

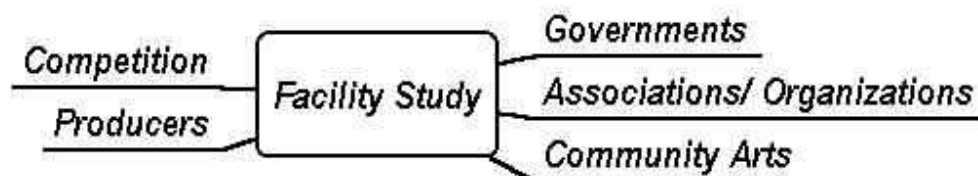
## How to Grow a Project

The assignment was clear. The client, a major manufacturer, wanted to include a large auditorium within an office complex and open it to community use. Was this a viable concept? Who might use it? What would they be prepared to pay? Could the new facility be a profit centre? And by the way, the report was required in three weeks.

Some consultants, when faced with such an assignment and tight time lines would reach for a Scotch or an aspirin. but in this case, the consultant booted up and clicked on a new kind of software that has been developed specifically for the purpose of organizing and structuring ideas. Based on an idea mapping concept called Mind Mapping, it offers a bridge between the text based analysis and a more visual way of portraying information — hence the name VisiMap.

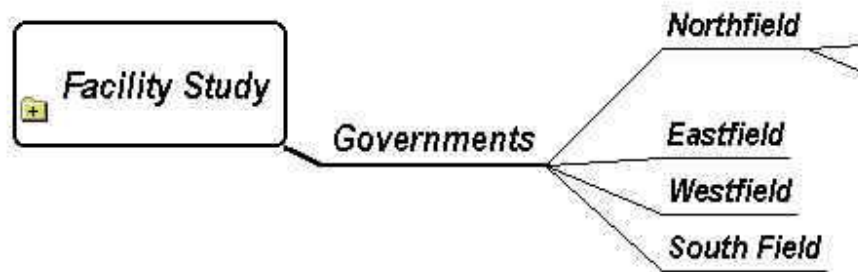
Basically the project called for an initial community consultation requiring about 70 interviews. The first task was to develop categories for these. The consultant decided that she wanted to talk to potential users such as governments, local associations and community groups, institutions like hospitals and schools, performing arts organizations based in the community and commercial producers. It was also going to be necessary to find out what the competition was.

This was a snap to document in VisiMap. She opened the program, right clicked on the mouse and created the branches to produce the big picture.



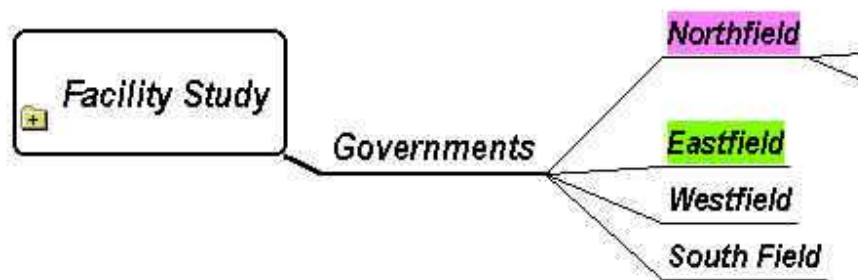
The next step was to flesh out each branch with specifics. The government was easy to look at because all the cities within the regional municipality were listed in the government directory. But it was important to keep this information at one's fingertips.

That meant expanding the government section of the map to include the names of the municipalities. Then under each one it was possible to create another layer of branches with the names and positions of the persons to be contacted.



VisiMap now allowed the consultant to open a split window on the lower half of the screen. By highlighting any branch on the map it now became possible to write text underneath. Here was the ideal place to record the name of the person to be contacted and a phone number.

When you have to make 60 or 70 calls in a short period of time the chances of getting a live person on the end of the line are about 10% - especially in government. So how do you manage your calls? It's simple with VisiMap. Color code the process. For example, when you have called and left a message, you can click on the right button of your branch and color the background green. When you receive a call back, you can type your notes right into the text box, and change the colour to pink to indicated that you have completed an interview or an entire section. You're getting there.



As calls come in and information needs to be recorded, it's tempting to grab the nearest piece of paper and jot down a few notes. But that's absolutely fatal when you have to produce well documented back-up within your report .

Our consultant avoided that problem by making all the notes in the text window of VisiMap as soon as her calls came in.

Interview responses were varied. Some respondents were keen to use the new facility. Others were certain that they would never use it. Still others were intrigued and wanted to think about it. A picture was starting to develop so that a realistic estimate of outside use could be made.

Finally there were more pink boxes on the screen than pink ones. Nearly all the calls had been returned and there was a solid base of information. It needed to be turned into a section of the project report. Another few clicks of the button and the results of the survey were in readable and organized format. It now looked like this.

## 1.0 Governments

### 1.1 Northfield

#### 1.1.1 Dir. Economic Development

Mr. John Thinkbig reports that the City rents meeting space 10 times a year and would be interested in using the new facility provided that rents were competitive.

#### 1.1.2 Events Coordinator

Ms. Jane Smith arranges public consultations for the City and thinks that she could rent the new auditorium at least 6 times each year. She hopes there is reception space in a lobby that would also be available.

The beauty of VisiMap is that it can format and organize your random notes into a structured report automatically. All it takes is a click on "copy" in the menu of VisiMap and a click on "Paste Text" in your word processor. All the headings and subheadings are neatly numbered and even formatted in your chosen style. The document in this case formed an actual section of the report's appendix. The consultant was able to draw the necessary conclusions from the interviews and deliver the verdict to the client on time and on budget.

Our consultant didn't have to reach for the aspirin and saved the scotch for an appropriate celebration.

Management expert, Henry Mintzberg has explored a range of strategy making in books like *The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning* and *Strategy Safari* and contends that the term, strategic planning is actually an oxymoron.

What he highlights is that there are different thinking processes. Forming a strategy is a creative process in which the mind needs to be free to play with a structure. Analysis requires a more traditional linear format with a sequential pattern. Too often we want to characterize ourselves as left brain or right brain types and rely on one or the other. The truth is that we need both, each at the appropriate time in the process.

Planning tools like VisiMap address both halves of the equation in a user-friendly way. VisiMap allows you to play with your initial structure. You can add and subtract ideas, reorder them and move them around while looking at the big picture outline.

Then you can then flesh out the outline with solid information. VisiMap allows you to move from section to section easily as you gather the necessary information. When the information is complete, you still have the option to restructure or recorder sections of the outline and all the underlying text follows it seamlessly.

Our consultant found it easy to create the initial plan, to provide an interview structure, to manage the information during the collection process, to write the content and to produce it in the appropriate format all within one program. If you're lucky you can put VisiMap to work in an equally effective way. It's available to try at [www.visimap.com](http://www.visimap.com)