

Teaching slow thought to fast food business

 By [Louise Marsland](#)

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From uber-fashionista to observer and trend analyst, Dion Chang has reinvented himself and hopes to take business along for the journey with his new trend watch brand, Flux: cause the effect. Can you predict the future for more than five minutes these days? In Chang's opinion, not really; forecasting is passé as things change too fast in our more virtual world of reality – analysis is where the intellectual capital lies.



Chang wants to get people to think differently. Everything is interconnected, he explains, and a changing society has a huge impact on pretty much everything. Take South Africa as an example. "There's too much info. People can't absorb everything. What I'm doing is putting things into digestible packages... giving people a quick snapshot.

"I don't believe in forecasting in the 21st century – things now happen in two months' time rather than 18 months' time. I prefer the Buddhist approach: look at strategies now and prepare for the future. Take current political debates in South Africa; they for example will flip any strategies completely. I am analysing trends, not forecasting them."

And that is the crux of Flux, the brand which was launched last year and already boasts Unilever and Media24 as clients. Flux the business is launching into the industry with a trends event in September 2007.

Event

There is limited seating for the event on 7 September for the business audience and 8 September for the consumer audience. The venue is the new Faculty of Art, Design & Architecture campus, University of Johannesburg, opposite the SABC in Auckland Park. The business event on the Friday will give attendees insight into what people's lives are about – from the media to politics and technology; and, for consumers on the Saturday, more general global trends will be covered in property, fashion, gadgetry and lifestyle. Bookings open this week on: www.fluxtrends.com.

For the first year, the event has a local focus but, Chang is quick to emphasise, with local speakers of calibre. His next phase, for Chang is a compulsive planner, is to invite international speakers and launch an expo component in time. Speakers confirmed include: *Mail & Guardian* editor-in-chief, Ferial Haffajee on the 'State of our nation'; Toby Shapshak with a 'Technology Review'; analyst and editor Justice Malala with a 'Political Review'; Chang with 'Slow Thought'; and various speakers on the digital environment, the youth, fashion, lifestyle, media and popular culture.

Chang chose the various themes for the event based on what the talking points of the day are that people need decoded. He's an obsessive clipper of articles (his words). He has envelopes for various categories and constructs his strategies based on the information he analyses and decodes for clients. Issues such as human displacement: the brain drain, the middle market cash cow vs the more popular LSM 7/8, the impact of the info superhighway on society. It's stuff he's always been interested in – as much as handbags and shoes in his now-past career.

Inquiring mind

Chang, who prefers to be known as innovative *and* resourceful – which you'd have to be changing careers mid-stream – says he has an “inquiring mind”. It's that inquiring mind which led him to his current thinking and perceived gap in the market. He advocates “slow thought” for corporates will become a reality as individuals start realising that they need empty head space for creative thinking.

He believes that the way we rush through life in this century with all our technology actually hampers creative thought: “Despite all of our gadgets, we put our lives on hold to deal with everything. We take the laptop home, still have SMS 24/7, we never switch off from work at home and our boundaries start blurring. Take SMS, it's a mezzanine level of communication: somewhere not quite engaged, but also not quite ignoring people...”

He's certainly got a point. He's gone from fashion forecaster to wanting to change the world “one observation” at a time.

Join the dots

Chang's hoped for outcome from his new business is to tell people “how to join the dots”.

“I'm taking a lot of noise and giving people clarity.... We've gone cold... we've lost the human element in much of what we do. That is what people increasingly need, to bring the soul back into business.

“What I enjoy is holding a mirror up to society and saying: just look, this is what is happening, and now and again with a small pin jab at the end... a sting in the tale. We hurtle though life and don't get the time to stop, think. We are in survival mode these days.”

ABOUT LOUISE MARSLAND

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