

How to use QR codes for marketing

 By [Bradley Maseko](#)

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Most South Africans have probably seen them in magazines, newspapers or even websites and still have no clue as to what they are and the purpose they serve; however, for those that have been introduced to the world of QR codes, they are experiencing the endless possibilities of using these codes to connect the physical world to the interactive world through mobile web access.



As an example of QR codes look and work, this one links to the Facebook page of Brandedyouth Insights.

[click to enlarge](#)

For those with limited information or no knowledge at all on QR codes, the following is a simplified breakdown.



"QR" stands for quick response and, for a clear definition on these codes, [Wikipedia states](#): "A QR code is a matrix barcode (or two-dimensional code) readable by QR scanners, mobile phones with a camera and smartphones. The code consists of black modules arranged in a square pattern on a white background. The information encoded can be text, URL or other data."

Relatively new

While these codes might seem relatively new to the scene, they were actually created as far back as 1994 in Japan and were primarily used for tracking components in factories. Their entrance onto the scene in South Africa, however, has been a bit slow because the demand and the use of smartphones had not reached the levels we are currently experiencing.

The advent and acceptance of smartphones, together with the ability to download QR code readers, has suddenly created a greater opportunity for marketers to interact with current and potential consumers through mobile web access, leading to QR codes becoming very relevant for connecting and sharing information.

So how does one generate a QR code?

Quite simply, actually; anyone with a computer can generate a QR code. All you have to do is search the Internet for "QR code generators". There are several sites that will illustrate how you can easily link information to the code.

Two important points to consider

However, there are two important points that need to be taken into consideration when you are generating a code.

1. The more data you put on your code, the more it will result in the pixels of your code being smaller and this might make it difficult for some QR code readers to scan your code.
2. Because the codes are scanned using phones, one has to make sure that the site or URL will load well on a mobile phone browser.

Once the code has been generated, the next phase is to display it such that the target will be able to see it and scan it. Most smartphones now come with preinstalled QR code readers; for those that don't, downloading them is a very easy process. Once the QR code is installed, you just have to point the camera to the code and the phone scans and links you directly to the desired information provided by the generator of the code.

Much can be done using QR codes in the advertising, publishing and branding sectors. While QR codes can be used to connect with consumers interactively, avoid linking to sites and URLs that don't add value but instead try to use the codes

for rich and relevant interactions.

Practical examples

Here are some practical examples of how to use QR codes:

- **Business cards:** QR codes on your business card can link directly to your website or to pages containing information about your services and products.
- **Emails:** QR codes used in direct mail to consumers will enhance their experience with the brand and deliver more information quickly.
- **Products:** QR codes embedded on the packaging of products can link to information on ingredients used, the production process or special discounts /coupons.
- **Commercials:** QR codes embedded in commercials can give you more information about the product being advertised, the cost and where you can purchase it.
- **Train stations and bus stops:** QR codes placed at bus stops and train stations link to information such as timetables and costs.
- **Restaurants:** QR codes placed at the entrances of restaurants link to information about the place, their menu and prices.

Asia has been the leading continent with regards to the use of QR codes and one can expect to find these codes on almost anything, from magazines to subways. The impact has been so great that McDonalds in Japan is using the codes on its packaging to direct customers to a webpage displaying nutritional information about the different products.

View some of the ways in which the code is being used in Japan.

Smartphones to play a pivotal role

The increase in the number of smartphone users and the increasing popularity of mobile web access, especially in the youth market, is going to play a pivotal role in the use and acceptance of QR codes in SA. The youth are tech-savvy and beyond just using their smartphones for social networking; they are now keen to discover what else their phones can do.

The student newspaper at Wits University has paved the way and has started using QR codes on its front page. We can expect the major tabloids to soon follow suit and we will also start to see these codes appearing more in magazines, billboards and on different products.

The ways of engaging and connecting with consumers are changing; marketers need to adapt to the current trends in the market in order to ensure that their products and messages stay relevant and that they remain in touch with their consumers. QR codes are one such trend. New and effective uses for these codes are cropping up each day and, for those who thought that these codes would be a fad, there is a need to rethink where they stand and start looking at the endless possibilities that exist when making use of QR codes in marketing.

For marketers seeking to provide more information and to interact with consumers to gain a competitive edge in the market, the use of QR codes in a creative and relevant way will, without doubt, be a step in the right direction.

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