



Effective Mind Maps

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

Type of map: Sources of MindManager knowledge map

Software used to create: MindManager

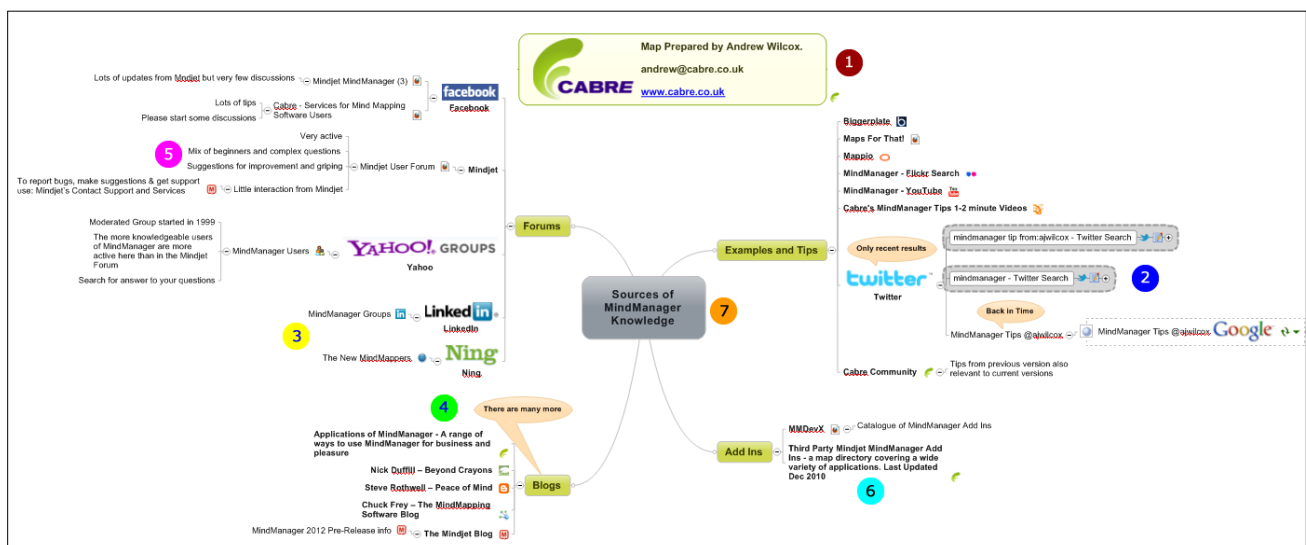
Source: MapsForThat! map gallery

URL: <https://www.mapsforthat.com/map.php?m=1541>

Overview

One of the advantages of being one of the judges for Mindjet's monthly "Mappies" mind map contest is that I get a chance to see some well-designed visual maps each month. During this last month, I was sent a link to this excellent mind map, which is an information repository of MindManager resources. I normally don't focus on one software developer or another in these reports, but I thought this mind map by Andrew Wilcox was noteworthy for its excellent design and the way it communicates its subject with great clarity.

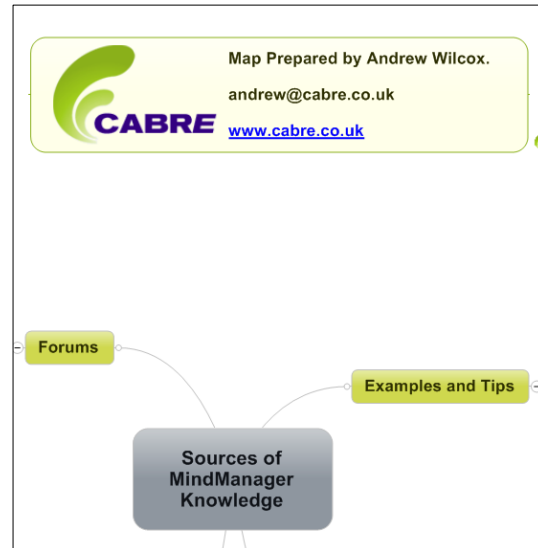
In this report, we'll look at the factors that make this mind map work so well, with an emphasis on those techniques you can apply to your mind maps.



1 Strong branding – without dominating the mind map

As a MindManager trainer, Andrew is always looking for new clients, like any other service business. So it's essential that his mind maps clearly communicate who created them – especially those that will be placed in online map galleries like MapsForThat! and BiggerPlate.com.

Andrew does a nice job of communicating his brand in this mind map, making it noticeable but not drawing too much attention to it. That's important – you don't want to draw attention away from the mind map itself. This treatment



strikes a nice balance between being too modest and too “in your face.” Andrew also includes a link to his website (the little “swoosh” mark in the lower right corner of this topic), giving anyone who views this map an opportunity to learn more about his coaching services. He has also wisely added a logo for his company, which helps to establish or strengthen his Cabre brand in the minds of his prospective customers.

2 Interactive elements add value

This is one of the few mind maps I've seen that include some interactive elements – dynamic links to two different Twitter searches, which enable anyone who downloads this mind map in MindManager to view

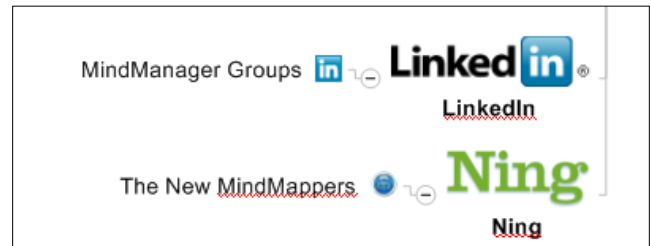


Andrew's latest MindManager tip tweets, as well as those that can be found via the search term of “mindmanager.” These tweet streams can be pulled into MindManager maps using one of Mindjet's Smart Map Parts, and they add a lot of value to this mind map. Every time the map is opened, these dynamic elements pull in the latest Twitter content corresponding to these search

terms; these tweet streams can be refreshed at any time, giving the reader an easy way to keep up with Andrew's latest work and anyone who is talking about MindManager on Twitter.

3 Logos add visual appeal

The purpose of this mind map is to provide the reader with links to the best MindManager resources on the web. To make it more visually appealing, Andrew has incorporated logos for each of the websites he references in his map. Nicely done! These logos make it immediately apparent what lies beyond each of the map's resource links, and they contribute to a very professional-looking mind map.



4 Nice use of callouts

In mind maps, callouts are used to provide additional information to the reader. They contain information that doesn't necessarily belong in a child topic, yet they perform an important function: They add meaning and help the reader to understand more about the topics to which they point. In this MindManager resources map, Andrew uses them to excellent effect. In the callout pictured at right, Andrew informs us that there are numerous mind mapping blogs on the web, more than can fit in his mind map. He's simply sharing the best of them with us (including my blog – thanks, Andrew!).



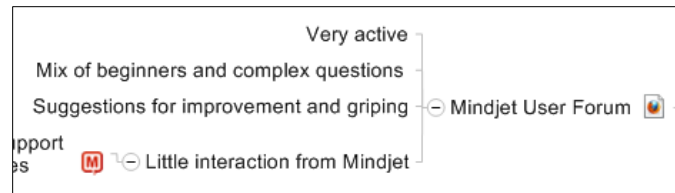
Above the Twitter feeds (covered in item number two on the page above), Andrew has placed a callout that informs us that these dynamic feeds contain “only recent results.” That’s important to know – that more information exists beyond the 10 records that are displayed in this map.

Think about the ways in which you can use callouts to perform a similar function: To add meaning and context to those topics that need them.

5 Informative subtopics

One of the areas where many mind mappers struggle is figuring out how much detail to communicate at the lowest levels of their mind map. Too much information and the reader's eyes glaze over as they try

to wade through a thicket of dense information. Too little, and the reader may be left wondering, "What's this all about?" or "What's he trying to say?" There's an art to explaining "just enough" about any given topic, and discerning exactly what your target audience needs to know.



I'm happy to report that Andrew strikes just the right balance, providing us with useful information, in just the right level of detail, for each area of his mind map. Note how he doesn't attempt to communicate in complete sentences, just a tight, clear phrase that communicates what you need to know – like "little interaction from Mindjet" and "mix of beginners and complex questions."

6 Longer subtopic: Good or bad?

The subtopic depicted at right is 19 words long. Too long. It refers to a list of MindManager add-ins that Andrew maintains on his website (as shown by the small green Cabre "swoosh" in the

lower right corner of this subtopic). As a general rule, anything longer than 3-5 words is a no-no when creating mind maps.



How else could Andrew have communicated this information? Perhaps via a carefully-worded set of multiple subtopics, like he did elsewhere in this excellent mind map. Or he could have placed the detail in a topic note, reducing the visual clutter in this section of the map while still keeping the information just one click away.

7 Central topic needs more visual appeal

The only other thing I would change about this excellent visual map would be to make the central topic a different color. Black lettering on a medium gray background just doesn't visually "pop" the way it should. Because Andrew has created a mind map focused on MindManager resources, I would use a medium to dark red background – or

perhaps a white background color with the bright red MindManager logo embedded in it. That would work very well, because it would help the reader to immediately understand that this mind map is focused on all things MindManager.



One other possibility that would make sense: Use the same shade of purple for the central topic background color as Andrew uses in the lettering of his Cabre logo. All four first-level topics are the same shade of green as the "swoosh" image in his logo. Why not make the central topic the other color of his logo? That would help this mind map to communicate his brand more strongly.

Keep in mind as you read my advice, however, that it's completely subjective. There may be a specific reason Andrew decided to use this color. The bottom line, despite these two minor shortcomings (the central topic color and the too-long subtopic covered in item six above) is that this is a very well-designed mind map that communicates clearly and concisely. Nice job, Andrew!

Questions?

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

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