

I have been in the industry with my own company since 1994. The entire time I have worked in this field there have been very few times any two techs ever agree completely. The advice I give here is based on my experiences, testing, and what I know works.

I am always about saving money and not spending it on things you don't need to.

Explaining QR Codes



QR codes are starting to pop up in more and more places. From outdoor billboards (see the image at right) to Twitter avatars to magazine ads, the proliferation of smartphones is helping fuel a huge increase in QR codes.

What is a QR code? (Q=Quick R=Reference)

A QR code is a 2-D barcode that can be scanned by a smart phone's camera and transfer information. Based on the type of code it is, it might direct the viewer to a website, make a phone call, deliver a vCard or more. You can scan a QR code by using a QR reader on your smartphone or iPod Touch. I like ScanLife (a free download for Blackberry, Android, iOS and Windows Phones) as it allows you to scan QR codes as well as standard barcodes, but there are dozens of free and paid QR scanners out there. I actually scanned the standard barcode on router the other day and it brought me to an info page that talked about the router and gave me links to purchase the router online.

QR codes have been spotted on direct mail pieces, movie posters, business cards and in Times Square.

Whether they'll have the staying power of your website or of your MySpace page has yet to be determined, but while they still enjoy the buzz of the "next big thing," you can take advantage of QR codes in marketing your small business.

How do companies and individuals use these "QR" codes?

QR codes are fairly new here in the states (no surprise, they're big in Japan), so many people won't recognize them when they see them or won't have a smart phone with a QR reader installed, which limits their impact. Most current advertisements that use QR codes still have to explain how they work, and the steps the person has to take to access this additional information.

That is why I am here, to get you informed on what they are and the uses for them....

1. **QR Codes on business cards.** OK, not the most creative idea ever. In fact, this is probably the most common many businesses use QR codes. Rather than overload a business card with all of the contact info they include only the bare minimum for reaching people, then create a QR code that leads people to their Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, Flickr, Plaxo, Yelp, FourSquire, Digg, Delicious, StumbleUpon, Whrrl, and MySpace profiles. (I can't keep that many up!)
2. **Scavenger hunts.** Again, for some reason this appears on every list of QR code marketing ideas. Probably because scavenger hunts are fun and engaging, although a lot easier to write about than to

administer. Still, for destination marketing, a scavenger hunt approach can be a great way to get visitors to check out places they might not otherwise go.

3. **Labeling.** Somewhere, a restaurant patron is enjoying wine from your vineyard. They notice the QR code on the bottle and quickly scan it. That takes them to a mobile site where they can learn more about your wine, your vineyard, and links to where you can buy a case for delivery...all before the check comes.
4. **Storefront displays.** Few retail businesses are open 24/7. Don't (fully) disappoint potential customers after you've left for the day. QR code and put it in your storefront window. One quick scan and you've turned a potential lost sale into an online customer who's going to share a lot more of their contact information with you.
5. **Promotions, discounts and giveaways.** If you want to encourage patronage from the iPhone and Android set, you could create discounts that are specific to the QR codes. You could run these codes in advertisements or post them throughout your store. You could even turn them into a "retweet" so that your shoppers share their discount with their followers.
6. **Laptop stickers.** Slap a QR sticker of your vCard or website to your laptop, making it easier for other geeks to connect with you when you're at the local coffee shop.
7. **T-shirts.** Put your QR code on your t-shirt (or parka, in Maine) for some shameless self-promotion. Or, make a bigger impression by printing up 100 t-shirts and put them on 100 interns and have them attend a public event like a ballgame, street fair or campaign stop. For more engagement from the crowd, put different messages on the shirts, so people take more scans of more of your codes.



8. **Get funky with your QR Code design.** QR codes allow a little wiggle room, meaning that you can "hack" the code itself. A famous, early example is the BBC's QR Code. However, you can play around with the QR code once it's been generated in an image editing tool like Photoshop and work in your own logo or brand. Always be sure to test your QR code before printing up a few thousand copies, however.
9. **Use QR codes to get Likes and Follows.** You can create mobile-friendly landing pages with Facebook like buttons or lead them to your Twitter page for a quick follow. The name of the game is engagement, so a like or follow can create a long-term marketing opportunity. Caveat: so far the Like buttons that QR tags generate lead to the Facebook website rather than the mobile app. I don't know about you, but I rarely log into Facebook's website from my phone, so that requires extra steps the average person may not be willing to take.
10. **Supplement your retail space.** QR codes next to pieces of art could help art galleries move more art, or museums replace those aging audio tape tours. Hardware stores could link to how-to videos on YouTube of how to use specific power tools. Groceries could link to pages that talk about how their products were sourced, and perhaps to interviews of the farmers who grew the food. Electronic shops could bring visitors to review sites so they could get unbiased reviews of stocked products. Or to an e-commerce site where shoppers could buy out-of-stock items. Book stores could link to their own reviews of books on their blog.

11. **Increase e-commerce sales.** Since QR codes can lead to URLs, you can create a code that will populate a shopping cart with specific products. (Assuming your e-commerce solution can handle that.)
12. **Build your email subscriber list.** Use your QR code to send people to your email signup. Just make sure you give people a compelling reason to subscribe to your list...otherwise you will have just wasted their time. Not the best way to engage your audience.
13. **Get the phone ringing. (Well, I am trying to get my phones ringing.. 😊)** QR codes can also make a phone call. If you want to get the phones ringing--at your business or at campaign headquarters--you can create a code that will dial a predetermined number. Likewise, QR codes can generate SMS text messages.

As you can see, there are plenty of ways to use QR codes to connect and engage your audience. QR codes can provide additional information, including photos, reviews, directions and event dates and times. There's a certain amount of fun and surprise with QR Codes, so that you can take advantage of a "what's behind door number one" mentality.



Where can you get them? Free on the internet, I got all the ones you see in this article on the web for free. Just google – QR Codes for free..... 😊 !

Remember ANY questions, email me at: Montgomery@Hollyecho.com. If possible, I will include the answer to your questions in my next article.