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QR Codes allow you to build digital elements into mail and printed pieces

John Foley, Jr., founder of interlinkONE

You may recall an article I wrote awhile back that discussed merging your print and mail communications in today's multi-channel world. The article provided insight into a variety of ways this is possible, including the use of email, PURLs and QR Codes. Since then, the interest in QR Codes has skyrocketed and mailers continue to seek information on how they can use this technology and present the benefits to their customers.

Today, in order to grow your business, it is important to understand and seek out ways to connect traditional print and mail with other popular channels, because your customers are looking at all channels of communication in an effort to reach their own customers. QR Codes are becoming popular because they can easily engage a customer with immediate response. Learning how you can implement the technology and then showcase your capabilities to current and prospective customers will only add to your marketing efforts.

QR Codes 101

For those unfamiliar with the technology, QR (Quick Response) Codes are two-dimensional barcodes that have been around since 1994 — widely used throughout Japan and in parts of Europe. However, with the increased adaption of mobile phones, they are quickly rising in popularity in the United States.

Accessing the information QR Codes hold is simple. Some phones come with QR Code readers pre-installed. Others require you to download them. Once your mobile device contains a QR Code reader, you simply point your phone to the Code, snap a picture, and the software on your phone decodes the image. Instantly, you are directed to a website or landing page with information about the product or company of interest. They may also take you to a video or a social media page that promotes your company. QR Codes make it easy for consumers to quickly to jump from a printed piece to the Web with the help of their mobile devices.

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Getting Started

The best way to begin transitioning QR Codes into your service offering and effectively market the new capability to your customers is to integrate the technology into your own printed materials. QR Codes can be found on business cards, billboards, postcards, promotional materials, banners and flyers. For example, Sir Speedy of Tampa printed its own direct mail promotion complete with the recipient's customized QR Code to engage interest. When the customer received the mailer, they were encouraged to scan the Code and upon doing so were taken to their own company's website. Showcasing the QR Code technology and usability first hand to customers has proved beneficial in garnering interest and ultimately more business. Showing customers the numerous ways QR Codes can be incorporated into current materials will spark ideas on how they can use QR Codes in their own initiatives.

Successfully Implementing

Once you make the decision to integrate QR Codes into your mix of services, there are a few best practices to keep in mind:

Clearly understand barcode differentiation Understanding the various size and deterioration limitations is critical to effectively using this technology. QR Codes may still be readable with up to 30% deterioration. This allows you to take a few liberties when it comes to the design, such as placing your logo in the middle or adding a wrapper around the Code that fits with the overall creative theme of your printed material. While it may sound difficult, there is software on the market that makes it extremely easy to generate QR Codes independently or as an integrated part of the company's end-to-end personalized marketing solutions.

Know how to educate without cluttering It is important to remember that not every consumer is familiar with QR Codes. It may be necessary that a successful campaign educates the consumer directly on the printed material, while being careful not to clutter and take away from the printed piece's main message. To do this, you will want to provide specific instructions that make it clear that people can take a picture of the Code with their phone to access additional information. You may even want to provide a website URL that allows them to download a QR Code Reader.

Coupling with PURLs

One of the most important benefits QR Codes offer is the ability to tie together print, mobile and web channels in an effort to increase the response rate and reach individuals through their preferred channel. PURLs are increasingly being used as part of a mailing campaign as they are also an effective way to increase the response rates of marketing efforts. Coupling QR Codes with PURLs can easily boost the effectiveness of your mailings for multiple reasons, including:

Providing one-to-one communications

PURLs can be embedded right into QR Codes so when the recipient scans the Code they are taken directly to their personalized landing page. Once a recipient is at the page, you have the opportunity to engage them and have a one on one dialogue. This will only enhance the value PURLs already bring to your mailings and are a logical extension to those that you may already be implementing. They can fill the gap that other cross-marketing tools cannot.

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By Marll Thiede
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QR Codes make PURLs portable. They allow the recipient to access each individual PURL without needing to be sitting in front of a computer. Because people are on the go, and many carry their phones with them at all times, this portability is ideal in increasing the response rate. Additionally, QR Codes eliminate the need for the recipient to type a lengthy PURL into their web browser. By pressing one button, the recipient is automatically directed to their own personalized website. This eliminates the chance of typos and decreases the amount of effort required by the recipient to access the information.

Measuring the Success

As with anything business-related, it is the outcome and success that is most important. Being able to measure the success of any marketing initiative is crucial. Not only will it be helpful to you in determining which of your customers are interested in the technology, but it provides quantitative data showcasing your success that you can share with your customers. Additionally, if your customer is going to take the leap and integrate QR Codes into their printed materials, they will definitely want to be able to measure the results, allowing your customers to better determine customer behavior. There are multiple ways to measure the QR Codes included on your marketing materials, including:

Monitoring scans of the code Various software programs have been developed with the ability to record the amount of scans per day, what time those scans took place, the location of the scans and the types of devices being used to scan the Code. Let's use as an example a healthcare provider sending out a mailing to members with allergies promoting a new over-the-counter drug and that mailing features a QR Code that directs the recipient to a website with additional information. Using these software programs, the healthcare provider would be able to gauge interest in the new drug by monitoring how many people scanned the Code each day, and in which geographic regions.

Gathering customer information in real-time It is also possible to take QR Codes one step further and use them to capture contact information on each customer. With the right software, it's possible to direct the users to a landing page which will request their contact information before they are allowed to proceed. Upon completion, your customer will now have valuable knowledge previously unattainable at that point of engagement that will allow them to update mailing lists and address labels without the individual having to send in a change of address form.

Moving Forward

QR Codes are one of the hottest applications in the marketing world today and for good reason — the concept of building digital elements into mail and printed pieces is a win-win. The Codes are easy to create, print and track and cost little or nothing to add to your mailings. As customers continue to seek communications through multiple channels, those mailers that recognize the growth of QR Codes and act upon it are better positioning themselves to provide the information their customers want, when they want it.

John Foley, Jr. is the founder of interlinkONE, and presently serves as the CEO of the company. He is widely recognized for his visionary approach in designing Internet business applications that meet the changing needs of dynamic print, fulfillment, and mail service provider organizations, also known as marketing service providers. For more information, visit <http://interlinkONE.com>.



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