

# Forty Years of Improving Business Communications

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IM WHITE PAPER SERIES

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INFORMATION MAPPING



COMMUNICARE  
Productivity Through People Skills™

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## Introduction

*“When The Method was first developed, we never imagined such technological advances as the Internet, mobile technology, teleworkers, and Instant Messaging,” said Robert E. Horn. “Through all of this change, the principles that the Information Mapping method is based on — learning theory, human factors engineering and cognitive science — have remained relevant and have, in fact, been able to keep pace with innovation. The successes that our customers have enjoyed by standardizing and simplifying business communications through The Method have been truly gratifying.”*

The Information Mapping methodology (The Method) is a research-based approach first created in 1965 to analyze, organize, and present information. Originally developed by Robert E. Horn for the Department of Defense, Horn later commercialized The Method forming Information Mapping, Inc. (IMI). Forty years later, The Method has been embraced by hundreds of thousands of individuals in 40 countries.

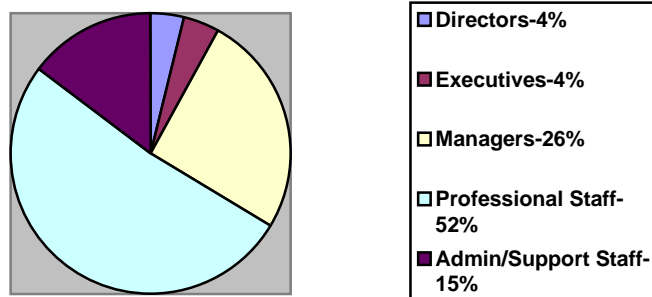
In conjunction with its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, IMI conducted a survey of its users to find out how The Method has kept pace with changes in technology, work force composition, and current business practices.

## A Loyal and Diverse Base

Over 500 “Mappers” responded to the IMI survey, which was conducted in September 2005. The majority of respondents (44%) was from organizations with 5000 or more employees and represented industries that included finance, government, health care, high tech, education, insurance, pharmaceutical/biotech, retail and telecom.

Attestation to the usefulness and “staying power” of The Method was obvious by both its continuous use and new adoption. 71% of respondents began using The Method within the last five years; 14% have used it between six and 10 years; 9% between 11 and 20 years; and five respondents (1%) reported using The Method for over 20 years.

As represented in the graph below, the Mapper community ranges from professional and executive levels to administrative and support staff.



The Method has also successfully “hopped jobs.” 53% of respondents reported that as their jobs have changed either within the organization or to another company, they have introduced The Method into their new position.

## Grass Roots Adoption Leads to Higher Corporate Productivity

The majority of early adopters of The Method are individual Mappers who take the initiative to improve their business communications skills or who need to quickly learn how to efficiently communicate large quantities of information to meet project deadlines. This grass roots adoption of The Method often results in group, departmental, and eventually corporate adoption.

“Bottom up” adoption has been a key factor in the proliferation of The Method. The tasks for which The Method is most often used – developing consistent policies and procedures; writing clear technical and user documentation; writing efficient and clear business communications; architecting efficient, easily-navigated Web sites – are often delegated to rank-and-file workers. These employees have sought out The Method as they have done with software, processes, and other resources and productivity tools that will help them succeed. Ross Mayfield, CEO of Socialtext, recently discussed this phenomenon in an article in *The Boston Globe*. "All great productivity applications -- e-mail, instant messaging, spreadsheets -- have not been brought into the enterprise from the top down," Mayfield says. "They've done it from the bottom up."

Over 40% of respondents reported that their companies have standardized communications based on The Method, pointing to the ongoing and growing need for better business communications. The majority of respondents noted that use of The Method started at the individual or group level, and the efficiencies and productivity gains that they experienced finally resulted in wider adoption. Of the respondents whose companies had not yet standardized fully, 50% indicated that they were either standardizing at the group or corporate level or had plans to do so.

## The Constants of Business Communications

Although technology has transformed business and society, the basics of business communication have remained constant. The majority of respondents point to the applicability of The Method to efficiently, accurately, and concisely communicate policies and procedures; standard operating procedures; and technical and training documentation.

As the need grows for companies to strictly comply with federal and state regulations, respondents pointed to a growing need for The Method in communicating business process information, developing compliance documents, and generating high-quality business communications.

## Measuring Results in Time, Efficiency and Productivity

Since its development, more than 300,000 people worldwide have been trained by IMI and its licensees, with millions of pages and screens of critical corporate information communicated using The Method. Over its 40-year life, The Method has had significant impact on both writing and reading within organizations, including:

- 83% reduction in first-draft development time
- 20–50% increase in writer productivity
- 57% decrease in the number of words in documents
- 32% increase in accuracy of retrieval of information
- 38% increase in corporate documentation use
- 20-50% decrease in traditional and online documentation costs
- 54% decrease in performance error rates

These numbers were verified by survey respondents, who reported both hard and soft productivity gains within their organizations (see side bar).

## The Next 40 Years

Survey respondents proved that the basics of business communications are virtually unchanged over the past 40 years. The ability of The Method to seamlessly and naturally support new technologies continues to be a growing need.

Organized, easy-to-find and easy-to-reuse information has become a key indicator of productivity as content management solutions (CMS) and XML-based structured content have increased. In a separate study conducted by IMI's Professional Services Group, the lack of previously-structured content within an organization slowed the adoption and productivity gains originally anticipated with CMS implementation. The Method has been useful in organizing content, and making it CMS- and XML-ready for such enterprise applications.

As more content is moved to the Web through such increasingly popular venues as tagging, podcasting and blogging, the need for structured content exponentially increases so that information seekers can easily locate useful content.

In today's fast-paced communications environment, an e-mail or Instant Message may have a life span of seconds. The content contained within, however, may have a longer life span that can affect corporate policy, behavior, risk and performance. As people resort to these "instantaneous" communications vehicles and try to process more and more content in order to be successful, the need for effective communication that is clearly communicated will become crucial.

The Method is already proving its efficiencies in organizing e-mail communications, Webcasts, and content for CMS systems. And if the last 40 years are any indication, The Method will continue to be one of the most prolific and long-standing productivity tools that organizations can adopt.

## The Benefits of Information Mapping

"I did a quick [study] in just being able to locate a piece of information in a document that was partially information mapped and one that was fully information mapped. Users were able to find information an average of 12 seconds faster in the fully mapped version."  
Boston Scientific

"[The Method] increased customer satisfaction [as measured by] fewer calls with questions." Princeton University

"...I am ready to present my boss with a better 'first draft' of everything." American Heart Association

"...my writing is now very on target with my subject matter."  
CareerBuilder

"Based on an informal survey, I have found that I get more comments/suggestions from my content reviewers since they found the documents so easy to read and to edit." FICC

"My [boss] loved it. In fact, he began using the Info Mapping program for his documents after I submitted several infomapped briefings to him." - Internal Revenue Service

"...when looking at accuracy of process-following for our teleworkers, the process standards improved 46% in three months after changing to Info Mapping procedures." GE Gaps Services

"[The Method] increased [our employees'] understanding of SOPs by 30%." - Large Pharmaceutical Company

## ABOUT IMI

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IMI is the leader in Information Life Cycle solutions. We deliver consulting services, learning programs, and technologies that improve communication effectiveness and make information easy to manage, access, and use. For the past 38 years our research-based Information Mapping® methodology and field-proven solutions have helped leading commercial and government organizations worldwide improve performance, solve information-intensive business challenges, and achieve long-term, measurable results.

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