

Visual Collaboration in the Age of the Coronavirus

A special report from The Mind Mapping Software Blog



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Visual Collaboration in the Age of the Coronavirus

As the number of remote workers continues to skyrocket globally, dispersed teams need tools that support their need to collaborate. Powerful web-based visual collaboration tools have emerged as potent instruments for group brainstorming, sense-making and other popular business applications.

Recently, their rate of adoption got an unexpected spike by the coronavirus, which has caused employers around the globe to mandate that their knowledge workers work remotely until the pandemic subsides.

To help us better understand this important inflection point, I recently interviewed senior-level executives from many of the developers of visual collaboration tools. I wanted to get a better sense of:

- How big this visual collaboration trend is,
- What they're hearing about it from their customers, and
- What they think the long-term impact of the COVID-19 contagion will be on remote work practices.

Most of them told me that they're now seeing a big spike of user sessions and interest from prospective customers. They believe that once the crisis is over, many companies will revert to face-to-face meetings.



But this crisis WILL move the needle in the direction of rich virtual work environments because it will show senior-level executives that it IS possible to be highly productive, creative and effective using visual collaboration tools.

Best Regards,

Chuck Frey
Founder & Author

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Website: mural.co

Mariano Suarez-Battán, Co-founder & CEO

Have you experienced an increase in the number of collaboration sessions of MURAL since the coronavirus outbreak disrupted world business travel?

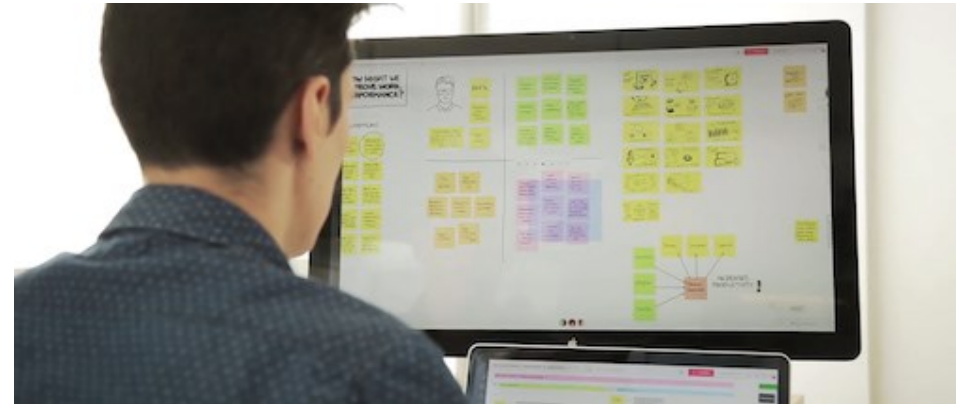
As more and more companies work remotely in response to COVID-19, we are seeing the highest increase in active digital workspaces in our Enterprise Network tier. Since we instituted our 90 days free to anyone signing up as a first-time user, we've also seen a steady increase in the number of new user workspaces.

How does MURAL enable teams to work flexibly in unpredictable situations like we're now experiencing?

MURAL goes beyond remote work by facilitating digital workspaces that gives anyone the ability to visually collaborate, explore ideas and communicate what's in their imagination, no matter where they are.

Our platform helps teams work more efficiently and come to educated, collectively-agreed decisions faster. It's a medium for translating imagination into plans of action, using human-centered design principles in a practical everyday way.

MURAL is particularly useful in helping facilitators run better



workshops remotely.

Humans are fundamentally visual beings, and have been for a long stretch of time. The process of visualization is great for teams as it allows complex information to be conveyed as quickly and comprehensively as possible. As we work out the details of an idea, we accumulate a lot of puzzle pieces, and if we want a better chance of finding out how the pieces fit together, we're best served by representing them visually.

Are you offering any incentives to encourage companies and teams to use your tool during this challenging time?

We are determined to help people make meaningful connections when they cannot meet in person and will continue offering resources and support to help teams stay productive. We've shifted existing resources and strategies to align around the best customer experience we can provide. Below is a quick summary of what we've offered to date in response to COVID-19:

- We are offering 90 days free for anyone signing up for MURAL for the first time. You simply [sign up for a free trial](#) and look for the customer service chatbot (Intercom) in your dashboard. You can chat with us there and we will take care of it for you.
- We created a [Remote Work Resiliency Plan](#), which anyone can use to deploy a durable remote work culture.
- We've held three [#SuddenlyRemote webinars](#) featuring remote collaboration experts Mark Tippin and Hailey Temple. There will be a weekly cadence of new content here, including announcements about additional webinars.

What are you hearing from your customers about the ways in which the outbreak has impacted their ability to collaborate and get work done?

We are regularly hearing from customers around the world on just about every continent, asking for assistance with remote collaboration. Beyond getting access to MURAL, they are looking for resources and materials that will help them collaborate better remotely. We've been researching methods and collecting best practices for years now, and are happy to help people out. Many of our key recommendations can be found in our free e-book. [Facilitating Remote Workshops](#)

Do you think this outbreak will act as a catalyst that will accelerate the adoption of technologies that enable remote workers?

The coronavirus is forcing enterprises to rethink the way they do business and revisit policies for security, business continuity, and remote workers. Telework has never been more vital — both for

The good news is after the toughest times have passed, we will be more resilient as a people. The virus may show us a more efficient way to work, leading to stronger operations in the long run.

- Mariano Suarez-Battan, MURAL

companies to stay alive and for employees to continue providing for their families. This unexpected global event has made clear that remote work is not only a cool perk, it's a key capability.

There's no question the virus will be a catalyst for huge changes in the workforce. Looking at Buffer and AngelList's [2020 State of Remote Work survey](#) of 3,500 remote workers, the data shows that once people work remote, 98% of respondents want to continue working remotely for the rest of their careers.

Business leaders will come to realize they can survive with a lot fewer face-to-face interactions, as travel for in-person meetings puts a strain on budgets and the environment.

A key selling point for visual collaboration platforms like MURAL is the cost savings on travel expenses for in-person meetings — which is now more evident than ever as people practice social distancing to slow the spread of germs.

The good news is after the toughest times have passed, we will be more resilient as a people. The virus may show us a more efficient way to work, leading to stronger operations in the long run.

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Website: stormboard.com

Reg Cheramy, CEO

Have you experienced an increase in the number of collaboration sessions of existing users your application since the outbreak disrupted world business travel?

Yes, our existing user base has definitely increased their usage. There has been an increase worldwide, but the biggest usage boost has come from our teams located in Australia, the U.S. and Europe.

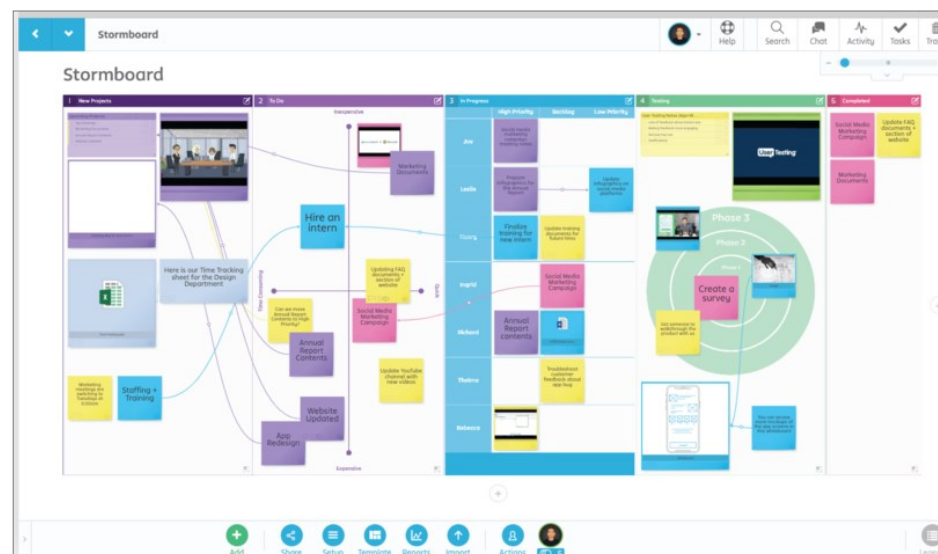
What about new users of Stormboard?

We have seen an even higher increase in new users than in our existing user's usage. Organizations that have offices in the U.S. and Europe are our largest spikes of activity.

How does Stormboard enable teams to work flexibly in unpredictable situations like we're now experiencing?

Stormboard is a shared digital workspace where users can add all types of content and work together on any device no matter where they are located.

Templates for common business processes let you get to work without any setup beforehand, but can also be customized to



company-specific processes. All of your work can be exported into formats like Word, Excel, and PowerPoint that can be easily shared with other members of your team or with stakeholders.

Are you offering any incentives to encourage companies and teams to use your tool during this challenging time?

We offer a 30-day free trial of all of our paid subscriptions, making it easy for teams to get to work quickly and seamlessly.

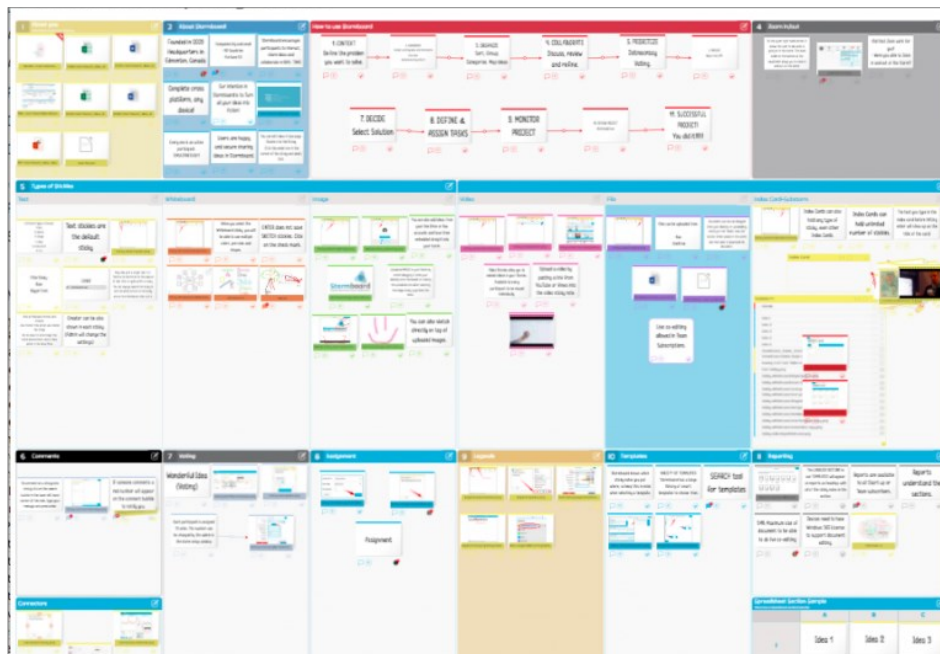
What are you hearing from your customers about the ways in which the outbreak has impacted their ability to collaborate and get work done?

Our clients are concerned that having more and more remote

employees working from home will make their reliance on using physical whiteboards as a communication tool challenging. They are looking for a digital solution like Stormboard to help capture ideas during a meeting when people are not going to be in the same room.

Do you think this outbreak will act as a catalyst that will accelerate the adoption of technologies that enable remote workers?

Yes. We believe there will be more top-down inquiries for broad company usage of these technologies. Companies are recognizing a need for collaboration tools that replace and enhance their



As digital meeting software and new meeting tools are accepted into their workflows over the next few months, they are going to be used more widely, and with synergy, across many organizations.

- Reg Cheramy, CEO

physical whiteboards, which are largely inaccessible (other than holding a camera phone up to the whiteboard) to remote workers.

Do you think this pandemic will result in a lasting change in the way that companies meet and collaborate?

Yes. As digital meeting software and new meeting tools are accepted into their workflows with ease over the next few months—especially a collaborative tool like Stormboard—they are going to be used more widely, and with synergy, across an organization.

This helps those who may not have wanted to change their way of working—or their views on using software—to be more exposed to, and see the advantages of, these tools.

Once they experience the benefits of digital visual collaboration, they won't want to go back.



Website: cardboardit.com

Iman Tucker, Director of Marketing

Have you experienced an increase in the number of collaboration sessions among users of your application since the outbreak disrupted world business travel?

As large organizations have been shutting down on-premises, face-to-face working conditions, there has been a spike in users relying on online collaboration tools to continue to work through their projects. Many west coast clients have reached out expressing their need for a tool like CardBoard at a time like this.

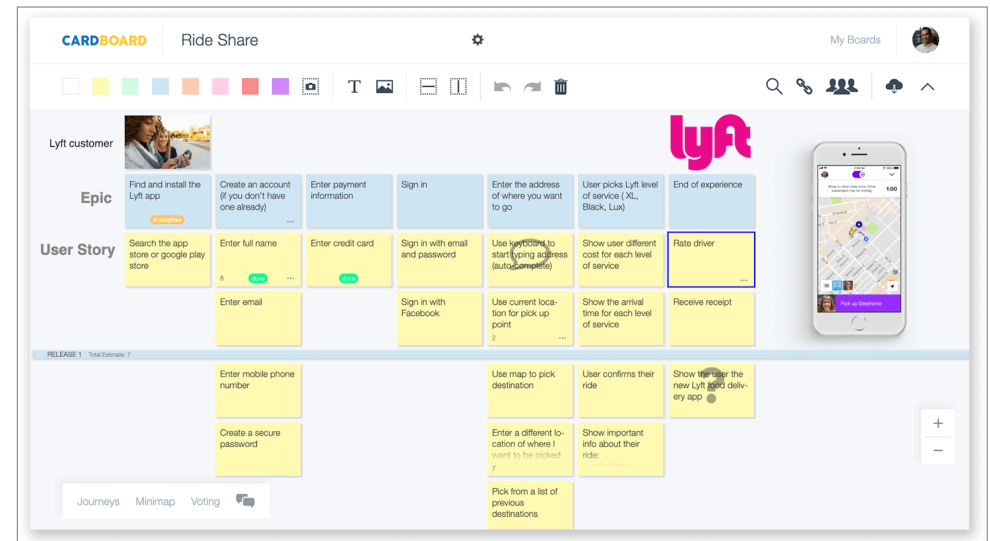
How does your tool enable teams to work flexibly?

With CardBoard, users are able to collaborate real-time, update tasks, and discuss projects from a bird's eye view all the way down to a granular view, virtually from any where in the world without being in a shared physical space.

Are you offering any incentives to encourage companies and teams to use your tool during this challenging time?

We offer a 30-day free trial for users to learn about CardBoard and user story mapping and see if it fits their needs.

What are you hearing from your customers about the ways



in which the outbreak has impacted their ability to collaborate and get work done?

They rely on online tools to communicate such as CardBoard. It's been a relief to our customers that they have a tool that allows them to stay on the same page as their teammates regardless of their physical location.

Do you think this outbreak will act as a catalyst that will accelerate the adoption of visual collaboration technologies?

The digital working landscape has already been moving in this direction. This may not accelerate the adoption, but more-less reaffirm the importance of having technologies that enable remote workers.



Website: draft.io

Alexandre Beauchet, COO and cofounder

Have you experienced an increase in the number of collaboration sessions among users of Draft.io since the outbreak disrupted world business travel?

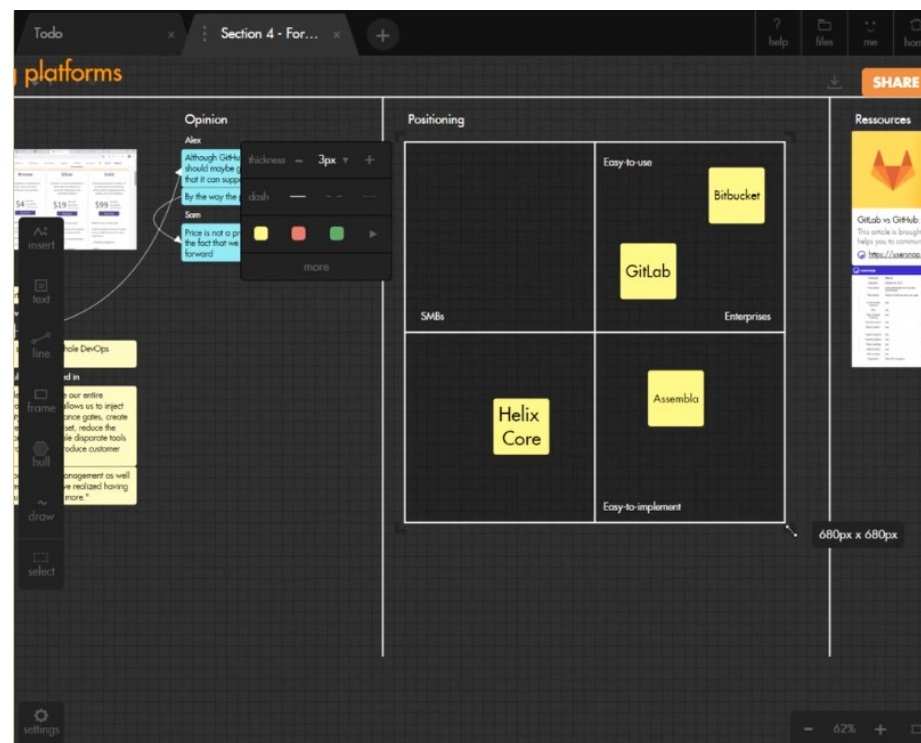
We haven't experienced an increase in the number of collaboration sessions for now. Our users are mostly digital-savvy professionals, used to taking advantage of collaboration tools.

How does your tool enable teams to work flexibly in unpredictable situations like we're now experiencing?

With Draft, anyone can create an account and collaborate freely with an unlimited number of other users or guests. The product is rather intuitive, so that the adoption is pretty fast. It's like a visual Google Docs: a powerful and flexible blackboard where digital thinking can take place, and that you can shape to fit your context and needs.

Are you offering any incentives to encourage companies and teams to use your tool during this challenging time?

We already propose a free plan without any time limit. So, for now, we're just accelerating Draft's promotion to let people know that they can count on us if they want to turn some of



their agile artifacts digital and collaborate remotely. Maybe we'll do more if the outbreak escalates.

What are you hearing from your customers about the ways in which the outbreak has impacted their ability to collaborate and get work done?

I'm in contact with some large French groups. They've already taken initiatives to decrease traveling and cancel large meetings. In addition to that, they've passed some of the French Government's instructions to their employees like no hand-

shaking, frequently washing hands, etc.

Do you think this outbreak will act as a catalyst that will accelerate the adoption of technologies that enable remote workers?

This outbreak will accelerate the adoption for sure, but the current structural change in the way we see work needs an incompressible time to happen.

We think that remote collaboration is more a matter of mindset and organization than a matter of tools. The technologies to work from home have been around for a while now. So if remote collaboration is still not very common in France, it's because managers are not ready to give trust to their employees for now.

Nevertheless, we know that people in large companies spend most of their time in meetings, that too many unnecessary people attend a specific meeting, that meetings are not always well prepared, etc. Therefore it might, indeed, help some managers to discover the advantages of remote and, above all, asynchronous collaboration!

Do you think this pandemic will result in a lasting change in the way that companies meet and collaborate?

We don't think that the pandemic will have a strong impact in itself. Nevertheless, we firmly believe that we are currently in an inexorable trend toward more remote collaboration for many other reasons (economic, environmental, or even lifestyle choices).

Applications of visual collaboration tools

The number of business use cases of visual collaboration tools is quite large. Here are some of the most commonly ones cited by their developers:

Product development: User story/customer journey maps, work-flows, product requirements, interactive design and storytelling.

Agile teams: Run scrums – sprint planning and retrospectives

UX research and design: Build out customer journey maps, user personas and empathy maps, as well as service design blueprints

Innovation and ideation: Mind maps, affinity maps, 5 Why exercises

Strategy development: Business model canvas, kanban, value chain analyses

Situational awareness: Keep track of up-to-the-minute inputs from multiple sources, make better-informed decisions, crisis management.

Marketing: Creating and storyboarding messaging, reviewing and approving proofs

Coaching and teaching: Conduct online workshops and training, run a small online conference, engage in group learning and digital team-building, tutor others.



Website: nureva.com/

Russ Erickson, Director of Business Development

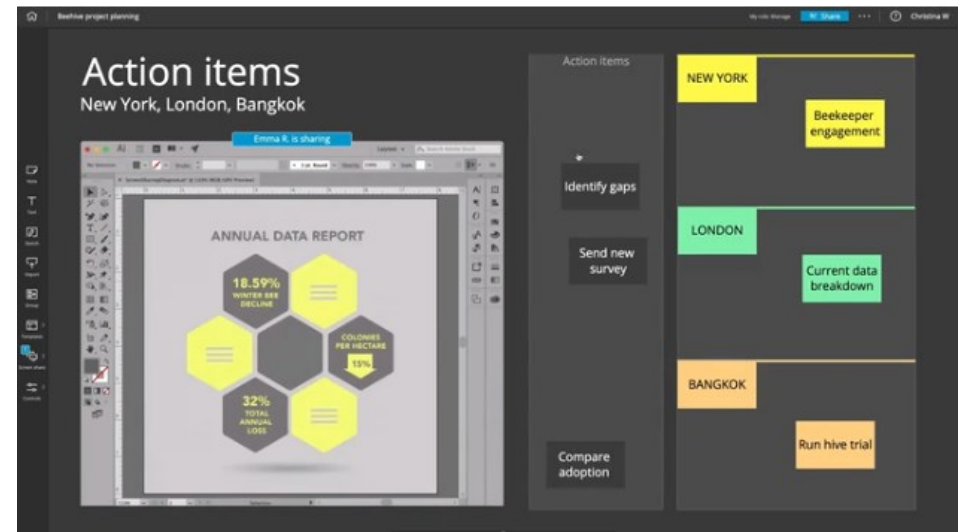
Have you experienced an increase in the number of collaboration sessions of Span Workplace users since the outbreak disrupted world business travel?

Absolutely. Many of our new customers are specifically saying that they suddenly need to run workshops and meetings remotely which had been planned to be in person, and that the reason is COVID-19. We have also seen a spike in our usage analytics across the board over the past few weeks. More customers are doing more things remotely and using Span Workspace to support that collaboration.

How does your tool enable teams to work flexibly in unpredictable situations like we're now experiencing?

Span Workspace was designed to support collaboration in teams with a combination of co-located and remote members, regardless of whether they are in the same room on shared displays and individual devices or connecting from afar,

Span Workspace doesn't care where you are. It helps you work together on a shared canvas that connects everyone. Additional tools in the platform help team leaders keep everyone on the same page while they are collaborating real-time. And the per-



sistent canvas workspace enables asynchronous work within teams as well.

Are you offering any incentives to encourage companies and teams to use your tool during this challenging time?

While not new to these times, we continue to offer all new teams a 30-day free trial for up to 5 team members, and are in discussions with many prospects about larger proof-of-concept implementations to ensure customers are comfortable with the value of Span Workspace to their business.

What are you hearing from your customers about the ways in which the outbreak has impacted their ability to collaborate and get work done?

Without question there is a hit to productivity when people are forced to change the way they meet, work and collaborate. Our customers are not exceptions in that regard. Those that have already been collaborating remotely with services like our Span Workspace are a bit ahead of the game, and this will force their colleagues to catch up.

This outbreak is creating a new normal where many people now realize that these technologies are critical to their ability to operate. Even if we revert to near-normal operation in the future, businesses now understand that they need to have systems and platforms in place and ready to go to support remote workers at scale.

- Russ Erickson, Director of Business Development

Do you think this pandemic will result in a lasting change in the way that companies meet and collaborate?

I think the main change is that companies will have plans and solutions in place to support more remote collaboration than they otherwise would have. The push to remote work at this level will not last because you do give up a lot of creativity and productivity when you force separation. But it will not go all the way back to the previous status quo either – there will be more remote work done than before.

How visual collaboration tools enable brainstorming

Problem definition - Assign a section of the screen to capture everything you know about the challenge.

Visual brief - Display a summary of the problem to be solved in a visual format.

A diversity of ideas - Ideas may be submitted in the form of words, images, sketches and other types of content.

Stimuli - Ideas already placed on the board often serve as stepping stones for additional ideas.

Templates - Board admins can place background templates in the shared workspace to aid in grouping and classification of ideas.

Group related ideas - Facilitators can visually group related ideas together for combination and improvement.

Mobile support - Team members can contribute ideas any time, anywhere.

Voting - Team members can vote on the ideas that are most promising, quickly whittling hundreds of ideas down to a handful of the highest-value ones.

Keep it colorful - Colored sticky notes can be used to denote different types of ideas or priorities.

Website: bluescape.com

Peter Jackson, CEO

Have you experienced an increase in the number of collaboration sessions among users of Bluespace since the outbreak disrupted world business travel?

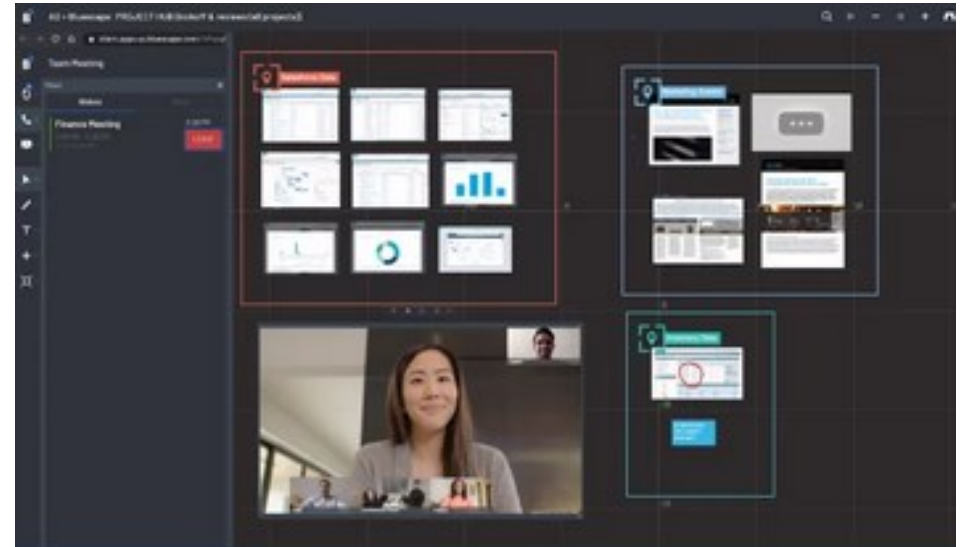
We measure a couple of things, workspaces and users. As you can imagine the growth has been at record levels over the past 5 days. Our customer base is worldwide but 95% of the current growth maps to our account base in North America. Many local and federal government agencies, including utilities and the military, use Bluespace.

How does Bluespace enable teams to work flexibly in unpredictable situations like we're now experiencing?

A Zoom call is one document and one person speaking. A Bluespace workspace is everyone commenting and changing work real time or in your time zone. The workspace never goes away. The phone call does.

Bluespace is a secure way to put all your data (all types) in one container. We are a visual container with a curation of all critical data for everyone to work on.

Are you offering any incentives to encourage companies



and teams to use your tool during this challenging time?

We are trying to support both beating the crisis and keeping people productive. Our pricing is a SaaS model, so upfront fees are light. We have been lowering pricing models and engaging with price effective trials.

What are you hearing from your customers about the ways in which the outbreak has impacted their ability to collaborate and get work done?

Ford has told people to go home and use Bluespace. They have 2 infected in China already. They like most of our customer base are looking for platforms to keep productive.

Do you think this outbreak will act as a catalyst that will accelerate the adoption of technologies that enable remote workers?

It was happening regardless. Why? Commutes cost workers 6-10 weeks a year. Depression is at all-time highs. It's hard for parents to raise their children when both must work to pay for high housing costs and other living expenses.

The office is not necessary for a majority of the worldwide workforce.

Do you think this pandemic will result in a lasting change in the way that companies meet and collaborate?

Changing behavior is tough. People hated moving to email, moving to Slack, etc. New ways of communicating don't happen overnight.

Company leaders that push for effective and more productive tools like Bluescape will make the shift sooner than projected. It was going to happen regardless.

Cell phone growth took time (I had an OKIDATA the size of a shoe box). So did the transition from cable TV to streaming. The curve is accelerating because the need to be productive and have situation intelligence securely is needed remotely NOW!

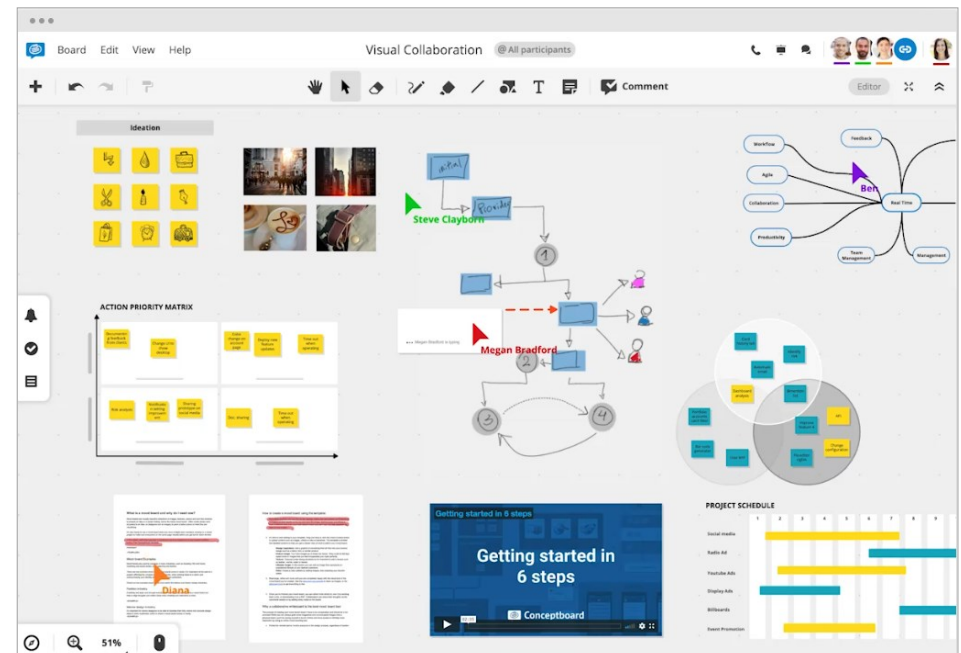


Website: conceptboard.com/

Daniel Bohn, Co-Founder

Do you think this pandemic will result in a lasting change in the way that companies meet and collaborate?

While a number of innovation-oriented global companies have already incorporated remote collaboration tools into everyday workflows, the COVID-19 outbreak will certainly drive a mainstream adoption. This 'forced adoption' will turn out to be a blessing in disguise as more companies wake up to how virtual collaboration tools like Conceptboard can drive productivity, break down bottlenecks and ultimately result in large-scale time and cost savings.





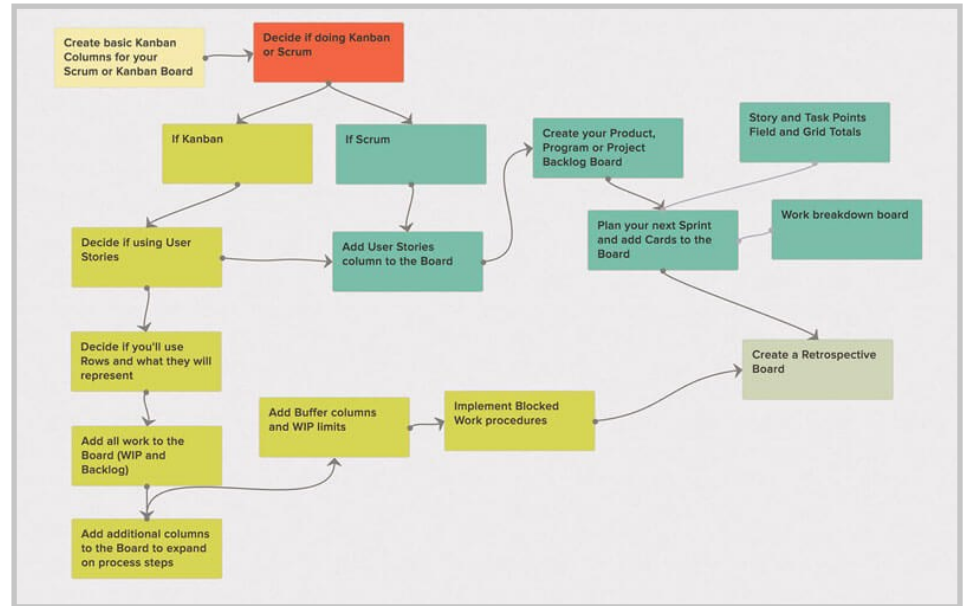
Website: cardsmith.co/

Monica Borrell, CEO

Do you think this pandemic will result in a lasting change in the way that companies meet and collaborate?

We have been seeing an increased interest in remote facilitation tools from facilitators and team leaders. People who usually bring together cross functional teams from around the world for 1 to 2 day workshops to brainstorm and improve their business processes and strategies.

Tools like Zoom and Cardsmith are allowing teams like this to avoid travel, and also to split up the work sessions from grueling all day or multi-day sessions into smaller chunks of time over a longer period. The by-product benefit of shortening work sessions and holding them over a period of a week or so is fostering improved creativity because people have time to digest and let their subconscious minds work on the problems.



About the author

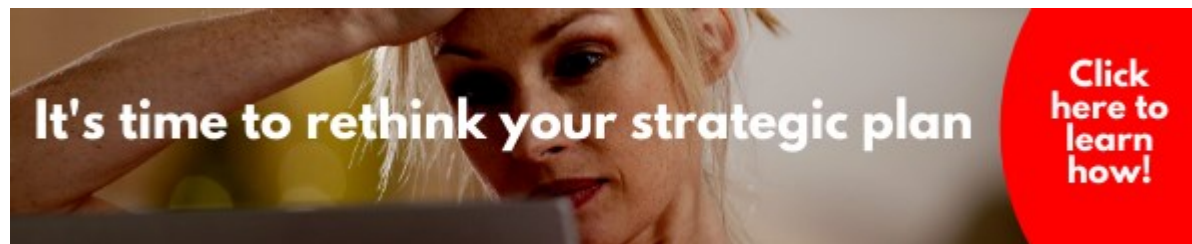
Chuck Frey is the author of [The Mind Mapping Software Blog](#), the world's leading website for news, trends, tips and training on the business uses of visual thinking tools, including visual collaboration, mind mapping, concept mapping, diagramming and sketching. It provides unique knowledge and actionable insights that help its readers to be more productive, creative and effective in their work.

Chuck is also the founder of InnovationTools, formerly the largest, most extensive website focused on business innovation,

creativity and brainstorming which operated from 2002 to 2012; it was merged with InnovationManagement.se in December 2012.

Chuck continues to write about business creativity, productivity and success strategies on his personal blog, [ChuckFrey.com](#).

For more great information, trends, reviews and thought-provoking insights into all aspects of visual thinking, [please sign up for his free visual thinking e-newsletter today!](#)



As business slows down, it's a perfect opportunity to take a fresh look at how you think about and plan for the future of your business. [Learn about a more agile way to conduct strategic planning here.](#)