

QR CODES

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Do these look familiar? They are more than just unusual graphic designs or logos; they are actually QR codes, 2D bar codes embedded with information that can be read by a QR scanner. *QR code* stands for quick response code – because it can be decoded quickly. Unlike traditional bar codes, these 2D codes can contain information in both the horizontal and vertical directions so they hold a much greater volume of information. QR codes can be embedded with text, links to PDFs, URLs, calendar events, coupons or other data. These codes were originally used in the manufacturing sector where hand-held scanners could decode logistical information on product parts. Now you can use a scanner application on your smartphone or mobile phone with a camera to reveal the embedded data in QR codes wherever they are. It's as easy as taking a picture.

It is predicted that by late 2011, [nearly half the U.S. Population will own smartphones.](#)

QR codes were developed more than 15 years ago in Japan and have been used mainly by techies in the United States for several years. However, with nearly half the U.S. population having the capability to read QR codes with a device already right in their pockets, you are likely to be seeing these codes in the mainstream with growing frequency. Now is a good time to learn how you can read and create QR codes and to consider the possibilities they offer for your business and just for fun.

READING QR CODES

Reading QR codes is as simple as taking a picture with your smartphone. iPhones, Blackberries and Androids all have the capability to scan and read the data hidden in QR codes. If you have a newer smartphone, it may have come with a QR scanner application already loaded. If not, you can download a free application that will turn your smartphone into a QR code scanner/reader. To learn which QR reader software is compatible with your smartphone, search for your model on the [Mobile-Barcodes](#) site, or simply do a Google search of your phone's model and the words "QR code Reader."

Once your QR code reader application is loaded, simply point your smartphone's camera at the code and take a picture. The embedded information will appear on the screen of your smartphone. If you get an error message or "no code detected" message, try again. It may take a little practice to learn how to frame the code in your camera's lens for a perfect reading.

Here's a code to practice with. If you're reading this document on your computer, no need to print. You should be able to scan the code right off your computer's monitor. Be sure to include the white border around the graphic in your scan – it is part of the code.



CREATING QR CODES

Several websites can help you create your own QR code, free of charge. You can even pick your own colors. A Google search for QR code Generator will give you several sites to choose from. It takes only a few minutes.

Once you have created your own code, it is up to you to decide where you want to put it and how you want to use it. There are endless possibilities for QR code applications.

FUN, BUT NOT JUST FOR FUN

QR codes on t-shirts, coffee mugs and business cards can be great conversation starters and a lot of fun. You can even create a game using QR codes that reveals clues to solve a puzzle or leads to a treasure. But QR codes are not just for fun; they also have some very practical applications in marketing, public relations, inventory control and elsewhere in business – wherever interactive communication is important.

You can establish multiple QR codes for various purposes. There is even software available to help you track your QR codes and the responses you receive from individuals who scan your codes. The possible uses for QR codes are endless. Here are just a few of our favorites:

Website or Facebook Page Traffic

QR codes can serve as an introduction to you or your business by sending traffic to your website or even your Facebook page. Including your QR code on your business card and any mailings or email advertising you do can be a great way for potential clients and customers to get more information about your business by scanning the QR code and landing on your website. QR codes can be embedded with a URL to your website or to a mobile-enhanced landing page established just for the user of the QR code.

Product Launches or Promotions

QR codes can be an integral part of your campaign to introduce a new product or promote a new service. Include your code in print advertising, emails and on your website, all with instructions for decoding the secret message leading to a PDF or URL introducing your new product or service. Who can resist a puzzle?

Brochures and Catalogs

Using QR codes can turn your print brochures and catalogs into individualized interactive experiences. Imagine a brochure advertising your services with QR codes leading to bios, portfolios or just more information on brochure topics. Your catalog can be filled with great pictures of your products, each with a QR code that, when scanned, takes the user to more detail specifically about the product and provides the capability to place an online order.

Retail Display

Retail displays can be enhanced with QR codes that take shoppers to a text document or website to answer any questions they may have about products and let them know if there are other colors or models in stock.

Self-Guided Tours

One new and innovative use of QR codes is to include them as part of self-guided tours at museums, parks, historical and tourist attractions. Each exhibit or special interest point along the way can have a posted QR code with more information for interested patrons with QR scanners on their smartphones.

FUTURE OF QR CODES

QR codes have already been used very creatively: codes on t-shirts that scan to your Facebook page, codes on album covers that spell out secret messages, codes embedded in artwork. The creative possibilities are endless and because of the volume of information these 2D bar codes can contain, so are the practical applications.

Although the first 2D bar codes began appearing in the mid 90s, their commercial use is still somewhat limited in the United States. QR codes are inexpensive and easy to create and they provide endless opportunities for interactive communications, but only if people accept and get comfortable with them. You will help decide if QR codes are a passing fad or if they become the next great tool in interactive communications.

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