

Print's New Frontier

QR CODES: BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN PRINT AND THE WEB

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QR CODES: ADDING THE “WOW” FACTOR TO PRINT

Looking for a way to connect print to the Web? To increase the relevance of print among younger consumers? To add a “wow” factor to your marketing collateral? Think QR codes.

You are starting to see them everywhere. They look like jigsaw puzzles, sometimes in color but most often in black-and-white. They are on magazine advertisements, posters and billboards, business cards, and just about everything else.

They are quick response (or QR) codes, and they act as mobile shortcuts to websites, discount coupons, videos, and other content. Point at them with your smartphone, snap a picture of the code, and you are zipped to a video, a coupon, a Web page, contact information, or other content. A static medium suddenly turns into a dynamic, interactive one.

Immediate Response!

Whether you are a corporate marketer placing a magazine advertisement or a small business doing a sales promotion, QR codes are particularly appealing because they capture viewers' interest at the very moment it is piqued: See. Snap. View.

You don't lose eyeballs by asking people to manually input URLs or scribble them down onto a piece of paper that might get lost.

Plus, QR codes cost little or nothing to add to your print campaigns. There is no reason not to use them.

So make those static printed pieces interactive. Add "live" product demos to sell sheets. Send trade show attendees right to your website. Let viewers download your company contact information and "save the date" information right to their phones. It is no wonder so many of today's top brands are using QR codes. These include GMC, Ford, Google, Pepsi, Ralph Lauren, The Weather Channel, Best Buy, Chevrolet, Starbucks, Facebook, and countless more.

They're Trackable

Wait! It gets better. Because these codes resolve to Internet sites, QR codes are an easy way to track the interest level of many of today's mobile consumers.

How many people snapped the code from the brochure you distributed at the trade show? Were mobile users more likely to respond to the trade show graphic or the magazine ad? Track this and more with QR codes!

Where Did QR Codes Come From?

Although many people are just being exposed to QR codes, the codes themselves are not new. In their most basic form, QR codes have been around for years.

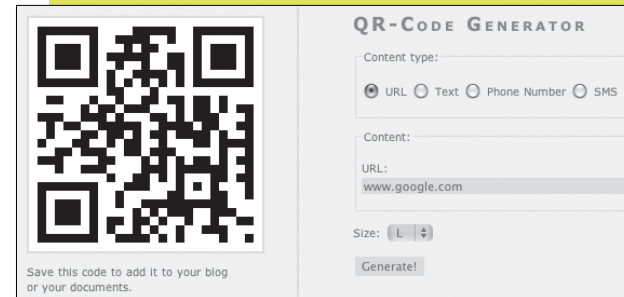
QR codes were first created by Toyota subsidiary Denso Wave in 1994. Since that time, they have been extensively used in Europe and Japan. Now their use is exploding in the United States. You see them in Times Square, in the pages of Entertainment Weekly, as well as on CD cases, point of purchase materials, business cards, and a wide variety of marketing collateral.

Creating QR Codes

Intrigued? You should be. The best part is that creating a QR code is simple and costs little to add to any print marketing program. There are a variety of QR code generators on the market. Among them:

- Kaywa QR-Code Generator
- ZXing QR-Code Generator
- Nokia Mobile Codes Generator
- QR Stuff

To create the most basic codes, you simply go to the site, input the URL to which you would like the code to point, and hit "generate code." You'll get back a .png or .jpg image that you can save and insert into your print or online materials.



An example of a QR code generated for a link to Google on Kaywa QR-Code Generator.

Yes, it's that easy. Using more complex software, you can also create personalized QR codes (say for generating personalized URLs); codes with embedded logos; or codes that provide extremely detailed tracking and multi-channel integration capabilities. Some QR codes are even "smart codes" that can customize the content based on the date, location, and model of phone that is reading it.

You may also want to test the codes to make sure they are created properly, follow QR code "best practices" to maximize their effectiveness (see the end of this paper), and are compatible with multiple readers. If you would like help with any of these steps, talk to us and we'll be happy to help you.

Here's how it works. Someone walks by a QR code, or sees one printed on an envelope or company brochure. They take out their smartphone and snap a picture of the code. With the right software, they are then taken to the desired Web destination. There they access a video, a coupon, a survey or sweepstakes entry, plain text message, or a mobile site (mobi-site) with games, downloadable apps, or any other content appropriate to the campaign.

Let's look at a few examples.

Movie posters.

QR codes are being added to movie posters to allow passersby to learn more about the movie than they can see on the poster. By snapping the code, they can watch trailers, see a full cast list, or even buy tickets for their local theaters.

When TriStar Pictures' "District 9" and Tim Burton's "9" were released, consumers were able to scan QR codes on movie posters and magazine advertisements to see exclusive clips from the movies, commentary from the directors, and link to the films' websites.



Business cards and marketing collateral.

Add QR codes to your business cards and marketing collateral. It's intriguing. It starts a conversation, and with one snap, you've achieved marketing's Holy Grail of getting your contact information into your target's cellphone.



Direct mail.

Add a QR code to your direct mail piece — even put it on the envelope — so that people don't have to be in front of a computer to access the information. Just grab your coffee, snap the code while you toss down a bagel, and watch the video on the way to work.

When Samaritan's Purse wanted to promote Operation Christmas Child, which provides Christmas presents to needy children all over the world, it added a QR code to its direct mail envelopes. The QR code resolved to a video clip showing distribution of the boxes, beaming faces of the children, and the benefits of the program.





CD jewel cases.

Sitting at a friend's house and like the music he's playing? Snap the QR code on the case and be taken to the band's Facebook page, listen to more of the album, and purchase MP3 versions of the songs. Even order concert tickets online.

When Green Day released its new album, "21st Century Breakdown," the band used QR codes in magazine ads, posters, stickers, and other locations to direct users to a mobile site where they could download exclusive images and videos.



Restaurants are using them on table cards to encourage customers to sign up for loyalty programs. Right at the table, diners can snap the code and take a survey, provide feedback, and sign up for a VIP club or other loyalty program. QR codes make data-gathering easy.



Window clings.

Add a QR code to a window cling that gives shoppers the opportunity to access a coupon right in front of your store. What better way to get them to act on impulse while they are already staring at your merchandise in the window?



Magazines are using QR codes as a way to provide additional value to advertisers. Adding codes is a great way to allow readers to go directly from an ad to making a purchase. Or they can browse additional colors and styles not shown in print.

Start brainstorming! Although these are some common applications, you can use QR codes for almost anything. The creative possibilities are endless.

Did you know that the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) are proposing that QR-coded fuel economy labels be placed on the window of every new vehicle in dealer showrooms by 2012? According to the proposal, the QR codes would resolve to a Web page that allows consumers to personalize and compare the fuel economy of different vehicles by inputting their own driving habits and fuel costs into an online calculator.

Types of QR Code Readers

In order for customers or prospects to read QR codes, they need a reader. Some phones come with readers installed. Others require viewers to download them.

Among the most popular readers are:



KAYWA
READER



BLACKBERRY QR CODE SCANNER



2D SENSE PLATFORM (FORMERLY iMATRIX)



Try Scanning QR Codes Now!

Download a reader to your smartphone and scan these QR codes.

Best Practices for QR Codes

Like any marketing technology or application, QR codes work best when certain best practices are followed. Let's look at a few of them.

1 Optimize for mobile sites. Because people will be snapping these codes with mobile cameras, you may want to make sure the content to which you are driving them is optimized for mobile viewing. This isn't always necessary, especially as smartphone screens get bigger, browsing gets faster, and phones become more optimized for surfing on the go. But it's a good practice if you can do it.

2 Make the codes easy to read. Keep the URLs simple. This makes the code easier for phones to read. Using a URL shortener like TinyURL is a great way to do this. Make sure there is enough space around the code so it's not crowded by text or images. This reduces interference. If you're going to be placing QR codes in permanent locations, think about things like reflections or shadows that might impact the camera's ability to read the code.

3 Test, test, test. Treat QR codes like Web pages. Test them before deploying them, and test them on a variety of readers and with a variety of quality phones. Newer, more highly featured phones can handle a lot more than less expensive phones sold by discount retailers.

4 Make the QR code worth decoding. Make the code worth decoding. Don't just send people to your website. Provide deep content. Sweepstakes. Coupons. Music. If you are selling something, send people to review sites or fan pages. Make it worth their time.



Visit a website.



View a presentation.



Visit a web page specifically designed for smart phones to request more information.

5 Make it serve a purpose. Not only should the code be worth decoding, but it should serve a specific marketing goal. What is the intent on the back end? To gather information? Conduct a survey? Get the person to interact with the brand through a game or sweepstakes? Make an online purchase? Who's the target audience? Is the content well matched to their needs and interests?

6 Include multiple paths to response. Although you want people to snap the code, include multiple paths to response. Not everyone will use the code, so make sure they can access the information even if they don't have a smartphone or mobile data plan. Perhaps include a short URL to the same landing page or let people send a text message to retrieve desired information, such as coupon codes.

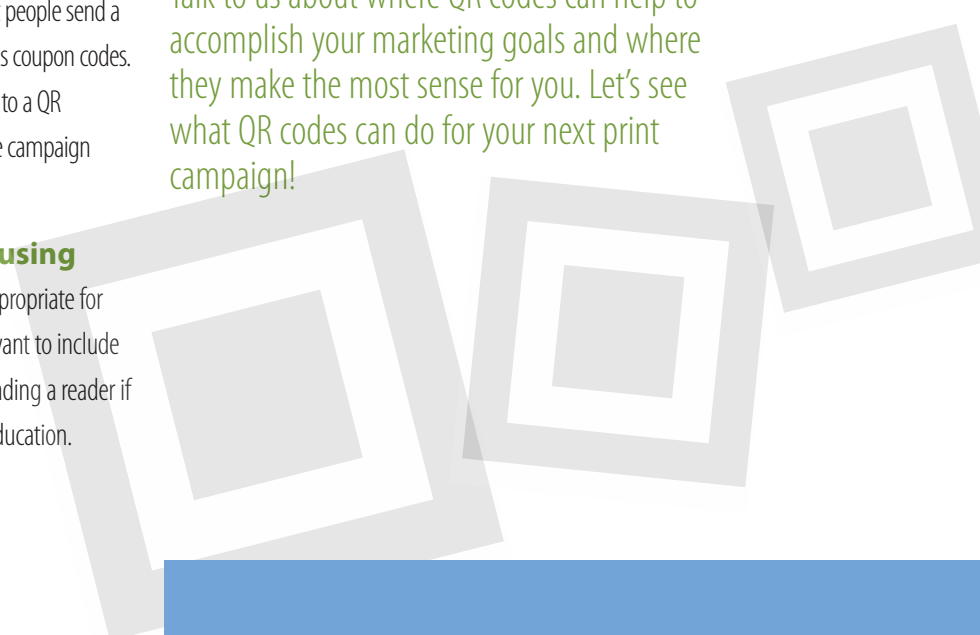
After all, it's not about getting people to respond to a QR campaign. It's about getting them to respond to the campaign period.

7 Include instructions for using the code. This isn't going to be appropriate for all campaigns, of course, but you may want to include short instructions for using the code and downloading a reader if necessary. Part of success with QR codes is user education.

Conclusion. In today's marketing world, it's all about spontaneity, mobility, and instantaneous gratification. It's easy to envision a world in which all marketing and corporate identity materials and packaging include QR codes by default just as they include URLs, email addresses, and Twitter IDs.

Imagine a world in which consumers routinely snap the information on the way out the door to work. Grab a breakfast bar and snap a code for the road. It's happening today. Do you want to be part of it?

Talk to us about where QR codes can help to accomplish your marketing goals and where they make the most sense for you. Let's see what QR codes can do for your next print campaign!



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