
How Smartphones, QR Codes Revolutionize Mobile Strategy

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Have you heard of QR codes? If not, you will; they're already being touted as the next big thing in marketing. Whether you buy into that or not, as a retailer you need to know what they are, what they aren't, and why you should care. QR codes were created by a Japanese auto parts company to track production and have since become ubiquitous in Asia and Europe. They appear on nearly everything from coffee cups to buildings to movie posters. In the U.S., we are starting to see these codes used in magazines and other print media.

The driving force behind QR code acceptance is the smart phone, which has become the dominant mobile device since the introduction of the iPhone. As more and more consumers use these miniature computers as the remote control for their lives, it only makes sense for marketers to find ways to connect through them.

The idea is a simple one: the consumer points a camera-equipped smart phone at a QR code, using one from the plethora of free apps available. The app decodes it and redirects the phone to a Web site, or a video, or some other web-enabled content. Coupons are an obvious option, but much more is available; the only limit is the marketer's imagination and the ability to supply relevant content.

As is the case with any medium, the content is the important part. The "gee-whiz" factor will get consumers engaged as these codes begin to pop up; whether they stay engaged will ultimately be determined by how useful the

provided content is. Those planning to use QR codes as a way to deliver an advertisement will wear out their welcome quickly. Even coupons will grow tedious in time; QR codes are a big idea, and the added value to the shopper needs to be big as well.

More and more shoppers today are looking for greater depth of information at the shelf edge; QR codes are a natural fit for that. Wine pairings, recipes, country of origin; anything that is relevant to the shopper makes sense.

It's only a matter of time before these codes begin cropping up on packaging. Now is the time for you as a retailer to engage in this new medium and take control of the conversation. As QR codes become more prevalent on product packaging, shoppers will be directed outside your store to learn more about the products you sell. But, by providing codes at the shelf edge, you can be a part of the conversation, and more effectively communicate with your shoppers. In addition, brick and mortar stores have an option that the manufacturers lack: the ability to put different codes in each store.

QR codes by themselves are not a silver bullet, but they are fast becoming a critical part of a mobile strategy. And a strong mobile strategy is a necessity if you want to continue to connect with shoppers where they are and keep them tied to your brand.

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