

COLUMNS

All bar code readers are not created equal

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On June 26, 1974, the first barcode using the Universal Product Code (UPC) was scanned to buy a pack of chewing gum.

In 1994, 20 years after that pack of Wrigley's gum was first scanned, the QR code was invented by a Toyota subsidiary in Japan. QR codes were born.

Today, not only is bar code scanning technology in the hands of every retailer, it is in the hands of nearly every customer. QR and bar code scanning applications are accessible simply through an app and the camera on their mobile device.

Part of the success of QR codes can be attributed to the ease of implementation and their versatility.

Far beyond a means of simply pushing out marketing materials, QR codes today are used for diverse implementations such as order tracking or sharing safety materials via on-campus police cruisers.

QR codes are shared on art displays to learn more about the pieces and artists, on sushi to tell the food's story, for remembering Canadian war veterans, to combat showrooming, and much more.

There is even greater potential for QR codes as an integral part of the path to payments, in mobile ticketing, for consumer goods packaging information, and in collaboration with other technologies such as augmented reality.

Consumer experience

A recent survey from PRS found that while 94 percent of consumers could recognize a QR code, only 47 percent of those consumers had actually scanned a code themselves.

Many consumers are unaware that they need to download an app to scan codes. And navigating through the confusion of bar code readers in the app store is a challenging task.

At latest count, when searching on QR reader in the United States, the Apple App Store has more than 400 readers whereas the Android store has 1,000-plus readers. (This is the number of readers listed when search term "QR reader" is entered.)

These readers include the simple, a basic scan to the complex, a reader that allows you to create codes and fully personalize your scanning experience.

However, what most QR readers are missing is consumer preference to simply read the code quickly, reliably and effortlessly each and every time.

One bad experience with a QR code scan can turn a customer off from future scanning.

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A successful experience, however, can have an incredible impact on the brand through increased consumer mobile engagement.

QR code scans done well can create brand ambassadors and scan-ready consumers for future QR code opportunities. And what makes a good reader is not all the whiz-bang features, but in fact the decoding algorithms which are the foundation of the reader itself.

Reader quality

QR code reader apps are not all built the same. The majority of bar code readers on the market use a free decoding library as the foundation element of their system.

These free decoding libraries are average at best and are not available for all mobile operating systems.

There are, however, a few companies who started developing QR readers for industrial environments and, as such, the scanners have been built for difficult scanning conditions with low lighting or poor-quality images that results in higher quality and a consistent experience for all scans each and every time.

These industry pioneers have QR readers with decoding engines that are stable.

Over time, their decoding algorithms have been refined, resulting in reliable readers that are well beyond the capabilities of the off-the-shelf engines from newcomers.

These pioneer readers support the proper handling of cameras across a large number of different devices, a well-tested viewfinder module, quicker decoding on slow CPUs and omni directional code reading.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT mobile QR and mobile bar code reader partner can make or break a mobile campaign.

The wrong one could negatively impact how consumers view your brand.

Consumers have highly capable devices at their fingertips and they are ready, willing and able to interact. It is up to brands to make sure that those interactions are optimized by delivering the best mobile experience.

In 2013, mobile bar codes will be an integral component of mobile marketing, helping to drive engagement and, ultimately, ROI. The question is, which mobile bar code reader will you recommend for your campaign?

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