

Cracking the QR Code

Have you seen a lot of these odd looking bar codes around lately? Perhaps in a TV or print advertisement, on product packaging, or simply someone's business card?

What are they?

The image to the left is what is commonly known as a QR code, which basically functions as a more sophisticated and modern day barcode. Recently, it was estimated that over 14 million users scanned a QR code in June of 2011 alone, with over 58% of those coming from their own homes.



Why are so many folks using this feature?

- Larger storage capacity - Each QR code can store a great deal more data than a standard barcode.
- User friendly: The codes are easy to create and work on most operating systems including: Android, Apple and Windows.
- Affordable: There are a number of resources available for free to assist in creating customized QR codes.

How do they work?

To access the info within the code, all you have to do is scan the code with your smart phone or other scanning device.

What if I don't have products that I need to barcode? How can these help me and my business?

- Lead Tracking - Unique QR codes can be used to keep track of prospects acquired from marketing campaigns and provide direct links to unique pages within your website.
- Easy to Reach - You can make it easy for people to reach you by providing a QR code that contains all your contact information. For example, the QR code above is my contact information. Please feel free to try it out and let me know what you think.
- Surveys - these codes are great for tracking surveys and making it easy for your clients to quickly respond.

Most of us are familiar with barcodes the machine-readable label that provides information about the item to which it is attached. Every time we check out in the grocery store the cashier scans them to ring up our purchases.

The QR code (abbreviated from Quick Response Code) is the trademark for a type of matrix or two-dimensional barcode that was first designed for the automotive industry in Japan. The QR Code system became popular outside the automotive industry due to its greater storage capacity and fast readability when compared to standard barcodes.

QR codes were to become common in consumer advertising. In theory, a smartphone with a QR reader can be used to scan a QR code, displaying the code and converting it into a useful form such as the URL for a website and eliminating the need to type the whole URL into a web browser.

Since the QR code provided a way to access a brand's website more quickly than by manually entering a URL it was supposed to become a focus of advertising strategy. Beyond mere convenience to the consumer, the importance of this capability is that it is supposed to increase the conversion rate (the chance that contact will convert to a sale for goods or services). The QR code was thought to quickly and easily encourage interested prospects further down the conversion chain.

So what happened? Why are we not seeing increased demand for QR codes? In your own experience, when did you scan a QR code last? While there are statistics that show an increasing number of people are scanning QR codes, I found none indicating people repeating their use of this technology.

In fact, I can't name a single person that routinely scans QR codes. Can you?

The big question is this: why hasn't something as promising as the QR code gained more traction in the 10 years of its existence?

Below are the five reasons postulated by Aaron Strout that prevented this fairly simple technology from living up to its promise.

5 Reasons For The Death Of QR Codes

1. Apple and Android have yet to ship a phone with a QR reader pre-loaded. This is — and will be — a deal breaker in most cases, given the fact that these two mobile platforms accounted for north of 87.6% of all smart phones sold worldwide in 2012.
2. In many cases, the mobile experience sitting behind the QR code is a disappointment. I can't tell you how many times I've tried scanning these codes only to be taken to non-mobile optimized sites, or worse, to a site where I scratched my head wondering what the connection to the original call-to-action was.
3. Some QR codes end up in places with no wifi or connectivity on your phone (airplane, subway station). This is an obvious failure.
4. Many consumer packaged goods companies feel that committing valuable space on their label/packaging to a standard UPC code and a QR code is overkill. And, in many cases, they focus on leveraging the UPC bar code to connect to an online experience (Weight Watchers' mobile application lets you scan bar codes to give you nutritional information and provides number of "points" in a particular product).
5. Even when a QR code is done right (link to mobile-optimized site, available connectivity, clear call-to-action), it's hard to convince oneself that the minute it takes to pull out your phone, open up a scan-

friendly app (assuming one had been downloaded), scan the QR code and then wait for the experience to load, is worth it.

[The Death Of The QR Code - Aaron Strout](#)

Here are some recent campaigns that worked because of clever execution and an understanding of what actually motivates consumers to scan a product, brochure, or ad's QR Code:

A QR Code postage stamp was issued for the 20th anniversary of the issuance of postal stamps by Croatian Post Hrvatske pošte, the national postal service of Croatia.

Each of the 3.10 Kuna (0.56 U.S. dollars) stamps has a unique code printed below the QR Code. When you scan the QR Code you're taken to a mobile site where the unique code can be entered and you can view confirmation on the receipt of your mail as well as additional data about its route. Users can find out when the mail was sent, how many kilometers it had traveled, when it reached its destination and more.

Cognac brand Hennessy recently produced a limited edition run of bottles featuring art from famed New York designer and artist Kaws. Each bottle has a custom designed QR code with an image of a Hennessy bottle in the center. The code leads to a mobile site, which has so far been accessed 1.3 million times, 600,000 of those via QR code scans.

Starbucks teamed up with Lady GaGa for an online and offline six-round scavenger hunt with prizes of GaGa's music, Starbuck's gift certificates and more, played by thousands of enthusiastic fans of both brands.

Google's new WebGL Bookcase lets you browse a 3D version of any of thousands of books. Once you decide what book you want to buy, you scan a QR Code to view the selected books on your mobile phone.

Why QR campaigns fail

1. Unreadable codes on billboards, too high up for people to get a clear scan; on ads in subways, where there is no cell phone reception for scans.
2. QR codes in TV ads By time you run and get your phone, find the scanner, and try to take a shot, the ad's over. Doh!
3. No instructions. Not everyone knows what a QR code is and how to scan it. So it's necessary to include clear and concise instructions that include the benefits of bothering to make the scan.
4. Using a proprietary code so you need a specific type of QR readers to scan it. As if people would download a scanner just to read a code they don't understand. Fail.

[No, QR Codes Aren't Dead. They're Just Used Badly - B.L. Ochman](#)