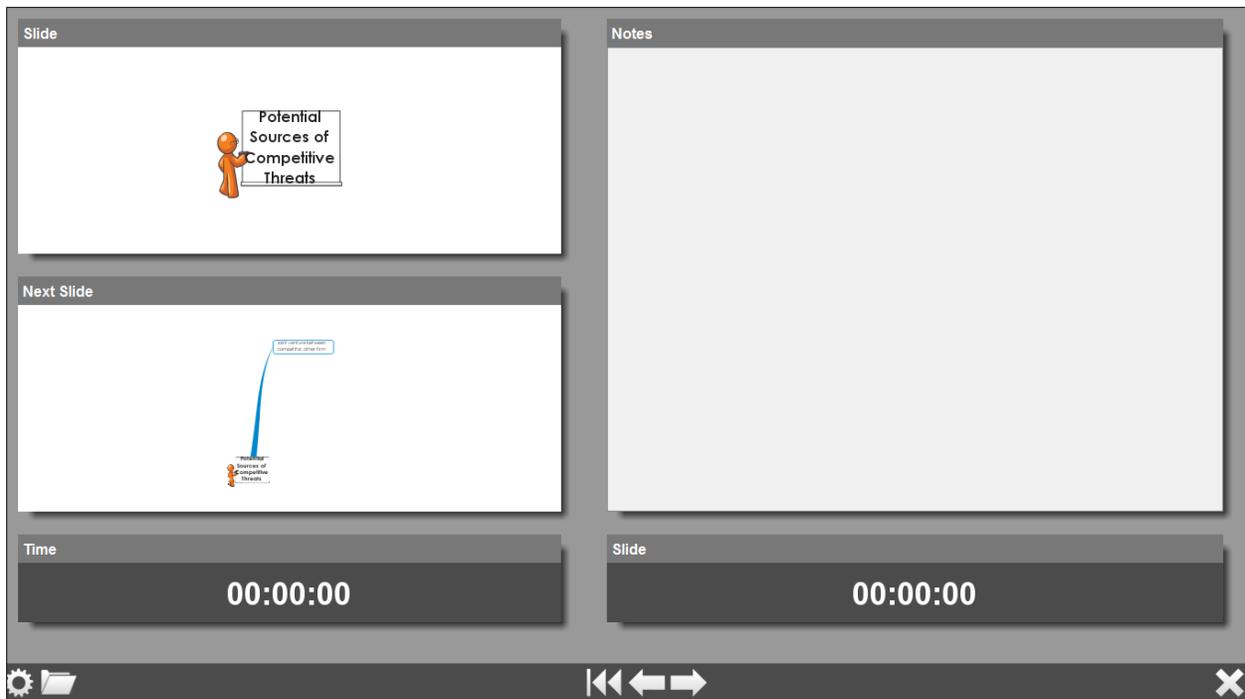




A comparison of mind mapping software presentation capabilities

Mind mapping software varies widely in terms of its presentation capabilities. That's the conclusion of my latest research. Some programs keep it as simple as possible, taking charge of displaying your map's content, one topic at a time. Others give you much greater control, enabling you to decide which topics and subtopics should be displayed in your presentation and in what order. As you would expect, there are trade-offs to both approaches.



Mind mapping software presentation modes generally fall into two types:

1. The program walks you through the mind map's topics one at a time, zooming and panning as needed to display each topic in a simplified, full-screen view.

2. The user is able to select specific topics, subtopics and other map elements, and can tell the program to create a slide based on their selection. I call this the “snapshot” model of presentation building. Slides are displayed in a sorter panel, usually designed to mimic the vertical slide sorting pane in Microsoft PowerPoint. During the presentation, the program simply plays the slides in the order they appear in the sorter. In other words, your audience is not seeing your mind map, but rather a series of screen shots of it.

Initially, I welcomed the “snapshot” approach to creating presentations from your mind map, because it gives you such granular control over what you show to your audience. If your mind map contains background or proprietary information that you don’t necessarily want to share with your audience, that’s not a problem. You just don’t create slides of those topics.

But I soon discovered a serious shortcoming to the “snapshot” approach: When your audience is viewing a series of screen shots, it’s hard to tell where the topics displayed fit into the overall map. Seen out of context, the individual topics are very disconnected from the mind map of which they’re a part. In the original “pan and zoom” model of presenting, topics swoop in and out of view. You can always see the currently-displayed topic and via the map animation, see the larger context of which it’s a part, too.

This really came to a head when I was asked to do a presentation to a group of mind mapping enthusiasts at a Fortune 100 company. Read on to learn what happened, and what I learned from this experience.

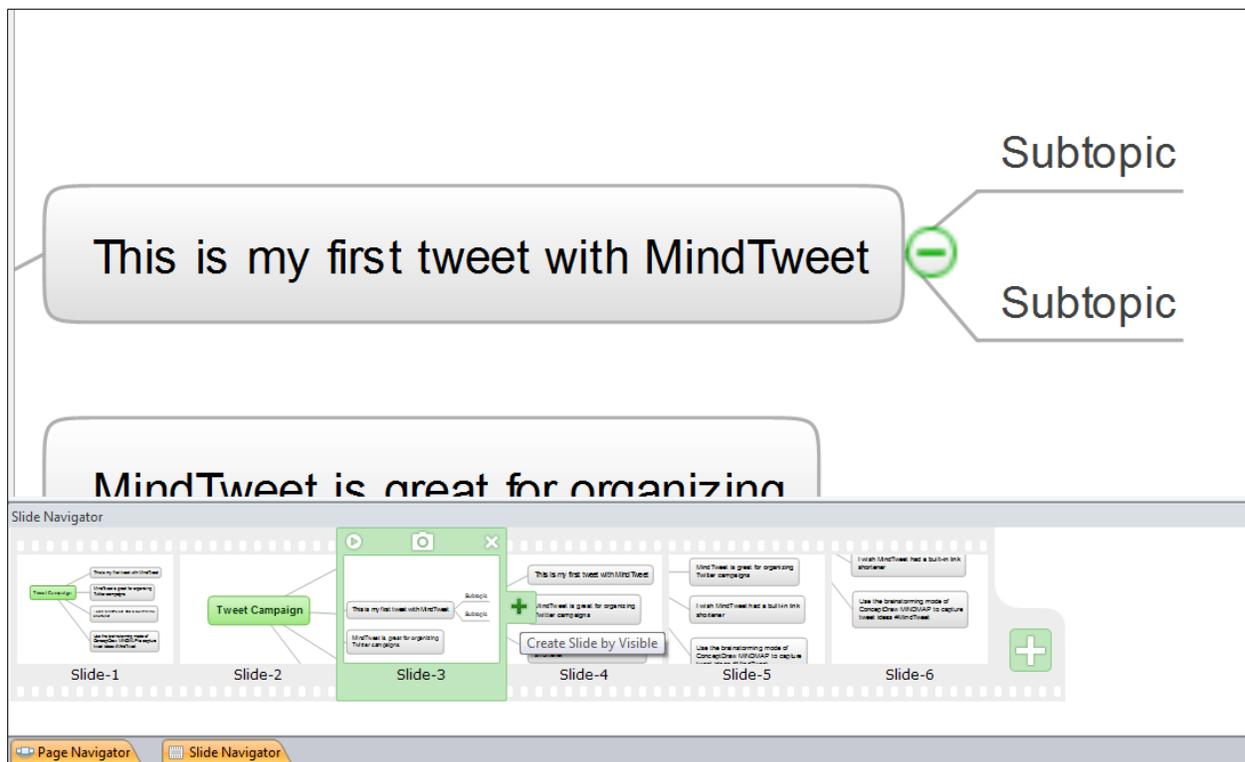
ConceptDraw MINDMAP 7

ConceptDraw MINDMAP’s presentation capabilities are accessed via the presentation tab in the program’s ribbon toolbar. Developer CS Odessa uses an interesting hybrid approach: You can create slides by selecting topics you want included in your presentation, using the “set to visible,” “set to selected” or “set to selected with subtopics.”

When you select topics and create slides from them, the slides are displayed in the slide navigator, a horizontal pane below the program’s work space. It can be toggled to be visible, or minimized to a tab at the bottom of the screen – which is quite nice. It stays out of the way until you need it! Each slide in the navigator has controls on it that enable you to play the slide show from the current slide, set the slide to the topics and subtopics that are visible on the screen or delete the slide. In addition, a tab with a big plus sign on the right of it enables you to create a new slide from the visible topics. You can also drag and drop slides in this preview mode to

reorder them. The controls are intuitive and easy to use, once you understand the terminology ConceptDraw MINDMAP uses.

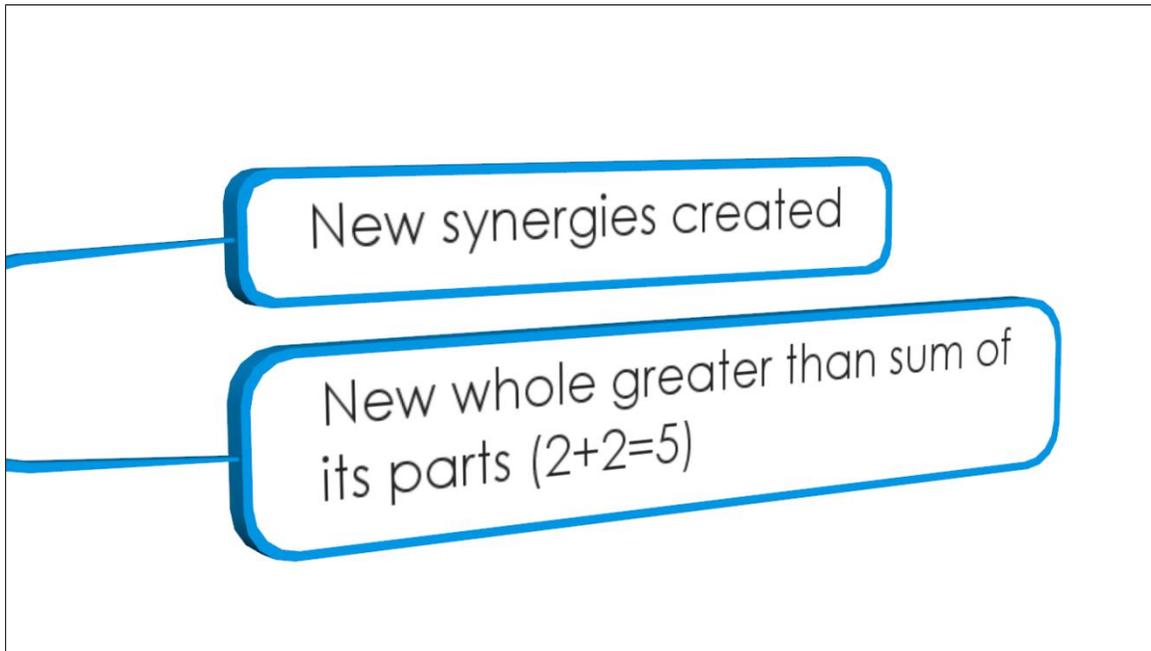
I wasn't sure what several of the slide navigator controls did at first, until I played around with them. For example, why would you want to set the slide to the visible topics, when you already have a slide of that view? So with one of the slides selected in the navigator and the corresponding map view displayed in the workspace, I added several subtopics to my mind map, and then clicked on the "set slide to visible topics" command. My slide was instantly changed to reflect the edits that I just made to the map. Cool!



The other control that was confusing at first was the "create slide by visual" tool. At first, it seemed like all it did was to create a duplicate of the current slide. But then I realized that this would be very useful if you wanted to drill your audience down another level into your mind map. You could easily do so, keeping the existing slide – which displays a higher-level view of a map branch with its subtopics collapsed – and then create a subsequent slide that displayed the same branch with its subtopics expanded.

Another neat feature of ConceptDraw MINDMAP's presentation mode is that, even if you don't select topics to be included in slides, the program will create a presentation for you, using your map's top-level topics. That makes it ideal for first-time users of this program and busy executives who don't have the time to figure out its intricacies.

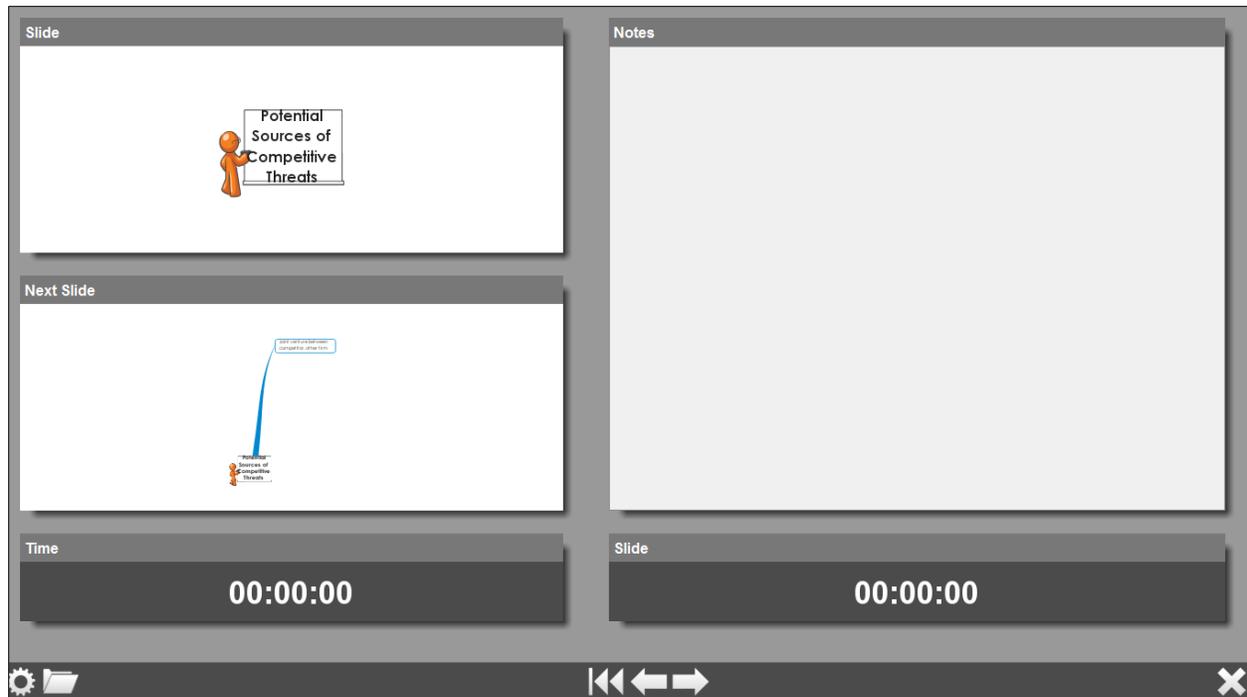
iMindMap 5.5



iMindMap 5.5 is a bit different than most of the other mind mapping software programs we've looked at so far. It doesn't enable you to "build" slides from your maps. Rather, it simply delivers a spectacular 2-D or 3-D view of the contents of your map's topics. That's not necessarily a drawback, by the way!

When you're running a presentation in iMindMap, the program displays your topics in the order in which you created them. You can adjust this order using the program's branch ordering functionality. Zooms and pans are smooth and are impressive, especially in 3-D view. If you want to wow an audience, iMindMap's 3-D presentation view will do the trick.

Navigating within a presentation is done using a set of forward and back arrows at the bottom of the presenter's screen, or the arrow keys of your keyboard. The right and down keys advance your presentation by one topic, while the up and left keys can be used to back up one step – easy and intuitive. A rewind icon on the presenter's screen can be used to back up to the beginning of your presentation – in other words, to display your map's central topic.



If you're using a computer with two screens – or a laptop with a projector – iMindMap will automatically sense this and will display your presentation on one screen and a presenter control center on the other (see the screen shot above). The latter contains panels to show you what the audience is seeing, the next slide coming up, any topic notes you have created, total elapsed time for your slide show and for the current slide, and a set of controls for modifying how the program displays your map. These controls include:

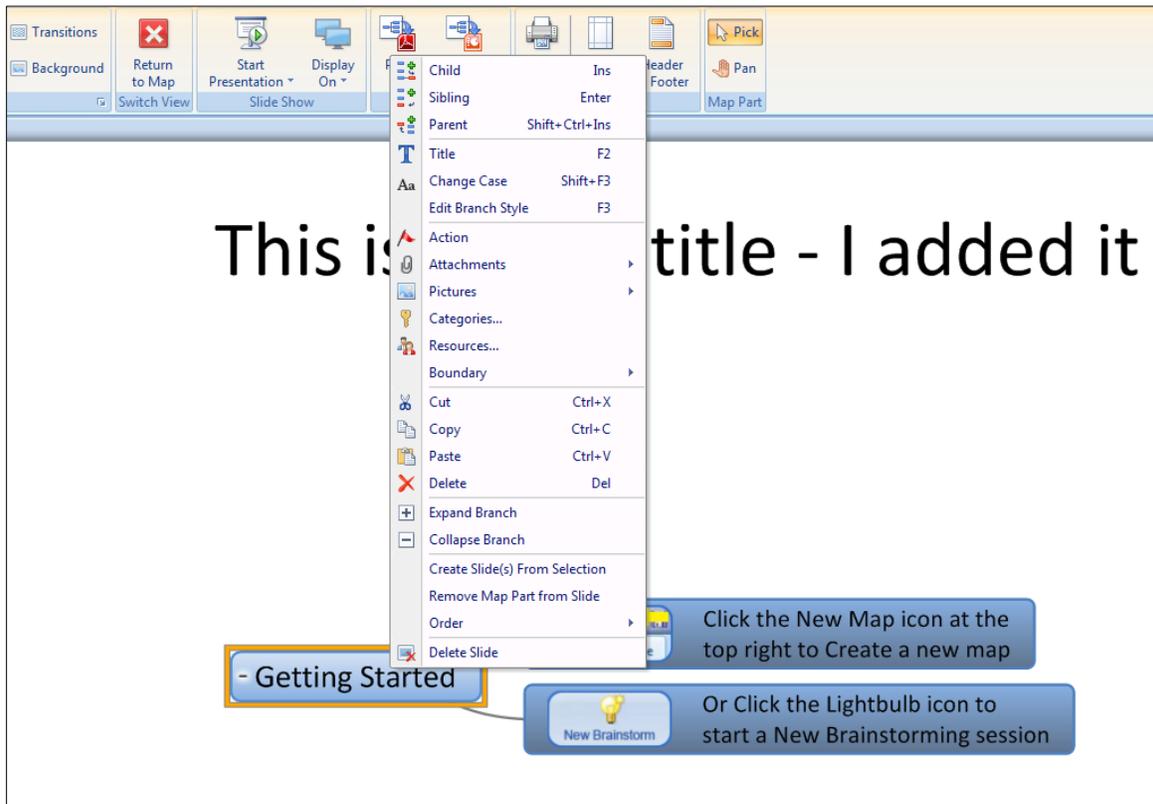
- 2-D vs. 3-D display of your mind map
- Branch by branch vs. main branch navigation – this controls whether iMindMap displays only the first-level topic, or drills down into the child topics as well
- The speed of animations (slow/medium/fast)
- Screen to black – if you want to display a black “pause” screen to your audience
- Screen to white – if you want to display a white “pause” screen to your audience
- Flip screens – alternates the screen the audience sees with the one that the presenter sees
- Automatically open links on topics when they are displayed (this saves you from having to remember to do this during your presentation)
- End presentation

In addition, a folder icon at the bottom of the presenter's screen enables you select and open any linked mind maps.

I was impressed and pleasantly surprised with iMindMap's well-designed presentation tools.

MindGenius 4

MindGenius 4 doesn't have a ribbon toolbar tab dedicated to presentations. Rather, you start creating your presentation from within the "home" tab, using the "switch view" button, which looks like a slide. Not exactly intuitive. This gives you the option of creating a title slide for your



presentation within a two-pane view that is very similar to what you've come to expect in PowerPoint: Thumbnails of your slides are displayed in a vertical pane on the left side of the screen, and the currently-selected slide is displayed in the main part of the screen. To add to the confusion, when you're in this view, a "presentation" tab appears in the program's ribbon toolbar, then disappears from view when you click the "return to map" button. While this helps to reduce visual clutter on the toolbar, it is a bit hard to get used to at first.

To add slides to your presentation, you select the topic you want and use the "add slide" button. This button expands into a drop-down list, which gives you the options of creating a blank slide, one based on the "current selection" or the "current selection (don't switch)." If you choose the first of the two "current selection" options, MindGenius switches you to the presentation view; in the second one, it adds a slide but you stay in the map view.

I quickly created several slides from one of my MindGenius maps and switched to presentation view to see what this program can do. You can add text and pictures to each slide; each one is

an editable, resizable object, which is very useful. This means you can include slides in your presentations that don't even contain sections of your mind map, if you want. Just open a blank slide and add an image and some text to it. You can also select a background image from your computer and stretch, tile or center it behind your slides.

Curiously, any map topics and subtopics you have added to the slide can be dragged and dropped within the slide itself. But the map object as a whole isn't resizable. In other words, if I just have a topic and two subtopics on a slide, it doesn't fill very much of it. I'd like to be able to make it larger, so it's more legible when I show my map on a large screen or in a web conferencing session like WebEx or GoToMeeting. But that's not possible. This is a shortcoming in my opinion.

Within the presentation view of MindGenius, you can still add content to your map. Right-clicking on a topic displays commands to add a child, sibling or parent topic to it. I added two subtopics to one of the map branches in a slide, then switched back to map view. The new subtopics also appeared there. According to MindGenius, you can annotate your slides and add topics during a presentation, which can be very useful in small group settings where you're getting input from your colleagues.

In the test I ran, I discovered that right-click functionality isn't available during presentations, but you can use the program's hotkey commands to add topics (for example, the insert key adds a child topic). You can also delete branches, edit branch titles, detach branches and reorder them during presentations.

As you're building your presentation slides in the slide show view, you can add one of 22 transitions to the current slide or to all slides. You can also make a PDF of your slides or print them directly from this view, which makes it easy to generate handouts for your meeting.

Running a presentation displays your slides full screen, with no controls. Everything is done from your mouse or the keyboard (page up and page down keys). Each slide is displayed in order, but there's no sense of moving around your map – just a series of "snapshots" of the topics you have inserted into each slide, with all of the shortcomings that presentation method implies.

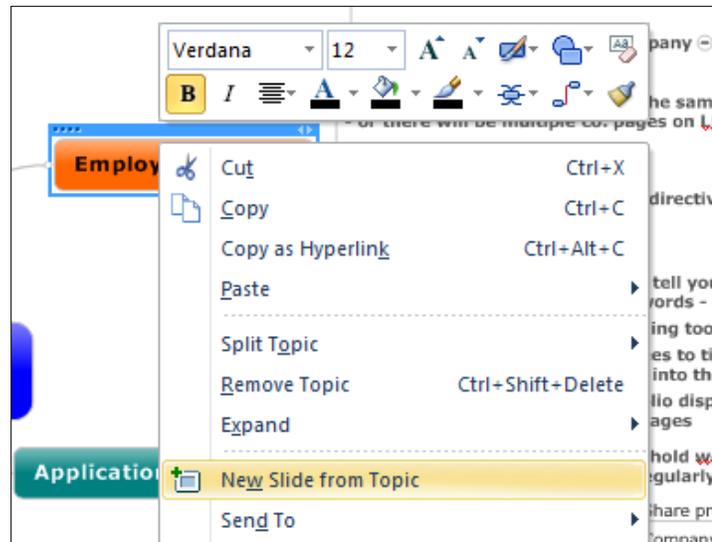
I was pleasantly surprised at the extent to which MindGenius enabled me to customize my slides, but a little disappointed that it only offered the "snapshot" model of slide presentations.

MindManager 2012

MindManager 2012 has one of the better designed presentation set-ups of any mind mapping program, but is hampered by the fact that it uses the "snapshot" model, which doesn't really show audiences the "flow" of your thinking from one section of your mind map to the next.

To begin creating a presentation in MindManager, you click on the “view” tab of the ribbon toolbar, and click on the “slides” button. This opens a vertical pane on the left side of the screen, a slide sorter that should look very familiar to PowerPoint users. Within it, you can re-order slides by dragging and dropping them.

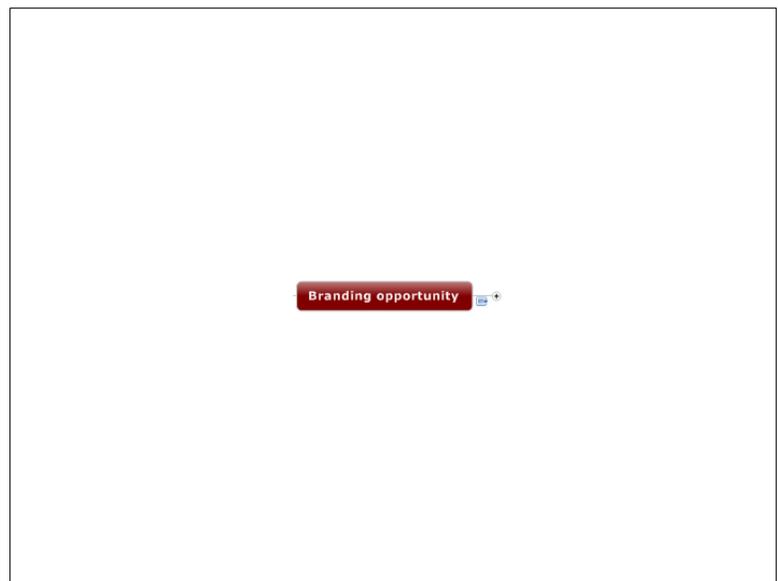
You create slides from topics by right-clicking on them and selecting the “new slide from topic” command. This inserts a view of the selected topic and its children to the slide sorter. It captures the current state of this collection of topics and sub-topics. In other words, if you have collapsed all of the subtopics below a certain level, only those which you have open in map view will appear in the corresponding slide.



As soon as you create a slide based upon a topic, a small slide icon appears next to it – which enables you to see at a glance which sections of your mind map have been added to your presentation and which have not. I like that!

Once you have created a set of slides in MindManager, you would expect to be able to manipulate or embellish them, but the options to do so are extremely limited, unfortunately. The biggest drawback, in my opinion, is that you cannot expand a topic and its subtopics to fill a slide, or reduce the size of map elements to make them fit, if they are larger than the area of the slide. As I was working with MindManager 2012 to write this report, one of the slides I created had the latter problem. It displayed a topic with child topics two levels below it. The lowest-level topics didn't fit on screen. But there wasn't anything I could do except to collapse them (you can continue to edit and add to your map in the slide view). I was hoping to be able to drag and drop this set of topics to the left to make everything fit, but the program didn't give me that option.

I also faced the opposite problem: dealing with a single, collapsed topic, floating in a sea of white space (like the



screen shot at right). I couldn't make the topic any larger, which means it would be too small to be legible when projected onto a screen or viewed during an online conference.

I had this happen to me when I gave a webinar for the employees of a Fortune 100 company last year on the topic of MindManager and project management. I was embarrassed to show some of my slides, because the content on them was so small – and there was nothing I could do about it. What was even worse is that I was presenting from a mind map that had 3-4 levels of detail to it, and it was hard for people to follow along, because they didn't know where the topic I was talking about fit into the larger structure of my overall mind map.

It was during this presentation that I arrived at the conclusion that the “snapshot” model of presentations that MindManager and several other program use has some serious shortcomings!

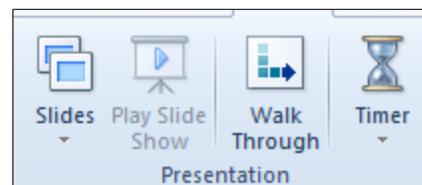
There are other features I expected to find in MindManager's slide view that are noticeably absent, namely:

- The ability to add a slide template or background color/image
- The ability to add text, titles or images to slides (insert floating image was an option when I right-clicked on a blank area of one of my slides, but the options below that – “from library” or “from file” – were grayed out, which means I couldn't use them)
- The ability to create a title slide with text only.

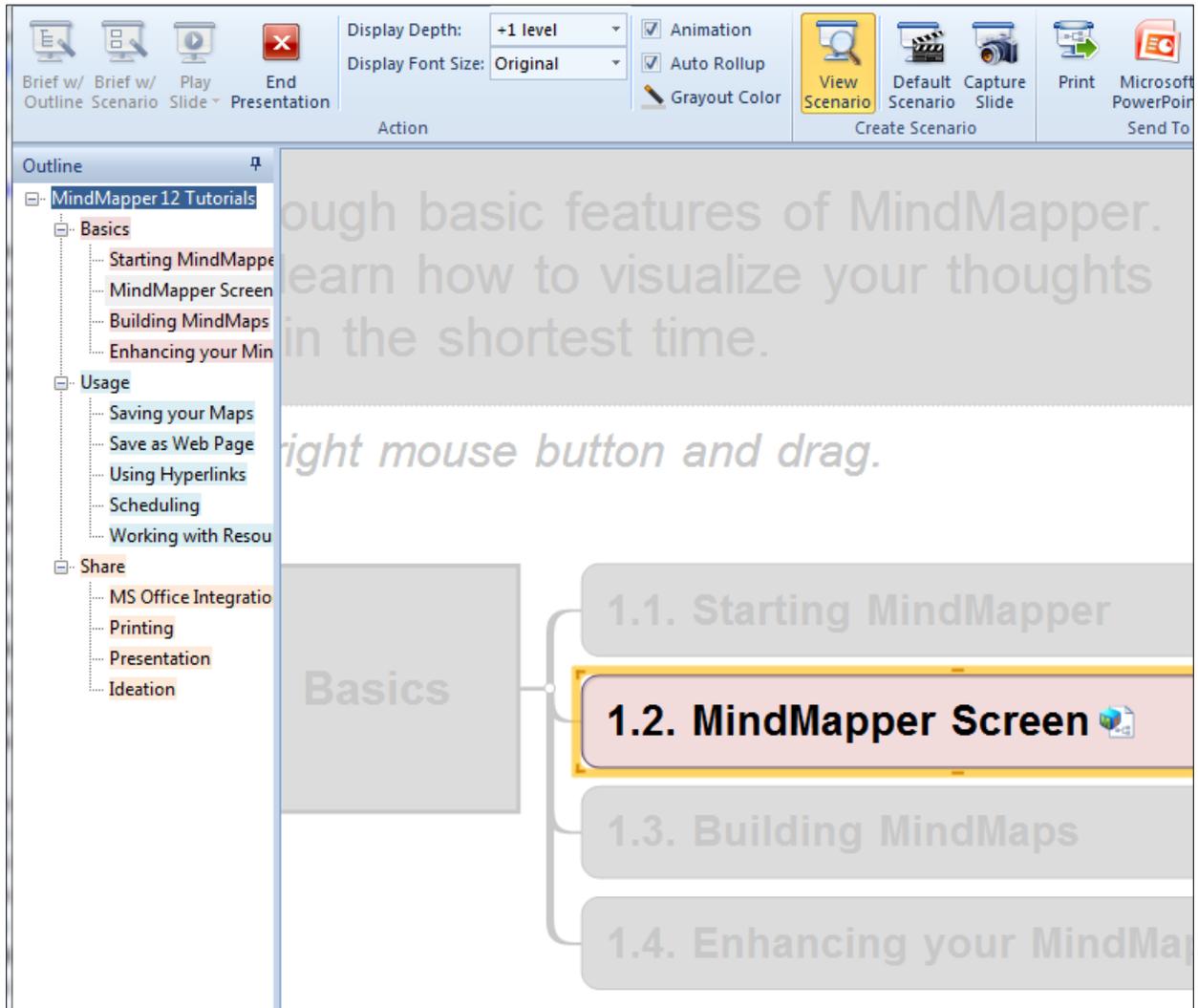
If you can't even add images to slides, then you can't brand them with your company image, an oversight on Mindjet's part.

MindManager previously used the traditional model of presenting mind maps, which was to zoom and pan you to each topic and subtopic in your mind map, which Mindjet calls a “walkthrough.” The slide production tools are an addition to MindManager, not a replacement for the walkthrough. I didn't realize that until someone from Mindjet pointed it out to me.

MindManager 2012 provides the best of both worlds. If you prefer to have a pan-and-zoom presentation model, or simply don't have the time to create slides, you can still perform a walkthrough of your mind map.



MindMapper 12



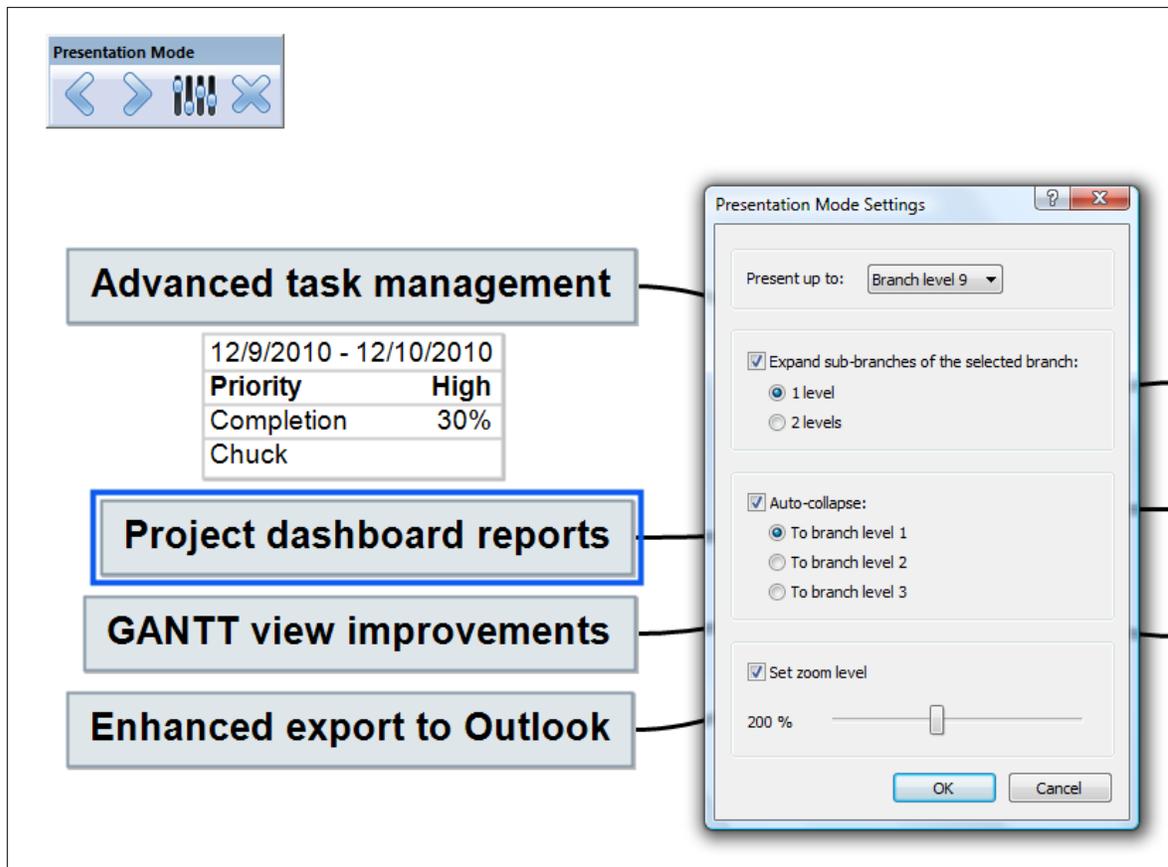
MindMapper offers three options for viewing your mind map as a presentation:

Brief with outline displays a hierarchical outline view of your map in a vertical pane on the left side of the screen (see screen shot above). You “advance” through your map by selecting topics in this pane. MindMapper displays the currently-selected topic and grays out the rest of the mind map. This gives you the maximum flexibility over viewing or skipping specific segments of your mind map, but seems to be rather inelegant. Why? Because your mind map may contain topics that you don’t want your audience to see, yet there they are in all their glory, in the outline view.

Brief with scenario divides your mind map into “logical units” – such as a topic and its children – so you can walk your audience through the content of your map. It appears you can select a topic and add a slide to the list, but it’s not clear how you “play” it from this view. Apparently it’s more like the brief with outline view, where both panes (the slide sorter and the main part of the

workspace) are displayed on screen for you and your audience to see. Once again, this arrangement gives you more flexibility, but just doesn't look very professional. It's like Toto in the Wizard of Oz pulling back the curtain to reveal the Wizard pulling the levers that made the illusion work – it's not necessarily something you want to show on screen. Plus, it's a source of visual distraction.

MindView 4

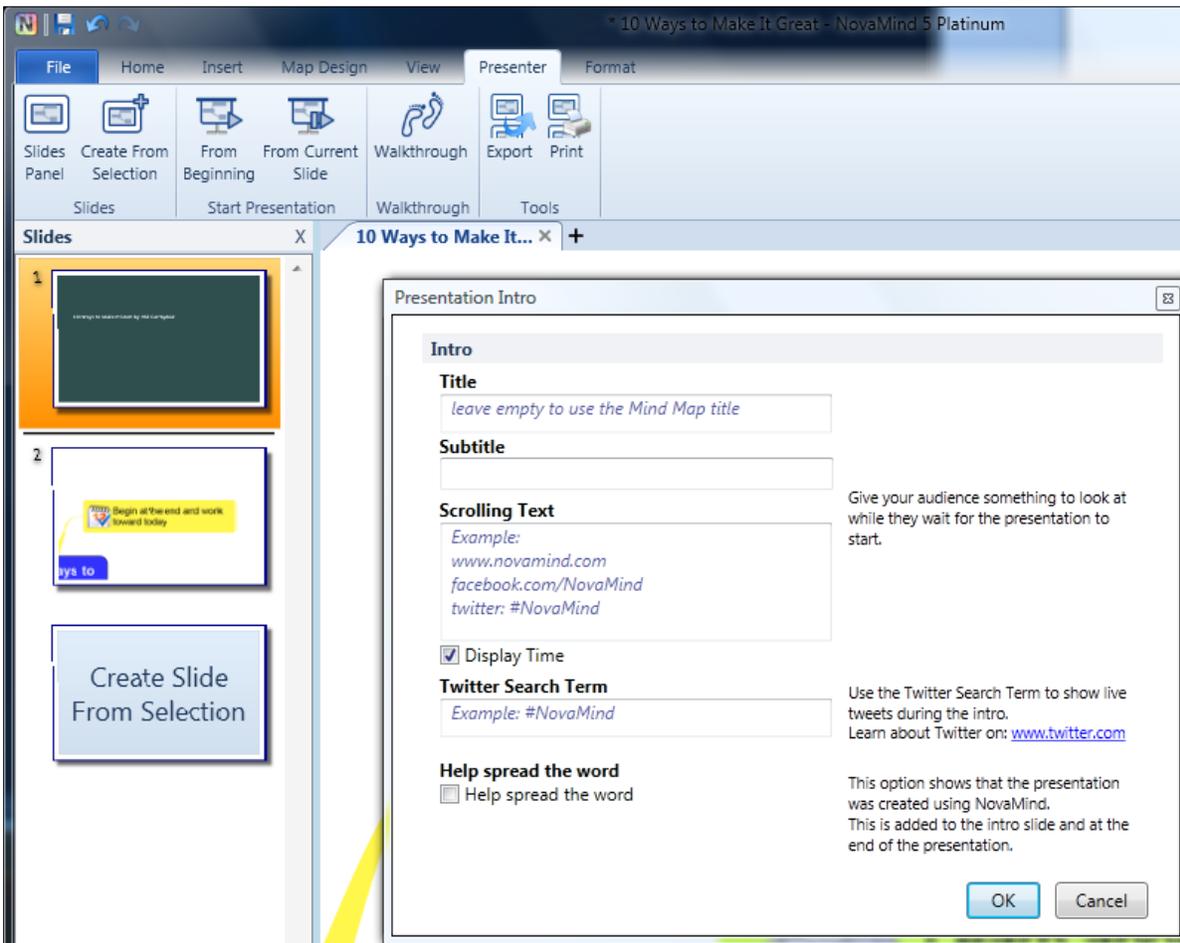


In MindView's presentation mode, the program's toolbars disappear from view, and your map is displayed full screen. The program initially displays a high-level overview of your mind map, with all of its map branches closed. In other words, only first-level topics are displayed. A set of controls on screen enables you to move forward and backward through your map. Each topic is expanded and the current topic is highlighted with a blue outline. When you have clicked through all of the contents of one first-level topic, it collapses and the next one is opened.

The control bar contains an options button that, when clicked, gives you access to several settings for tweaking how MindView will present your map's contents (see screen shot on the previous page). You can tell it how many levels deep it should display, and how deep it should open sub-branches within your map. You can also tell it how many levels deep it should auto-collapse topics, and set a default map zoom level.

MindView 4 is among the best high-end mind mapping software programs on the market today. Its project management capabilities are second to none. But its presentation capabilities are disappointingly rudimentary. I was hoping that it would be able to do more than it does.

NovaMind 5 for Windows



NovaMind 5 boasts one of the coolest presentation tools of any mind mapping software program. It's simply a joy to use, and will impress the audiences to whom you're presenting.

You access this innovative program's slide production capabilities via the "presenter" tab in the program's ribbon toolbar. Clicking on the "slides panel" button opens a vertical pane on the left side of the workspace, just like PowerPoint. To create a new slide, you have three options after selecting a topic in your map:

1. Click on the "create from selection" button in the toolbar
2. Click on the "create from selection" slide, the last image in the slide pane
3. Right click on the topic and select "create presentation slide"

No ambiguity here. Even if this is the first time you've ever used NovaMind, you can figure out what to do.

When you first create a presentation from your mind map, NovaMind automatically creates a title slide that offers some impressive options. Clicking on the title slide in the sorter displays a "presentation info" dialog box (see the screen shot on the previous page) that enables you to enter:

- A title and subtitle for your presentation
- Scrolling text – which you can use to share important information with your audience on screen, while they wait for your presentation to start (nice!)
- Show your Twitter feed – again, enabling you to deliver useful content to your audience while they wait for you to begin your presentation
- Help spread the word – this checkbox, when checked, displays a statement that your presentation was produced using NovaMind. If you want to help spread the word about this innovative mind mapping program, you can do so. Most people will probably leave it unchecked, but it's nice to see a developer thinking "virally!"

After you've added a topic to your slide show, you can do several things to it. The simplest yet most significant, in my opinion, is to display the content of each slide at different magnifications: Close-up (your topics "fill the frame" with a minimum of white space), normal and distant (small topics, lots of white space). After the experience I had with MindManager and my webinar with the Fortune 100 group, I was quite relieved to see that NovaMind offers this option.

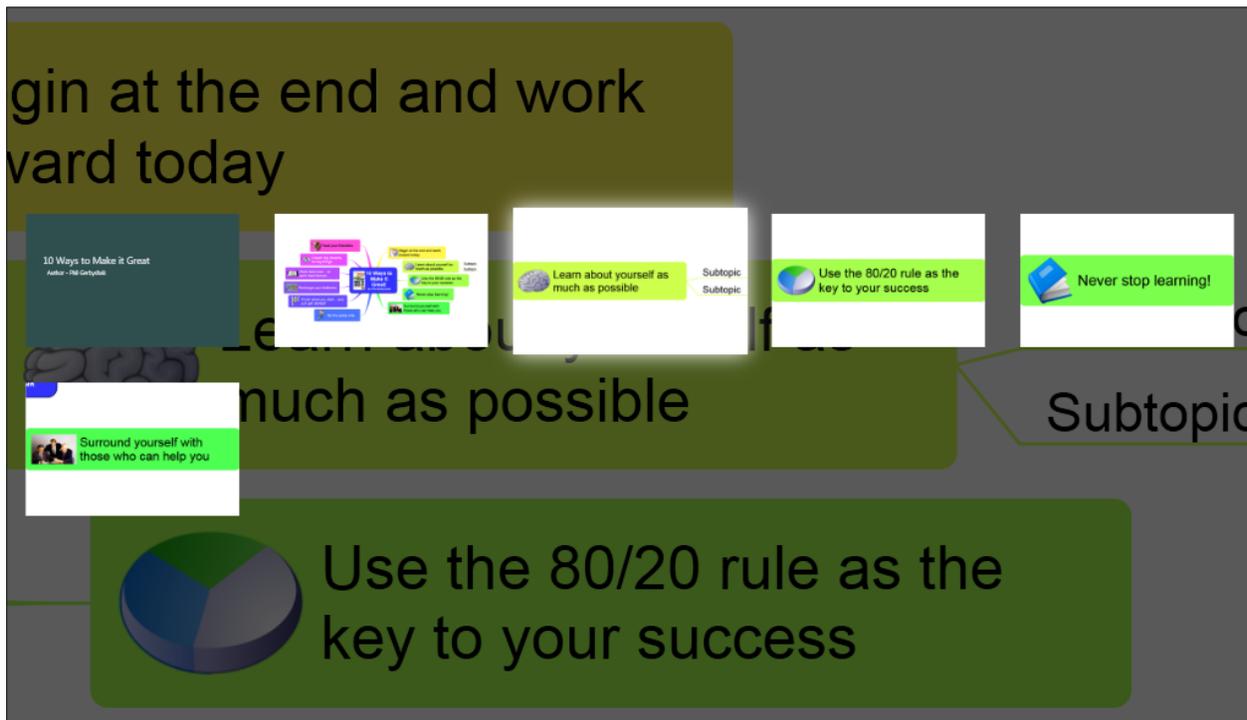
You can create slides from boundaries, floating topics, callouts and shapes, which gives you an added level of flexibility when you're creating your presentations. As I was researching NovaMind's capabilities, I didn't realize it could do this. A pleasant surprise!

If you simply want to present what's in your mind map or don't have the time to create slides, NovaMind offers the "walkthrough" option. In this presentation format, the program decides what to display for you, stepping through each topic and its subtopics in clockwise order.

One nice feature that the NovaMind development team has built into its mind mapping program is the ability to hide slides. This comes in useful when you don't want to display a particular slide, but you don't want to remove it from your presentation entirely, either. When a slide is hidden, the program displays a diagonal line across the slide number, indicating that it will not be displayed during the presentation.

NovaMind uses the traditional model of presenting map topics during a presentation, namely zooming and panning you from one topic to the next. In this sense, it's a nice hybrid of the two methods of mind map presentations – it enables you to create slides, which tell NovaMind which map content to display and in what sequence – but still zooms and pans from one selected topic

set to the next, so the audience and presenter don't lose their sense of place while viewing the mind map. Nicely done!



If you don't want NovaMind's presentation to take over your entire computer screen, simply hold down the CTRL key in Windows when starting your presentation and it will be limited in size to the existing NovaMind window. This can be very useful if you are doing a webinar presentation or Skype session, and you want to share just a window and not your full screen. NovaMind is the only mind mapping program that enables this. Again, kudos to the NovaMind development team for thinking of this! It's an increasingly common usage scenario.

Another unique feature is the slide sorter, which can be accessed during your presentation via an icon in the lower left corner of the screen. It shows a visual list of your slides (see screen shot above), so you can immediately navigate to any slide in your presentation with a single mouse click. This can be useful during a Q&A session after your presentation, when an audience member asks a question about a specific slide. Rather than clicking back through your presentation, one slide at a time, you can use the slide sorter to quickly locate the slide and immediately jump to it.

In addition to these features, NovaMind enables you to access hypertext links, attached files and notes that are part of your mind map during your presentation, which brings an added dimension to what you're able to present.

At any time during your presentation, you can enable editing of your mind map using an icon at the bottom left corner of your screen. This can be useful if you need to incorporate audience input into your mind map. Imagine adding this level of interactivity to your next presentation!

For more details on NovaMind's presenter mode, [check out this documentation for it](#) from the NovaMind website.

Visual Mind 11

Visual Mind 11 does not contain a presentation view. The program's help file recommends that you display your mind map using the program's full screen view.

XMind 3 Pro

To access the presentation capabilities of XMind, you must upgrade to the Pro version. Once there, you'll find a rudimentary presentation tool. Like iMindMap, XMind doesn't enable you to create slides, but simply to present the contents of your mind map in a clockwise order.

The "enter" key is used to advance from one sibling topic to the next, while the "tab" key enables you to see the sub-topics of your map. The space key can be used to step through topics at all levels, one at a time. The arrow keys can also be used to navigate topics at the same level of your map (up and down) or at different levels of your mind map (right and left keys).

In addition, during the presentation, a navigation toolbar can be viewed near the bottom of the screen, but doesn't actually appear until you mouse over it. It contains arrows that enable you to view the next sibling or child topic, as well as to toggle a slide outline view on the left side of the screen. This last option enables you to immediately jump to any topic in your map. Because it's a text outline, rather than a set of thumbnails, it's much easier to tell exactly which topic you want to jump to.

During presentations, XMind Pro grays out all of the topics of your mind map except for the currently-selected one. Topics are not drawn on screen until you advance to the next step. This serves to keep the audience's attention on the topic about which you're speaking, and minimizes other distracting topics that may be on screen – very effective. But I discovered as I walked through one of my XMind maps that the program doesn't always move adjoining topics out of the way as a series of child topics is built up, step by step. Instead, they overlapped each other.

If your presentation needs are fairly basic, you may find this XMind's capabilities to be somewhat useful. But I found that it doesn't look as professional as the other programs

reviewed here. Hopefully, it's developers plan to address this soon, because XMind is otherwise a very good program, especially for first-time users of mind mapping software.

