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Hooked on your cell? You must be Canadian

Study finds we talk 49 minutes a day on cellphones, double the global average

BY RICHARD BLOOM

As a representative of 16,000 students, Jennifer Green's cellphone is always on and almost always attached to her ear.

"On a given day, I could get between 15 and 50 phone calls from students, ranging anywhere from one minute all the way to 30 minutes," says Ms. Green, 24, a marketing student and the president of Humber College's students' federation in Toronto. She also frequently uses her phone for personal reasons.

"I don't know anyone in this day and age that doesn't own a cellphone. Constantly, cellphones are going off."

Ms. Green isn't alone in her chattiness. From salespeople to senior citizens to students, more and more Canadians are both buying mobile phones and ratcheting up talk time.

In fact, when you ask them, Canadians appear to be among the most talkative in the world, according to a study to be released today by the Canadian arm of mobile phone giant Telefon AB LM Ericsson.

Respondents said they talked an average of 49 minutes a day on cellphones, nearly double the global average of 27.

Only the United States is higher as respondents there said they talked an average of 63 minutes a day, the study reveals.

The study was conducted in conjunction with Starch Research and consisted of 2,000 in-home one-hour interviews with Canadians aged 15-69 across six provinces.

It didn't measure exact talk minutes provided by cellphone carriers but instead asked people's "perception" of how much they talk.

"It's very important for our customers to understand how they're perceived in the mar-

ket Perception is reality for most cases from a consumer perspective," said Vishnu Singh, Ericsson Canada Inc's manager of traffic and revenue growth.

He added that Canadians and Americans are used to unlimited talking on their wireline phones and that habit is being transferred to mobile phone usage.

What's more, most carriers offer free evenings and weekend packages, which means non-stop conversations have little impact on consumers' wallets, he said.

"In North America, we have big buckets of minutes and the cost of usage is quite low compared to many of the European countries where the tariffs are much higher," Mr. Singh said in an interview.

Users in Britain talked 32 minutes while those in Italy and China round out the top five at 30 and 27 minutes, respectively. The global figures were compiled from more than 14,000 interviews in 10 countries and are accurate to within 2.2 percentage points.

The study also shows that 63 per cent of Canadians own a mobile phone, up from 56 per cent in 2003. That number, it says, should grow to 69 per cent in 2005.

"[Cellphones] are really becoming a lifeline for Canadians from a communications perspective," Mr. Singh said.

Mark Quigley of consultancy Yankee Group Canada said that, while he agrees cellphone usage has "grown dramatically" in recent years, he questions the talk-time figures. He said that according to data from the phone companies, Canadian talk an average of 347 minutes a month, or about 11.5 minutes a day – also below that of the United States – and cellphone penetration is about 45 percent.

"The minutes of use sounds very much out of whack," Mr. Quigley said.

Mr. Singh responded to that concern by repeating that the study was based on consumers' perception not actual billed minutes.

Still, Messrs. Singh and Quigley do agree that the cellphone won't be replacing the traditional home telephone any time soon.

"We're still a long way from outright replacing our landline," said Mr. Quigley, adding that Canadians use cellphones mainly as supplementary lines and are "cost sensitive" enough to make longer calls on a flat-fee home phone versus a pay-per-minute service.

Earlier this year, Humber's Ms. Green experimented with canceling her landline phone but ended her trial after three months, citing poor quality.

"It was horrible. The area that I was in, the signal wasn't very good ... I was wasting my minutes hanging up and trying calls again," she said.

Other highlights of the study:

- Use of short message service (SMS), also known as text messaging, has doubled since 2003, with 23 percent saying they send or receive an SMS message on a monthly basis. Nearly half of young Canadians (aged 15-24) say they use text message on a weekly basis.
- One in 10 young Canadian cellphone owners uses multimedia messaging services at least once a month, even though they were only introduced to this country last year.
- Of those with cellphones, 69 per cent say they never leave home without it.
- Fifty-seven per cent did not know it is possible to access the Internet on cellphones.

Matters of statistical interest raised by this article are:

- A *clear* Question is needed – is the attribute of interest the average talk time over the population of *adults*, *telephone* users or *cellphone* users (or owners)?
 - For a variate with a lower limit of zero and a few very high values, the *median* may be a better attribute than the average.
- What was the *method* of selecting and was the *frame* from which the sample was selected a list of:
 - Canadians (who may or may not own a phone or a cellphone);
 - times of the day (people who talk *longer* are then more likely to be selected);
 - Canadian cellphone users (or owners)?
- People who are more likely to *answer* the telephone are more likely to be selected for the sample.
- Limitations on Answers due to measurement error arise from using respondents' *self-reported* 'perception' of their talk times – note the comments of Mr. Singh (near the bottom of the left-hand and top of the middle columns) and of Mr. Quigley (at the bottom of the middle and top of the right-hand columns).