Just What Are QR Codes?

Recently, you may have noticed odd little black and white squares, like those above, all over the place: on flyers, websites, marketing materials, and even convention booths. I first saw them at an Android App review site right after I got my new Android smartphone. At first I wondered who got hold of their website code and inserted all the funny looking abstract art. Then, after some research, I found that these were called QR Codes. These little "matrix" barcodes were originally used for tracking inventory in vehicle manufacturing but are now being used in much broader applications. This type of barcode has the capability of containing a myriad of information. It can be as simple as a hyperlink URL to a website or video ad, personal contact information, a block of text, or any other sort of basic information (in case you are wondering, the three I put there are, in order left to right: a link to a website with a barcode reader app, a link to my company's homepage, and my basic contact info).

Reading these QR codes requires a program that can scan and decode them. The one that I use works very well, has a very simple interface, and is simply called "Barcode Scanner" by ZXing Team. If you download the app through the Android app store and scan the first code above, it will take you to their website which has a link to a page where you can create your own QR codes! It also allows you to scan any barcode, search for the item online, and receive competitive prices and store locations. It makes shopping for products that much easier. For those of you who use iPhones, you can grab an App called NeoReader or QR App that will do the same thing.

There are marketing applications as well. My company recently attended a marketing and trade expo in central New Jersey. To help reduce the amount of handouts we needed to print off, we uploaded our marketing materials to our website and had one page with four QR codes for attendees to scan as they walked by. This allowed them to get the direct link to the marketing materials contained on our website where they could then view and save the handouts. We significantly reduced the costs of paper, printing, and waste (think "green"). In addition, updates to the material will be delivered when people go back there using the QR code. It also eliminates reprinting of our marketing materials whenever there is a change or update.

For those of us who are using social media such as Facebook to expand our reach into the community, Likify (www.likify.net) creates a QR code that links your mobile device to a fully functioning "LIKE" button for your Facebook page. You can then place this QR code anywhere, including printed materials or business cards, for people to scan and then "LIKE" your Facebook page. This helps simplify the process of combining all your current marketing groups with your Facebook page, and it is all accomplished with one little QR code.

There are limitless ways to use these codes to simplify advertising, make marketing more accessible to a younger crowd, and also make it easier to drive internet traffic to your website and Facebook pages.

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