

COLUMNS

## 7 deadly sins as applied to QR codes

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QR codes have been mocked, debased, abused and downright hated, oftentimes with good reason.

There is no doubt that QR codes have gotten a bad name amongst the media cognoscenti. Much ado has been made about the Tumblr blog *Pictures Of People Scanning QR Codes* (spoiler alert: the site is empty implying that no one actually scans QR codes).

But like most tools, QR codes are only as good as the people who wield them and without a doubt people have been wielding them poorly, sinfully even.

Below are the seven deadliest sins that I have seen committed by folks using QR codes.

*(Note: The author begs artistic license in his alterations of the actual sins for the purposes of this article.)*

### 1. Sloth

By far the most pervasive sin of all.

If you are going to use a QR code, do not be lazy about it. Test out the QR code to ensure it scans properly. Work through the entire user flow. Think through the messaging. And, for goodness sake, make sure your destination is mobile-optimized.

### 2. Gluttony

Just because they exist and are free to use does not mean that you should engorge your marketing collateral with QR codes.

Like all tools, be judicious in where and how you use them. QR codes are great to use when directing people to a campaign-specific page on a Web site which is cumbersome to type into a mobile browser as opposed to just sending them to your Web site homepage.

### 3. Parsimony

You are asking consumers to take out their phones, select a QR scanning app and then scan your code all whilst they were in the middle of doing something else such as reading a magazine, waiting for the train or watching some television.

If they are being generous with their time, do not shortchange them back make sure the experience is worth their time. Or do not bother using a QR code at all.

### 4. Shame

Do not tuck your QR code away in a corner of your ad because it is ruining your design.

Do not obfuscate the call to action or drown it out in a sea of competing messages.

Do not let it be an afterthought to the ad. If you are going to use a QR code, make it proud.

#### 5. Ignorance

Use a short URL redirect embedded in your QR code to get measurement data and analytics.

Since QR codes encode URLs directly within them, the only way to get usage data from a QR code is to use a short URL to do the measurement and tracking and then redirect users to the original destination.

#### 6. Arrogance

Do not assume everyone knows what QR codes are or how to use them.

Do put calls to action next to the QR codes so people know what to expect when they scan the code.

If you can, use a text keyword as an alternate for those who do not have a smartphone or a QR code reader.

#### 7. Stupidity

My favorite sin of all.

Do not put a QR code where someone can't scan them. Like in subways where you do not get reception. Or on billboards on the highway or on the back of trucks, where drivers could lose their lives trying to scan your code. Or in airplane magazines where mobile phones are supposed to be switched off.

*Bonus sin:*

#### 8. Optimism

Do not assume QR codes are a silver bullet or a cure-all.

Do not assume that just because it is there people are going to scan it.

Do not assume that hundreds of thousands of people will scan your code, even when done right. It is one of many tools marketers can use to add interactivity and responsiveness to their static media and should be used judiciously.

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