



'I simply can't live without my cellphone'

By: BRENDAN PEACOCK, *Sunday Times*, 7 June 2007 posted on **05-27-2007**.

"YOUNG male South Africans have listed their cellphone as the one thing they can't live without — ahead of family."

Most of South Africa's younger generation do not speak on their phones — they spend most of their time on social networking services like MXit, which have taken over from regular SMS functionality.

"Making calls is too expensive," says Nicky Howell, 14. "I use my phone mostly for MXit, followed by SMSing friends. Chatting services are very addictive — I can't do without them."

Value for money and free stuff have always been top of the list of motivations for cash-strapped young people, and using affordable communication channels means avoiding the parental control that comes with more expensive options.

"Sometimes we have two or more contracts or phones, so it would be difficult for our parents to track what we're doing. Only money is really controlled by our parents," says Howell.

But most young people appear to be aware of the dangers of chat rooms and online services.

"Chat rooms are pretty boring now. You can tell the dangerous guys because all they ever say is, 'I want to meet you, I want to meet you.' We know they're lying and only out for sex," says Pamela, 14.

Aside from being the first to offer the free and therefore immensely popular "Please call me" option, Vodacom is ranked first as a telecommunications provider.

"We don't want to be on the same network as our parents, and it doesn't feel like that with Vodacom," says Trevor Crouse, 14.

"The only other company that comes close is Virgin because they have a more rebellious image."

Vodacom's advertising, and Virgin's, to a lesser extent, seem to make a big difference.

More recently, MTN has reinvented itself, producing a string of adverts which South Africa's youth considers cool.

"With Virgin, the Branson idea is associated with his products, and we identify with the Blingtopia ideal. But sometimes we're confused by these messages because we don't know what part of Virgin is actually being advertised," says Nathan Woods, 14.

"When it comes to Vodacom, they get us young with characters like Mo the meerkat, and we have known them for years."

Vodacom South Africa's managing executive for brand and advertising, André Beyers, says although the cellphone industry is

highly competitive, the company does not directly target young people under the age of 18.

"Our youth market is between the ages of 18 and 24. We follow trends in the youth market very closely and use a variety of research studies to gain greater insight into the market.

"Brands that resonate with the youth are often iconic, highly popular, and deliver on their promises. We aim to deliver on all these criteria for our young customers."

Interbrand CEO Jeremy Sampson says Vodacom's success in building emotional attachments with the young public would not survive without the backup of value for money and technical consistency.

"One element in its success is its South African-ism. It plays that card more heavily than other networks.

"Virgin aims to set itself up as the rebel, the David versus the Goliaths, which is youthful and in-your-face. Virgin's leadership in South Africa is experienced and I expect more from them.

"MTN seems to come across as too mature, and it behaves differently as a company."

With regard to handsets, Nokia came up trumps.

"Cellphone makes are like banks — we don't tend to change and we get used to them. Nokia's operating systems are popular and reliable and the phones offer good features ," says Sampson.

[Comments](#)
