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Move over slow food, here comes slow information

By Alexandra Cain

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Is it really June tomorrow? Time flies so fast, it's no wonder I felt a genuine sense of relief when I came across the notion of slow information.



Theresa Anderson, UTS academic and associate professor, says the best approach is to adopt a fast and slow approach to life.

This is a movement that [takes its lead from the slow food brigade](#), which is a way of eating that celebrates appreciation for the time it takes to prepare food. It encourages us to savour what we eat and who we eat with.

Slow information is similar. For me, it's about taking time to appreciate the process of attaining knowledge. It's the antithesis of mindlessly scanning social media feeds.

It's about reading books, taking the time to actually talk to people and – this is the part I love – making time to think.

Imagine that, actually putting aside time to cogitate. Prioritising it in our day. Being purposeful about how and what we think about.

I interviewed University of Technology Sydney academic, associate professor Theresa Dirndorfer Anderson, about slow information. She suggests the best approach is to combine a fast and slow approach to life. It's an interesting angle when one of the overriding narratives of our time is its increasing velocity.

"Fast is relative, so what's fast for a small business is not necessarily fast for a large, transnational corporation," says Anderson.

"Working out how to adjust your practices to attend to speed is an ongoing challenge," she says.

I think we all grapple with the pace of commercial life. At the same time, we have more information at our fingertips than ever before.

This is great in lots of ways as it gives us plenty of real data on which to base business decisions. But we're bombarded by information and it's hard to know which bits are important.

Enter the slow information movement. Slowing ourselves down and thinking about the information sources we trust is one way to overcome the constant info deluge.

It's about reading books, taking the time to actually talk to people and – this is the part I love – making time to think.

The real challenge for a small company is that slowing down requires a conscious decision to operate that way. But it doesn't have to mean the business has to respond to trends slowly, or is left behind.

Rather, slow information is an opportunity to take the best from our fast-paced world and overlay a slower, more considered approach on top of it.

This may allow smaller firms to take the time to really get to know their customers, not just by gathering data about how they transact with the firm, but also by having real conversations with them.

As Anderson says, the idea is to let machines do what machines do well but also find ways to tailor the way you connect with customers and – importantly – work out how you can do that in a scalable way that makes commercial sense.

For instance, businesses should be analysing all the data they have about how customers buy from them or find them online. But on top of this, why not film and collate small videos of customers talking about what you could do to make their lives easier. But don't stop there. Feed that into strategic plans and make it an ongoing process.

"You need to learn to harness the fast and the slow, because if you just stay in the slow lane, as the cliché goes, life will pass you by," Anderson explains.

As we head towards the new financial year, it's an idea to think about how your business operates and what you could slow down to extract more value for the company.

In small business, it could be a way of generating a real competitive advantage.

What could you slow down in your business? Post a comment below.

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