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Business at its best

The correct way to implement QR codes

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Insert typical sceptical line about why QR codes do not work

No, this is not just another rambling piece about why QR codes do not work.

Ninety percent of you reading this will be mobile marketers, advertisers or enthusiasts, so I do not need to teach you to suck eggs telling you how QR codes help connect the physical and digital worlds and how they help brands have that secondary conversation in a channel that normally lacks a voice.

Nor will I go on to lecture you at QR codes' greatness. Instead I want to take a look at why they cut so such stick and if they deserve it.

Penetration
Top 3 countries by smartphone penetration

#1 Australia

#2 Singapore

#3 Hong Kong

Top 3 countries by QR usage

#1 USA

#2 Germany

#3 Britain

Whilst the sources of these statistics vary on their approach of data collection there is definitely a disparity between the people that can and those that do.

Whilst I have limited experience in the states I do know Britain and Australia quite well and I would put usage differences down to consumer knowledge and creative use.

This is a chicken-and-egg question: consumers will only look to investigate and learn if they see a personal value, that value is delivered or not by the creative/media agency and their brand.

QR #fails

The 'wrong' usage of QR codes does two things. First, it undermines the creative/brand it represents and, next, it undermines the use and learning of the consumer and, in turn, undermines the next QR code they see.

All you need to do if put your consumer hat on and try to understand what is going through their head, think of it in

the same way of the holy MREC banner. I see a banner, I click on it if a) it offers me something extra that I know I will enjoy or b) it is something I am interested in and have time to see it.

It is when the consumer hat is not worn that usage that undermines everyone else happens.

QR codes' "wrong" usage has led to many a blog dedicated to displaying their arguably thoughtless use. WTF QR codes and Worst QR fails are my favorites.

I personally have seen in the last two weeks: QR code leading to a complicated desktop site, QR code on the underground (where we cannot get signal), QR code eight feet up on an out-of-home installation and the best, a QR code on the side of a bus.

I have however seen some great usages recently: on a bag of coffee linking me to the grower's personal story on YouTube and a QR code leading me to the entry page of the competition to which the poster was referring.

Cracking the code
So what is it that differentiated a good use of QR codes from a bad one? Here are six key factors to think about when using QR codes:

1. What is in it for the user?

Only use QR codes if you are giving consumers something interesting with which they will want to interact.

2. Tell them what it is you are offering them when they scan
Everyone likes to know where they are going.

3. Tell them how to get there
Chances are they might not know what a QR code is, tell them what they need and how to do it.

4. Give them a fair chance of getting there
Where are you placing the QR code? Is it somewhere they have time and ability to scan? Is it high-dwell? Do they have signal? Is it in their eyeline?

5. Make sure they get there
Use a short URL. The shorter the URL the simpler the QR, the simpler the QR the quicker it will scan (the scan will activate). Use dark colors as the contrast helps scan quicker. Test on as many devices.

6. Count them when they get there
Use Google Analytics or another tracking service. Track your conversions and attribute conversions to your QR code.

NOW THAT YOU have mastered QR codes, look out for the next thing to link your physical viewers to digital fans: Hyper-localized keyword-driven mobile search and Near Field Communication (NFC).

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