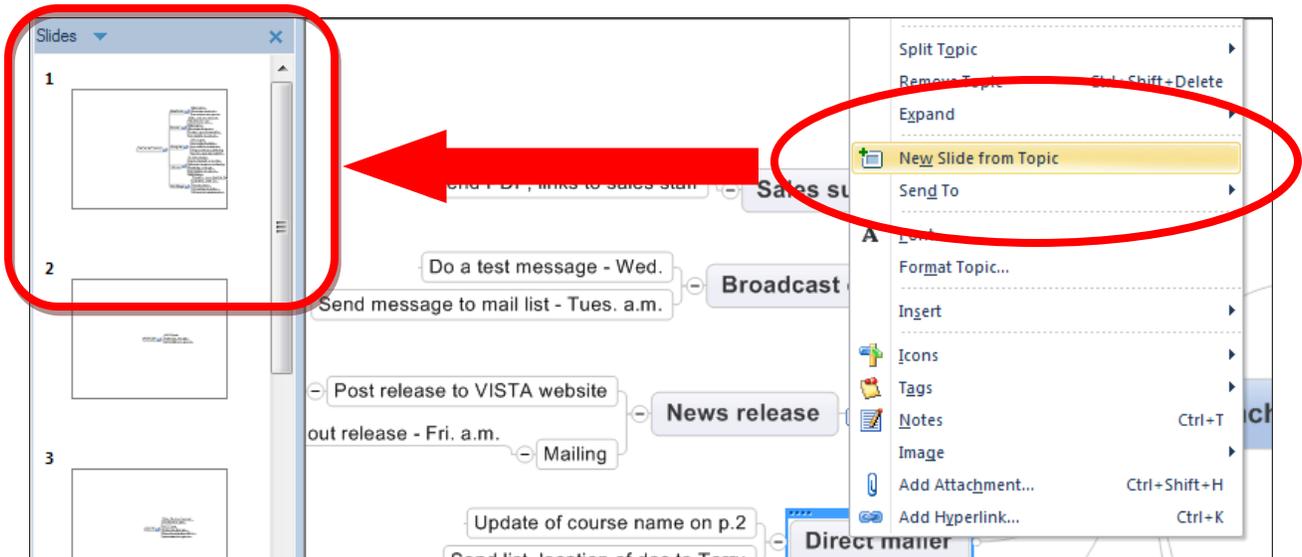


A comparison of PowerPoint export formats in mind mapping software

by Chuck Frey, Mind Mapping Software Blog

Exporting mind maps to PowerPoint files is a common task that many people need to do with mind mapping software. It's an ideal tool for gathering and organizing your thoughts, and then moving them over to Microsoft's ubiquitous presentation program – either as visual objects or converted to text. With many mind mapping programs, it's even possible to make presentations directly from it. In this report, we'll analyze each of the major mind mapping programs and outline the capabilities they offer. I'll also compare the pros and cons of each developer's approach to exporting, and what this implies in terms of how much reformatting you'll need to do in PowerPoint.

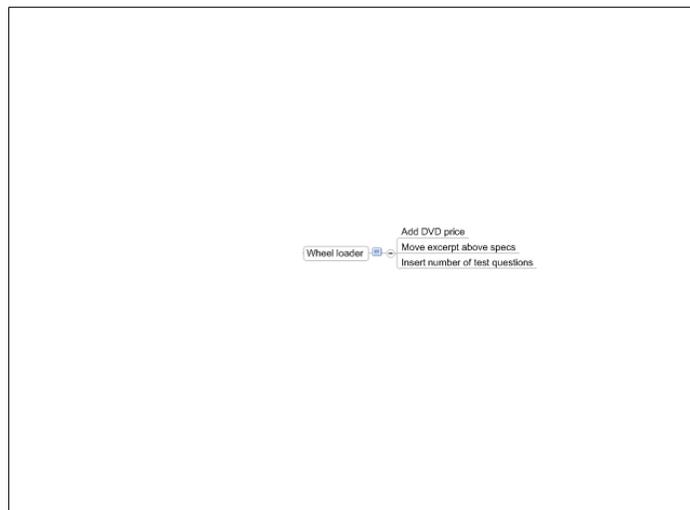
MindManager 9



In past versions of MindManager, you could make presentations directly from the program, but the program decided what to display. It basically walked you around each branch and sub-

branch of your map, displaying each one in clockwise order. Starting with version 9, Mindjet moved to a new presentation model, which now enables users to designate which branches and sub-branches should be included in your presentation. You do so by right-clicking on the topic that you want to convert into a slide, and selecting the “make a slide” command (see the screen shot on the previous page). MindManager then adds that topic and any sub-topics to a slide sorter to the left of the work space – which looks and functions very much like the one contained in PowerPoint.

I’ve used MindManager to make a presentation, and I found it to be fairly challenging. Why? Because you can’t adjust the size of the topics and subtopics in your slides. Where this becomes a shortcoming is if you want to export a simple branch with only two sub-topics, for example. When you convert it to a slide, it becomes a small image floating in a lot of white space (see the screen shot at right for an actual example of this).



If you’re trying to present to a large group or via a web conference (the situation I found myself in several months ago), you’ll discover that this is a major disadvantage: The mini-grouping of topics is so small compared to the screen real estate that it may be almost unreadable. Also, it’s hard to follow the progression from one topic to another, because MindManager treats them as separate, discreet objects. This causes you as the presenter and the audience to lose a sense of the context of the topics they’re viewing. Clearly, this needs to be made adjustable in future versions of MindManager. For a better approach, see the review of NovaMind 5 below.

You can export all topics to PowerPoint, or only selected topics. Because MindManager only exports visible topics, you can use filters to hide those topics you don’t want exported. That’s a valuable feature, in my opinion, because not everything you put in your mind maps needs to be shared with an audience. In fact, to keep their attention, you really ought to be selective about how much detail you show to them.

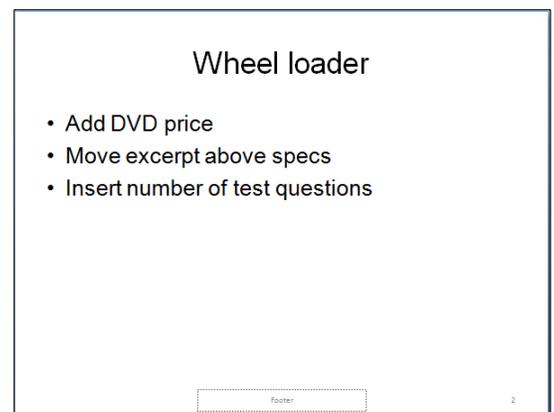
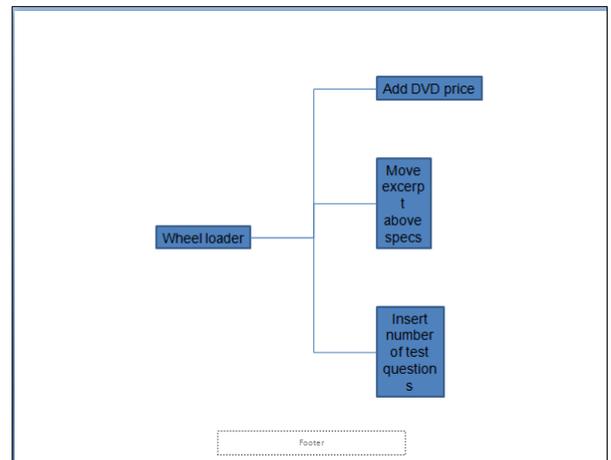
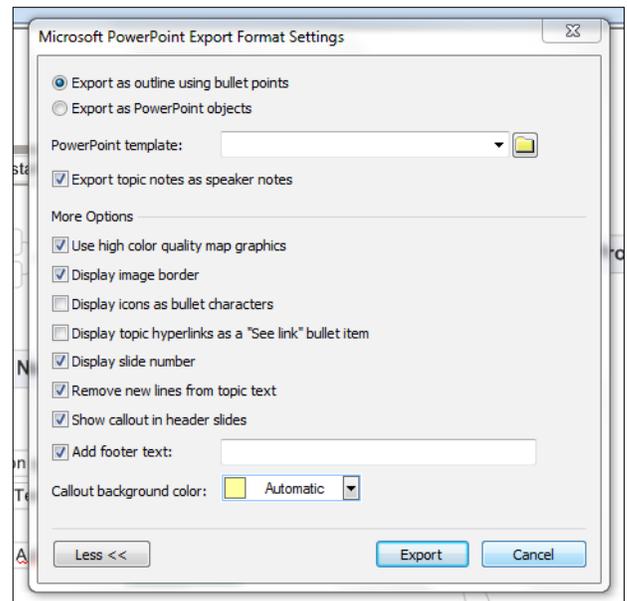
MindManager can export to a plain PowerPoint file (no template) or to the PowerPoint template of your choice. If you have a standard corporate template that you use for your presentations, this is a real-time saver.

The screen shot at right shows what the export to PowerPoint dialog box looks like. As you can see, it gives you quite a few options as far as what gets exported or not. MindManager 9 enables you to export your mind maps to PowerPoint in 2 different formats: As an outline and as images of the mind map branches (called “export as PowerPoint objects” in the dialog box).

Export as PowerPoint objects: When I did this type of export to one of my mind maps, I expected it to retain the look and feel of the branches in my map. That’s not what happened. For some reason, MindManager converted my map branches into a blocky topic style, with text in black. Not very attractive, and somewhat hard to read. Some of the text actually breaks in the middle of words to a new line. You can select and adjust the size of each topic, which corrects this problem, but that approach seemed overly fussy to me. I don’t want to have to work that hard to incorporate data from my mind maps into a presentation!

I hope Mindjet spends some time improving this feature, because it leaves something to be desired.

Export as outline: The other option for exporting your mind maps to PowerPoint is to do so in an outline format. When you do this, each first-level topic of your mind map is converted to a separate PowerPoint slide, with the topic text as the slide title and its topics and subtopics as bullet points and sub-bullets. In contrast to the export as

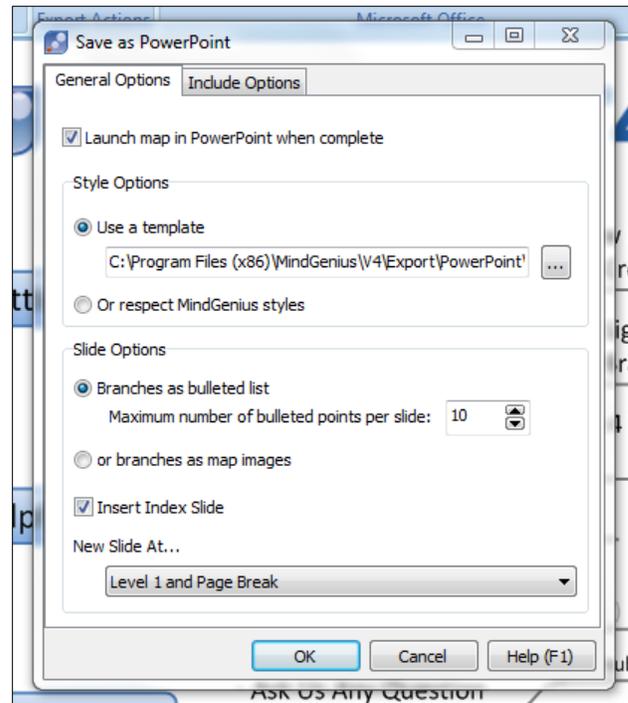


objects option, this outline export is very clean (see the screen shot at right) and should be easy to embellish in PowerPoint.

MindGenius 4

MindGenius 4 does a nice job of exporting your mind maps to a decent-looking PowerPoint file. You can export to a default template that the developer has thoughtfully included with the program – with an attractive plain blue background – or select the one of your choice by browsing to its location on your hard drive. If you select “respect MindGenius styles,” the program honors the font size and styling from your mind map.

In the section entitled “slide options,” you can specify the maximum number of bullet points that MindGenius places on a single slide. You can also export your map branches as images.



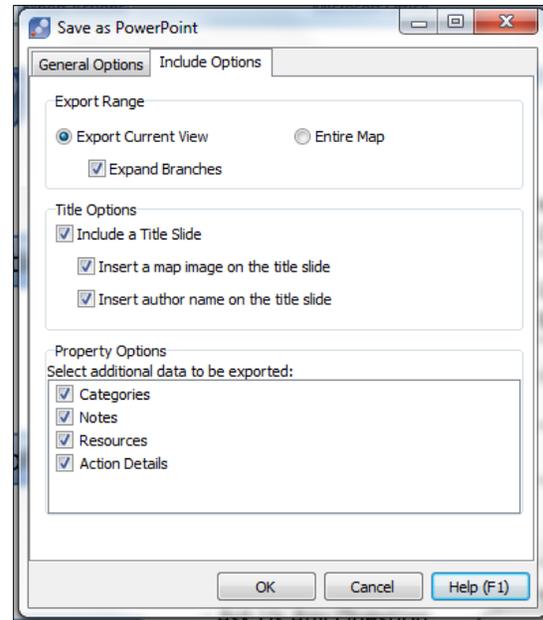
Another nice touch is a check box to “insert (a) title slide.” This inserts the file name and author’s name into a title slide that is the first one in your presentation. That’s followed by a second slide that shows your entire mind map as an image. After that, each first-level topic and its children are formatted as separate bullet-point slides.

In addition, you can export each branch as a map image. I tried this, and discovered that it created slides that looked quite pleasing (see screen shot at right).

A second tab of MindGenius’ PowerPoint export dialog box gives you ample control over what gets exported, and how it should look. For example, you can export the current view



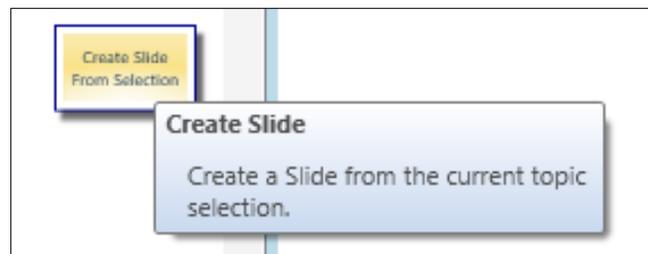
(useful for exporting only topics and subtopics that are visible in a filtered view). You can also decide whether or not to include a title slide and map image at the beginning of your presentation. “Property options” refers to categories, notes, resources and action details, which should be exported. This second tab’s contents are displayed in the screen shot at right. It’s nice to see these options, but I think it would be more useful if you could also decide on whether or not to export floating topics and links to web pages.



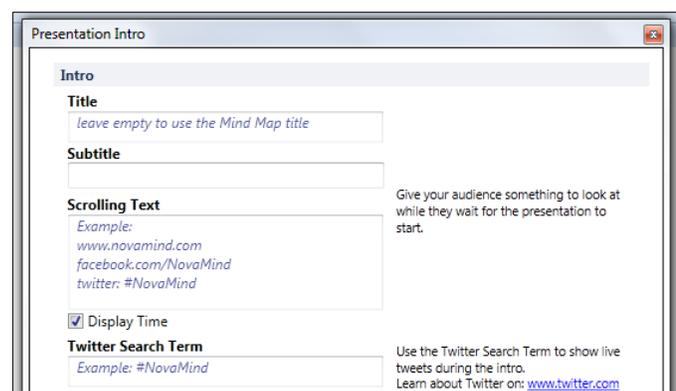
Kudos to the developers at MindGenius for crafting a PowerPoint export tool that doesn’t overwhelm with too many options, is easy to use and delivers polished output that doesn’t require a lot of additional tweaking.

NovaMind 5

NovaMind 5 enables its users to make sophisticated presentations from within the program. To do so, you first click on the program’s “presenter” tab in the ribbon toolbar. Clicking on the “slides panel” button opens a vertical pane on the left side of the workspace, where you can manage your slides. To convert a topic into a slide, you can right click on it and select the “create presentation slide” from it. You can also click on a “create slide from presentation” button that always hovers at the bottom of the slide sorter view, or by clicking the “create from selection” button in the presenter toolbar.

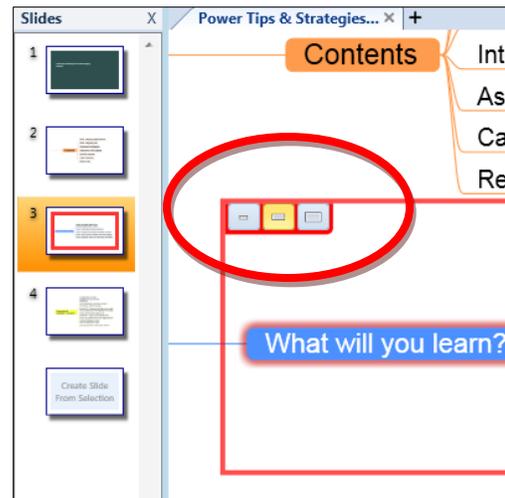


Double clicking on the title slide causes the program to display a special “presentation intro” dialog box, where you can extensively customize this slide. For example, by default, the program uses the map’s central topic as the title. But you can override



that here. There's also room to insert a subtitle and insert a line of scrolling text, which you can utilize to display a special message to your audience – such as a welcome greeting, or you can insert a URL or a Twitter feed. The idea is to give your audience something to watch while they're waiting for the presentation to begin.

Double-clicking on a content slide in NovaMind's slide viewer displays its contents in the work area with a red border around them, and 3 small rectangular control buttons in the upper left corner (see the screen shot at right). These allow you to adjust the size of the map branches relative to the borders of the slide itself. In other words, if you have a map branch with only one or two subtopics, you can easily zoom in closer, so it fills more of the frame. This approach is superior to what MindManager offers; although both utilize a slide-based presentation creation tool, only NovaMind lets you control the size of your map objects within the slides.



What's especially nice is that when you do a presentation in NovaMind 5, the program pans and zooms from one topic to the next. There's a sense of progression, of context that was missing from MindManager's presentation toolset. In addition, if your computer is connected to a second screen or external projector, the program automatically displays two views: The presenter sees a special view that shows the current slide and what's coming next, as well as a timer that shows the elapsed time of the presentation so far. The audience sees only the slides. The first time I tried this in NovaMind, it blew me away. What a great presentation tool!

Exporting to PowerPoint: Exporting your mind map to PowerPoint is a simple affair with absolutely no options. You tell NovaMind where to save the file and it creates a PowerPoint file there. Opening it reveals a set of plain, bulleted slides.

Clearly, the developers of NovaMind

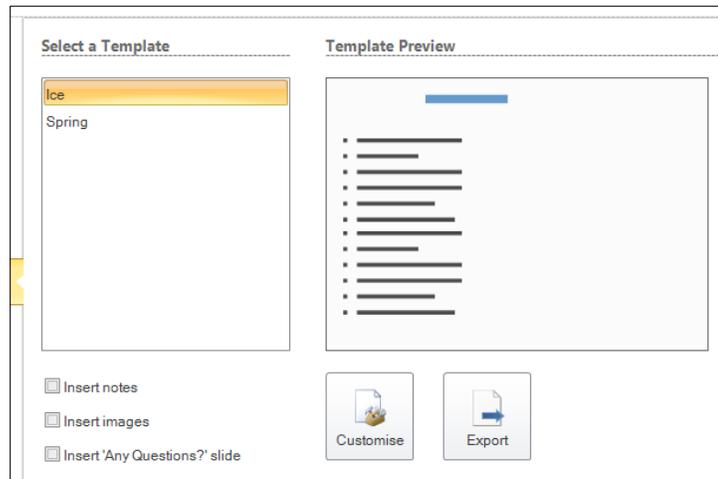
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- Mind mapping applications
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- Interviews with experts
- Ask the experts
- Case histories
- Resources

would prefer that you use their presentation tool – as well you should, because it’s powerful, flexible and is certain to make a great impression on your next audience.

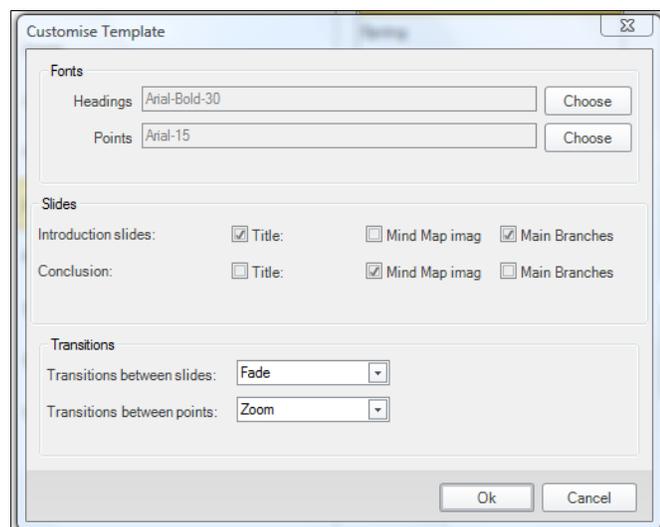
iMindMap 5

Like most mind mapping programs, iMindMap 5 has a built-in presentation mode, which “flies” you around your mind map from one branch to the next. You can also add in a 3-D element, which changes the plane of view of your topic from flat to angled. Topic lines take on a depth, and the effect does give your presentations some added visual impact.



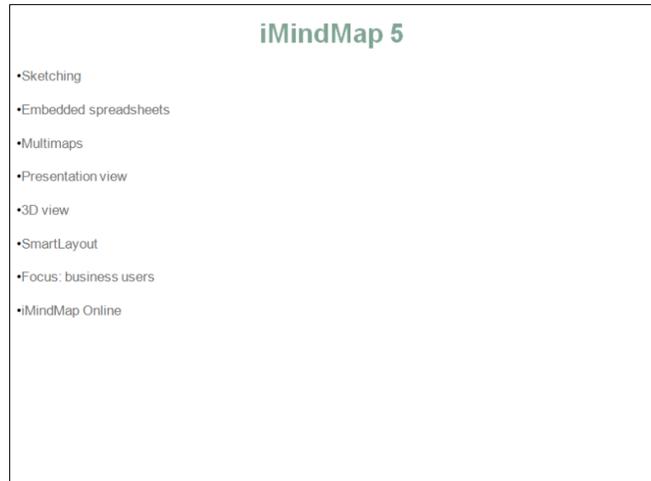
iMindMap can also export to PowerPoint, and that’s what we’ll be focusing on here. When you select export/presentation from the file menu, iMindMap displays the dialog box pictured above right. You get a choice of two templates: ice or spring. Below that are check boxes, where you can decide if you want to insert notes or images from your map into your exported slides, and whether or not iMindMap should inset an “any questions” slide at the end of your presentation. These are the basic export settings, which should meet the needs of many users.

This dialog box also contains a “customize” button, which gives you access to additional controls. It enables you to select the fonts for your slide titles and bullet points. You can also add introduction and conclusion slides, and select which map elements they should contain (title, mind map image and main branches).



You can also select transitions between slides and between bullet points. Each drop-down box gives you access to five types of transitions. Curiously, there is no way to tell the program you don't want any transitions. You get them whether you want them or not, apparently. My gut feeling is that I'd like to control this level of customization within PowerPoint. As a general rule, I prefer not to use such transitions, because I believe they distract the audience from the message you're trying to communicate. But that's just my opinion.

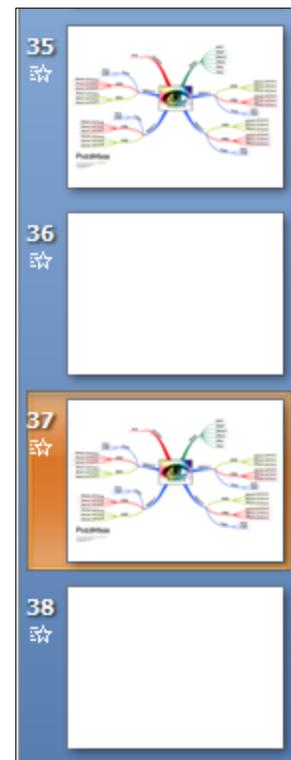
The exported PowerPoint file looked very curious to me. The mind map I exported contained 8 first-level topics, one of which had 2 sub-topics. In addition, two topics contained images, and the file contained a second central topic with four first-level topics (this is a new capability of iMindMap 5). The export tool made this into 11 slides, and didn't export the topic images. But it did insert an overall view of the mind map twice.



Bullet points were formatted so they were almost flush with the left side of the slides. Clearly, there is a significant amount of text reformatting that would be required to make this more attractive. I hesitate to call iMindMap 5's export templates by that name. It just creates a simple slide title, with plain bullets. There is no design at all. I suppose that does give you more freedom to apply a template in PowerPoint, but I wish the content that the program exported looked a bit more polished and professional.

I tried a second export with a less complex map, and this time it inserted 4 slides that consisted of an image of the entire mind map, with a blank slide between each one (right). I couldn't figure out why. Clearly, this part of iMindMap is a bit buggy and needs some attention.

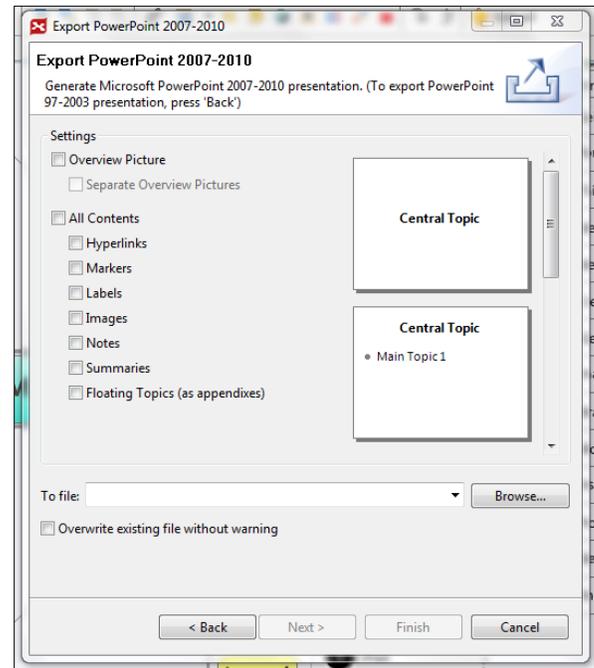
One other thing that struck me as missing from the PowerPoint format that iMindMap 5 exports to is that there is no option to begin your presentation with an overall view of your mind map as an image. Nor can you select between displaying the points of your mind map as images of map branches. Text is the only output option.



XMind

XMind 3 Pro offers two types of PowerPoint exports: PowerPoint 2007/2010 (.pptx file format) and PowerPoint 97/2003 (.ppt file format). This is thoughtful design on the developer's part, because not everyone has the latest version of Microsoft Office installed in their computers.

Using the PowerPoint 97/2003 export command displays the dialog box at right, which gives you a high level of control over what to include in your PowerPoint file and exclude from it. You can add an overview picture, which takes a snapshot of your entire mind map and places it as the first slide in your PowerPoint file. You can also tell XMind whether it should export hyperlinks, markers, labels, images, notes, summaries and floating topics. As you select these checkboxes, a preview panel shows you a model of what your slides will look like.



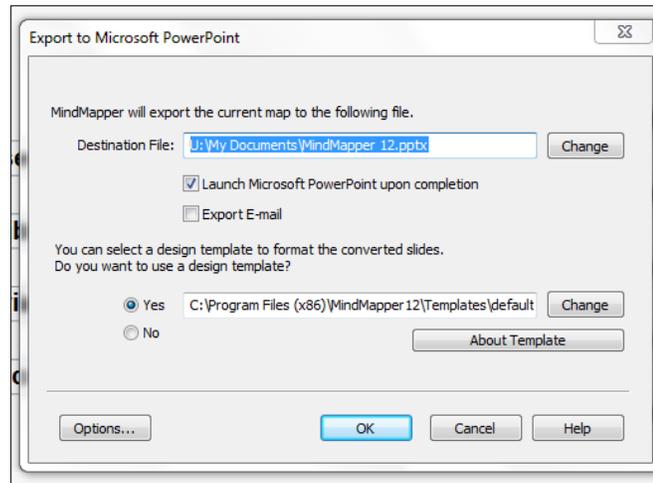
The PowerPoint 97/2003 export looks and acts exactly the same. The only difference is that XMind saves the file to a format that is readable by older versions of PowerPoint.

The file that XMind outputs is very clean; the text of each first-level topic is used as the slide title, while subtopics are formatted as bullet points (see screen shot at right). This clean output makes it easy to embellish these slides with a template and additional formatting. XMind does not give you the choice of a PowerPoint template during the export process. Also, you must have the Pro version of XMind (US\$49 per year) in order to do PowerPoint exports.



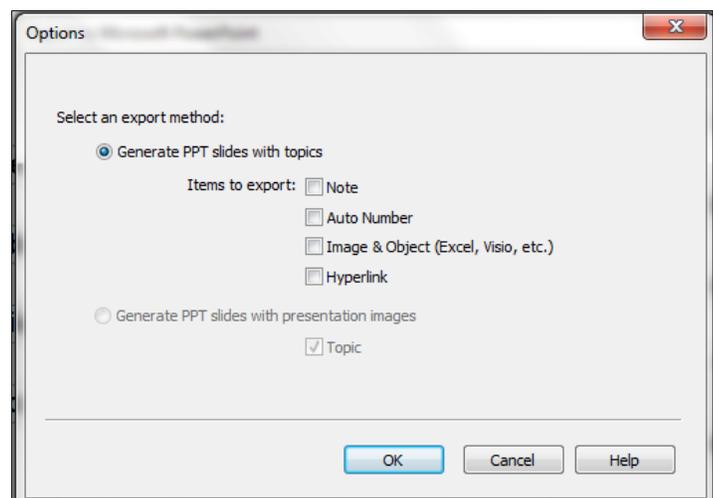
MindMapper 12

MindMapper recently got a major update, which includes improved integration with Microsoft Office. To export a mind map created in this program, you must first click on the “share” tab of its ribbon toolbar. Confusingly, there are two PowerPoint icons on this toolbar, but in different sections of it. One is for exporting, the other for importing. At first, this was a bit confusing, but a quick read of the pop-up tool tips helped me to sort out which icon was which.



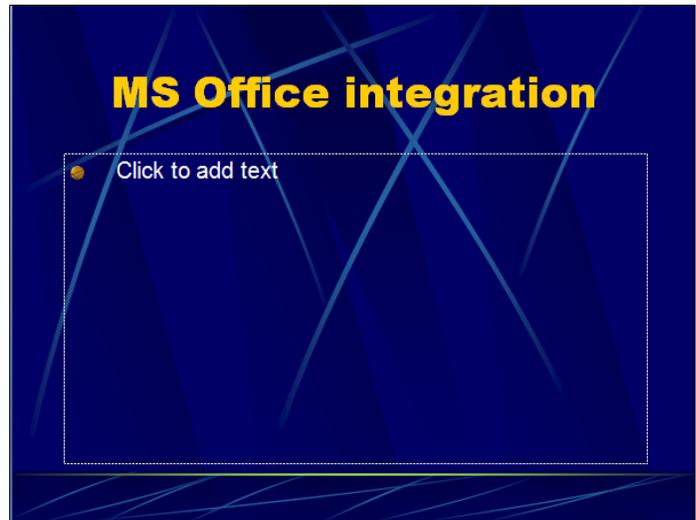
The export dialog box (above right) is very simple: It suggests a name and location for the output file, which you can override, if you want. You can also tell MindMapper what PowerPoint template you want it to use for the export file. By default, it selects its own pre-installed .POT file. One very interesting option is a “export e-mail” checkbox. This enables you to export your mind map to a PowerPoint file; the program will then open your e-mail application and insert the file into a new e-mail form. Cool! That should save you a few extra steps!

This dialog box also contains an “options” button, which gives you even greater control over your exported file. You can include or exclude notes, images and objects and hyperlinks. For some reason, the option to “generate PPT slides with presentation images” was greyed out on my copy of MindMapper 12, so I turned to the program’s online help for answers. Unfortunately, it doesn’t provide any. In fact, the screen shot they use in their help file also has this option greyed out. Strange...



And here is what the output file looks like, using MindMapper's pre-installed template. It's much more colorful than most of the other mind map exports we've looked at. If you don't like this template, it's easy enough to select a different one, either during the export process from MindMapper, or while you're working in PowerPoint.

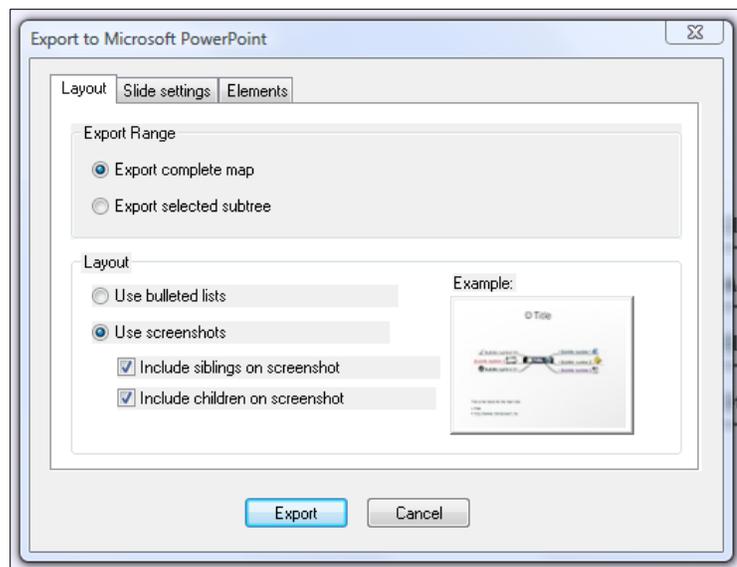
Overall, MindMapper has an easy to use, common-sense approach to exporting mind maps to PowerPoint.



Visual Mind

Visual Mind doesn't appear to have a presentation mode built into it. However, it can export to PowerPoint. When you select this option from the main menu, a dialog box appears that gives you a great deal of control over the output of your mind map. It contains 3 tabs: layout, slide settings and elements. We'll take a closer look at each of them:

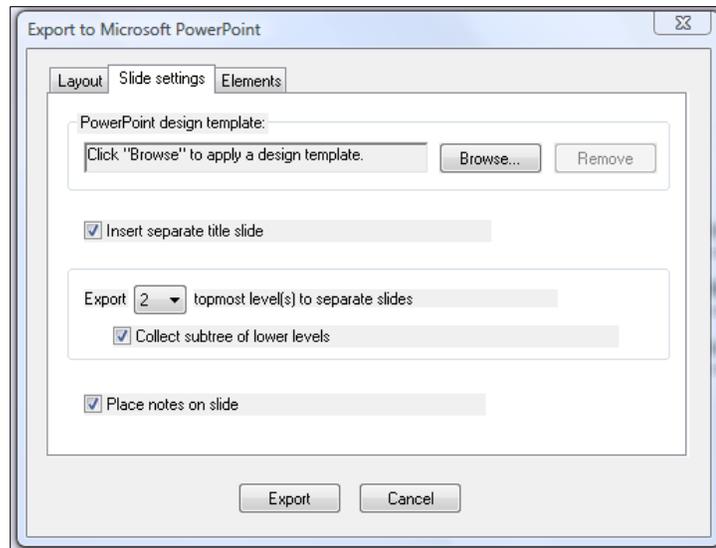
Layout: Visual Mind enables you to export your entire mind map to PowerPoint, or only the "selected subtree" – in other words, a single branch. This could be very useful if you have created a mind map that contains some background information that you don't necessarily want to present to others. You could simply gather all of the information that you do want to present within a single first-level topic, and then just export that. This tab of the dialog box



also lets you choose to export your map's contents as bullet points or images; a small preview window to the right of this set of radio buttons shows what your slides will look like if you choose either option. If you decide to export as screenshots (images), you can choose whether or not to

include sibling and child topics in your screenshots. If you have a large, complex map, these options could be helpful to simplify the screenshots that Visual Mind generates.

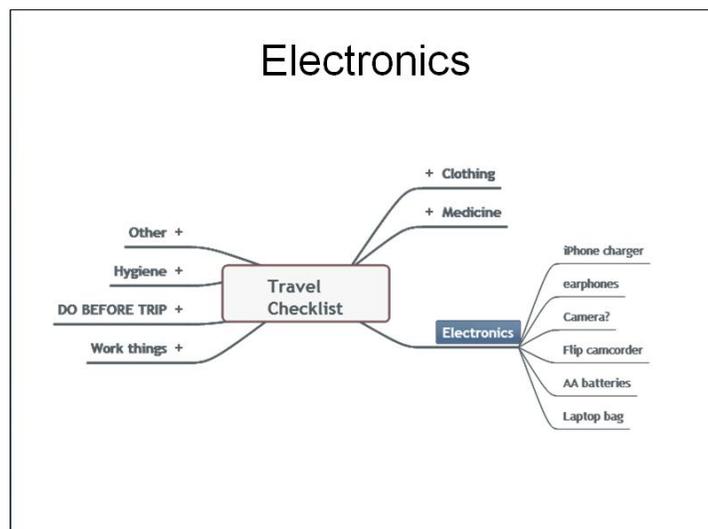
Slide settings: The first option in this tab is to apply a template to your map output. You can browse to the folder where Microsoft Office has stored its PowerPoint templates, or select your own – useful if your organization has a standard template it uses for all presentations. You can also choose to include a title slide, and decide how many levels of topics and subtopics per slide should be shown. Finally, you have the option to include topic notes on your slides. I don't know why



anyone would want to select this last option, because it would probably add a lot of visual clutter to your slides. In addition, the amount of notes may not fit on a single slide, if you're prone to writing longer topic notes.

Elements: This final tab contains a set of 5 checkboxes, where you can tell Visual Mind whether or not you want your map output to include symbols, hyperlinks, e-mail addresses, links to files and folders and phone numbers. It's nice that the program gives you such a fine level of control over the map elements that get included in or excluded from your slides.

The mind map I used to evaluate Visual Mind's export to PowerPoint capabilities – a travel checklist – did so cleanly. I selected the screenshots option, and the image at right shows what a typical slide looks like. As you would expect from a built-in presentation mode, Visual Mind created a series of slides where one first-level topic at a time is open, and the rest of the branches closed. In other words, the two slides

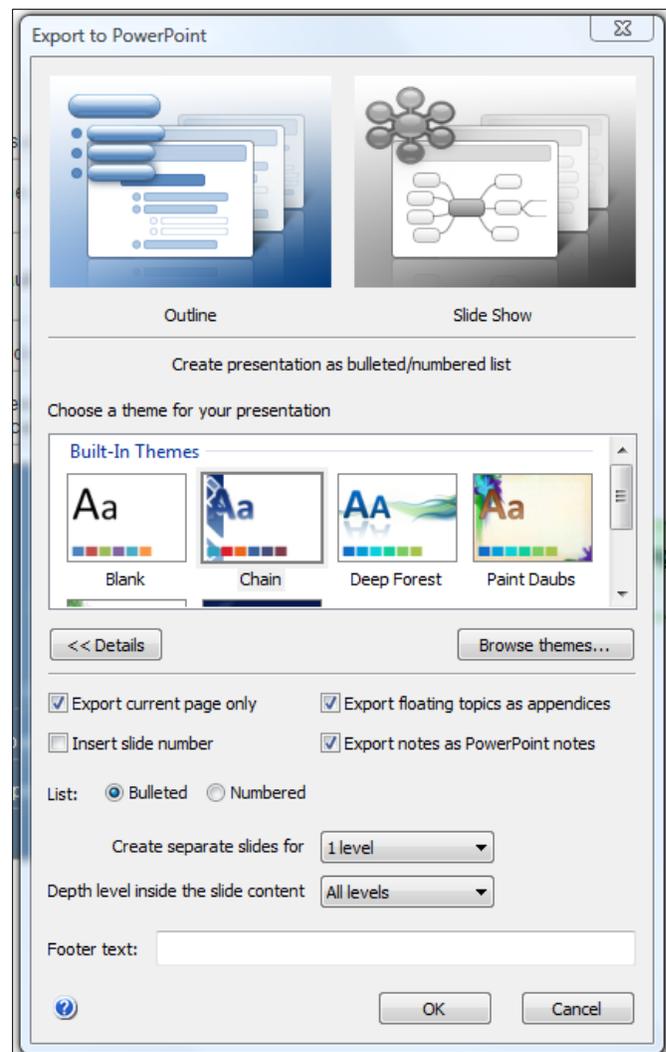


previous to this one displayed the “clothing” topic expanded, followed by a slide where the next first-level topic, “medicine,” was expanded. This is an intuitive, common-sense approach, which should be easy for audiences to follow during a presentation. The output to bullet points option (not pictured here) also creates very clean output that can easily be embellished using any PowerPoint template.

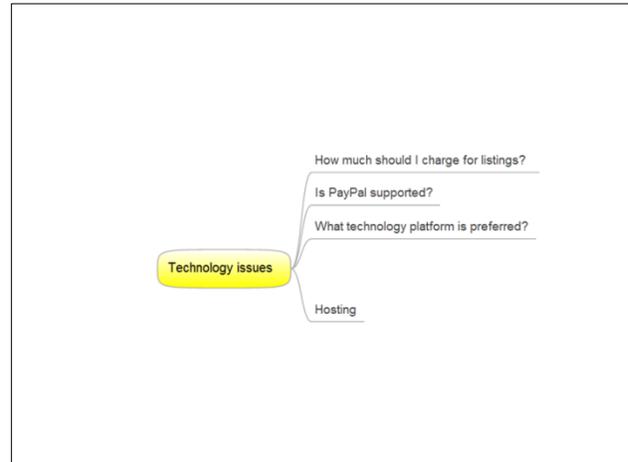
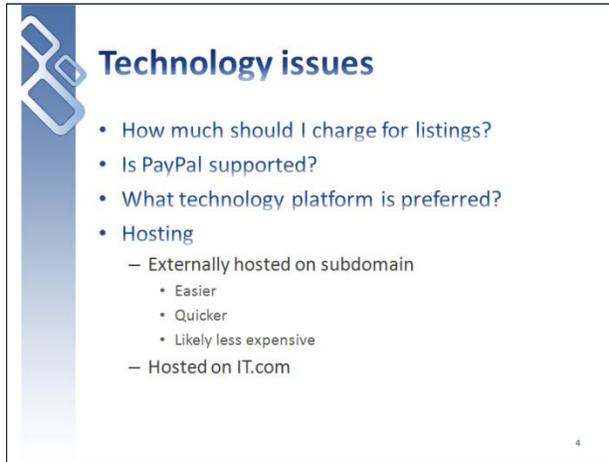
ConceptDraw MINDMAP 6

Where many of its competitors utilize a Spartan, black-and-white dialog box for PowerPoint exports, ConceptDraw MINDMAP gives us a colorful alternative. When you select outline or slide show, the currently-selected option is displayed in color, while the other one is rendered in shades of gray. If you select outline, you can select from 6 very attractive slide themes built in to the program.

A “details” button expands the dialog box to display additional options for handling additional pages within a ConceptDraw MINDMAP document (this program enables you to have multiple “pages” of maps within a single file), show or hide slide numbers, export floating topics as appendices and topic notes as PowerPoint notes. This is the way topic notes should be handled – so that the presenter can utilize them, but they should not be visible on the slides that the audience sees. Other options enable you to tell the program how many levels of topics per slide should be displayed, and how many levels of depth should be displayed within the content of the slide. This would be very useful for simplifying the slides generated from a complex mind map that contains many levels of topics.



Exporting to a slide show completely collapses this dialog box, with no options displayed. Selecting the outline output creates slides that are typified by the one below left, while selecting the slide show option produces slides with screen shots of each major topic and its sub-topics as shown below right.

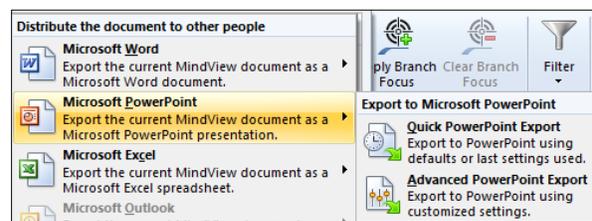


The bulleted slides are among the most professional looking of any mind mapping program I've seen, and even include a gradient color on the slide titles and first-level topics that is consistent with the design of the template.

On the other hand, the slide show output has a shortcoming that I addressed earlier in this report (in the discussion of MindManager's capabilities): Displaying a first-level topic and its children in isolated form causes the audience to lose their sense of context about where this subject fits into the larger whole. I like Visual Mind's approach much better, where the full map is always shown, but one branch is expanded at a time. You can always see where you've come from to get to the current slide.

MindView 4

When I reviewed the document export capabilities of mind mapping software several months ago, one of the things that made MindView 4 stand out was the fact that it offered two types of exports – quick (basic) and advanced. I'm pleased to report that it does the same with PowerPoint exports. The first option



enables you to quickly export your mind map with a standard group of settings, while the latter enables you to customize its output.

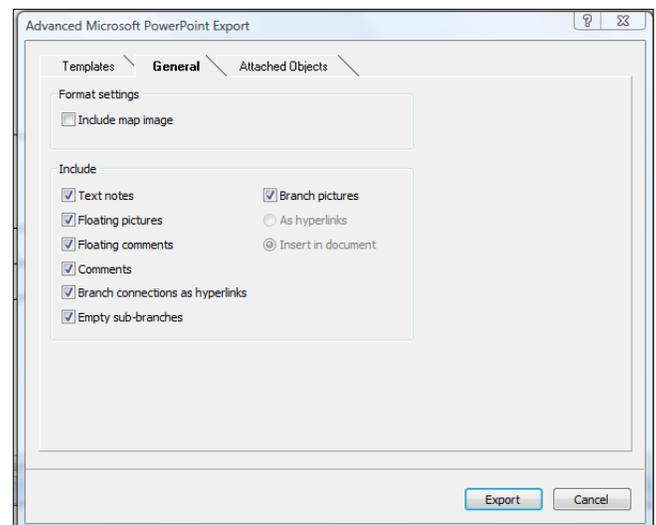
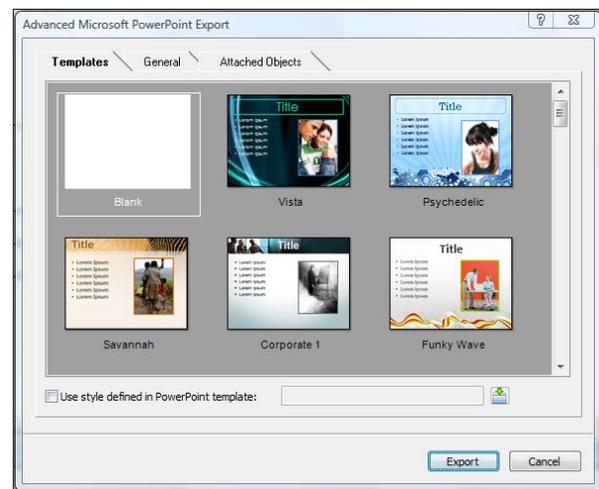
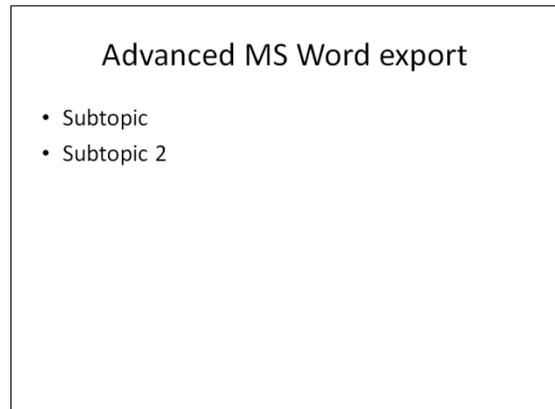
The basic export option, when you click on it, immediately begins generating slides and then opens PowerPoint. The output is plain text on a plain white background, in an attractive set of fonts and sizes – easy to customize in PowerPoint by simply applying a template to your new deck of slides.

Selecting the advanced export option opens a 3-tabbed dialog box, which enables you to extensively customize the output of your mind map. We'll take a look at the options that each one offers.

The program's help file points out that when you export a mind map using MindView's advanced export option, the program "remembers" the settings you selected, so you don't need to re-enter them each time you export it – nice! It also enables "round-trip" editing. In other words, if you export your map and then realize that you need to make extensive revisions to your presentation back in MindView, you can re-import it into the mind mapping program and it will retain any formatting changes you made in PowerPoint. This capability is also unique to MindView.

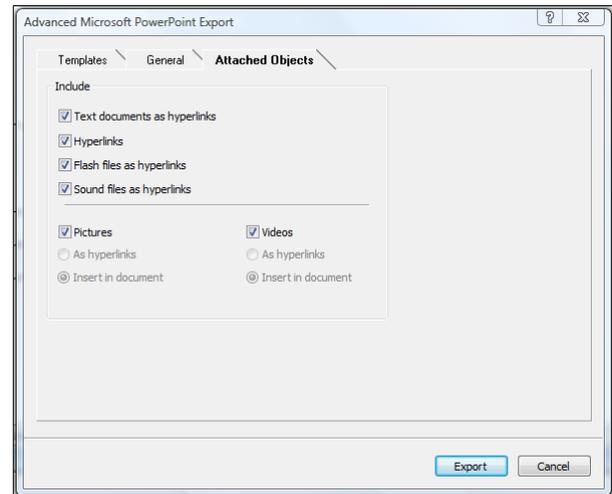
The first tab (above right) enables you to select from one of 26 professional-looking PowerPoint templates, the most of any program I have reviewed in this report. You can also browse to select any PowerPoint template as well – especially useful if your organization has a standard template with proper branding that it utilizes for all presentations.

The second tab (right), entitled "general," lets you specify which map elements you want to export to PowerPoint. Options include adding a slide to your presentation that displays the entire mind



map (always a good choice, in my opinion), including topic notes, floating pictures, branch pictures and comments.

The third and final tab enables you to tell MindView what to do with attached objects during the export process – namely, text documents, hyperlinks, Flash files and sound files. Wisely, if checked, each of these objects can be treated as hyperlinks in your PowerPoint slides, so they can be viewed or played during your presentation. In addition, pictures and videos may be either hyperlinked or embedded into your slides.



Pictured below right is a simple MindView map that has been exported to PowerPoint, using one of the templates supplied with it. The output is clean and professional looking. The export process included the elements I requested, and everything worked just as it should. One nice touch is that MindView displays a status message at the conclusion of the export process, letting you know it was successfully completed. This would come in useful if you were using a computer that, for some reason, didn't have PowerPoint installed.



MindView doesn't enable you to export your map branches as images. Output as text – slide titles and bullet points – is the only option.

Conclusion

Mind mapping software developers offer a variety of options for exporting mind maps to PowerPoint presentations. The best, in my opinion, give you the greatest flexibility. In other words, if you prefer to do all of your slide formatting in PowerPoint, they enable you to export your map's contents as plain text on a plain background. On the other hand, you may want your mind mapping program to do all of the heavy lifting. In that case, you'll want some professionally-designed templates to choose from.

If you work for a large corporation that has strict standards for presentation templates, you'll probably want to stick to plain output that you can customize in PowerPoint. The best of all possible worlds would be a mind mapping program that enables you to browse your computer's hard drive or your corporate network for any PowerPoint templates that ship with Microsoft Office or which your organization supplies. Examples of this approach include Visual Mind, MindView 4 and MindManager.

Another valuable option is the ability to select which topics and sub-topics should be exported, and which don't need to be. Not everything in your mind maps should be shared, and it's nice to be able to be more selective in your mind mapping program, rather than having to spend a lot of time deleting bullet points and, in some cases, entire slides once your map has been exported to PowerPoint. The most practical approach to this challenge is to use a mind mapping program that enables you to filter the contents of your mind map – by key words, icons or other criteria – and then export only that content. MindManager and MindGenius support this type of functionality.

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.