

Enhancing the Customer-Brand Interaction Through Mobile Marketing

Let's face it, smartphone technology is quickly overtaking the mobile phone market. According to one recent survey, 30 percent of North American shoppers own a smartphone.¹ And the number of U.S. smartphone users is expected to increase dramatically in 2011—to 49 percent of the cell phone market by the end of the third quarter.²

As the number of smartphone users continues to soar, more and more marketers are jumping on board with the latest mobile marketing trends. And it's no wonder why. Mobile marketing provides new and exciting opportunities for brands to provide instant gratification to consumers who want more information about a company, product, or service. Used correctly, it can prolong and enrich consumer interaction with—and thereby perception of—your brand.

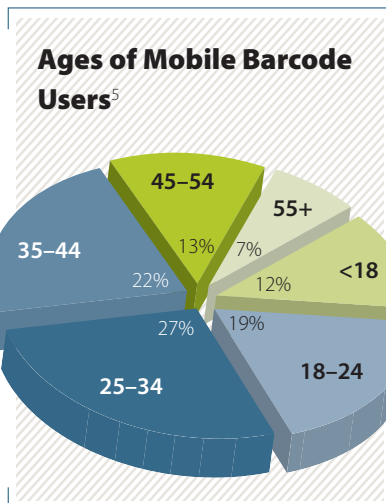
MOBILE BARCODES

One of the newest forms of mobile marketing is the use of mobile barcodes. These two-dimensional graphic images contain unique information such as text, photos, videos, music, and URLs. After downloading a free barcode reader application, smartphone users can access information and resources simply by taking a photo of the barcode.

Mobile barcodes are rapidly gaining popularity among marketers for their ability to garner attention and deliver a wide variety of content quickly and easily. In fact, 22 percent of Fortune 50 companies have used them for marketing purposes.³

But they're also popular with consumers. It's estimated that 30–40 percent of smartphone users have downloaded a barcode reader application. In addition, those who use mobile barcodes scan an average of 2–3 barcodes each month.⁴ The majority of those who scan mobile barcodes are men (73 percent), and scanning is most prominent among 25- to 34-year-olds.⁵

The two most common types of mobile barcodes are the quick response (QR) code and Microsoft Tag. Let's examine each in depth.



QR Codes

Originally developed in 1994 by Japanese company Denso Wave to track vehicle parts, the QR code has been widely used throughout Japan and Korea for some time. Today, it is quickly gaining popularity in the West. From July to December 2010, the number of QR code scans increased by 1,200 percent.⁶



Figure 1.0. QR Code

QR codes are black and white graphical images that can store up to 4,296 alphanumeric or 7,089 numeric characters. This allows for fast uploading and decoding of information by mobile camera phones and other machine vision applications.

Items or actions that can be delivered by QR codes include:

- URLs
- Sweepstakes entry forms
- Coupons
- Images
- Videos and mp3s
- Games
- vCards and vCalendar items
- Phone calls
- Application downloads
- Retail purchases
- Map locations
- Facebook likes and Twitter tweets
- Recipes
- Reviews
- Text messages and emails
- Instructions

QR Code Readers

The following are just a few examples of QR code readers that you can use:

ScanLife

getscanlife.com

MobileTag

m.mobiletag.com

Lynkee Reader

m.lynkee.com

Kaywa Reader

reader.kaywa.com

Because they are nonproprietary, QR codes can be generated and read for free by a wide variety of programs. Many QR code generators also offer analytics—usually for a fee—that allow you to track how your code is being used (e.g., number of scans, unique users, scan locations, phone type).

QR codes can be printed in any size (the largest to date was a 159-square-meter code created by Audi).⁶ However, it's best to keep the size above one square inch to ensure optimal readability.

Microsoft Tags

The Tag is Microsoft's proprietary mobile barcode. As a high-capacity color barcode (HCCB), the Tag uses colored triangles rather than black and white squares. If necessary, Tags can also be produced in black and white.

Tags work much in the same way as QR codes, but there are a few distinct differences. As previously mentioned, Tags can be created in color or black and white. They can also be customized to better represent your brand (with your logo, for example). In addition, Tags have smaller size requirements and can generally be printed at less than one inch.

Microsoft Tags offer free features including scanning, creating basic Tags, generating some custom Tags, and downloading simple analytics. More advanced features may come at an additional cost.

And because they are proprietary, you only need to deal with one source for creating and reading Tags. The Tag Reader application works on all smartphone platforms and reads all Microsoft Tags, so you never have to worry about compatibility issues.

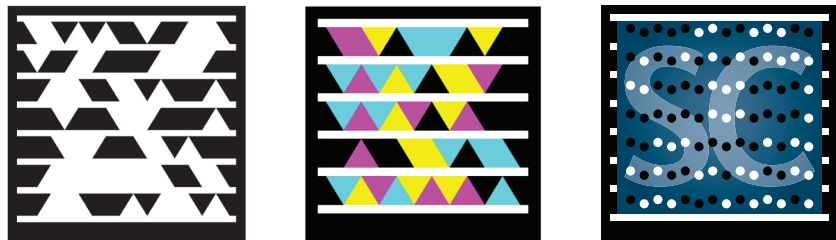


Figure 1.1. Microsoft Tags

USING MOBILE BARCODES TO BOOST YOUR MARKETING EFFORTS

Because mobile barcodes can deliver a wide variety of information or actions, they offer brands seemingly limitless possibilities for new and creative marketing campaigns. Let's explore just a few potential uses.

Coupon and discount offers – Discounts attract attention. In fact, according to a recent survey of smartphone users, 53 percent of current QR code users have scanned codes to secure a coupon, deal, or discount. And 87 percent plan to use a QR code for the same purpose in the future.⁷ Entice potential scanners with special promotions and discounts to help increase brand awareness and sales.

Sweepstakes or other contests – Not surprisingly, another popular use for QR codes among current and potential users is for sweepstakes entry.⁶ You can easily incorporate a sweepstakes promotion into your marketing materials to help garner attention. These promotions have the added benefit of allowing you to gather customer contact information for future promotions.

Brand and campaign awareness – You can use mobile barcodes to provide quick access to additional information about your brand or a specific campaign by directing users to a Web page, a microsite, an online game, or even a video. Just be sure the information is relevant and interesting enough to hold viewers' attention and make their effort worthwhile.

Event promotions – From concerts to conferences, mobile barcodes can help you get the word out about your special events. Place them in promotional materials to offer additional information to potential participants, or use them during an event to enhance the overall experience. Some events have even incorporated mobile barcodes on name tags to facilitate networking.

Retail sales – Recently developed technology is now allowing retailers to offer customers fast and convenient service through mobile barcodes. Whether in-store or online, customers can quickly purchase items just by scanning the code and entering their payment information. These transactions have the added benefit of collecting customer information for future promotions.

Contact and location information – Mobile barcodes make it easy to share your contact information or company location details. Use them on business cards to deliver vCard contact information directly to the scanner's smartphone. Or add them to marketing materials to direct users to your office or storefront via Google Maps.

72% of smartphone users say they would likely remember an advertisement that contained a QR code.⁷

KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL MOBILE BARCODE IMPLEMENTATION

Creating a successful mobile barcode campaign takes careful planning. The following tips can help ensure your efforts get the desired results.

- 1. Educate audiences about how to use the barcodes** – Don't assume that people already know about mobile barcodes and understand how to use them. After all, the U.S. market is fairly new to this technology. Provide brief instructions as well as a link to a reliable code reader.
- 2. Make it relevant and useful to consumers** – Content should add value to the customer experience and shouldn't duplicate information they already have. Otherwise, you risk alienating your audience—reducing any likelihood that they will return for more.
- 3. Follow size and placement guidelines** – Not all smartphone cameras are created equal. If your barcode is too small or has poor resolution, you run the risk of presenting potential users with scanning problems. Also, don't crowd your barcode. Giving it plenty of white space will make scanning easier.
- 4. If directing to a website, be sure it's mobile optimized** – This may seem obvious, but you want to be sure that the website or page that you direct users to is optimized for mobile phone use. Sending mobile phone users to a traditional website may annoy them and create the impression that your company isn't up to date on the latest technology.

MOBILE WEBSITES

Mobile marketing campaigns generally begin by creating a mobile-optimized website. These sites are usually simplified versions of a company's traditional website, but they can also be campaign-specific microsites or single-function Web pages. It all depends on what you are trying to communicate with your audience.

A good mobile website plan will typically begin by reviewing your traditional website's analytics. This will identify what pages are most utilized by your audience, thereby helping you decide what should and shouldn't be included on your mobile site.

When determining the content you want to include on your mobile website, think about the following.

- 1. Keep it simple** – A mobile site's content should be succinct and to the point, as most mobile devices have very small screens. In addition, think about your navigation—mobile users don't have a lot of time to spend searching through a complicated site. Most content should be accessible with one or two clicks.
- 2. Avoid heavy graphics or large images** – Too many design elements on your mobile site can make downloading and viewing your content time-consuming and frustrating for the end user. Instead, keep your site clean and simple.
- 3. Give users a choice** – Some mobile users may want to visit your traditional website for one reason or another; therefore, automatic redirects may be irritating. Give your mobile users the freedom to choose between your mobile and traditional sites.
- 4. Keep scrolling to a minimum** – Keeping content to a minimum will minimize the need for scrolling. However, if scrolling becomes necessary, be sure to use only vertical scrolling and avoid horizontal scrolling altogether.

As with your traditional website, you will want to consider the use of tracking analytics on your mobile site. This data can give you valuable insight into who is using your site, what content is most frequently viewed, what might need to be changed, and other helpful information.

REACHING OUT TO MOBILE PHONE USERS

Experts predict that the number of smartphone users will skyrocket in the next few years. Currently, there are 5 billion cell phone users worldwide, and it is expected that half of this market will own a smartphone by 2015.^{8,9} In light of these numbers, there truly is no better time than now to consider how you can incorporate mobile marketing into your business approach.

Mobile barcodes and websites are just two tactics to consider. A wide selection of methods, such as custom applications and text messaging campaigns, offer countless opportunities to garner more attention for your brand.

So consider reaching out to consumers in a new way today. With careful planning, a bit of creative thinking, and proper implementation, mobile marketing can help you provide useful information to your customers while improving their perception of your overall brand.

To find out how Snitily Carr can help with your mobile marketing efforts, contact us at 402.489.2121 or info@SnitilyCarr.com.

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