



Plectica Software Helps Valens Wrestle with Complex Problems

VALENS USES PLECTICA TO VISUALIZE AND CLARIFY
IDEAS ACROSS ALL LEVELS OF THEIR BUSINESS - FROM
STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONAL TO TACTICAL

“When you don’t have a tool like Plectica, you run the risk of sacrificing the complexity of an argument or the project so that it’s easier to articulate and manage. Plectica is so simple to use, yet it can capture something as complex as global jihadist networks.”

- Madeleine Blackman



Customer Summary

Valens Global is a private firm devoted to combating terrorism and violent extremism worldwide. Valens conducts systematic analyses of violent non-state actor threats to understand the complex threat environment, and offers best practices to reduce the impact of-and prevent-attacks, for clients across all sectors.

Website: valensglobal.com

Size: **-15 employees**

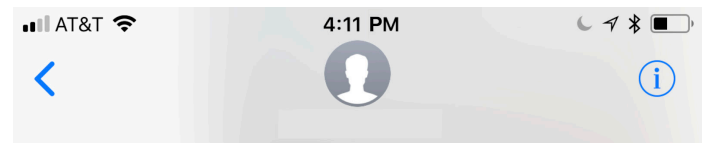
Problem Visualize and clarify complex problems for all levels of their business

Solution Individual and team Plectica mapping sessions help organize and share ideas and replace whiteboards

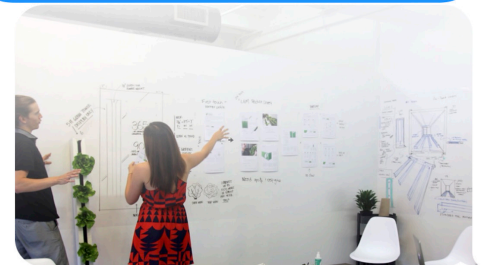
Benefits Faster time to manage and report, and no need to sacrifice real-world complexity

Problem

Valens knows complex, nonlinear problems—deep analysis of complex problems is not only their job, it’s their product. Research staff at Valens analyze and deeply understand how to measure and evaluate counter-radicalization programs and their impact, for example. Prior to integrating Plectica into their workflows, Valens would whiteboard project proposals, work plans and reports. Staff would then take pictures of the whiteboard to share the information.



Here’s the whiteboard from this morning, not sure you’ll be able to read everything ;-(



Delivered

Valens utilized the popular whiteboard-photo-to-text technique

This process was limiting, as it required a lot of space, plus the information was not easily viewed, shared or edited.

Due to the complexity of the problems they engage with, the whiteboard-photo-to-text technique was not sustainable for Valens. In fact, the complexity of the issues Valens deals with is part-and-parcel of their value-proposition to their customers. Sacrificing this vital analysis of complexity to simplify an argument wasn’t an option. Valens sought a better way to plan, manage and carry-out complex projects.

Solution

Valens integrated Plectica throughout the project lifecycle as a “digital whiteboard” and “idea organizer.” Using Plectica, the team thinks through and organizes their ideas from project inception to project management to product development (written reports).

“Plectica is structured how I think [i.e., systematically] and is a much easier way to whiteboard.”

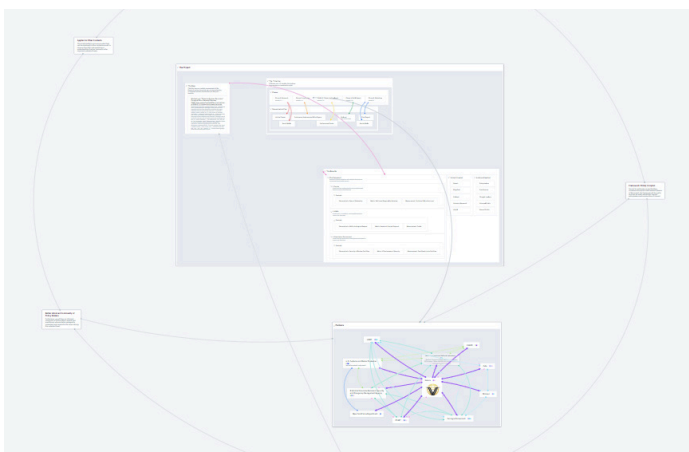
– Madeleine Blackman

Project Inception

A Valens team, including several partners, develops a project roadmap in Plectica. Valens’ research and business development teams work on one map and use Plectica’s collaborative features to incorporate diverse perspectives and optimize partnership opportunities. During this process, they use Plectica’s card color and perspective-taking functionality to capture partner expertise and understand their unique contributions or overlapping offerings. The finalized roadmap is instantly available to all members of the process. These maps have become so valuable, Valens includes a link to the map in their final proposal.

“It’s been really helpful to use Plectica as a visual aide to show partners and clients our ideas and methods in addition to, or occasionally in place of, proposals or one-pagers. Grounding discussions or negotiations in illustrations moves them along much quicker and with clearer communication.”

– Tara Vassefi, Special Advisor



Valens uses Plectica to develop project roadmaps

Project Management

After Valens wins a proposal, they use the same map they built to conceptualize the project to then build-out a project work plan, complete with all the necessary project details. Vivian Hagerty, Deputy Research Manager, explained that the first time Valens used a Plectica map in a proposal “after we won the grant I had been gearing up to plan this project only to realize that it was pretty much already done because we had a comprehensive map in Plectica.”

“What’s amazing is that because the Plectica map is so comprehensive from the project proposal, we often need to do very little to it to convert it to a work plan. It saves us a ton of time.”

– Vivian Hagerty

These project work plan maps save Valens Research Managers time, as they no longer need to create a separate written work plan from scratch. They also find the maps to be more informative, as staff more clearly understand the manager’s thinking before completing their work. Managers report that they’ve seen an increase in staff understanding how their work fits into the broader project because of Plectica maps.

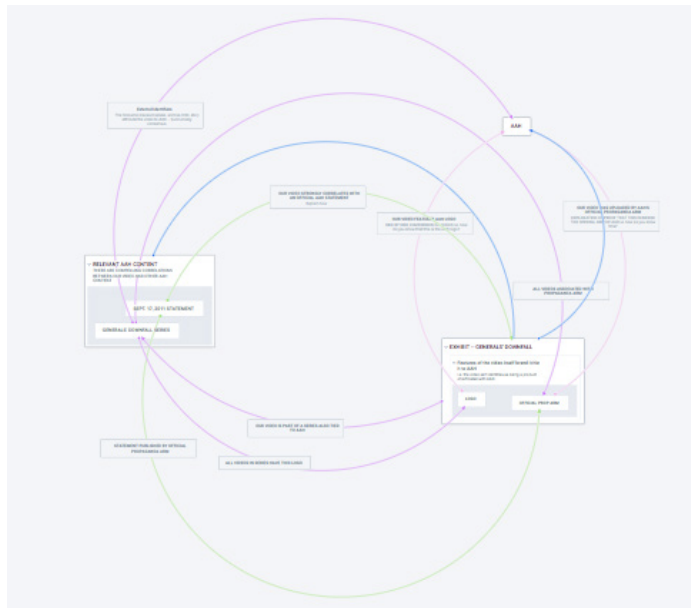
Product Development

Finally, Valens research staff use Plectica maps to structure arguments for written reports. Plectica allows them to walk through a nonlinear argument in a linear way, which translates directly into a report outline. In this way, a tremendous amount of complexity can be made accessible and understandable in a written report format.

Valens’ Research Manager, Madeleine Blackman explained, “Sometimes I struggle with how to convey information when writing a report. Before Plectica, I would spend about an hour bouncing ideas off a colleague to get clarity. Now, I’m able to get to that end clarity myself using Plectica.” Blackman found that using Plectica software has many of the same values as interacting with a colleague. This is because Plectica has a patented “cognitive architecture” which is based on decades of research in the cognitive sciences and mimics how the human

brain thinks through problems and situations. This architecture (which is often implicit to the user), makes creating, organizing, and capturing ideas on the canvas feel intuitive to both users and viewers. The net result is that clarity of thought is increased and occurs faster. Blackman uses Plectica to map out her reports, and through the process of editing and refining her maps she is able to gain greater clarity in her thinking.

Further, by laying out the building blocks of the argument on the canvas, staff can identify any gaps in the analysis and ensure they are making a clear, evidence-based argument. Plectica’s relationship features, including the ability to label relationships and change relationship styles, help to visualize gaps in evidence and logic. Also, because Valens’ analyses include a great amount of detail, they are able to collapse/uncollapse cards and zoom in and out of the map to view the issue at both molecular and granular levels.



Valens staff edit and refine arguments for written reports in Plectica maps to gain greater clarity

Benefits

The Valens team readily integrated Plectica into their business practices because of its ease of use and flexibility. When asked how long it took them to learn Plectica, research staff estimated, “about three minutes.” Valens uses Plectica to visualize and clarify ideas across all levels of their business: from strategic and operational to tactical. Thus, regardless of the business area, Valens staff can benefit from a shared understanding of the complex issue, garnering greater team buy-in.

Valens’ Map Analytics

At the time of writing this case, Valens global had five staff on Plectica. Together, they have made 39 maps (an average of 7.8 maps each) and 10,998 edits (i.e., changes or modifications) to these maps, which is an average of 282 edits per map. However in each map on average there were only 96 elements (67 cards and 29 relationships). This means that with Plectica’s unique cognitive architecture Valens’ staff can iterate and refine their maps to achieve greater clarity on their thinking. It shows that their maps are decreasing in complexity and increasing in quality of thought over time.

“[Plectica] is a tool that is simple to use but is able to capture immense complexity.”
– Madeleine Blackman

Blackman explained that “When you don't have a tool like Plectica, you run the risk of sacrificing the complexity of an argument or the project so that it's easier to articulate and manage.” Instead, she explained, “Plectica is so simple to use, yet I can capture something as complex as global jihadist networks.”

For more information, contact: support@plectica.com