

Title: Herald Sun online – 22.07.18

URL: <https://www.heraldsun.com.au/technology/smartphones/shocking-cost-of-australians-addicted-to-social-media-at-work-revealed-in-new-study/news-story/319aaf1a7afc193544d667f3df54b238?login=1>

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How long do you spend on social media?

**SMARTPHONE**

# Shocking cost of Australians addicted to social media at work revealed in new study

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July 22, 2018 12:00am  
Subscriber only

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## EXCLUSIVE

AUSTRALIAN workers are costing the economy and their employers billions of dollars each year in lost productivity due to an addiction to smartphones and social media.

News Corp Australia can reveal the first research that shows the extent to which adults say they are checking their social media and smartphones during working hours.

A further 5.2 per cent admit to being distracted by their device more than 15 times a day.

Of those checking their phone or social media at work, 92 per cent are spending up to 90 minutes of work time scrolling their feed or replying to messages.

Research has shown for every period of distraction, it takes a further 23-minutes to return to the same level of concentration. So 90 minutes of self-reported social media scrolling could actually amount to more than that in lost productivity.

A total of 52 per cent of all employees who admitted to checking their phone during work hours said if they were happier in their jobs they'd be less likely to be digitally distracted.

More than 1000 Australians aged 18 and over in all states and territories were surveyed for the research, conducted last month.



📷 Aussies are spending hours on their phones. Hannah O'Brien 21, and Zi Kit Toh 22, can't be parted from their iPhones. Picture: David Caird

The findings coincide with digital media experts being called in to conduct seminars at many major workplaces to try and combat this worrying trend of the digital drain.

One expert, Dr Kristy Goodwin, said her business in this area has increased 80 per cent on this time last year.

Dr Goodwin said the findings were shocking — but given they relied on self-reporting the figures and time wasted on smartphones or social media during the day was likely to be higher in reality.

“People definitely may be conservative in estimating how much time they’re actually being digitally distracted during work hours,” Dr Goodwin said.

“I would be terrified if we quantified the loss. It would be in the billions. Not just to the time lost and the resumption lag of 23-minutes to regain to full concentration but also the cost in terms of employee wellbeing on smart devices being integrated into work. Many employees are not getting quality of sleep because they are sleeping with their phones near or adjacent to bed and they are never switched off from work to an extent.”

Ross Reekie, CEO of Rise Consulting — an employee happiness firm — said smartphones and social media was designed to be addictive, but instead of banning sites or smartphones from workplaces the key was unlocking employee job satisfaction.



“This problem is only going to get worse and I would say we need to reframe it from being anti-smart devices or social media to thinking about how we can integrate employee motivation along with the use of devices and social media at work,” Mr Reekie said.

“Employers have a big responsibility to get this right. We are asking people to be connected to work 24.7 yet not allowing them to have some down time so it’s a complex problem.”

Julie Inman Grant, eSafety Commissioner, said employees needed to be mindful of their social media and device usage.

“No matter where people are, whether it’s at home, on the bus or at work, smartphones and devices are playing an increasingly prominent role in their lives,” she said.

“As adults, we need to be mindful about using technology in a healthy and balanced way – and to be modelling this behaviour to our children.”

#### **‘I’M ADDICTED TO MY PHONE’**

FELICITY Billa, 28, admits she’s addicted to her phone.

The Manly-based marketing manager is always checking social media and using her smart devices to keep up to date in her role.

But the line is easily crossed in being distracted by personal tasks during work hours.

“I would say I’m on my phone at least an hour a day for non-work related things. But at the same time on top of that if I get a notification I would immediately go and check it so some days it may be more,” Ms Billa said.

“I definitely would like to be using my phone less in general. I feel like it’s just an extension of myself in some ways.”

Ms Billa said she remains contactable for work at all times so in some ways it needs to be a give and take for employees.

“But I know I’ve been distracted and when I am I do try and make time up if I can,” she said.

“I do understand business owners might be concerned about losing money but there has to be a give and take and rather than banning things there needs to be a positive way forward to make it work for everyone.”





📷 Felicity Billa, 28, regularly checks her phone at work. Picture: Danny Aarons

### **‘I CHECK MY PHONE EVERY 10-20 MINS’**

SARAH Scales, 24, isn't allowed her mobile phone during her working hours.

The Carlton resident thinks it's a good thing as when not at work she checks her phone every 10-20 minutes.

“We are not allowed to use our phones on the floor of the store and I think it's great because we can actually focus on our jobs and the customers,” Ms Scales said.

“I definitely know most of my friends who work in office jobs — every time someone messages them they message back straight away and surely that means they aren't focusing on their jobs as much.”

Ms Scales said larger employers should find a way to limit smartphone and social media use in the workplace because she sees the positive benefits of when it is banned.

“Look obviously it won’t work having a complete ban in some industries but social media and phones are so addictive. If you scroll through your feed it is never ending and you can just waste so much time. It must be costing the economy not having a solution to this.”



 Sarah Scales, 24, works in retail and isn't allowed to have her phone on the floor of the store while working. Picture: Tony Gough

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## **KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS**

One third of Australians say they “regularly get distracted” by their smartphone or social media during work hours.

42.6 per cent admit to getting distracted by their smartphone or social media up to seven times a day.

5.2 per cent admit to being distracted more than 15 times a day.

92.5 per cent say they spend up to 90 minutes of work time checking their own device or social media on a work computer.

5.2 per cent say it is up to 150 minutes and 2.4 per cent spend more than 151 minutes a day being distracted.

Of those distracted by their smartphone or social media, 52.3 per cent said if they were happier in their jobs they’d be less likely to be pulled in by the digital influence during work hours.

## **HOW TO STOP YOURSELF FROM BEING DISTRACTED DIGITALLY AT WORK (AS RECOMMENDED BY EXPERTS)**

\*Turn your phone to greyscale. If you look at your phone and it is in black and white you are less likely to need to check your notifications and need a dopamine hit that is triggered by the colours of the screen.

\*Proximity. If you are trying to focus on a task, put your phone in your desk drawer or out of sight. It will mean you are less likely to reach for it.

\*Turn off notifications and remove all social media apps from your homescreen so if you do need your phone for work-related purposes you aren't triggered by seeing the distractions on your home screen.

\*Stop multi-tasking (where possible), when you are overwhelmed by your workload and numerous tasks you are more likely to want to be distracted and easily reach for your phone or open the social media tab.

\*Mindfulness, meditation and box breathing. When you feel fatigued by your workload try taking a break and breathing in for four beats, hold for four beats, breath out for four beats and hold again for four beats to complete a "box cycle". It will help you focus.

\*Aim to be happy in your work and if you're not happy or satisfied talk to your employer about doing a task that does fulfil you. If you feel as though you are making a contribution you're less likely to want to waste time watching cat videos.