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## QR Codes vs. MS Tags: let the code war begin

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The QR Code is one of many 2D code formats. Others include Microsoft Tag, EZCode, JagTag, Digimarc and Wikkit. Having recently spotted a few MS Tags in some national magazines, we wanted to revisit "Quick Response: The Road Ahead for QR Codes," July 2010.

### KEEP IT SIMPLE

At the end of the day, the only thing that matters is making it easy for people to learn about our company, products and services.

We prefer QR Codes. More mobile phones applications can read them — they are easily recognizable.

Many of the popular smart phone applications for reading QR Codes don't support MS Tags. Having to download another app to scan an MS Tag could frustrate or confuse readers.

QR Codes aren't necessarily pretty. Some customization is possible. For example, companies can put their logos in the middle of the codes.

**The bottom line:** More people probably are familiar with QR Codes. And the greater the recognition factor, the higher the possibility consumers will take action and scan the codes.

— Jason Pinto, [interlinkONE](mailto:interlinkONE) ([jasonp@interlinkONE.com](mailto:jasonp@interlinkONE.com))

### CAN'T GET BY ON LOOKS ALONE

QR Codes and Microsoft Tags (MS Tag) have the same essential function: connecting mobile users to websites, e-mail addresses, phone numbers and so on. But they have some critical differences.

A QR Code usually is monochrome while an MS Tag is 4-color. Each has design and print workflow implications. Both formats can be customized to look attractive in a print layout (see illustration), although designer tags always should be tested for functionality.

Another consideration is the proprietary nature of MS Tag, which is not necessarily a bad thing. MS Tags encode only a short string, which is converted to a URL, vCard or other data in Microsoft's server, which then redirects the user to the correct destination. Microsoft currently does not charge for that service, but this could change.

QR Codes, on the other hand, can encode any text — up to 4,000+ characters! While this would create a monster file, it is possible to minimize URL length, resulting in a less complex file. Using an open specification provides more user control.

Some service providers, like Print 2D ([www.print2d.com](http://www.print2d.com)), use many formats, including both QR Codes and MS Tags.

**The bottom line:** The real value doesn't hinge on which barcode format is



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used. Rather, it is the mobile-friendliness of the landing page, and the market appropriateness and appeal of the mobile experience.

— John Parsons, *Byte Media Strategies* ([john@bytemedianews.com](mailto:john@bytemedianews.com))

## TOO MANY 'WHAT IFS'

Mobile enthusiast and blogger Terence Eden is not anti-Microsoft. He loves his Windows Phone 7, MS 4000 keyboard, Xbox hardware and the company's continuing support of the Creative Commons.

But he has some reservations about MS Tags.

"Essentially, an MS Tag contains just a number," Eden explains. "The reader then has to connect to the Internet, query Microsoft's servers, then return the information to you."

According to Eden, that raises the following questions:

- » What if Microsoft's database goes down, is corrupted, is switched off, or is generally unavailable?
- » Can Microsoft profit from your data?
- » When [and if] Microsoft starts charging, what happens if you don't pay?
- » If a customer is roaming or doesn't have Internet access, how does he or she get the content? (A QR Code containing a business card can transfer contact details to your phone even if you don't have an Internet connection.)

— See Terence Eden Has a Blog: <http://shkspr.mobi/blog>.

Have a trend you'd like to see revisited? E-mail [KOB@americanprinter.com](mailto:KOB@americanprinter.com).

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