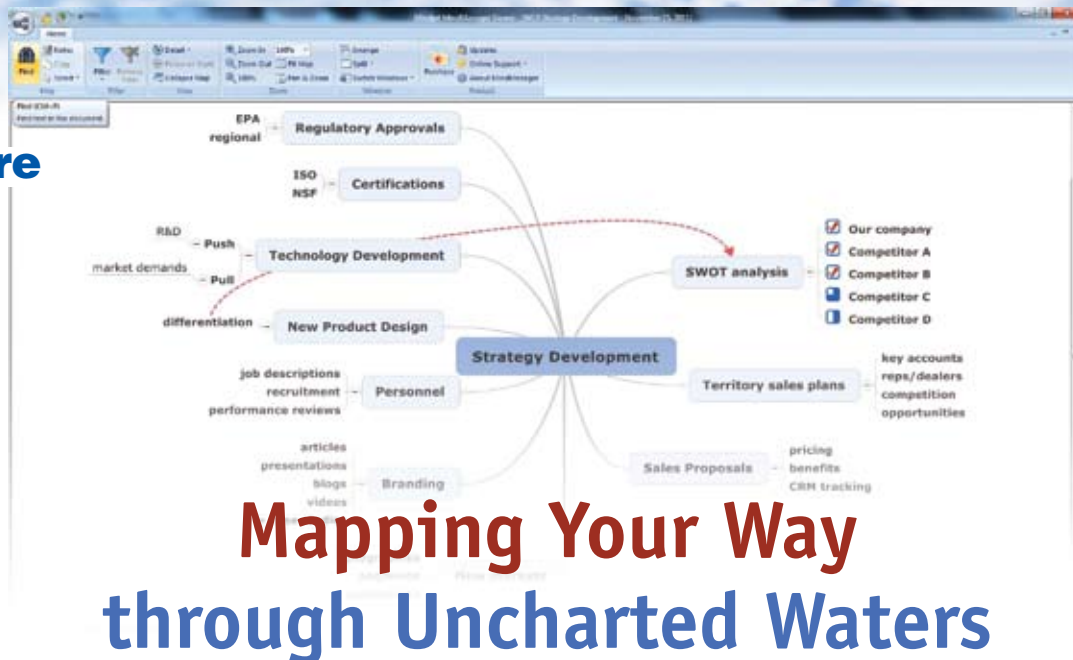


Feature



Mapping Your Way through Uncharted Waters

It's no secret that to get where you want to go, you need a map. Fortunately for those of us in the water business, there are a number of outstanding tools that can help us chart a course to get to our goals. In the February 2011 issue of *Water Conditioning & Purification*, I addressed social networking tools; media that can help you more effectively sell water technology and tap into the dialogue surrounding your brand, product or services. Idea mapping, or mind mapping, is another powerful 21st century tool for capturing ideas, making connections, plotting a course of action, and even collaborating with an ever-increasing number of partners.

Idea mapping is a great help in tackling day-to-day activities as well as major projects. The task could be as simple as sketching out a weekly to-do list, plotting a strengths/weaknesses/opportunities/threats (SWOT) analysis, organizing a sales pitch or outlining a presentation. It could be as complex as designing a customer relationship management (CRM) system, laying out the year's communication plan or mapping a territory sales plan, right down to key accounts, reps and dealers, opportunities and competitive positioning. Themes flow into ideas, which connect to supporting thoughts and links and tactics.

An idea map is a team-building tool. It's a communications tool. It's a flagpole to rally your team around. Think of idea mapping as a 21st century whiteboard, but without all that dry-erase ink smeared on your shirt cuffs and without the illegible handwriting that's made generations of skull sessions into big headaches. With idea mapping software—some is free, some can cost a couple hundred dollars—you can type ideas as topics and sub-topics and create diagrams that allow you to track ideas and connect them to each other with lines and arrows. Topics can contain links to websites or documents. In a lot of ways, they look like maps of river systems, with trickles and glimmers of ideas that run into tributaries and combine with other thoughts to form rivers that flow to success.

Maybe it's no coincidence that idea maps look like water-courses or networks of pipes—they're a perfect tool for the water industry, says management consultant and long-time idea mapper John Kauke. "The water industry is global," Kauke says. "It's got a lot of moving parts, with dozens of elements of technology, regulation, issues, players and philosophies to track." In short, he

By Jim Lauria

says, it's "dynamic, asynchronous and bloody complex." That's just the sort of situation that calls for a map. According to Aristotle, the soul

never thinks without an image. Your idea map is that image. It allows you to see the forest and the trees—the big picture and the details all at the same time.

Think like a genius

The idea-mapping concept is outlined in a couple of great books: *Mind Mapping* by Tony Buzan and *Idea Mapping* by Jamie Nast. Buzan, a British educational consultant and memory expert, is considered the father of mind mapping, a term he coined in 1993. He was inspired by the note-taking habits of none other than Leonardo da Vinci, who diagrammed his ideas to express the paths his mind was taking. As Buzan puts it, "a mind map is a graphic expression of the natural synaptic patterns of the brain."

"Following those synapses breaks the tradition of linear thinking that we usually fall into," says Jamie Nast. "It's more in tune with how our brains really work and allows us to break the logjams that occur in the creative process when linear thinking gets us stuck on some detail that keeps ideas from moving forward. By using idea maps or mind maps, we don't allow those ideas to dam up the stream of consciousness—thoughts can flow through, around or over the sticking points. Usually, I find, we can follow one of those other streams to get where we need to go." As Nast says, "where your brain goes, you will follow."

The art of thinking

Idea maps can often be beautiful—not just because they lead you to better decisions and more effective processes, but because there's something aesthetically pleasing about the patterns we draw as we approach a problem. As a result, it's probably no surprise that idea mapping dovetails with the ideas put forth by Harvard professor Youngme Moon in *Different: Escaping the Competitive Herd*. She describes business as an art form, so the artful twists and turns of our planning process are a close fit. They're also in step with Moon's philosophy that success comes from finding ways to offer something truly different and unique to the marketplace. With idea maps, we can capture and collect the ideas that make our brands stand out. We can find nuances in

unexpected places and see new ways to tie them to our brand, our goals and our programs. We can design our programs and projects like we design our products, with an eye toward efficiency, function and appeal. Moon also says marketers need to be time shifters, able to see the past, present and future. What better way to put the whole timeline on the same screen than with an idea map? What else allows us to follow time forward and backward and dip into linked websites and documents?

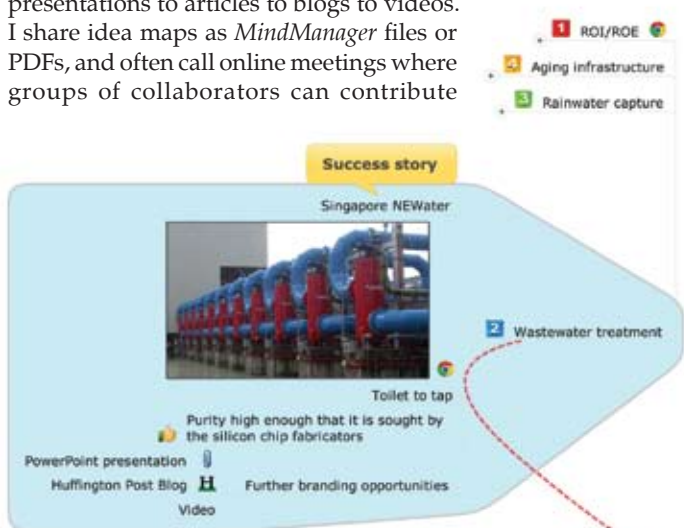
Multi-tool

Like a Swiss army knife, an idea map can serve many functions. First, it's a great creativity tool. We can flow through an idea session, recording flashes of insight and moments of creativity. We can build sequences and connect streams, linking ideas to each other and tying them to actions. At the next stage, an idea map is a decision-making tool. Buzan points out that a good mind map allows you and your collaborators to see connections and trade-offs. Reviewing a mind map is like reading a planning diary, he says. I've found that idea maps fit modern learning models, making them invaluable tools for connecting with a wide range of teammates and collaborators who may view things in very different ways.

Peter Drucker, in *Innovation and Entrepreneurship*, says the manager of the future will be a guide through the learning process. Idea maps help me lead teams through planning sessions, appealing to visual learners, verbal learners, classical planners and matrix thinkers. We're all learning together. Kauke calls this "talking among tribes," which can also describe the wide range of participants that can join the planning or communications process. He says idea maps allow him to tap into what he calls the "extended enterprise," a broad collaboration in which information flows in all directions from manufacturers to distributors to customers, up, down and across the supply chain. As a guy who maps ideas in both English and Spanish, Kauke is an expert in very extended enterprises.

Putting maps to work

I've used MindJet's *MindManager* to chart my company's strategic plan, competitive analyses and sales programs. I use an idea map to guide me to competitors' websites to stay current on their programs and products. I've used it with my communications consultant to map the course of key messages that we've adapted from concepts to presentations to articles to blogs to videos. I share idea maps as *MindManager* files or PDFs, and often call online meetings where groups of collaborators can contribute



in real time. In addition to *MindManager*, there are quite a few software packages available for idea mapping. Some are proprietary. Buzan created *iMindMap*, Microsoft offers *Visio*, and SimTech's *MindMapper* integrates with *Microsoft Office*. Free packages, including *CAM Editor*, *Compendium*, *FreeMind* and *XMIND*, are also available. Each package has its own capabilities, styles and challenges. My advice is to pick one that is as natural for you to use as possible, so it helps your ideas flow rather than interrupting them. Regardless of the software that built them, idea maps are powerful living documents, connected to ever-changing websites and easy to adjust and update. Einstein said: "We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used to create them." Idea mapping may well lead us to the breakthroughs in our thinking that allow us to sail into the uncharted waters where new solutions and new technologies await. After all, the only renewable resource as vital as water is brainpower—and like fresh water, we need fresh ideas to survive and thrive.

About the author

◆ Jim Lauria is Vice President of Marketing and Business Development for Amiad Water Systems, a manufacturer of clean technology water filtration systems for agricultural, industrial, municipal and commercial applications. He holds a Bachelor of Chemical Engineering Degree from Manhattan College and has over 20 years of global experience as a business executive in the water treatment industry. Lauria can be contacted at jim@amiadusa.com

