

Visualizing your Solutions: Mind Maps and Wireframe Diagrams

Let me start this post out with a huge thanks to Rene ([aka @vcdx133](#)) and Melissa ([aka @vmiss33](#)) who has been very helpful with me getting from idea to diagram/document using these tips. Having a simple template to start things off with becomes the best way to get Visualization helps your ideas become more clear because it forces you to see the relationships between things, and to do the physical process of drawing them out on paper and/or using a digital platform. Before you think you need to be an AutoCAD, or even a Visio expert, you have to learn to quickly get ideas drafted out.

There have been many days where I stared at a blank diagram software screen and fought with how to get it to work in a nice way using the product when what I should have done is to start with just sketching it out in rough format first. This goes to the classic phrase “don’t let perfection get in the way of good enough” When you need to take the thought process from ideation to visualization, there are many tools and techniques that can help you. The most popular ones I use nearly every day are:

- Paper sketches
- Mind Maps
- Diagram Tools: Visio, OmniGraffle, PowerPoint

Each has a distinct purpose in the process.

Paper Sketches

This is one that Melissa ([aka @vmiss33](#)) has taught me to leverage more and more. When you want to get started on an idea, just break out a pencil or pen, and some paper. Scratch diagrams and sketches take your idea and put them into a visual form. This helps you think about how to visualize it before you go diving into OmniGraffle or Visio and find yourself searching shape catalogs for hours



and getting frustrated.

Scratch pads and notebooks are excellent for both words and diagrams. As you write out and sketch out things, your mind is forced to connect the physical motor act with the thought process. This helps to enhance learning and to get closer to a result for you with your ideas. I’ve also gotten some really nice notebooks which I enjoy using. [Rhodia](#) is one type that have very nice paper and lots of different styles. My favourite to use is engineering paper or graph paper style.

Mind Maps


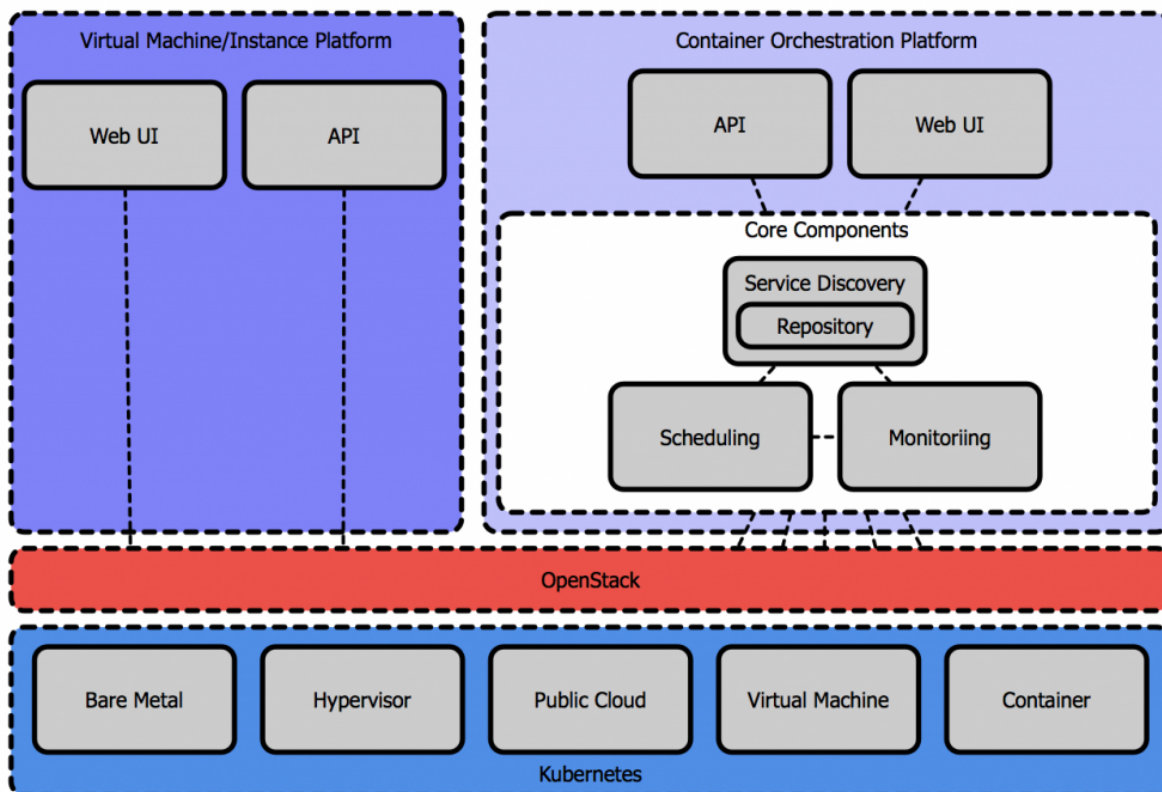
Whether it's a site map you want to work out, some ideas and related content/thoughts, or just general brainstorming, mind maps are also a great tool for taking verbal and thought processes and putting them to paper easily. Start with your core idea/thought and then branch out from there using simple mind map diagrams. There are lots of resources online to help you as you learn to use this technique to expand on your ideas.  MindNode is a product I use for the Mac, but there are many different products which you can find online. The goal is really just to adopt the practice first and then you can use this for both self-ideation as well as for collaboration. A project manager who I worked with for years taught me the value of quickly scribing down discussion ideas for project planning using a mind map which has served me well over the years.

Diagram Tools

Before you think you need to be creating perfect diagrams with visually-stunning graphics, start with the basics. Wireframe diagrams can be easily drafted out as a digital version of your earlier sketches. You can choose the level you want your graphic quality to be, but the best diagrams I've used and created are ones that I modelled after a template that I got from Rene Van Den Bedem (aka @vcdx133).



Using a seemingly simple diagram format means you concentrate on the content. Once the content is completed and your idea is committed to a diagram, you can then tune the graphic style all you want. The first step is moving from concept in your head to the concept in a diagram. Products I've used include OmniGraffle, Microsoft Visio, and even Microsoft PowerPoint can be quite handy for doing such diagrams. Hopefully these are helpful tips for you as much as they were for me.