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How to incorporate QR Codes into your marketing solutions



UNLOCK THE CODE

A young couple drives through a neighborhood staked with For Sale signs. At each lawn, they stop, get out, pick up a flyer, and move on. Each flyer offers different things – some the asking price of the home, others the amenities with pictures – and a phone number to contact the realtor. Somewhat discouraged, the couple continues through the neighborhood until they get to a For Sale sign in a cul-de-sac. The house meets the eye test. Then the couple looks at the flyer underneath the sign.

QR Codes offer unlimited possibilities for marketing services companies

By Graham Garrison

On the top right of the flyer is a two-dimensional bar code. "I know what this is," the wife says, and she pulls out her smart phone and lines it up with the code. She scans it, and the code takes her Web browser to a landing page for the house. The page contains everything they wanted to know – the asking price of the house, county and city taxes, pictures of every room, times for an upcoming open house, and the e-mail and phone number of the realtor. Within a minute, they're on the phone with the realtor to schedule a private tour.



Qs about the Codes

QR Codes are just what they look like – bar codes. Except they're two dimensional and full of possibilities for marketing solutions. QR (Quick response) Codes were developed in the mid-90s by Japanese automobile parts manufacturer Denso-Wave. The code can contain pure text, links to websites – pretty much anything you'd be able to get to with an Internet browser.

"In Japan it's become part of the everyday culture," says Val DiGiacinto, Vice President of Sales, The Ace Group. And by every day culture, he means on buses, in newspapers and magazine ads, on buildings, on vending machines and the sodas that come out of them. They're everywhere and in everything. "Statistics are that 40 percent of the Japanese population uses it every day. It's part of what they do."



DiGiacinto says he's been aware of QR Codes for a while, but caught their first implementation in the United States during the 2008 U.S. Open. Ralph Lauren had a full page ad in the *New York Times* with a QR Code and an explanation on how to use it. "It basically took you to a mobile friendly site where you were able to purchase some Polo products that were specific to tennis," says DiGiacinto. "It was a limited experience. They repeated the exact same ad in both the *New York Times* and the back page of *New York Magazine* during the 2009 U.S. Open. They were sold on it. This was 2008 – phones have come a long way already."

"In most lunch-and-learns, even during the presentations, it's amazing how the technology still takes a bit of working and showing and understanding. But once it happens, you can start to see the light go on."

– Val DiGiacinto,
Vice President of Sales, The Ace Group

InterlinkONE, an innovative marketing solutions company, wants to make an impression. As attendees walk into a convention center for the Dscoop conference, interlinkONE hits them with their best shot – a floor decal with a QR Code that if scanned, takes the attendee to a video of interlinkONE reps welcoming them. At a booth on the convention floor, interlinkONE offers cookies with QR Codes. The company put QR Codes in brochures for people to scan and visit Web portals with storefronts and video demonstrations. Banners display QR Codes prominently. InterlinkONE employees even wear T-shirts around at night with QR Codes to scan.

"Everything that we had printed, we put QR Codes on," says Jason Pinto, Project/Marketing Manager at interlinkONE.

Closing the digital distance

Smart phone technology, and buy-in from the general population, are pivotal in the perception of QR Codes catching on in the United States. Rodrigo Abreu, Vice President, AlphaGraphics International, says that the most common concern for consumers is "to understand

if their mobile will work the application and how to download the software to use it," he says.

"This will not be a concern in the future because all the smart phones will come with a solution to use it."

DiGiacinto anticipates smart phones overtaking older models by the end of the year. Newer BlackBerrys have the reader technology pre-installed as part of BlackBerry messenger. It's also free by downloading BlackBerry Messenger 5.0. The iPhone has its apps store, and Droids and newer Nokia models come pre-installed as well.

"That's changing right before our eyes," says Pinto. "More and more people have smart phones as opposed to just a flip phone or other older models."

For more information on smart phone applications, see the accompanying sidebar.

A man walks into a restaurant with \$10 in his wallet and an empty stomach. He orders a sandwich, chips and a drink. Before he sinks his teeth into the sandwich, he wonders how many calories are in it. On the paper wrapped around the sandwich is a QR Code. He scans it, and is able to view the calorie and nutritional information of the sandwich and other items on the menu – and wouldn't you know it, the store also included a promotional coupon with the QR Code. After he's done, he walks up to the register with the QR Code and gets a free dessert, still coming below his desired calorie intake.

Spreading the Code

More and more customers want to hear about QR Codes. The Ace Group has reached out to marketing and sales executives nationwide, providing a Powerpoint presentation during lunch-and-learn sessions that includes a description on what a QR Code is and a collection of movies on how they can be implemented. One movie uses Google as an example to show the audience that large companies are involved in the technology.

"In most lunch-and-learns, even during the presentations, it's amazing how the technology still takes a bit of working and showing and understanding," says DiGiacinto. "But once it happens, you can start to see the light go on."

At the presentations, if DiGiacinto can get some of the attendees to ask him "So you mean I can ..." he'll have accomplished what he set out to do, "which is to communicate what this technology is and how it can be utilized," he says. "Then it's the attendees' responsibility to take the technology into their world and see how it fits."

The Ace Group already has buy-in from one major customer. Fans at February's NBA All-Star game in Dallas, Texas, were treated to a glimpse of the future of advertising and marketing

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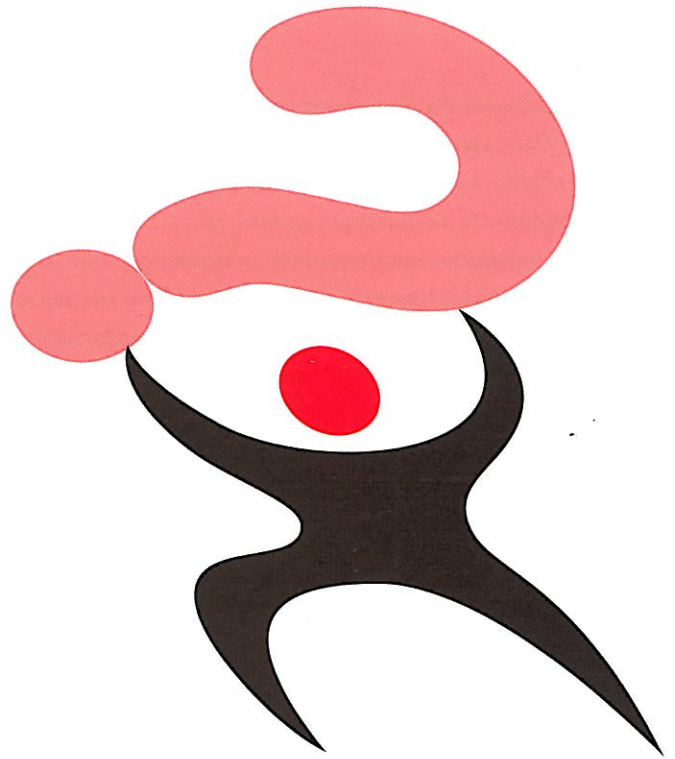
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solutions. The 100,000 fans didn't know it, of course – the "trend" came in the form of what looked to them like an oversized bar code, shown on 3,500 HDTV screens throughout Dallas Stadium. Simple instructions invited them to scan the QR Code to receive a coupon that would be sent to their phone for a free All-Star game gift available in the stadium stores.

"The six-hour campaign started when people began coming into the stadium," says DiGiacinto. "We were able to, along with the NBA, view the statistics on a laptop and watch people scanning the code and do what they were supposed to do with it – all while watching the game." After six hours worth of customer interaction, The Ace Group and NBA deemed the promotion a slam dunk.



QR Codes, like everything else, need proper implementation and execution. But it's something worth looking into, and something worth talking about with your customers.

The NBA promotion is just a glimpse into the potential of QR Codes at sporting events. Teams and leagues can promote their products with QR Codes flashed on the big screens, or in posters at concession stands, or on the concessions themselves. Everywhere you turn is a place to put a QR Code, an opportunity to reach out to customers.



A woman sits in a coffee shop, reading a local magazine before she drives to the airport. She turns to an advertisement of one of her favorite retail stores, and sees a QR Code displayed prominently in the ad. She scans it, and reads that the store is having a promotion exclusive to those who scan the Code. She can't believe her luck – she's a few blocks away. She scans her plane ticket, which has a QR Code on it – the airline is reporting an hour delay already. She'll have plenty of time. She finishes her coffee, and heads for the store.

The wrong way to sell

As companies find unique ways to deliver QR Code campaigns for customers, DiGiacinto warns that there are wrong ways to go about it.

"Charging to create the code is probably the wrong way," he says. "We don't want to just create a code and give it to somebody. The entire value ad needs to come on the back side of it. We'll do design work for the Web, we'll execute a customer's design for a landing page. We'll do all of the data collection."

Feeding customers snippets of QR Code usage instead of blitzing them with too much information is also a recommended tact. "We've been having better results sending some information that at least shows a little snippet," DiGiacinto says. "I don't like sending a Powerpoint because, without me being there to talk about it, it's almost a waste of time. We'll explain what we're doing. Show a code in an e-mail. Based on that information, we have the ability to show what the possibilities are and at least give some basic introduction to it."

As exciting as the technology is, it's important that customers stay grounded in the realistic ROI that QR Codes bring.

"It's wrong to tell them that it's the new thing that's going to generate all kinds of leads," says John Foley, president and CEO of interlinkONE. "The right way is to introduce them to mobile marketing. The numbers show the growth of mobile marketing, so if you want to reach an audience, here's another tool that you can do that, but don't think it's going to replace everything down the road. The wrong way is to say 'this is going to be so successful.'"

A new marketing language

So do QR Codes change the landscape of marketing and advertising? Possibly, as seen in the usage in Japan and other

countries. QR Codes, like everything else, need proper implementation and execution. But it's something worth looking into, and something worth talking about with your customers.

"A lot of people don't do good marketing, they just do the same old thing," says Foley. "But QR Codes allow us to be more interactive. A part of it is just having the conversation to explain to customers what they are and how to use them, which is fine by me, I really want to have the conversation." ■

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