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QR Code 101
for
Small Businesses

QR CODE 101 for Small Businesses

One of the ways a small business can market itself better both offline and online is by using QR codes. Although, currently quite new to business owners and customers, QR Code usage has been rising and it's wise for any small business owner to jump on board now before getting left behind by the competition. If you have no idea what QR Codes are about, then read on as we look at the basics.

What are QR Codes?

Quick response codes, commonly known as QR Codes are similar to the barcodes you find on physical products you buy at your supermarket such as your box of cereal or bottle of shampoo. While regular barcodes are scanned by barcode readers at the till, QR Codes can be scanned by mobile phones and most importantly direct the person scanning to an offline or online destination.

For example, you can scan a QR Code and be directed to a phone number, a SMS, a website, an online video on Youtube, a social media page on Twitter, Facebook or Foursquare, an image on Flickr etc. As you can probably imagine QR Codes give both business owners and their customers a wide and exciting range of experiences than just a regular bar code.

Business owners are provided with creative and high conversion marketing strategies, while customers get quick and easy interaction with brands and businesses through the convenience of their mobile phone.

How to get a QR Code?

One thing that stumps small business owners when it comes to QR Codes is that they often don't know where to begin.

The first thing is to decide how QR Codes can fit into your existing marketing strategy and the best ways to integrate QR Codes into the kind of business you run. For example, a restaurant would have a more entertaining QR Code marketing campaign than a funeral parlor or a lawyer would.

One also needs to decide where to direct QR Code scanners in a manner that is appropriate to your business. So while a restaurant could direct customers to a coupon landing page, a lawyer would direct clients to his online resume or profile.

After setting up the destination page/video/image etc, you can generate a QR Code for free online through the numerous free online generators or have your web marketer do it for you.

The final part is to place the QR Code in the most appropriate location that your current and potential clients are most likely to notice it. This could be on newspapers, magazines, business cards, promotional material, storefront windows etc.

Now that you know what QR Codes are and how to use them in your small business, you can now go out and create a mobile marketing campaign using QR Codes.

Why you need Mobile friendly Mobile Web Apps for QR Codes

QR Codes are of a big benefit to small business helping them to marry their offline and online presence in a cost-effective and creative way. However, not many businesses have mobile friendly sites which make implementing QR Codes a problem.

This is because QR Codes are scanned with mobile phones so any website information has to be readable on a mobile phone. If people scan your business's QR Code from a magazine or flier, can they comfortably read your website or do they have to zoom in and out?

The ideal situation is that they should get the important information in mobile friendly version and complete the marketing process.

How to Mobile Web Apps work?

Despite what you may have heard, mobile websites are not complicated. The way it works is that when someone is trying to access your site, an installed software detects whether the person is browsing from a personal computer or a mobile phone. If they are browsing from a computer, they are directed to the normal website and if they are browsing from a mobile phone they are redirected to **your Mobile Web App**

The mobile friendly site may be a subdomain of your current site such as mobile.yourbusinesswebsite.com or an entirely different site such as yourbusinesswebsite.mobi. There are a number of scripts, plugins and mobile services to help create mobile landing pages and sites.

Not every single page of your website has to be mobile optimized, just a few key pages. Obviously the pages you want to direct your QR Code scanners must be mobile optimized such as your sign up page, contact page, about us page and product/ services page.

Social media is mobile friendly

If you have videos on YouTube, an account on Twitter or on Facebook, then you don't need to worry because these sites are already mobile ready and will display content in a user friendly way to mobile users accessing your content. If you don't have a website or can't afford a mobile friendly website, you can use your Facebook fanpage as a landing page.

QR Code Challenges Every Small Business Owner Needs To Be Aware Of.

QR Codes can be of great benefit to small business owners who want a cheap marketing method that combines offline and online marketing. However, as with any good thing, QR Codes have certain challenges that small business owners ought to be aware of so that they can better navigate this marketing system.

1. Although mobile phone usage has sky rocketed, QR Code usage has not grown by the same proportion in the Americas. Over in Japan, they are extremely popular among the population who are more fond of new technologies. QR Code usage will grow as people's personal attitudes change toward this new trend and though it may take time, small business that have learnt to use QR Codes will be ahead of the competition when upward surge really takes place.
2. Consumers may find that other forms of mobile usage are much easier for them to use such as using SMS or text messaging and apps, rather than scanning a barcode. However, these methods were also not highly regarded when they were developed, yet when young people caught on to them, they exploded. The good news is that as more and more people see the reward of scanning barcodes, they will find it easier to do so and increase their usage.
3. One of the critical factors that will cause this shift is if business owners offer great rewards on the other side of that barcode. There is a big difference in just sending people to get basic and boring information on your website versus offering fantastic discount coupons or giveaways, early access tickets to new movies, book releases or music concerts and so on. QR Code marketing has to be just as entertaining and thrilling as all other successful marketing methods for people to respond positively to it.
4. A final challenge with QR Codes to take note of is that if they are not properly printed with the right contrast, they are difficult to scan and result in lost sales leads. So if you place a black and white code against a white wall, a mobile phone camera may not be able to capture the image in a way that the bar code reader app can process. The solution is to have a background that strongly contrasts with the barcode colors. For example in the above case the QR code should be placed on a black or dark blue sheet before placing it on the white wall.

Practical ways to market your small business with QR Codes

1. **Videos-** you can have the QR code link to your YouTube videos. It's best to choose the most appropriate and creative videos that match your marketing campaign. Here are a few examples:
 - a real estate company can link to videos that showcase a walk through a property for rent or for sale
 - a restaurant can link to a recipe video or a video from a news channel or popular travel show that highlighted the business
 - a hair salon may link to a video on the latest hair trends by celebrities
2. **Product information-** by placing QR Codes on your products at your store or during a trade fair or business expo, people can scan and get more detailed information about the product online. No matter what type of product or service you sell, you can direct people to an online catalogue, menu or gallery.
3. **Social media-** if you want people to connect with you on your LinkedIn, Facebook or Twitter profiles, QR Codes provide an easy connection point for them to do that. You can encourage them to post videos, photos and comments on your pages for more social engagement.
4. **Coupons/freebies-** one of the most popular ways to use QR Codes is to promote coupons, freebies and other giveaways. These can be especially popular and high converting during seasonal sales such as Easter, 4th of July, Halloween, Thanksgiving, Black Friday, Christmas and New Year holidays. A creative concept would be to print your QR Codes in colors that match the seasonal holiday.
5. **Audio-** QR codes can also link to audio files. For example, radio stations can connect their audience to past interviews or to listen to particular song while a local book store can have audio readings of a book online.
6. **Images/photo sharing sites-** if your business markets itself best with images such as if you run an art gallery or a photography business, you can showcase your gallery by placing QR Codes on your business cards or other material that links to your photo gallery online

How to create different QR Codes for your campaigns

Once you decide you want to use QR Codes to market your small business, one of the most important things to put in place is a tracking system. A tracking system for your different QR Codes will help you answer questions like:

- How many people scanned the QR Code on my storefront window and how many scanned the one I placed on the noticeboard on the other side of town?
- Which QR Code location gets the most response?
- What times of the day or days of the week get the highest and lowest scan rates?

Here are some tips on how to implement a tracking system for your QR Code marketing.

1. Come up with separate marketing campaigns

Before putting in place a tracking system it is important to decide what each of your marketing campaigns is about.

For example, the goal of your first campaign may be to give away free coupons and to drive traffic to a particular landing page where they can access those coupons. You then decide to have QR Codes printed in different media and locations such as on your business card, your storefront window and maybe on a notice board in a shopping mall located across town.

You may then have a second campaign that focuses on building your social media following and decide that your QR Codes will be placed at your cash register, on your company vehicles and the staff uniforms.

2. Generate unique QR Codes for each campaign segment.

This means that each particular campaign will have unique QR Codes for each of your locations, even if they are driving traffic to the same website page. So using the above example, the free coupon campaign will have 3 distinct QR Codes, one each for the business cards, the storefront window and the notice board.

The first thing is to generate 3 unique URLs using the Google Analytics Campaign Builder. You will need to specify:

- your campaign name (free coupons)
- your campaign source (QR code)
- your campaign medium (business card/storefront window/notice board)
- your landing page (the website page url)

Once you specify these details for each medium, the Builder will generate a unique url. You need to then shorten that URL using any free shortening service that also offers tracking and then use the shortened url to get a unique QR code using a free QR Code Generator. Repeat this process for each of your campaign mediums.

Using these 2 tips will help you get unique QR Codes for each of your campaign locations and help you monitor how well each location performs. This will help you to weed out poor locations and focus on high converting locations.

How to create a value-driven QR Code customer experience.

One of the reasons QR Codes are taking time to get mainstream consumer acceptance is because business owners are not creating a positive and value-driven experience. Consumers don't want to take the time to scan your code just to land on a general information website. They expect to get a rewarding experience so here are some tips on how to do this.

Have Valuable Rewards

To create valuable rewards, it's essential to do your homework and carefully research your target market to see what they appreciate, what psychological triggers they respond to and so on. Your rewards should be clearly spelt out so that there will be no misinterpretation issues. Each niche market has its valuable rewards but here are some general ones you can use to get some ideas:

- Free entry into a contest to win something of value
- Access to coupon codes that will save them money on their next purchase
- Access to daily deals that are available only for a certain time
- Access to downloadable ebooks, audio clips, ringtones
- Access to a live customer service person who can answer their questions, solve their problems, give them a free quote etc
- A video that demonstrates how a product works, a funny or shocking video that is going viral, a virtual tour of a location.
- Exclusive access to a product, service or information

Deliver on Your Promises

It's important for your business to deliver on its promises to maintain a favorable brand image. If you have a successful QR Code campaign but fail to deliver the rewards, people will have a bitter taste and will be reluctant to scan your codes again.

By thoroughly testing your Code Campaigns from start to finish, you can iron out any glitches in the system and make sure your target market has a seamless experience. Also make sure to have a back-up plan to handle any complaints and problems as quickly as possible.

How to build your small business email list using QR Codes

One of the ways QR Codes can benefit your small business is by helping you build your email marketing list in a easy and user friendly way. By making it part of your marketing campaigns, QR Codes can provide a less intrusive way to collect email addresses because you are able to provide real value to your prospects.

Here are some steps to help you build your email list using QR Codes:

1. Sign up to an autoresponder service. There are many available online such as Aweber, IContact , GetResponse and many others. Some offer free trial offers while others have a free edition so you are sure to find something affordable for your small business.
2. Next create a signup form within your account and paste the code into your mobile friendly landing page on your website. You can also put your signup form on one of your Facebook tabs if you don't have a mobile website.
3. Next you will use the url of the landing page to generate a QR Code so that when people scan it they land on the page where the signup form is located.
4. You need to find an attractive offer to get people to sign up to your list. This is not too difficult to do for an offline small business because a lot of your services are tangible in nature. So you may want to consider coupon codes, free giveaways, limited time discounts or free downloads for your products and services.
5. Make sure to put these offers next to your sign up form as part of your sales copy.
6. Have a strong call to action wherever you have placed your QR Code, clearly telling your customers what you want them to do. For example you can write "Scan this code for 10% savings on your next meal" "Scan this code for a free dental consult".
7. Make sure you have an automated system in place to handle all your new signups. For example you can have an automatic email sent to the new signups with information about the coupon or free consult. This will help you run your small business more smoothly without constant interruptions if you did things manually.

Using these simple steps, QR Codes will become an important part of building your small business email list.

How QR Codes can help a small business build their social media presence.

One of the ways QR Codes can help a small business is by creating a social buzz online. If you've wondered how to add more fans and followers and have a more active and vibrant social media account, QR Codes could just do the trick.

Here are 2 tips on how to create a social buzz using QR Codes:

1. Create a separate social media marketing campaign for your small business. For example, you can do the following:
 - Have quizzes and trivia where people can only participate via social media
 - Offer coupons and giveaways that are only accessible to your fans or followers
 - Have people 'Like' a product, service or experience they bought or had with your business.
 - Create a conversation about a particular topic on your social media accounts that relates to your products or services. This conversation should be fun and stimulating enough to make people want to join and participate. For example, a shoe store could start a thread about "If I had \$100 I would buy this shoe" and then reward the best post with a \$100 voucher.

Whatever campaign you come up with, use QR Codes to enroll more people to the social media buzz by using QR Codes in your offline ads. For example a hotel could have a QR Code that reads "Join this weeks trivia quiz on Twitter and stand a chance to win a free night for two". The code would obviously lead the scanner to the hotels Twitter page

2. Another way QR Codes can help with your social media presence is through checkins and reviews. You can make it easier for people to do Foursquare and Facebook checkins on their mobile phone by providing a specific QR Code within your store that they can easily scan. These checkins improve your social ratings and increase your business exposure to a larger network of the scanner's friends. In addition, you can have your clients scan the codes and leave their reviews on social review sites like Google Places and Yelp, helping you to get more reviews in the bag that will boost your SEO rankings.

Essential tools to jumpstart your QR Code Marketing- Part 1

Here is a some essential tools to keep in mind when using QR Codes to market your business.

1. QR Code Generators

QR Code Generators turn your url, text, sms, video link into a 2d code. They are free to use and if you surf online, you will be sure to find many options. Here are a few free generators that work well:

- Kaywa- this is owned by a company called Datamatrix, a company that pioneered the 2d codes. You can use Kaywa to create codes that link to website URLs, phone numbers, SMS and text.
- QR Code and 2D Code generator- apart from generating codes, you can also shorten your url using their services and also make the color and format of your codes unique.
- Kerem Ekran is another generator that allows you to customize and format your code
- QR Generator
- QR Stuff- this generator can code Google Maps, Paypal Buy Now Links, Social Media links, iTunes links, YouTube Links amongst others
- Google's Visualization API

2. QR Code Readers

As a business owner, it's important to know the various QR Code readers that your customers are likely to use and which ones work best. This will also help you to give them better instructions on how they can scan the QR Codes.

Here are a few well known free readers:

- Barcode scanner- a free app that scans QR Codes and enables users to share contacts, apps and bookmarks using the codes
- QR App – this is a paid app available on the iPhone that can scan codes and keep a history of all the codes you have previously scanned. One can also use it to add scanned contacts to the phones address book
- QR Reader for iPhone- a very quick and free app with many options such as sharing content via social media, a built in web-browser, and a detailed view option.
- I-nigma is a free reader that can be used on iPhones, Androids and Blackberries. You can scan codes, save codes, launch URLs and save scanned contact info to your mobile contacts.
- QR App – a paid app that scans QR Codes using automatic detection and saves a history list
- QR Droid- this free Android app has the ability to scan QR Codes in portrait and landscape modes and can generate codes to enable a mobile user to share their contacts, bookmarks, apps, geolocations, and more.

Essential tools to jumpstart your QR Code Marketing- Part 2

Here are 2 more tools that will assist you in marketing your business with QR Codes

1. QR Code Tracking Systems

It's important to monitor the performance of each of your QR codes using tracking systems. Tracking systems can give you real time information on how well consumers are responding to your QR Codes.

If you used a paid QR Code Generator you can get analytics as part of the package such as total number of scans, number of unique users, the gender of the scanner, their income levels, their ages, which mobile operating system they were using and the geographical location they scanned from.

You can also track your QR Codes using:

- Google Analytics- insert Google Analytics code into each of your landing pages to see how many visits that page is receiving
- URL Shortening Services- once you shorten your long URL before generating your code, you can use the URL shortening service to track the performance of that URL. There are a variety of free shortening services that also have tracking capabilities such as bit.ly. Another service is goo.gl that not only shortens your URL but also generates a QR Code for you and then provides detailed analytics.
- There are also specific QR Code Management systems that give you even more detailed analytic data. Code management systems make it easy to track multiple codes and create detailed comparison reports. For example if you are using codes across three different newspapers for the same campaign, a code management system will help you track and analyze each newspapers code usage and help you decide which newspaper delivers the best value for money. One such system is Delivr.

2. Mobile Website Creation Services

The final essential tool that makes the whole QR Code puzzle fit together is a mobile-optimized website. Your webmaster should be able to create one although there are sites like ShareSquare and Qraffiticodes that enable you to create your mobile site on their platform. Whichever way you choose to create a mobile site, it should have these key features:

- Buttons and links that are well-sized so that they are easy to touch
- Small images and solid colors for quick loading
- Tap to call links.
- Tap to email links.
- Tap to SMS (text).
- Google maps integration.
- Social sharing links.
- Links to Yelp, Flickr and other mobile-optimized sites.
- Links to YouTube and Vimeo (both mobile-optimized).

Benefits of using QR Codes to market your small business.

If you've been wondering whether your small business really needs to jump on the QR Code bandwagon, first consider these benefits of using QR Codes and how they can improve your business.

1. First of all, the **explosive growth of mobile phone usage** globally has made mobile marketing a necessity for business owners. Almost everyone owns a mobile phone and more and more people are purchasing smartphones as they become more affordable and have more features. With more people using their mobile phones rather than their personal computers to surf the internet, it only makes sense to have internet marketing strategy that works well with mobile technology and QR Codes fit the bill. Furthermore, mobile users are becoming more tech savvy and are using their phones to download apps, play games, watch videos and TV, buy goods, transfer money, check their bank account, chat with their friends on social media and so many other daily activities. So QR Codes are just another way of people using mobile phones to connect with businesses and smart businesses that readily adapt to this change, will be the ones to benefit the most.
2. QR Codes are relatively **cost-effective** ways to market your business. All one needs is a mobile-friendly online destination and if you don't have a mobile ready website you can use the free Facebook page platform that is already mobile friendly. It is also quite easy to set up a QR Code campaign, because it only requires generating a free code and having it printed as part of your existing offline marketing materials such as your newspaper advertisements. QR code stickers are cheap to print and you can print your own simple ones from your office printer.
3. QR Codes provide an effective way to **bridge the gap** between offline and online marketing. One of the issues small businesses have had with online marketing is that it often doesn't seem very relevant to them because their businesses operate in the 'real'/ tangible world. However with QR Codes, offline businesses can actually reap rewards from their online presence because these codes drive their offline customers to their online sites. QR Codes provide a bridge to connect the regular, traditional offline marketing methods like newspaper ads to the modern online methods like websites and social media. It is also a benefit to customers who are used to being online yet like the feel of a physical store. They are able to interact with that business on both levels in a very easy way just by scanning a code instead of memorizing a website address.
4. Finally QR Codes can be **easily integrated** into your normal marketing activities. Its not one of those methods that makes you trash all the hard work you have invested so far in marketing your business. QR Codes come in and complement your current marketing activities. So if you are running newspaper ads, putting up posters or distributing flyers, then all you need is to add the QR Code to your sales copy with some minor adjustments.

These 4 benefits should convince you to give QR Codes a try in your small business.

20 Interesting ways small business owners are using QR Codes

If you are confused about how to use QR Codes to market your business, this series of articles gives you 20 ideas on how other business owners are going about it. Remember that marketing is not just about making sales but communicating with your customers in a positive way.

1. Transport companies like bus, taxi, tram and train companies can use QR Codes at their stations and other public areas that connect scanners to up to the minute information about the next available bus, taxi, tram or train.
2. Businesses that use direct mail are adding QR codes to their direct mail pieces. Some companies are even personalizing the QR Code for each recipient so they land on a website page that has their personal details so that it looks like it was made just for them.
3. Museums, art galleries, photographers and artists can use QR codes next to their art pieces so that art enthusiasts can get more information about that piece, make comments, see other art pieces related to it and even purchase the art online.
4. Companies that run Local tourist and historical attractions can use QR Codes along tour routes to give tourists more in-depth information about a particular animal, relic, location etc.
5. Real estate agents and developers are using QR Codes to let and sell commercial and residential properties by placing them on their signage. The codes connect renters and buyers to videos and more detailed information about a property.
6. Tutoring schools can use QR Codes to get students to sign up to free lessons and courses that are delivered to their email by an autoresponder program.
7. Food retailers can take advantage of QR Codes to provide food source and nutrition information about the food they are buying. This is especially useful for grocers who sell organic food since organic food consumers are very particular about where their food is sourced.
8. Food manufacturers and processors can place codes on their food packages that link to text or video recipes online that can be tried out by purchasers.
9. Very small business owners that receive very high traffic can rent advertising space at their stand or shop to other businesses that want to put of QR Codes. Think of newspaper sellers, hot dog stands, coffee stands etc.
10. Vineyards and small brewers can utilize QR Codes to market their brands better, provide interesting info about the wine/beer type, details which retail locations it is available at and accept online orders.
11. Clothing retailers are using codes on their merchandise similar to how normal clothing tags work. The advantage is if a brand wants to communicate its unique story or introduce the buyer to other clothes in its line, they can direct them to an online site with the codes.
12. Businesses and business owners that attend a lot of trade shows and networking events can use QR Codes on their name tags, business cards, trade show booths, promotional material so that interested persons just need to swipe the codes to get full information about that business.

13. Business can take advantage of public advertising space that may not be large enough for conventional ads, but are big enough for QR codes, such as supermarket trolleys, wrapping paper, bus seats, safety bars on trains, ski mountain chairs or amusement park rides etc.
14. One stationary item that gets in the hand of so many customers is a business' cash receipt, invoice or delivery note. By placing your QR Code on these stationary items you can have a much wider reach for free. Try and make the QR Code enticing such as a QR Code on a cash receipt would entitle the buyer to a discount on his next purchase.
15. QR Codes are also being used to advertise business in elevators. This works well if a business services clients in a particular niche and the building has a large number of that niche market. For example, a pharmacy would do well to advertise in the elevators of an outpatient medical complex or hospital.
16. Taxi companies that service the late night bar crowd can place their QR Codes inside bar and restaurant restrooms.
17. If your business is ever involved in a community related activity such as an awareness campaign, a fundraising or a petition, QR Codes can be an easy way to get a lot of people to sign up by placing the codes across town and getting them to sign up online.
18. Most people find filling in review and feedback forms tiring so having them scan a QR Code that enables them to review a business quickly online may result in more reviews for your business. Having them fill the reviews online on your Google Places listing or other review sites can improve your overall Search Engine Rankings.
19. Businesses that have a big transport fleet like trucks, buses, delivery vehicles, taxis etc can monitor their drivers and staff better by placing giant QR codes at the back of these vehicles so that the general public can report bad driving.
20. There are a lot of enterprising people who are now human billboards for local businesses. They can wear your QR Code on their T-shirts and walk around heavily populated areas of the town, and help people to scan the code that links to your offer.

Bonus Ideas

1. If you've ever lost customers because they arrived at your store after closing hours, then QR Codes placed in your storefront window can link them to your products online. Car dealerships can place codes on their vehicles that link late shoppers to a site with full info about the car on sale, while a bridal shop can link to their online bridal dress gallery. Another use is that people can use the QR Code to send you an email if they need to get a message to you.
2. Movie theatres can promote new movies by placing QR Codes on the movie posters that link to a YouTube trailer about the movie. The same works for music concerts, stand up comedy, book signings etc
3. Restaurants can use QR Codes to take advance orders for delivery or store pickup. The QR Code would link to their online ecommerce site or link to a live call

- operator who will take the order on the phone. Restaurants can also utilize their menus, napkins, wrapping and delivery packaging to advertise even more.
4. Businesses can help consumers find their way to their store location by linking the QR Code to a Google map. For example a late night restaurant targeting party goers can have a QR Code with the words “scan me to find pizza at 2 a.m.”
 5. Instead of having your customers cut out coupons out of their newspaper or magazine, why not have them scan a QR Code in the newspaper instead and save the coupon in their email?
 6. Run an educational institution and want to cut the cost of printing registration or application forms and avoid the manual sorting process? Have your students scan QR codes for different courses and events and sign up online.
 7. Travel agents can use QR Codes to help online ticket sales at airports. Many times people miss their flight or want to change travel plans so strategically placing QR Codes can help capture more clients who are already distressed and need an immediate solution.
 8. Cake decorators can market themselves to the large number of people who eat their confections at parties and weddings, by making edible QR Codes as part of their cake decoration. Just hope people scan it before they eat it!

8 Places you can place your QR Code for your small business

If you're having trouble thinking of where to place your QR Code for maximum exposure for your small business, here are ideas to help you do that.

1. **Your Business Card**-if you're going to be handing out your business cards all the time, you might as well place a QR Code on it. You can use the code to encourage first time customers by offering a coupon code or you can send clients to your online profile/resume.
2. **Newspaper Advertisements** – one of the ways to maximize your newspaper ads is to include a QR Code in your copy. Instead of people cutting out your ad, they can scan the code and save the information on their mobile phone instead.
3. **Classifieds**- you know that most classifieds charge by the word so QR Codes are a great way to cut costs if your target market likes to scour the classified ad section.
4. **Brochures/menus**-printing brochures, menus and fliers can be costly so why not get more value out of them by printing your QR Code on them too? Unfortunately most brochures and fliers often get tossed out, so QR Codes are a great way for readers to save your information on their phone before they do so.
5. **Store front window**- your store front window provides a very direct way to get your code in front of your customers as they walk in and out of your store. Make sure to include the code on your 'closed' sign too, so that customers can send you an email or get more information even when you are not around. You can also use QR code stickers on shopping mall floors and have them point a path to your shop within the mall.

6. **Within your store**- this is one of the most entertaining ways to use QR Codes. You can place the codes in various places around your store, so that your clients can discover them and get rewards. Apart from that you can also use QR codes on your physical products to help clients get more product information and reviews online about that product that may help them to make a purchasing decision
7. **Billboards**- if you are into billboard advertising, having a giant QR code printed on your banner greatly maximizes exposure of your business to drivers and passersby. They can quickly scan your code to get more information on their phone about your offer before driving off, so your marketing message is retained in their phone.
8. **Promotional Materials** - small businesses love to use promotional materials as a constant visual reminder to their clients. By adding QR codes to these materials, you provide an easy way to constantly remind your customers to access online information. You can print QR codes on your mugs, mouse pads, t-shirts, fridge magnets, company vehicles, bags, wrapping material or any other physical item that you use to brand your company

5 Common mistakes business owners make when using QR Codes and how to avoid them Part 1

QR Codes are two-dimensional codes that connect mobile users to your online presence and can be a powerful marketing strategy. However since it is a new trend, there often costly mistakes that business owners make that can be avoided. This article looks at the common mistakes and how to avoid them when using QR Codes to market your small business. Here are the first 3.

1. Not having a clearly defined campaign strategy.

Often business owners will jump ahead of themselves, print a few QR Codes, stick them somewhere and hope something happens. Yet for QR Codes to be effective, they must be the end result of a well thought overall strategy that is based on plenty of market research.

It is important to have specific goals your business wants to achieve such as to get more Facebook likes, to subscribe more people to your newsletter, to increase sales in the month of November 2011 etc.

In addition, it is vital to conduct thorough market research on your target market and to know how well they understand what QR Codes are, how to scan them etc. If you're target market is technophobic, you will need to incorporate a lot of educational instructions or decide that QR Codes may not be a good idea.

2. Not testing your QR Codes

A surprising mistake business owners make is not testing their codes. Although QR Codes are free to generate, your media ads are paid for so if a code is faulty, you will have wasted a lot of money on your ads.

You should test your code in the following ways:

- Make sure they work on various mobile devices

- Make sure they work with various code reading apps
- Make sure the color contrast between the code and its background is friendly so that it's possible to scan the code. Plus make sure the code is sized correctly.
- If you are using codes in outdoor locations, go to each of those sites and check that there is Wi-Fi in the location. After all with no internet connection, QR Codes will not connect to your website.

5 Common mistakes business owners make when using QR Codes and how to avoid them Part 2

In the first part of this article we looked at the first two common mistakes namely not having a clearly defined campaign strategy and not testing QR codes. Here are 3 more mistakes and how to avoid them.

1. Not having mobile-friendly website or landing page.

It's a shame to invest time and resources into a QR Code campaign yet not optimize your website for mobile users. If your mobile customers land on a page that they have difficulty viewing, they will hit the cancel button and forget about you. To improve their experience, make sure you create mobile friendly versions of your website with easy to click links and test how your mobile friendly site looks on different mobile phones. You can do this using mobile simulator software online if you can't access different phones

2. Not implementing a tracking system

Most offline business owners are not used to tracking their marketing campaigns because most offline marketing methods cannot be tracked. However QR Codes are computer generated so they can be tracked. Without a tracking system, a business is unable to monitor which codes are working best and if they are achieving the desired campaign goals. There are various free and paid code management tools that offer both basic and advanced statistics such as how many people landed on a website, how many scanned a code, where they did so and at what time.

3. Using long urls

One of the mistakes business owners make when generating QR Codes is using long website address URLs. The result is that when someone scans the code, their mobile browser finds it difficult to open that address. The best way to handle long URLs is to use link shorteners like bit.ly or owl.ly. By first shortening your website or landing page url and then generating a QR Code, scanners will get directed faster and smoothly to your website on their mobile phones

Now Go out there and QR your Buns Off!

A good resource to generate QR Codes is <http://www.qrstuff.com>