



Effective Mind Maps

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

Type of map: Business acquisition mind map

Software used to create: MindManager

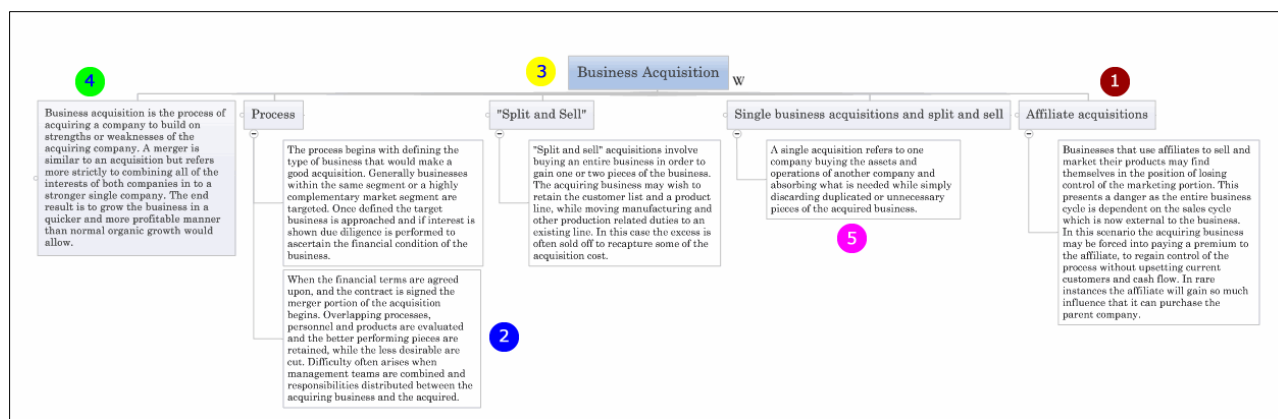
Source: BiggerPlate map gallery

URL: <http://www.biggerplate.com/viewmap.asp?id=703>

Overview

Sometimes mind maps need a lot of help. Something just doesn't make sense about how they're fundamentally structured, or they break a lot of rules of mind mapping. Sometimes that's OK if the mind map still does a good job of communicating information to others, but our subject mind map has much room for improvement on all counts. In this mind map, the author is attempting to convey some general information about types of business acquisitions. He or she simply copies and pastes a number of paragraphs from the Wikipedia definition of this term into a mind map.

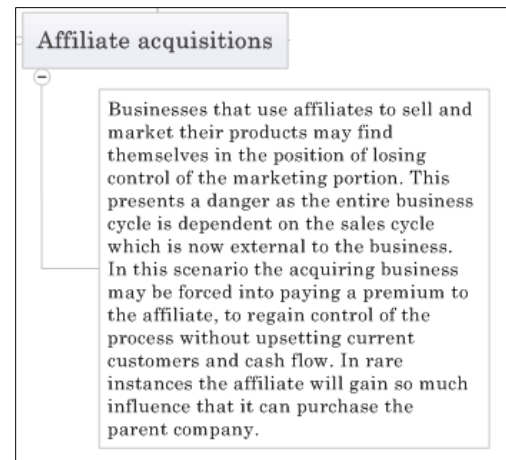
In this report, we'll look at some of the things that really ought to be improved about this map, and then we'll look at another, more effective way to present this same information.



1 Text in map topics is way too lengthy

First, let's get one thing clear: I'm not a strict devotee of Tony Buzan's mind mapping rules, which say that each mind map topic should only be one or two words.

Sometimes, longer topic names are justified. But not entire paragraphs. A mind map should serve as a visual summary of the topic it's about. But the meaning of this topic is lost in its length. Plus, it creates a lot of visual clutter that some readers may find confusing. Ideally, a mind map should "help" the reader understand, "What should I look at first? What should I look at next?" This arrangement doesn't do that very well, in my opinion.

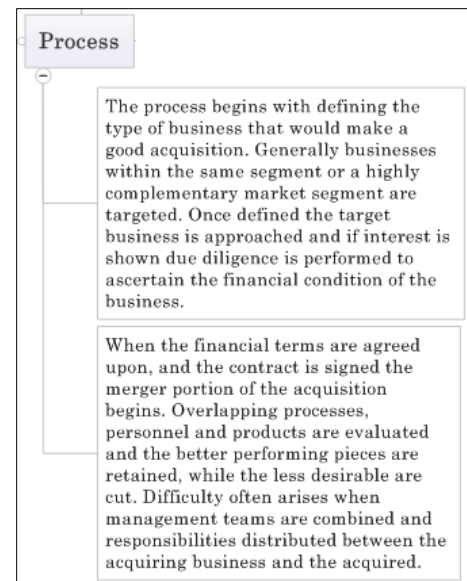


How would I improve this? Pull the paragraph of text into topic notes for "affiliate acquisitions." This would preserve a higher-level overview of the topic for readers, while also enabling them to drill down to read more details. Of course, if you're sharing a mind map as a PDF file, as a printout or an image, topic notes don't appear. So those would be the only exceptions to formatting map topics in this way.

2 Implied hierarchy between topics

In the topics pictured at right, some readers may think there is an implied hierarchy between these two topics. Actually, the second paragraph is a continuation of the first.

A better way to present this would be to think about what larger terms could be used to describe these topics – such as "early stages" and "after the contract is signed." These topic names would help to "frame" this information within a more understandable context – in much the same way that headings and subheadings in a document help people to understand the context of what they're reading.

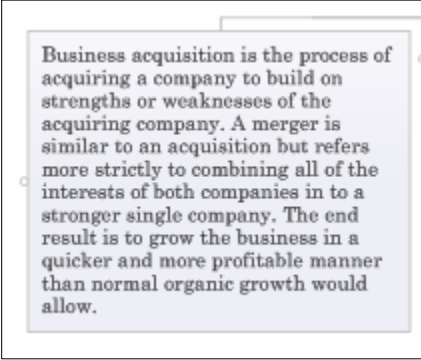


3 Questionable use of the organizational chart format

I'm not convinced that an "org chart" or top-down format is the best way to present this information. It spreads the information out too much and, because of that, makes the lengthy text small and hard to read. If the author of this mind map decided to do more research about business acquisitions and added more top-level topics to this map, it would become almost unusable, forcing readers on screen to scroll left and right to read everything, and forcing printouts to use small font sizes that may be unreadable by some people.

4 This topic needs more context

On the far left side of this mind map, the author provides a definition of business acquisitions from Wikipedia. The problem is that there is no topic above it to tell the reader what they're looking at. An intelligent person can figure this out, of course, but for the sake of consistency and clarity, it would be better if this branch of the mind map was called "definition" and then this paragraph of text pulled into a text note.



Business acquisition is the process of acquiring a company to build on strengths or weaknesses of the acquiring company. A merger is similar to an acquisition but refers more strictly to combining all of the interests of both companies in to a stronger single company. The end result is to grow the business in a quicker and more profitable manner than normal organic growth would allow.

5 This topic is out of place

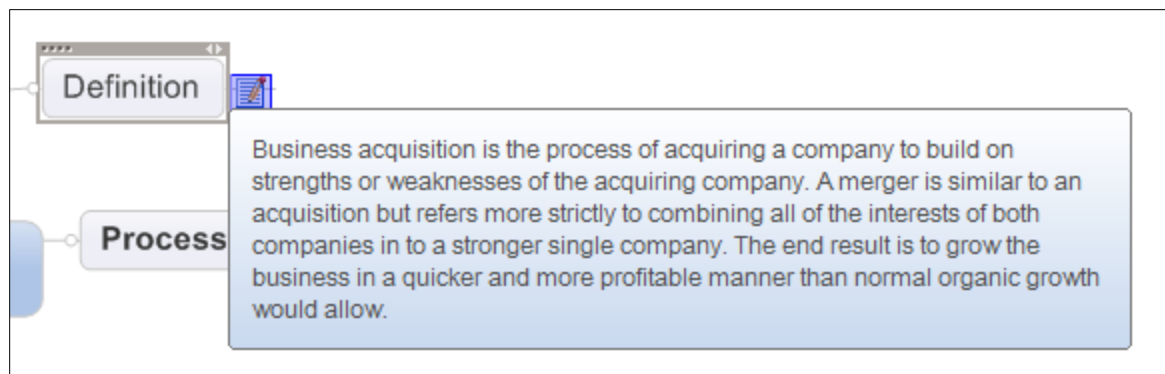
Each top-level topic in a mind map is assumed to have equal weight and importance. But this topic, entitled "single business acquisitions and split and sell," is actually a clarification of the topic to its left, "split and sell." Because of this, it should actually be a sub-topic of "split and sell."

Re-thinking the business acquisition mind map

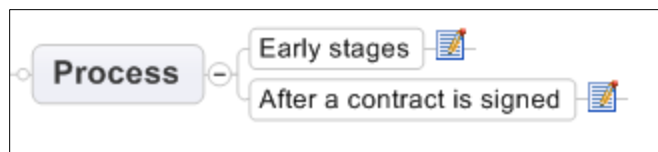
As I analyzed this mind map, I realized that it would be most useful to you if I showed you how I would convey this same information in a more effective way that is consistent with the principles you've been learning in the Effective Mind Maps series. My version of this map can be found on the next page, along with some notes on why I designed it the way I did.



This is my vision for what the business acquisition mind map ought to look like. A right-facing format uses space on screen and in print more efficiently than the org chart. Lengthy definitions have been pulled into map notes. Each topic has a clear context, such as “definition” and the two sub-topics below “process.” And there’s a clearer, top-to-bottom flow of information, from overview to more detailed information. Also, if you decide that your readers need to know more information about business acquisitions, additional top-level topics could be added without stretching the mind map even further horizontally, which would make it almost unusable. Let’s take a closer look:

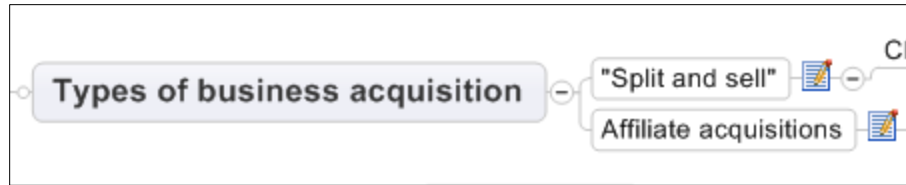


Here’s the definition of business acquisitions, which I cut and pasted into a map note. When you mouse over the note icon, this tool tip pop-up displays its contents in MindManager.



I looked at the two topics the author placed as sub-topics below “process,” and decided to call them “early stages” and “after a contract is signed.” In both cases, I asked myself, “What is this

topic about?” and “What would convey its essence to my readers?” That’s the type of approach you ought to take when summarizing existing information or research for communication to others.



The two types of business acquisitions now have a new parent topic that adds meaning and context to them. The details, as before, are now contained in topic notes.



“Single businesses and split and sell” has been moved to a sub-topic of “split and sell,” where it makes more sense. After all, it’s providing the reader with a deeper level of information about split and sell acquisitions.

Conclusion

A mind map is a highly personal creation, and this report was not intended to take the author of this mind map to task. As I’ve stated before, the goal of the Effective Mind Maps series is to teach principles of effective mind map design by deconstructing existing mind maps – those that are excellent examples of the art as well as those that could be improved. In fact, I’m convinced that you learn more from the latter, which is the reason I include them in these reports.

This is the first time I’ve used a “before and after” approach to help you understand how to create better mind maps. If you like this format, please let me know.

Questions?

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