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AUSTRALIA, WHY ARE WE SO AFRAID TO PICK UP THE PHONE?
Sir Richard Branson challenges Australians to go offline and have a real conversation on R U OK?Day

Wednesday 9 September 2015: We’re a nation that prides itself on mateship and looking out for one another, however we may be in jeopardy of forgetting the power of a conversation to help those in need. New research released from Virgin Mobile today unveils that we’re talking to each other less, hiding behind email and social media for difficult conversations and using emojis in place of real emotions.

Enough is enough – Sir Richard Branson has now joined the conversation. Alongside Virgin Mobile, he is leading a call-to-arms for Aussies to take time out from technology, by turning off their emails, logging out of social media and picking up the phone to have a real conversation on R U OK?Day tomorrow. As a show of support, Virgin Mobile will tomorrow offer free calls to its customers to its customers to any network within Oz, so they are able to make as many calls as they choose.

On average, we are spending two and a half hours a day communicating via social media, text and email but just twenty minutes on the phone to friends or loved ones. In fact, across the board we are speaking on the phone for less time than we were last year:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of call</th>
<th>2014 (average minutes)</th>
<th>2015 (average minutes)</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Partner</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>- 7 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mum</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>- 4 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dad</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>- 4 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siblings</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>- 4 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close friend (same town)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>- 6 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close friend (long distance)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>- 8 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A third (34 per cent) of Aussies have ignored a call in the last week because they didn’t feel like talking and another third (34 per cent) have sent a message to a loved one instead of picking up the phone. It’s no wonder four in five (79 per cent) Aussies believe we’ve lost the magic of voice-on-voice conversation.

But while we’re picking up the phone less, we still haven’t lost the desire for a real conversation:
- For 86 per cent of Aussies, speaking to a loved one on the phone always brightens their day.
- Almost nine in ten Aussies (86 per cent) believe that voice-to-voice contact is the best way to make a real connection with someone.
- Almost 70 per cent (68 per cent) wish they remembered to call those close to them more regularly.

So, what’s stopping us from making the call? The research indicates it’s our busy lifestyles, where modern communication tools and technology make it easy (and more convenient) to avoid having a more traditional phone conversation.

We’re so busy in fact, that over a third of us are spending our lunch breaks eating at our desks (39 per cent), scanning personal emails (35 per cent) and surfing the internet (35 per cent), instead of connecting with those around us. Only 15 per cent of Aussie workers use their lunch break at work to call a friend or loved one.

Additionally, social media has played a dominant role:
- A third of Aussies (27 per cent) admit they couldn’t imagine being “offline” for more than a couple of hours.
- A quarter of Aussies admit to hiding behind text, email and social media when they need to have difficult or uncomfortable conversations.
- Almost half (46 per cent) of Aussies often use emojis to communicate their feelings.
- Over a third (35 per cent) admit they’re guilty of diffusing an awkward situation using emojis rather than talking.

Social media can also lead to misinterpretation and misrepresentation of what people are going through:
- 4 in 5 (80 per cent) of Aussie social media users believe that people only post a “highlights reel” on social media and that it’s not a true representation of their everyday life.
- Three quarters (74 per cent) believe the majority of their online friends and followers don’t truly know what’s happening in their life.

Sir Richard Branson comments:

“While social media is a fantastic way to communicate, it doesn’t always provide the most complete view of what we’re really doing and how we’re really feeling. It can be easy to misinterpret whether people are OK if all you can see is a
‘best of version of their life. I’m not against social media – I really enjoy it as a communication tool – but sometimes nothing does the trick like picking up the phone to an old friend to check in and see how they’re doing.”

In addition to the free calls, Virgin Mobile has developed a national “Out-Of-Office” tool for emails and social media platforms, which people can download and use on R U OK?Day. This is available at makingmobilebetter.com.au.

Brendan Maher, General Manager, R U OK? says, “What people often don’t realise is that you don’t have to be an expert or trained counsellor to know what to say to a loved one or a friend when you think they may be struggling. It can be as simple as making the time to pick up the phone, listening to their story and then helping them to the next step.”

Sir Richard Branson concludes:

“I think everyone could recall a bad patch in their life, or simply a bad day. I know I can! I wouldn’t have been able to get through the hard times without the being able to have real and honest conversations with the people around me. I know the power a conversation can have. So, I’ll be putting my “Out-of-Office” on – why not join me?”

To find out more on how Virgin Mobile will be helping inspire people to start a conversation, visit: makingmobilebetter.com.au.

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Notes to editors:
The Virgin Mobile Research Study:

- Was conducted by Lonergan Research among 1,026 Australians aged 18 or older;
- The study was conducted online amongst members of a permission-based panel;
- Fieldwork commenced on Monday August 17, 2015 and was completed on Friday August 21, 2015;
- After interviewing, data was weighted to the latest population estimates sourced from the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

About Virgin Mobile Australia: Making Mobile Better
Virgin Mobile launched in Australia in 2000, based on Richard Branson’s belief that we could do mobile better. Better for you, and better for our planet. We’ve been rocking the boat ever since, and we’re not stopping now, because it’s just how we work. Innovative products and a commitment to great value for money are in our DNA.

Just look at Data Rollover: in an Australian-first innovation, we rescue your unused data and roll it over to the next month on all new Postpaid mobile plans, so now you don’t lose what you don’t use. We also roll over your unused calls and text: hey, you paid for it, so we figure you deserve a second shot at using it.

We also think you should be able to call or text your friends and family on our network within Oz as much as you like. So if you’re on a Postpaid plan, you can. Voicemail is free within Oz too, because answering the phone should be your call. And backing all this is the power of the Optus 4G Plus network, which just keeps getting stronger, and allows us to focus on what’s most important – you.

Best of all, because people and planet matter to us, we’re turning your mobile phone into a force for good. We’ve already tasted success with #mealforameal, our initiative to turn your social food pics into a feed for someone in need, and there’s plenty more where that came from!

We’re Virgin Mobile, and we’re making mobile better.

About R U OK?
R U OK? is a not-for-profit organisation that aims to inspire Australians to have regular, meaningful conversations throughout the year to help anyone who might be struggling with life. For tips on how to report sensitively and accurately on suicide, please visit: http://www.mindframe-media.info/for-media