



Michael Martine Interview Transcription

Chuck: Hello everyone. This is Chuck Frey, founder and publisher of the Mindmappingsoftwareblog.com and InnovationTools.com. Today I am talking with Michael Martine, author of the popular Remarkablogger.com blog and avid user of mind mapping software. He focuses on helping others to improve their blogs through a variety of resources including consulting and coaching. Thanks for joining us today, Michael.

Michael: Yes, it's great to be here. Thanks Chuck.

Chuck: Tell us a little bit about yourself. What do you do and what makes you tick as a creative person?

Michael: Well, the big chunk of what I do is try to help people in several different ways to basically boost their bottom line of their business online through marketing with a blog and through social media. The reason why I have gone into that is because it is simply something I have been doing for awhile. I got started online and got involved almost right away with designing websites and what not in the '90's.

Then, in 1999, I started blogging. This was when the Blogger service wasn't owned by Google yet and had some promise. I had created a fairly popular blog that doesn't exist anymore. It was all about hosting crazy videos from Google Video, which was the only video service at the time. So, that was fun. After a while, I had gotten over 5,000 subscribers and made some money with AdSense through that. This was back in the early days of blog monetization. It was all still really brand new. Over the years, I have just been doing it for a while and I switched to blogging on WordPress and I have created a consulting business based around that which then morphed into more of a training and information kind of business.

So I have free content, but there are also available e-courses, e-books and coaching and consulting training packages available. So, that's what I have been up to lately. And, in the course of planning and plotting all of these offerings, I found mind mapping software to be invaluable.

Chuck: So, what program is it that you use to do this planning?

Michael: Well, I used to use FreeMind simply because it was free and worked pretty decently. But more recently I decided to plunk the money down to get XMind Pro, which is much, much better. I really like it a lot. It's really easy to use, I love the visual look of the mind maps that are created and there are just really great features that I love - like the ability to branch out or fork one of my mind maps into a separate sheet and just keep going with that. I like it.

Chuck: What types of tasks do you use it for in your business?

Michael: I mostly use it for figuring out the content of information products. So, I'm using it to create a branched-out table of contents like an outline. Instead of a regular outline, I like to use a mind map because it's a much more organic process. Any decent mind mapping software will allow you to export that as a regular, real outline, if you want to, or in a document format or PowerPoint format, depending on what you are going for. So, that's pretty much it. That's mostly what I use it for. Sometimes, I'll use it for planning other things to use in the future like overall business operations or marketing ideas, just kind of general brainstorming. I would say 90% of what I use it for is creating the topic outlines for information products and services.

Chuck: Do you find the ability to attach links and documents and other resources to the map to be valuable in what you do?

Michael: Not really. I haven't really used that. I haven't had a need for it. The ability to add in additional, sort of long-form notes, that's been useful. The ability to put in icons for different things - like if one topic note is really serious and the other one is kind of "iffy," I like to put a question mark icon in there or a check mark icon, or something like that. But, creating links out on the document, I haven't really messed around with that much.

Chuck: So, you mention using icons. The ability to kind of visually index your outline is useful to you then?

Michael: Yes, quite a bit, because without that I just have a bunch of notes around the central idea and just looking at it without the icons, I really have no idea as to which of those thoughts I thought were valid or which one's were "iffy" or I rejected but I don't want to get rid of the information and destroy the data I have already created. So, I have found using icons to be valuable. I use check marks, question marks, red X's, that sort of thing to give it a flavor so when I glance at it I know immediately which notes are viable, etc.

Chuck: In what ways does the software you are using allow you to be more productive? It is a time-saver for you?

Michael: Well, not only that, because definitely it is, but having to create an outline, a linear outline doesn't work for brainstorming. The friction involved in trying to use any other method just really it's too great. And then, the advantage of this is it does follow more of a natural way of thinking for me. Being able to mind map is a lot more like being able to brainstorm on to the screen pretty much almost as fast as I can type. Once you get the simple keyboard shortcuts needed to add child notes and sister notes onto the mind map, you just go. I love that. It's great.

Chuck: So, do you find that it helps with your creative flow as you are brainstorming?

Michael: Yes, because as soon as I think about the friction in the process of capturing my ideas, it's really easy to start to forget things or get distracted and then you don't want to lose the spark that you just had there for a really good idea. The value of an idea has nothing to do with whether or not your mind will remember it. So, if I can't capture that stuff rather immediately, there's a real risk it might fall through the cracks and disappear. You know how easy it is to forget a dream after you wake up.

Chuck: Sure. You mentioned you use your mind mapping software for planning out information products. One of the things that I have found, whether I am creating reports or a longer article or whatever, is if you just start pouring those ideas into say Microsoft Word or any other word processing program, that the underlying structure of what you are creating kind of gets lost in all the paragraphs. Do you find it really useful to create that skeletal representation of what you are doing and make sure it is complete and well organized before you move on to writing?

Michael: Yes, absolutely, because if I don't do that what happens is I will start writing and then it's not really going to have the structure that I want. If I start banging out words in a paragraph format, it's hard to stop. If all I'm trying to do is create a topic structure, that's no good. So, mind mapping software is really superior to that. I just take the topics and export them into Word and I go in and fill in the blanks so to speak, and I'm all set.

Chuck: I have had other people tell me if they mind map their article or report first, the article or report tends to be more concise than if they don't do that process because otherwise they are just kind of rambling as they are writing.

Michael: Yes, absolutely and then one of the worst for a blogger it's like say we want to apply this to writing blog posts, which, you know, I haven't been, but now that we are having this discussion I am starting to think, "You know, maybe I should be using this for my blog posts,"

because usually if I write a blog posts I think of the headline first and then I just kind of go. This might actually be a much better method for the exact same reasons. Believe it or not, it just hadn't occurred to me.

Chuck: I haven't used it for actually writing blog posts myself but more for keeping track of all the ideas that my brain tends to produce and then classify those and then try and have more of a planned approach to content, if you will.

Michael: It makes sense.

Chuck: You mentioned on your "about" page on your Remarkablogger.com blog that part of your personal philosophy is not to whine and complain about what you don't understand, but to learn it until you do. How have you found the learning curve to be with mind mapping software?

Michael: Almost next to nothing. No learning curve - hardly at all. It's just mostly a matter of learning a couple of keyboard shortcuts like Enter or Tab or whatever so that you can create child notes or sister notes and whatnot. Other than that, poking around a little bit to try to figure out some other features. Like in XMind for example, I can take a note and take it and copy it and all of its branches off onto a separate tab and sort of copy that and start over again if I wanted to.

Chuck: You mean creating a sub-map?

Michael: Yeah, so it took a little bit to figure that out, but other than that, I found it a breeze.

Chuck: Great.

Michael: It was not complicated at all. I mean I'm pretty well-versed in word processing, PowerPoint, all that stuff. I've taught software for many years actually before when I had a regular full-time job. That's what I did. So, I don't know, my experience may be different than for other people, but I didn't really find it much of a challenge to learn. FreeMind was easy to learn. XMind has more features than FreeMind, but the basic mechanics always seem to be the same.

Chuck: It's apparent from reading Remarkablogger.com that you really like to empower people. When you recommend mind mapping software to other people, what do you tell them? Why should they consider using it in their business?

Michael: Well, I tell them what works for me and hopefully that's something that will appeal to them as well. Basically, what I tell them is that I use it to brainstorm ideas and create information

outlines because I find it is the fastest, easiest most direct brain-to-content connection that I can possibly have and it's virtually frictionless. So, for that reason, I recommend it to anybody, especially if they haven't ever tried it. Often, it's one of those things when once somebody tries it, they are like "Holy cow, what have I been missing?"

Chuck: I have heard that from many people. Once they get it they can't imagine how they ever lived without it.

Michael: I have to say also that using software for it rather than writing it down on paper or on a whiteboard is also just a lot easier, faster and better. I have tried it both ways and I found if I do it on paper, I find that I have a big mess that gets hard to read.

Chuck: Well, it's certainly a big advantage that you can move topics around and reorganize them until you feel they make great sense and that they represent a complete picture of what you envisioning to communicate.

Michael: Exactly.

Chuck: Is there anything else you would like to share with our listeners on this topic in closing?

Michael: One thing that I would really encourage people to do is try to use mind mapping for things that they hadn't thought to use it on before. Like for example, during our discussion today I had mentioned using it to maybe structure a blog post. Honestly, the thought hadn't occurred to me until now, so I think I'm going to give it a try and see how it works. I might end up with much better blog posts than what I have had lately that have more of a structure and be pulled together a lot better. So that's an example of branching out into a new thing. Anything you find new uses for and you can get better results than you had before, that's a big win in my book.

Chuck: You mentioned once again using it to write blog posts. I could see how it could really come in handy if you are trying to develop a series of blog posts around the same topic. It could really help it to become more cohesive.

Michael: Absolutely. That same thought was in my mind as well. It's one of the things that I use a series of blog posts for is to sort of test the waters so that I can see what kind of response I get to the topic and then I can maybe further develop that into a topic.

Chuck: Great. Alright, thank you very much for your time, Michael. I appreciate it.

Michael: Thank you. See you later.