

Leveraging QR Codes on Print Materials

QR codes, already very popular and in common use in China and Japan, are gaining momentum in the United States as a powerful, flexible and engaging marketing tool.

What is a QR code?

A QR code is a 2-dimensional barcode that looks like a square with smaller black and white squares, or sometimes colored designs. Businesses can print or display the code on just about anything, including: printed mail, e-mail, websites, television, print ads, posters, signage, and t-shirts. The use of QR codes on printed materials, especially direct mail, is particularly “hot” and growing.

The QR code can be scanned with a QR code reader that is available as a free application on most smartphones. Once scanned, the code connects the user directly to a website, dedicated landing page, video clip, download or any other creative link imaginable. The code can even automatically generate an outbound customer call, or send the user to a website that has the shopping cart pre-populated with products the user might be interested in.

How Can QR Codes Be Used in Print?

The ways that QR codes can be used on printed materials is only limited by the creativity of the marketing team using them. QR codes can turn a bill or invoice with no marketing value into an engaging, interactive customer experience. Customers reviewing their bill can see the code, scan it, and become linked to marketing messages or an interactive vehicle determined by the marketer. QR codes can also be used as a supplement to marketing materials to deepen customer engagement and provide additional messaging. QR codes literally serve as a real-time link, bridging the physical world to the online world.

Ways to Maximize QR Code Effectiveness

Printing a single QR code for a mass audience may be a great application for some campaigns. For example, a company may link the code to an online video that thanks all its customers for their business and provides a review of the benefits of a new product or service offering.

However, there is also a wealth of opportunity in using customer data to personalize QR codes to connect various customer segments with unique, customized links based on behaviors and preferences. For example, a customer who has shown a propensity to purchase a certain type of product might be linked to a landing page or video that offers information about another similar or complementary product.

Link QR Codes to Relevant Information

Wherever a QR code takes a customer, it's important the message is interesting and relevant. Do the research and data analysis necessary to thoroughly understand the target audience. Give strategic thought to the nature, timing and location of the message. Customers can become irritated if they scan

the code and spend their time reviewing information that is of no interest or value to them. This can be a blemish on the brand and also discourage the user from scanning future QR codes from that brand.

On the other hand, if a customer scans the code and has a favorable experience, it can:

- Help create a positive brand perception
- “Go viral”—or at least expand on initial exposures as readers send it on to others
- Turn prospects into customers
- Deepen existing customer relationships and increase loyalty towards the brand
- Educate customers on product and service benefits
- Increase the likelihood the customer will scan and interact with future QR codes

Be Creative

QR codes are unique in that the result of scanning them is a mystery to users until they actually scan them. This “sense of the unknown” creates excitement and anticipation. A lackluster back-end to a QR code can be a let down. Marketers should be creative when developing the messaging linked to the code. Make it worth the customer’s time and effort to scan by creating a worthwhile experience.

Update Messaging—Keep it Fresh

It is important that the messaging for a QR code stays fresh and updated. If a consumer scans a business QR code several times and always links to the same content, he or she will stop trying in the future.

Here are just a few examples of some creative ways to incorporate QR codes in printed material:

- Consumers like saving money. Link your QR code to a monthly or weekly discount or special savings offer. This will not only generate sales, it can establish new customers and create a habit of proactively scanning future QR codes for additional savings.
- Offer a % savings off the customer’s bill, but they only qualify if they scan!
- Send users to an e-mail or newsletter registration—and be sure to give them a compelling reason to register.
- Link to a welcome video on new customer welcome kits.
- Link to social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter accounts.
- Link to a PURL (personal URL/website) with a personalized QR code that offers products specific to that individual’s preferences.
- Use on anniversary kits to lead to a digital message or video thanking customers for the past year’s business.
- Print on smaller communications, such as postcards, that don’t have a lot of real estate for marketing copy, to create a product teaser. The QR code links to more detailed product information.
- Offer special savings for scanning multiple codes—developing the scanning habit and increasing response for future QR code efforts.
- Take participants to product information on tradeshow materials, including special offers or as an entry for a giveaway.
- Automatic entry into sweepstakes, or for a scavenger hunt that leads consumers to a business location.

A Cost-Effective Tool

QR codes can be highly effective in getting consumers to take a number of desired actions and are also extremely cost effective because initial delivery is simply a matter of printing on existing material that is already paid for. The only costs are the development of the functionality, if it's not something that is already in place, and the cost of fulfillment, if applicable.

With a little brainstorming and creativity, marketing teams can create endless ways to leverage QR code technology and engage more customers with their brand.

Sources:

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2. "50-Count 'Em, 50!-Creative Uses of QR Codes." *Flyte*. 26 June 2011. <http://www.flyteblog.com/flyte/2011/03/50-count-em-50-creative-uses-of-qr-codes.html>