



Case Study

Professor Michael F. Ruffini



“Using mind maps, I’m able to plan, organize, and sequence course material much better because I can see things visually. I’ve become a better instructor and course designer. And on the other end, my students have been able to learn much better and faster by using the mind maps.”

ROI

Cuts online course creation time in half; maximizes students’ learning.

Customer Profile

Michael F. Ruffini is an assistant professor in the department of educational studies and secondary education at Bloomsburg University in Pennsylvania. He is also the author of *Creating E-courseMaps for Online Courses* (Kendall-Hunt Publishing, 2006), and founder of the consulting company Map-a-Course (www.mapacourse.com).

Challenge

To help instructors translate their traditional instruction into an online environment.

Online Course Design

An education professor harnesses the power of MindManager to create courses more efficiently and with greater clarity.

Professors are increasingly being asked to create online courses out of the material they develop for their face-to-face classes. But they usually aren’t given tools to make this process intuitive and efficient. Professor Michael Ruffini has developed a methodology he calls e-courseMaps that uses the power of mind mapping, in conjunction with Mindjet MindManager software, to streamline the creation of such online courses.

“The whole emphasis now in educational psychology is being able to relate new information to prior knowledge,” says Ruffini. “MindManager enables faculty, with very little training, to create powerful images to depict complex information and relationships. Once they begin using this kind of visual technology, other ways of managing information seem crude by comparison.”

A rush to get online

Online learning has grown exponentially since the late 1990s. University faculty members are rushing to create online courses to provide students with an easily accessed and often self-paced way to learn.

Most instructors are given training in how to use course management systems, such as Blackboard, which have become widely used by students as online information hubs. But little training is provided in actually converting and organizing classroom materials into a Web-based course.

“Instructors typically get a course on how to use Blackboard and how to link their documents in a linear structure to organize a course,” Ruffini says. “You develop one piece of information for your course—typically a document or a file—then you link it to your course document in Blackboard.”

The result is a linear approach to course creation, with pages of text that students have to wade through one page at a time to find the information they’re looking for. Learners fail to see a holistic view of the entire course.

A new approach

Ruffini believes there is a better way to teach and to learn. Based on his experience as an educational design professional, he has developed a course-creation technique called e-courseMaps. He developed the technique after becoming dissatisfied using products like Inspiration to organize information. Three years ago, he saw MindManager demonstrated at a conference, and a light bulb went off in his head: He could use mind mapping to create courses.

He now teaches other teachers how to use Mindjet MindManager and Macromedia Dreamweaver to organize and publish their courses. “I’ll project a mind map in front of a room full of instructors and right away they get what’s going on. They can immediately see all the course elements and the relationships among those elements and that’s it—they are hooked on mapping.”

He first guides instructors through the process of creating and gathering all their course materials to make a map. “It’s important to emphasize that you need to have sound course materials first,” he says. “The mapping is the last thing—it’s like the lid on the pot, once your materials are all developed. The maps don’t do anything unless what’s underneath those maps makes sense.”

Ruffini then shows the instructors how to use the map structure to create discrete modules of instruction. The name of the module is inserted into the center of the map (see image on next page) with “main topics” radiating out from the center to

Solution

Professor Ruffini uses MindManager to help instructors create online courses.

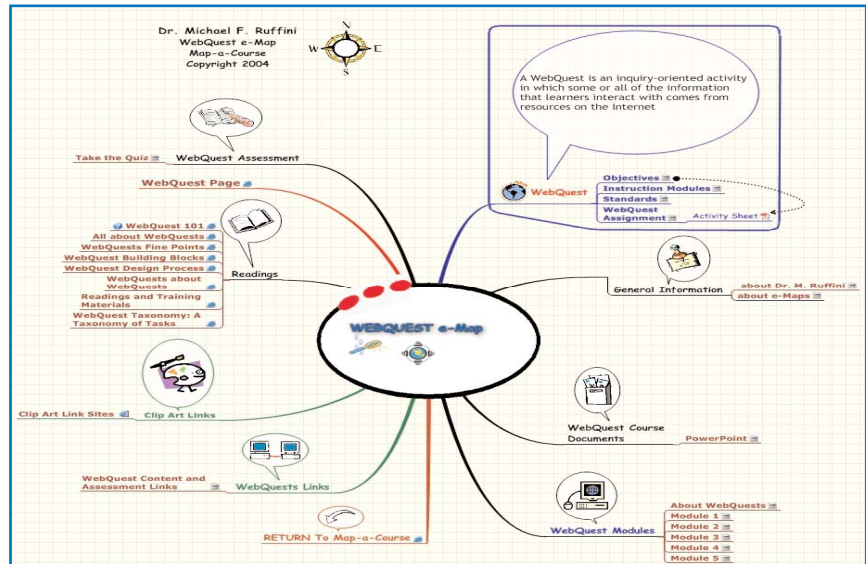
Product

Mindjet MindManager

Result

Course creation time has been cut in half, and students report much more satisfaction with the learning experience.

represent individual sections of the course. “Then from each main topic radiate subtopics that further break down the content of each unit,” he says. “Any one of these branches can include hyperlinks to supporting text documents, Word files, images, video, audio, spreadsheets, slide presentations, Web sites—even preselected data from a database or the content of specific e-mails. Text notes can also be attached to any branch as another way to communicate information.” Finally, he shows how to simply export the map as HTML and then use Dreamweaver to put the course material online.



Online course creation using Mindjet MindManager

Simplifying course design

Ruffini estimates that his mind mapping technique cuts in half the two to eight hours typically required to create a course outline. “Clearly, visually mapping your online courses will save you time. But it also makes you a better instructional designer because it lets you see at a glance how all your course content relates to each other—as well as any information that may be missing.”

Ruffini's e-courseMap methodology is a very flexible, visual approach to vastly simplifying and clarifying the creation of online course material. Any topic or subtopic can be instantly dragged and dropped to change the information flow, enabling the instructor to organize and reorganize the course material until it meets his or her satisfaction.

“MindManager provides a very powerful visual image that can depict complex relationships and information, which you really can't do if you're writing things down in a linear fashion,” he says. “There is no cutting and pasting, no clipboards filled with information. Course creation is done visually and instantly.”

Improving the learning experience

Ruffini says that course maps open a new window of understanding for students. The overview the maps provide (as well as the ability to quickly access all related documents, images, and Web sites) enables students to fully grasp the flow of a course. And because MindManager makes it so easy to reorganize the information, the students can quickly create a personal view of the information that makes sense to them. “My students just flip out in the classroom when the first see the maps,” he says. “I bring up a map of a new teaching module or assignment and they look at me like, 'Why isn't everyone using these maps?'”

This new style of learning is critical in a society that's drowning in data. “Because we live in an information-based society, the amount of content available for any given area is overwhelming,” Ruffini says. “Creating visual representations of such complex, interrelated information just makes it all so much easier to communicate and to understand. You put everything into the map and suddenly you can see how all the pieces fit together. It just makes sense.”

To find out how other leading organizations have benefited from Mindjet MindManager, visit www.mindjet.com/casestudies.

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