

# Sir Richard upbeat on Coast business

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NOOSA investor Sir Richard Branson strongly believes the Sunshine Coast will emerge from the current financial crisis largely unscathed.

The flamboyant British entrepreneur, best known for his Virgin brand of over 360 companies, knows first-hand how hard it is for small businesses to survive.

From launching a magazine called Student at age 16 and starting an music record mail order business in 1970, Sir Richard went on to become one of the richest people in the world, according to Forbe's 2009 list of billionaires, with an estimated net worth of around US\$2.5 billion.

Sir Richard's foray into space exploration is well known but his newest venture, Virgin Aquatic, could boost business in Noosa.

“It's incredible but our oceans have been explored less than space,” he told The Noosa Journal during an exclusive interview.

“The deepest parts of our oceans have never been properly explored because we haven't had the technology, and that's something Virgin Aquatic is working on.”

The company has already launched submarines that can reach 10,000ft, and is now working on a model which could dive to 35,000ft.

Sir Richard said the technical challenge was finding materials that would withstand the enormous pressure at that depth.

“The design is now well under way on a sub that would be able to go to the bottom of the ocean,” he said. “That is major in terms of underwater exploration and the collection of scientific data.

“I'm keen to base one of the subs off Noosa. This area of coast is amazing in terms of sealife, especially the whales.”

Sir Richard said the key to surviving the global economic crisis was to remain positive, creative and put in the extra yards.

“When times get tough you have to be prepared to put in some extra time,” he said.

“You may have to work an hour longer a day to make the same money but that means you will get by and keep your business going.

“In truth, Australia has hardly been dented by the global downturn. The best places rarely are.

“Noosa should sail through this without too much damage. Now, I know that is easy to say for people who still have a job, and it is a very different picture for those who have lost their job. Those people are doing it hard and my heart goes out to them,” said Sir Richard.

“But if you have a job, you're actually able to do well at the moment. Prices are down. Mortgages are cheaper, flights are cheaper. If you have a job you are probably better off than previously.

“If people like myself continue to invest in Noosa, we will come through this,” he said.  
“I started small and worked very hard to be successful. Small businesses during a recession must put in something extra until the recession passes.