



# Information on Your Terms

**D**ecades ago, a typical adult might have awoken to a cup of coffee and a newspaper before starting the day. Now, one may start with an Espresso con Panna with a ristretto shot while scrolling through social media apps on their phone.

## So, are things the same or different?

While this shift in a typical morning is an amusing visual, the fact is, consuming information is a human thing, an enjoyable moment we seek regularly. We have been entrenched in the “Information Age” for decades since the digital revolution, yet as the accessibility of data grows, so does the accumulation.

The internet now houses more than 1.7 billion websites as estimated by Cisco’s Visual Networking Index. According to Tubefilter in 2019, more than 720,000 hours of video are uploaded to YouTube every single day. At that rate, it would take someone 82 years without sleep to watch one day of video uploads. And that’s just on that one platform.

Not only has information exploded, so have its sources. Social media is among the most burgeoning, where news “writers” are not always the hired help. The footage you see could have originated with your neighbor’s cell phone camera. According to Statista from a survey last year, 43 percent of 25 to 40 year-olds source their news on a daily basis from social media, 18 percent from network news, and only 11 percent from newspapers.

## What’s the harm?

Of course, having information at our fingertips is not inherently bad. But, building an environment for anyone to contribute without peer review or filter has its pros, like transparency, but comes with challenging cons, like inaccuracy of information.

The sheer volume of information is most problematic, which makes it challenging to sift through what is important

and find what we are looking for. It increases the likelihood we ignore something important, called the “dilution effect.” Humorously dubbed “analysis paralysis,” we might be unable to act on the overwhelming amount of information. Have you ever had a question come up in a dinner conversation, and the answer was “just google it”? Easy access can also make us lazy intellectually. Having so much technical information available can also make us terrible consumers, like trying to diagnose your own symptoms on WebMD. Increased fear of missing out has been observed, suspected from the vast and instant choices for what to do with your time, what event to attend. And some effects are alarming, as we hear reports of increased negativity and depression from consuming news unrelated to your life or your influence.

## How do we strike a balance?

Just as we filter out impurities from our water to reap its essential benefits, we can filter out unwanted information from the world around us. Here are a few suggestions on how to get the news you want and the information you seek.

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Instead of watching cable or network newscasts, where the media station chooses the topics, filter your news sources for subjects that interest you. For example, Google alerts is an automated, free service that puts your customized searches into an email digest that you can read instantly, daily, or weekly. Just create a search, view the results to see if it matches your tastes, then choose the frequency of the notification. You can also use a local feature that further limits results to your geographic area. Other RSS or ATOM feed services perform similar functions, and depending on the features you want, can be free or paid subscriptions. Customize the information you receive with search terms with your desired level of specificity, such as “trends in water industry” for more general results, or “Kansas rural water industry news trends 2022” or even your county name. You can also search for other ways to bring information to your ears. Podcasts are a popular alternative to radio, allowing listeners to hear episodes on their own timeframe instead of tuning in at a specific broadcast.

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### On your terms

No matter how you decide to filter the oceans of information available in this digital age, the point is, focus on managing your attention to what you decide instead of allowing others to choose the data you consume. Be creative and open to different sources, whether it be written, spoken, visual or something else. A little bit of effort at the front end to filter and customize to your needs can save you time later and more assuredly provide you with the information on your terms.

### Looking forward to the Annual Conference & Exhibition

I am pleased to be presenting at the upcoming KRWA Annual Conference & Exhibition. While we have missed the past two conferences due to Covid, I look forward to participating in both the RWD Office Forum and City Clerks’ Forum this year. And on Wednesday, March 30, in one of the eight concurrent sessions, I will discuss the “Top Four Features Your Website MUST HAVE!” I will also be available at the KRWA booth area for one-on-one discussions about KRWA’s Website Services or other techie questions attendees may have.

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