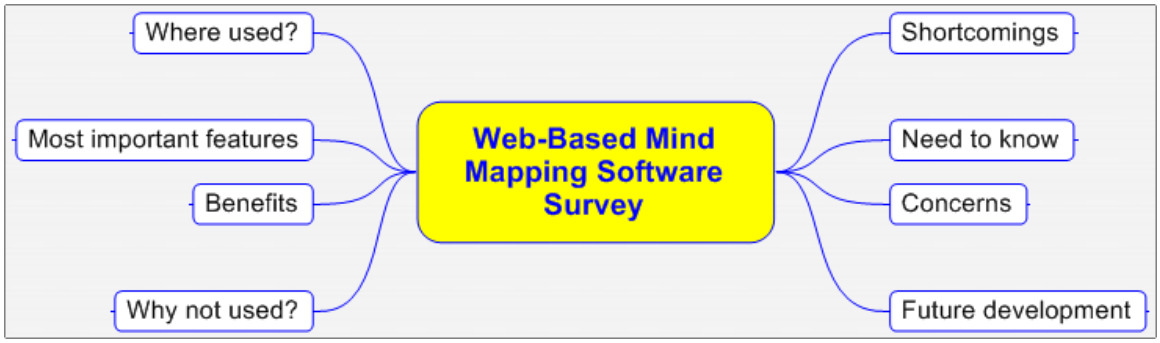


Survey Results

November 2007

This is the third in a series of surveys of users of mind mapping software. My objectives in conducting this study were to learn more about how people are utilizing web-based mind mapping software, and to shed some light on the advantages, disadvantages and future potential of this exciting new technology.

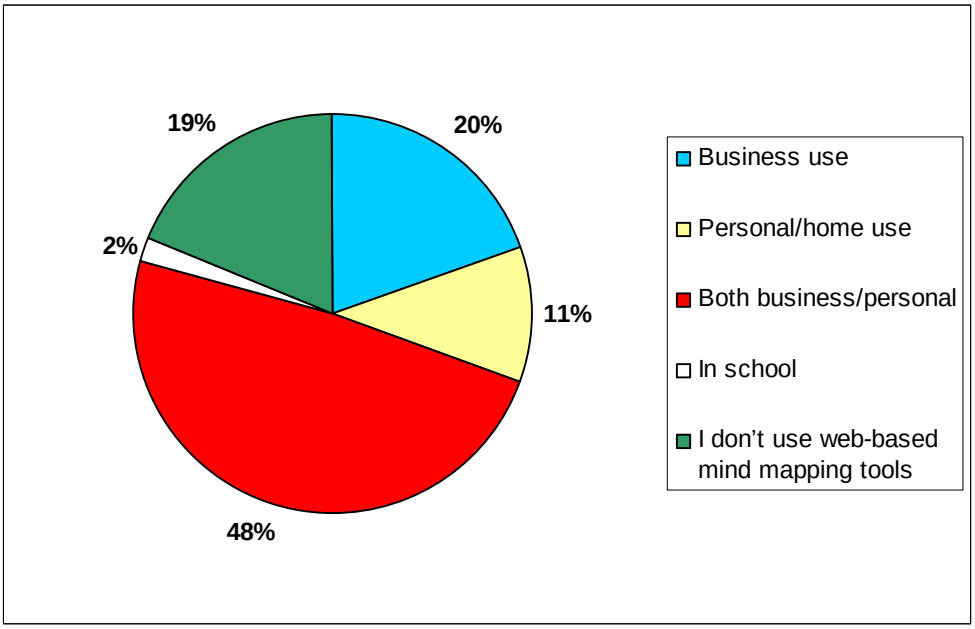
During the month of September 2007, 149 people participated in this online survey. Thanks to those of you who participated in this important research project, as well as the bloggers who helped to promote it!

If you have any questions, comments or suggestions for questions that you would like to see in future surveys, please send me an e-mail at chuck@innovationtools.com. I look forward to your feedback!

Visually yours,

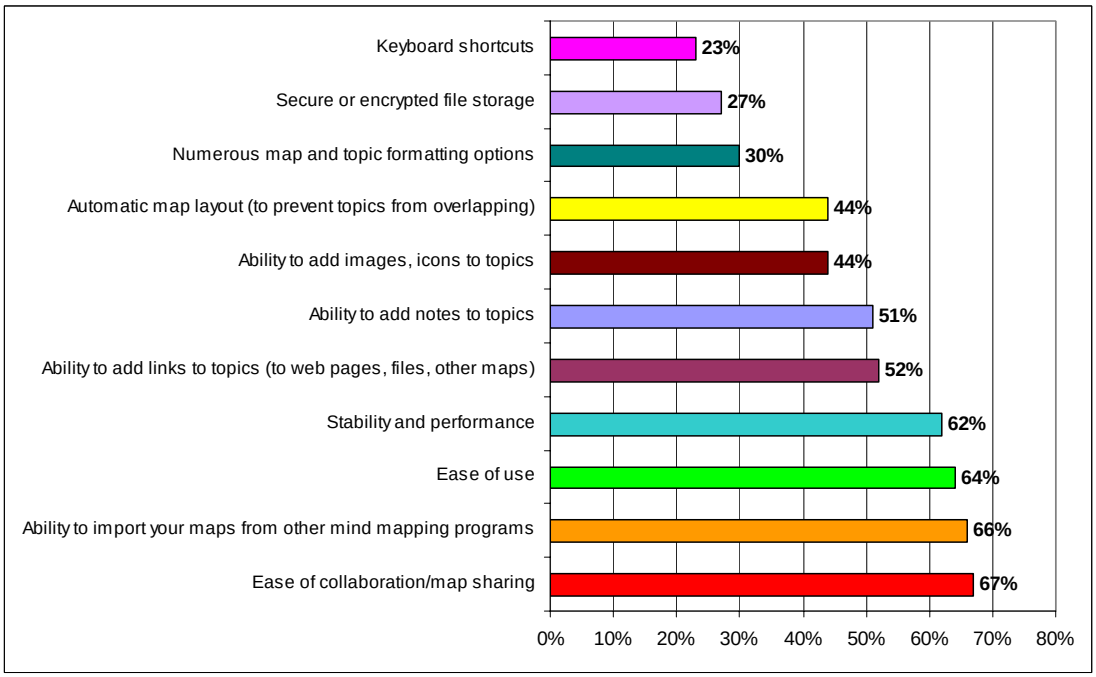
Chuck Frey
Founder, InnovationTools
Author, The Mind Mapping Software Blog
Author, Power Tools & Strategies for Mind Mapping Software (e-book)

If you use web-based mind mapping applications, where do you utilize them?



The largest percentage of respondents – nearly half (48%) – use web-based mind mapping software for both business and personal applications. Not surprisingly, only 20% of respondents exclusively use this type of software application exclusively for business. This would seem to imply that many of these web-based tools aren't quite ready for regular business use.

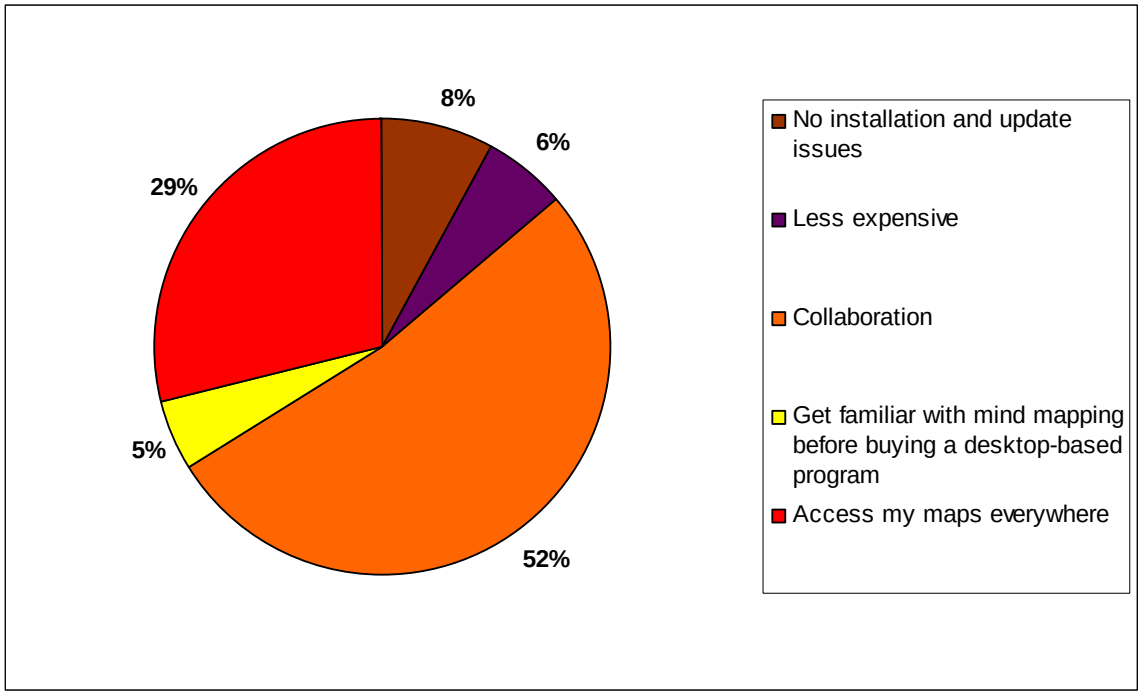
What features are most important to you in a web-based mind mapping application? (Please select all that apply)



The top response, “ease of collaboration/map sharing” (67%), demonstrates that this capability of web-based mind mapping software meets an important need for many users. This is also reflected in the second most popular response, the “ability to import your maps from other mind mapping programs” (66%). Clearly, many respondents do not view these applications as self-contained programs, but as part of a larger workflow.

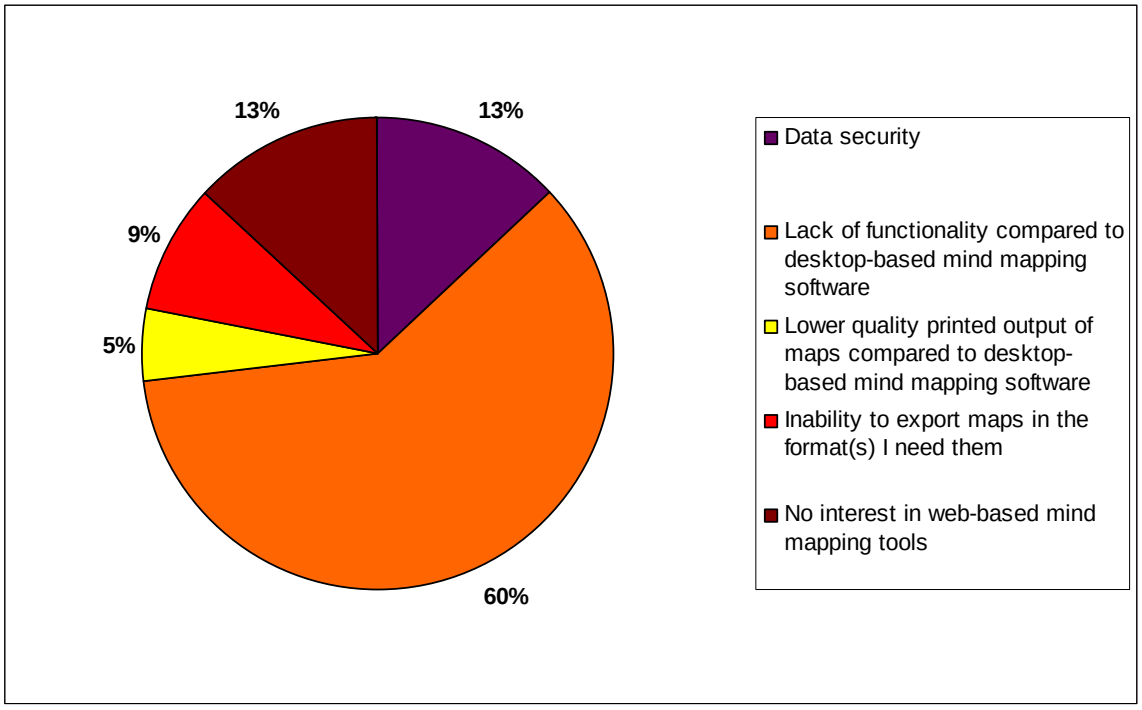
Ease-of-use (the third most popular response at 64%) is also a major consideration, especially because each of these web-based applications seems to operate a little differently than the others. Other top-ranked concerns included stability and performance in the ability to import maps from other applications.

What is the single biggest benefit of using a web-based mind mapping application?



The biggest benefit of using web-based mind mapping software cited by respondents, by nearly a 21% margin, was collaboration. Clearly, this capability of web-based mind mapping programs is very attractive to users. The second biggest benefit, according to survey respondents, was the ability to access their maps anywhere (29%). This isn't surprising, considering the variety of places and devices where people can now access their files. As businesspeople become more accustomed to utilizing web-based business tools, such as word processors and spreadsheets, they will come to expect similar functionality from their mind mapping programs. This benefit was also mentioned a number of times in the verbatim comments later in this survey.

If you haven't used a web-based mind mapping application yet, what is the single biggest reason why not?



Almost two thirds of respondents to this question (60%) said they are not using web-based mind mapping tools yet because they lack functionality compared to desktop based mind mapping programs. To be fair, several web-based mind mapping tools (MindMeister and Mindomo) do offer feature sets that are nearly comparable with that of desktop software, but clearly perception lags reality. This concern was also cited numerous times in the answers to the next question, which asked respondents to share their concerns about the shortcomings of these web-based tools.

What are the biggest shortcomings (if any) of web-based mind mapping applications, in your opinion?

The leading responses to this open-ended question were lack of features compared to desktop-based mind mapping software, concerns about privacy/security, the inability of many of these programs to work offline and the expected longevity (or lack thereof) of some of the web-based mapping tools. Will they still be around next month? Next year? And if one of them goes out of business, what happens to my maps?

As you can see by the quantity of these comments, respondents had plenty to say!

- Integration with existing systems and applications
- Unmatured community makes it difficult to get acceptance to use it
- Still fairly clunky interface
- Anonymity

- Is the hosting company committed to providing mapping services beyond the current fiscal quarter? How can they compete with FreeMind ?
- Not intuitive. Not easy to use.
- Poor support for Unicode character sets; I want mixed English and Russian (Cyrillic) text for language learning
- Within mindmaps, quite often very valuable information and ideas are projected. So we need a very good security system that others can't grasp your own or the company know-how.
- (Files) get slow when big. I also want the data on my machine as well. I want ownership of data; I don't trust the enterprises (developers) to be around for a long time.
- (Lack of) confidence in the security.
- No attachment of files and documents, i.e. saving of linked documents on server.
- Not as feature rich as desktop applications. Search function (is) not well developed.
- Sluggishness as compared to desktop-based tools.
- Need to be able to set up the application on own company intranet. Company will not trust outside company to maintain company information.
- I've used a lot of web-based applications and I find that unless there is some GREAT Ajax code happening, it's far too slow to enjoy.
- Poor printing when going from web to printer. If there is a good export function then this can be overcome.
- The need to be online to operate. Mind mapping tends to be a 'spur of the moment' activity.
- Poor project/task management import/export. No sync options (that) I've seen. Publishing doesn't always work well.
- Monthly cost over time ends up being more costly than just buying software and collaborating by email.
- When you are mind mapping online, there is a serious data security risk .
- I don't find them stable and functional enough to use them seriously. For collaboration, a Freemind or MindManager file on a server or web page is still a better solution!
- Privacy of the mindmaps. So I do not use web-mind-mapping for sensitive maps or for business related purposes.
- The fact that users cannot be certain that their maps are secure - both free from examination by those not authorized, and always available (e.g. accessible if the company fails). If I backup data online, I can encrypt data myself to whatever standard I choose - there is no such option with a web mind mapping application. SSL protects the exchange of data, but not its eventual storage on the service provider's servers. (I) cannot use them when I have no Internet connection - e.g. in a client's office or on a flight.
- (Lack of) privacy.

- Speed, functionality, interoperability
- Not as feature rich as desktop software
- If the server or the internet connection is down, I cannot access my work.
- Look and feel. I finally decided to buy MindManager because nothing came close to the professional look. 2. Ability to link to files on my desktop (also the reason I bought MindManager).
- Lack of robust keyboard shortcuts and response time issues
- Offline use.
- The need for an internet connection. The lack of functionality compared to desktop-based mind mapping software. The (perceived) lack of confidentiality/security.
- Full feature set. Not very good at recalibrating maps - often have to start over to reorganize an existing map.
- The browser limits the features and stability.
- Editing appearance, colors, fonts etc. Also, as with all programs, it takes time to learn, which means most people would not even consider doing, as they don't know how long it will take. Therefore the viral spread of mind maps is restricted.
- Limited functionality at this stage, and ability to be able to work on maps offline.
- I have not seen any that have the full functionality I need. I use electronic mind mapping to help with information overload. Consequently my maps have to be able to connect to data I have to track. With being able to export MindManager to a web page I can not think of any advantage to a web based system.
- Security concerns for sensitive data.
- They don't offer the possibility to link to local documents, nor very important feature to export maps to Office applications like Microsoft Word or PowerPoint.
- Rely on a company that may be out of business in a few months and lost access to my files.
- Not possible to add links to desktop files, only to Internet based files.
- No offline use. No good filtering.
- Cannot reliably handle large maps
- I prefer the capabilities of my desktop-based mind mapping software which is available everywhere where I have my laptop. If a web-based mind mapping app offered seamless integration with MindManager I would immediately start using the web application for collaboration.
- Trust, confidentiality and ownership. Mind maps produced by the web tools don't feel protected and mine - compared to traditional mind maps. I want to store (a copy of) the produced mind map on my local disk 2. Rapid changes - software not mature yet. 3. Competing platforms - no market leader yet. You do not want to work with more than one of them.
- Ability to use your maps offline.
- The poor ability to include the maps in documents (poor export functionalities)

- Offline access and reduced functionality. My current work environment is a thin client setup which has forced me to use web-based applications (Mindomo) however I miss being able to use ResultsManager and the Ontaris Outlook Linker which previously had let me nearly live in the one application (MindManager 7).
- Long term availability and reliability.
- A lack of security. A lack of ability to link to or embed documents. A lack of integration with desktop office applications.
- Performance. Every few dozen milliseconds faster they can load and add items, the better.
- Limited functionality and less than spectacular GUIs (graphical user interface).
- Sometimes the maps and text are not sharp when you need to print them out.
- Availability of all users to work on the map at the same time
- Many are still relatively new and developing past something of a beta stage.
- The largest shortcoming is that I must be connected to the web to use it.
- Lack of features, lack of integration with Outlook, inability to link to desktop files.

What do you need to know about web-based mind mapping applications to understand them better?

The answers to this question appear to focus more on issues that respondents are encountering before they decide on a web-based mind mapping tool, such as a comparison of the functionality of the tools, case histories and video clips that demonstrate them in action.

- How secure they keep your data.
- Tutorials.
- Long term plans for the product(s) - will they still be around in a few years, what upgrade plans might there be, persistence of data.
- I think that it's potentially a great idea that is even worth paying for but I'm confused by so many players and unclear pricing models. Will they fund via advertising or fees? A good marketing plan and a reasonable pricing model could create a viable new market segment for mind mapping tools.
- (I’d) like to see a comparison of functionality (including proven security).
- More information, examples and case studies on genuine collaboration - real time and other.
- Benefits versus desktop apps
- I'd like to see more information on publishing to blogs and other (web) sites.
- I think applications need better documentation.
- Aside from collaborative work, what is their merit?
- How can I get ideas into actionable tasks?

- Is a web-based mind mapping application fast enough, e.g. what about the bandwidth?!
- How they support true collaboration, i.e. how multiple users can work on the same map concurrently.
- Integration with other tools, both web-based (SharePoint) and desktop based.
- I am an attorney and client confidentiality issues are of utmost importance regarding web-based tools. I would need to be comfortable that any client information used is secure. I would also need to know that I could work off-line if I wanted to. Given the machine based program I use (MindManager Pro 7) I see no reason to switch.
- Tutorials on how to use them professionally
- Screencam examples for these applications are a must so we can determine all their features BEFORE we waste time with them.
- Where are the map stored, who owns each piece of content?
- How are the mindmaps stored and encrypted. Can Mindomo, Mindmeister files be exchanged? How? What guarantees are given that they are secure and how long are they stored at the web?
- How to determine when to use web-based tools versus desktop tools. Can a web-based tool replace a desktop tool?
- Ability to export and import, create concept maps, publishing and collaborating.

What key questions or concerns do you have about web-based mind mapping tools?

Security of one's mind maps looms large in the responses to this question, also the relative lack of maturity of the web-based tools compared to their desktop-based counterparts was also a major concern.

- Security and sharing with others
- How secure is the storage?
- Robustness
- Security of information
- Collaboration is not always real-time; should be
- Security, long term availability, service levels.
- They are really just brainstorming tools. Need something more. Richer features.
- I always question how securely private online apps actually keep my information.
- Are you going to use web-base tool in your business really?
- Continuing cost of service rental for secure storage.
- Need to be able to use them offline, too.

- Performance/response times. Reliability. Ease of sharing and access especially for novices
- Secure export to common formats (Word, Excel, PowerPoint, etc.). Ease of use.
- Speed, privacy, collaboration and reusing maps made in desktop programs.
- When is the printing and print formatting issue going to be solved? Will the online app use Google Gears in the near future to permit offline work? (Note: MindMeister recently announced this capability)
- When they are free it concerns me that they will start charging and I will lose my work.
- Stability, exchange with desktop files (for instance to keep, archive, distribute maps or edit them further). Security, particularly for enterprise maps.
- How long will the company (or individual in some cases) that a user chooses be around in such a competitive arena?
- How does one ensure security/encryption for mind-maps created on the web?
- Does it allow brainstorming to take place without interference from the process?
- How does the feature set compare with benchmark desktop software such as MindManager?
- Security: Is the content stored on a web server really safe? For business use, I am not allowed to share date via a web server within the internet.
- Options for printed output, ability to save local copies (back-up locally), formatting flexibility, starter templates
- Scalability
- I prefer desktop-based mind mapping software, but since most of them lack true collaboration features (concurrent updates to a single map over the internet), I'd consider web-based tools. They would have to allow seamless import from and export to desktop-based mind mapping tool formats.
- Whether the info could be lost at any point. Privacy is also key.
- How is data secured? In a collaboration scenario, how are changes and other updates merged and combined? In particular, if you allow "offline" editing, how are updates merged back into a map?
- How long will the service be available. Can I access my maps in 5 years?
- Rely on a company that may be out of business in a few months and lost access to my files.
- I'm still looking for an app that will give me a little more control on the placement of my map topics. Some big maps need a more organic flow to them.
- Copyright and ownership of my "knowledge" as it is far from my desktop.
- Seamless integration with desktop applications.
- No uptime guaranteed and again ability to view your maps offline.
- No off line access. How do I work with my maps when I don't have internet access or traveling?

- How can I tell how secure my data is?
- How quickly the interface on some will look gimmicky as the latest "look what I can with Ruby" phenomenon. (Note: Ruby refers to Ruby on Rails, a development tool that can be used to quickly develop software applications)
- If a mindmap is done on the web, what does it look like when a user takes it down to their PC? What functionality does a web based mind map have when a user downloads it?
- Privacy and security are my main concerns.
- Security (encryption) of the information stored on the remote host/web server.
- Can I print out a readable map on letter size paper?
- The stability of the company and the backend of things - access to them
- Offline usage
- Open data. That my mind maps is private and secure, and that I can export all my data it if I would like to change service provider.
- Who do I need to send an investment check to in order to speed up development?
- Main concerns: Security, portability, access, scalability.

What areas for improvement should developers of web-based mind mapping applications focus on?

Clearly, respondents want the developers of web-based mind mapping tools to focus on security, integration with many different types of productivity applications (with an emphasis on Microsoft Office tools), easier collaboration and offline access to maps were the leading responses here.

- Import/export options to other applications sync with appointments and to do's
- APIs, to provide links to other (on-line) applications
- Ease to transport the mind map apps to other software.
- Integration to additional functionality e.g. brainstorming like theRealizer
- Collaboration. Security.
- Make a desktop version available
- Ease of use and data security.
- Improvement to use the tool intuitively.
- Support for multi-language Unicode character sets. Organic, Buzan style, appearance.
- Security!
- Security and features to rival MindManager.

- Real-time collaboration, editing same mindmap in real time. - Easier invitation to customers and colleagues for editing maps.
- Ease of downloading/transfer to other formats for via email rather than store and access via the web.
- Speed and integration in wikis.
- Visual rendering and interoperability with desktop mind mapping software applications.
- Offering lots of mapping variety - concept maps, mind maps, fish diagrams, etc.
- Integration with productivity software like Star Office or Microsoft Office.
- Desktop Sync! This goes for every web application out there. Sync with MindManager and other desktop tools and sync things like tasks with Plaxo and other PIM applications online.
- Stability and ease of use, exchange with desktop programs.
- Desktop version that allows offline working and upload/download of user's data. Partially answered by the various import/export functions of some of the apps, but it's best for most users if they don't have to learn two user interfaces, sets of shortcuts, capabilities and limitations. Connecting files to map nodes.
- Speed, functionality, interoperability.
- GTD functionality (i.e., the ability to make nodes into next action items, and the ability to delegate these to specific groups or group members).
- The look - more Buzan-like. import and export options. I use MindManager in the office so would like to be able to move maps backwards and forwards without loss of information.
- Ability to link to files on hard drive or network.
- Options for printed output, ability to save local copies (back-up locally), formatting flexibility, starter templates.
- Smart auto-complete feature.
- Desktop look and feel. Security (for business use). Speed. Support for collaboration.
- Compatibility - import from Microsoft Office apps (including PowerPoint) and create map boxes based on header information.
- Developing a partnership with Gyronix for ResultsManager & GyroQ
- Compatibility with desktop apps and collaborative tools
- Adding more flexible notes, links to documents and other maps. Adding Images! A good addition maybe to have a drawing palette for quick sketches or doodles to get the message across. After all, a picture is a thousand words!
- Offline editing, and merging of updates back into maps. Facilities for collaboration (and perhaps an audit trail?). Improved functionality (and responsiveness).
- Better keyboard shortcuts for tree organization

- I think the biggest win would be in collaboration. Price is another factor as a "entry level" sort of target, but collaboration is the web's biggest advantage over desktop apps.
- Auto layout and easy navigation which is a problem for complex maps when collaborating
- Sync with desktop based application for offline usage.
- Support, security, desktop links
- Compatibility with Micosoft Office for the corporate crowd.
- Be able to work in mind maps offline. Ideally some next generation offline integration with tools like MindManager.
- Integration and support for more features. Perhaps integration with other web apps such as Google Docs, etc.
- Storage of mindmaps in standardized data formats that can easily be exchanged by web-based and traditional mind mapping software.
- Offline storage.
- Security and reliability.
- Increased interoperability with other programs and websites - I would love to be able to edit a map from within a wiki page, for example.
- Document applications of the software thoroughly, such as how it can be used in a public presentation, or to manage personal bookmarks.
- Project management features.
- Alignment with desktop tools
- Lots of exporting options, ability to work both online and offline, and real-world templates.
- The integration of concept mapping and flow charting functions.
- A useful tool would be to be able to place into a mind map a cluster of topics from such search engines as Clusty, Visuwords, Kartoo, Quintura, and others without having to construct one's own beginning chart...then revise as needed.
- Publishing, make it less cumbersome for new collaborators. For example, make a mind map semi-private, publish it on the web so only if the person knows the URL he could see it.
- Greater feature sets. One thing I like about Mind Genius is the ease of entering a new topic. Its very easy. I don't want to have to use my mouse. I would also love for them to have outlines and focus in/focus out capabilities.
- Advanced printing. Advanced styling.
- Smooth transition between online and offline version, security, being able to use in synergy with other off and online applications

What do you think the future of web-based mind mapping software is?

Respondents see a very bright future for web-based mind mapping applications. Many people cite the need for online collaboration, and believe that these online visual mapping applications are likely to be at the center of it. Several others think a major player (MindManager?) will make the move to offer an online/offline hybrid solution, which will help to drive adoption of web-based mapping. A lot of interesting ideas and perspectives were submitted in answer to this question!

- In 5 years, desktop based mind mapping software will be obsolete.
- Better collaboration, and more integration with the user desktop
- merge with office application
- Expansion of collaborative ability Integration with other tools/import/export in standard formats
- It will be the winner with server installations on company specific machines
- Integrate with other web applications, e.g. google docs, to give seamless experience of all on-line content (own and web-wide)
- Uncertain. How many of the current players will still be in the game this time next year? Will a big player like Yahoo or Google get involved?
- If the web based tool will works like a client application, it is meaningful.
- With further development and low cost to the user it could catch on. Why not sell a product to Google who could make it available as a free service, like their word processor and spreadsheet apps?
- Collaboration and the ability to share files widely.
- Should be good, if the word gets out to enough people.
- Real time, interactive discussion and synthesis of conversations - in support of tele-conferences.
- Nice idea but competition with other technologies may preclude acceptance as a standalone application. Needs to be part of another collaborative suite of tools.
- I'm watching with interest the forays into web-based software by Google and Microsoft. I believe the web will be the new platform but we have serious issues with speed to overcome.
- Strong if collaboration is easy and versatility is strong.
- I think it is very bright for a particular target audience. I use mind mapping for a full range of activities hence I have issues with having to be online as well data security issues.
- Integration with weblogs, export as a presentation, voice comments in the map.
- Not sure... Collaborating with desktop program files on a server is fine for asynchronous collaboration. And real-time collaboration is a mess if everybody is touching at the file, therefore using a desktop software and web conferencing tools works well.

- Desktop/web-based application can be used for the same data. (In the future), switch(ing) back and forth between the two becomes easy. On-line (will be) used for collaboration, desktop for individual use.
- Mind maps are a great tool for collaborative work, and there's where the web-based tools will shine.
- Very bright. As with most software I believe that the future is in web-based applications.
- I think it is strong, but I doubt it ever could take the place of a computer-based setup.
- They will evolve as "lite" versions of desktop software as a simpler collaborative environment. They will become a PowerPoint replacement for some users if they incorporate linkages with other files in a rapid manner.
- For private use, it could become as good as web-based e-mail if the price is acceptable. For business use, I think it depends a lot on security and collaboration features (similar to web-based office tools).
- Strong - as all desktop apps port to the web, they get more feature rich.
- It think they will be a conduit for desktop based tools for collaboration
- Incorporated into various online communication packages, such as Skype. Also maybe part of an online organizer, as I use mind mapping mostly for organizing myself, jobs needing to be done for a project, contact persons, etc.
- I think it would be a good alternative for people just getting exposed to mind mapping and would fit well with folks that use web-based applications as their primary working tools.
- That is difficult to say. In the three years or so that I have been using MindManager I have seen mapping used much more in my industry but the advantages that it brings are not commonly understood. The good work that you are doing is helping that effect, but the viability of ANY mind mapping software is still limited to certain niches.
- I think the collaboration aspects and instant access anywhere will mean that web-based mind mapping tools will show a significant growth in the future.
- Not a long future. They are fun to play with for a few minutes but does not support a real business environment.
- There are desktop and internet versions (of some types of software), and I think Mindjet MindManager will have also some kind of online version.
- It's off to a great start. I'd like to see more multimedia included (think pop-up video to explain topics) that can be recorded from a web cam.
- If there is a real shift from local to online software, the future would be a general use of web-based mind mapping with all other applications as starting point for brainstorming, note taking, writing, etc. Other formats (PowerPoint, Word, PDF, etc.) will only be the output of the main work based on (begun in mind) maps.
- MindManager will likely come up with something or buy someone and there will be a seamless online/offline solution.
- Heavily dependent on the development and acceptance of the web 2.0 paradigm.

- In 2-4 years to come they will catalyze the spreading of mind mapping philosophy to a larger audience as an easy to use and cheap web cooperation and meeting tool. In the long run (10 years or so) web-based technology will be the silver bullet winning technology.
- It has great future. I think 2 or 3 companies will be the key players and they will definitely should think about a ways to collaborate with their offline competitors.
- It is very useful in collaborative situations. Perhaps it will have other parts of the collaborative innovation process built up around it. Perhaps it will remain even more of a novelty than desktop mind mapping software, depending on where that goes and what the barriers to entry are.
- I'm not certain that these are as versatile as all of the hullabaloo implies. They are good tools for ordering thoughts but not, in my experience, very good for translating concepts into actions (though that could be operator error, I readily admit).
- I believe there is a very significant future in web-based mind mapping due to the ability to collaborate.
- I think the technology will continue to improve, just like other web-based applications (Zoho Writer, Sheet, etc.) and they will become easier to use. At some point, a few years down the road, they may be able to compete with desktop software, like SalesForce.com does with other CRM providers.
- Web-based access to popular software tools may be a way to conform to a standardized approach to visual mapping.
- Very positive due to the greater need for collaboration via the web.
- The future for mind mapping is probably a mix of desktop- and web-based tools.
- Good, hopefully it will be integrated into other web offices like Zoho or Google Apps.
- The web-based mind mapping will take the place of the desktop mind mapping applications, bringing to the user the same features and performance as desktop ones for a lower price.
- When you start your everyday activity logging into your mind map, like “MyMap,” and from there you can go to google.com, or to your office docs, or your online newspaper, your e-mail, etc. It will be the glue in the middle on the web, the single place that connects and organizes all your web activities.

Recommended resources

- The Mind Mapping Software Blog - news and updates on mind mapping tools and resources.
- The Mind Mapping Resource Center - a collection of software reviews and links to programs and articles about mind mapping software.
- Power Tips & Strategies for Mind Mapping Software - a best-selling e-book that will help you to increase your productivity with this type of software.
- Mind Mapping Software: How to Select the Perfect Program for Your Needs - How can you select the right program for your needs, when there are over 20 visual mapping software programs available today? This new e-book is a practical roadmap, a guide that separates the wheat from the chaff and that teaches you what you need to know to make an informed decision.
- Mind Mapping Resources page on Squidoo – A comprehensive collection of links to the best information about mind mapping software on the web.

For more information, please contact:

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