



BREAKING THE QR CODE

BY MAX WALKER, AM

The average person is not yet fully aware of what a QR (Quick Response) Code is. Especially its functionality. But, I believe QR Codes can open a new world of opportunity.

Many people fear change. They hate to leave the security of their comfort zone. Outside, dwells that nasty little four-letter word, FEAR - the darkroom where negatives develop. Voices in your head verbalise self-doubt.

"But what if it fails? What if I embarrass myself and the company?"

Nevertheless, in this uncomfortable unknown environment reside growth, education, fun and success.

If we do not embrace change then we will certainly miss the signposts to the future. Do nothing and everyone passes us by! Notably our competition.

On one of these imaginary signposts is a QR Code ... symbolically waiting to be scanned ... a window into tomorrow - a bridge.

Most people are perplexed by the black and white box - a miniature, pixilated, cross word puzzle some might suggest. But, loaded into the back end of this simple graphic footprint is an innovative marketing tool that is revolutionising the

way business and brands connect and better engage consumers ... with clever content that is relevant, rewarding and stimulating.

When accessed (by scanning) via a Smart Phone 'loaded' with a QR (Quick Response) code reader ... the magic happens. The real world becomes connected to the digital ... paper becomes text, slide show and/or a high definition video.



Code readers are free. Download from iTunes. ScanLife is one I use.

Denso Wave Inc, a subsidiary of Toyota to keep track of inventory, created it in 1994. The idea wasn't locked up tightly by patent.

The technology remains openly accessible to anybody who wishes to utilise the benefits ... expanding imagination and potential.

“ A lot of times people people don't know what they want until you show them.” Steve Jobs

Given the vast scope this releases to the global market place, it is a brilliant opportunity to create an open forum, where we can all take responsibility, campaign and drive the uptake in Australia.

Like all new ideas ... education is both the key and the challenge. Over coming the unknown and making comfortable the process ... we all have a role to play here. The more we talk about the concept, the value, the extreme creative uses and outcomes, beyond traditional buying and selling, the more rapid this transition. People want information where and when it suits them. Mobile phones have become more important than keys and wallet - only 35% of usage is now for calls.

In Japan and Korea, QR Codes have become a staple of society ... so, too, in

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the UK and Europe. In the USA 50% of all residential real estate marketing has a mobile component. The mobile phone has become an extension of who we are and how we connect. Part of the QR success is that it requires interaction to be useful.

The jaw dropping exploits of a skilled magician has captivated everyone, at some time. The magnetic attraction is watching an object disappear or, unexpectedly, a live rabbit is plucked from the depths of an empty top hat. Smiles and applause all round result.

"As with magic, the better the trick (content and context) the more compelling is the effectiveness of a QR Code."

Many people/businesses mistakenly believe it is sufficient to usher a user (scanner of the code) direct to a heavily populated web site. This is not magic. It is predictable, uninspired thinking. It is disappointing to experience. Expectations are much higher in today's tech savvy world.



I turned Derryn Hinch's rib-cage into a mobile website

If a person takes the time to scan your QR Code ... they should be rewarded with a special outcome, a surprise tool or unique destination. Otherwise, the exercise is a waste of time. You will never get them back. Give value entertainment, a 'deal' or fast track a process. Then people will talk about your 'magic' code and what it conjures. The ability to forward makes it viral ... Movie goers now expect to not only watch a riveting Stephen Spielberg quality 'trailer' that engrosses interest, but they

also expect to be able to purchase a ticket and secure a seat number on their hand held device.

We used to have to print out from our PC our purchase docket along with the two dimensional bar code to show evidence of payment at the ticket box. This process is, quickly becoming superseded. Similarly, the airport experience is changing dramatically.

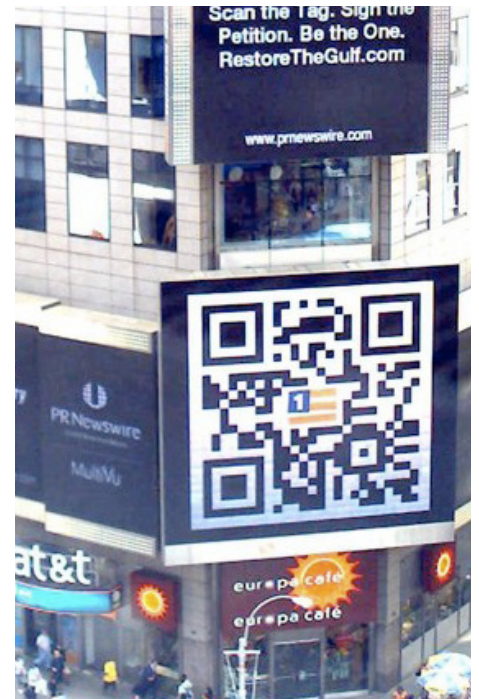
We are in the midst of a mobile phenomenon. An increasing volume of Internet access is now via a mobile platform leaving the PC behind. Video is king and preferred in byte-sized bits launched in the palm of the hand. Here the QR codes are very attractive gateways.

Earlier in my life I practiced architecture as my chosen profession. I fell in love with the blank sheet of paper ... I enjoyed using a graphic language, together with words, to create two dimensional blue prints or plans. These were the key strategy documents for building three-dimensional spaces. Today, architects use CAD machines to enhance imagination and structural possibility. Now a quick time virtual reality walk through, or fly through, will provide a virtual experience of what the building might look and feel like on completion. A valuable tool when selling ideas and emotion. Enabling dreams to become a reality in the real estate, construction marketplace A3 dimensional property experience!

Recently, strolling past a building site in the buzzing Chapel Street shopping precinct in Prahran, Victoria, I noticed with interest Sportsgirl's window shopfront. The popular clothing store was closed for substantial renovations. Here is a perfect example. Never miss an opportunity to innovate. Giant billboards double as construction hoardings (normally ugly, forgettable affairs) and become interactive shopping windows (media gateways). Utilising blocked out windows concealing the renovation site as a QR Code backdrop is a definitive advertising apparatus. Both elegant and clever.

Large multi-storey building sites are more and more using similar surfaces to attract and engage passing traffic.

Big money is starting to flow into billboards which now become a giant access to dynamic video content, competitions, sales offers... yes, we are standing on the edge



of a paradigm shift in the way consumers interact with brands, corporations and philanthropic causes. It used to be the brands that were all important. Now it is also about the voice and choice of the consumers.

I believe plans are in place to erect interactive facades around the country, at train stations, airports and shopping centres. These large, flat display windows house images of colourful products and/or services which consumers will be able to purchase - by scanning the item's QR Code with their Smart Phone. The scan literally unlocks a virtual store 'entry' to the mobile online shop where they can buy the desired goods and products with the press of a finger - seamless! The 'selection' is then delivered to a home address. Easy. Impressive.

It's another powerful opportunity to engage with customers particularly outside of business hours and timetables.

Shoppers in South Korea buy items from butchers and supermarkets from virtual billboards mounted in train stations, on their way home.

Expect commuters to be given more and more opportunities like these globally ... literally the train is coming ... and we all need to buy into the journey. It is part of the future.

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Retailers are now getting a greater understanding that there has been a quantum shift in buying habits - and not just at our desktop computer! Shoppers are engaging while travelling, out and about, even whilst browsing in the side stores. The velocity of growth here is where real growth will happen. Retailers cannot ignore the 'shift'. QR Codes are more plentiful everyday.

Real Estate is another profession being encouraged to re-evaluate the way business will be done in the future - advertising and experiencing property 24/7.

Imagine, you are walking the dog and under-dressed ... you are in the real estate market ... you are attracted to a property "Auction in 2 weeks" ... the billboard contains a QR Code ... out comes images, plans, estimates and even a video 'walk through' in some cases. These all reside on a mobile phone platform including contact numbers ... forward to your partner, wherever they might be, for approval ... "make the appointment to inspect". It's still Sunday morning and a coffee beckons ... the dog's walk has begun ... so too the 'engagement' with the property manager ... all at your finger tips ... a unique mobile web platform for each property. Linked to Facebook and Twitter channels. All scanning and property sites access is monitored. A vendor report is generated - value add to the vendor.

It makes the head spin in terms of all the possible ways to use the QR Code ... to

increase effectiveness and user experience ... the analytics dashboard helps tracking, capture and strategy.

There is still much room for experimentation while mobile marketing is taking shape ... but the speed of change and implementation is increasing. "Fortune favours the brave" in a world increasingly dependent on mobile platforms and social media ...

Mobile phones give agents a defined competitive advantage and vendors the opportunity to maximise 'opens' 24/7.

I get excited about QR Codes when wearing my writer's cap. There is the potential to have a QR Code on the back sleeve of a book which takes the reader to the author, like myself, in a 100% to camera format, talking about the essence of what content resides inside the covers - even tell a short story. Life and engagement is about connecting through unique, unordinary, authentic stories.

If only in one of my earlier titles, "How to Hypnotise Chooks", I had not only the text and the beautiful, thick 'n' thin, black lines of WEG's (my mate, the late, Bill Green) illustrations bringing my stories to life. BUT also on the top of each new chapter perched a catchy title plus a QR Code! This would have added the dimension of television to the book. Audio and video streaming on the smart phone in one hand, paper version in the other. You have to be excited about this if you are a writer, communicator ... thought leader.

Promote your books, products, services on postcards using QR Codes ... revealing recognisable faces, voices and trusted people. Try it. The cost is not expensive.

Thus, imagine, if every piece of paper, brochure, postcard, leaflet that is relevant to your business was supported by a mini-television clip slide show, graph or graphic note with audio? Extremely powerful connector.

In Tokyo, Japan, the use is way more edgy. Tee Shirts declare if a person is single via the QR factor, Tattoos embed their multi-dimensional message, multi-story buildings are clad with media gateways. Laser-etched QR Codes on tombstones take people to memorial websites and videos of the deceased ... what next?

Real estate companies like Oliver Hume, Marshall White, Buxton's, Greg Hocking and Noel Jones are a few who have embraced the potential and doing all they can to 'fast track' the use and understanding of these curious little graphic chequerboards. Others have embraced the need to mobilise in different ways ...

QR Codes may even help re-vitalise the realm of print marketing into the future. How? This is a great question!

Newspapers and glossy magazines are already occasionally using the tags to support campaigns and extra advertising revenue is resulting.

How much cost is involved in adding a QR Code to a magazine or newspaper's existing advertisements - not much. ROI is fantastic.

Connecting print to mobile is exciting. Newspapers and magazines could become more financially viable. All print forms could become interactive ... bringing it alive not killing print off. And it is trackable ... how many views. This has to be attractive to advertisers.

Smart phone usage in western society is expected to increase at a significant rate in 2012 ... and those that don't establish themselves with smart technology now will be left in the dark ... a long way back.

Car manufacturers, Mercedes Benz, Jaguar, Land Rover and BMW have already tasted success with media streams and mobile platforms.

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As an event the Australian Formula One race was scattered with impressive QR Code examples for a broad range of automotive products ...

Heineken beer successfully sport QR Codes on their bottles. Wine makers and labels are putting their heads together to produce terrific selling opportunities ... and database capture. Smart tablet menus at the table ... revealing DVD explanations of food and beverage.

What potential for the travel industry? Every destination brand should have a QR code gate way to video ... trains, planes, boats and buses.

Where do we start ... endless ... compelling opportunity to showcase ... the experience, costs and indelible benefits?

Airlines and the travel industry will see QR Codes become part of everyday landscape using opportunity on ticketing, in-flight video and magazines.

Coffee clubs and incentives for free coffee are now wonderful examples of mobile phones and QR Codes ... No rubber stamps and squiggly signatures.

Loud public acclaim is already acknowledging this eco friendly form of advertising ... engagement ... and conversation.

"C'mon ... Create your own footprint, green DNA, or QR Code!"

Content and context will always win over straight technology. Average never wins. It is all about the idea.

In Australia, the issue we're facing isn't the technology; it has existed for 17 years. It is the execution. We need to think more laterally. Open our minds ... our potential. Our challenge is to educate. Remember in the not too distant past, when computers were terrifying in their complexity? The first mobile phones, fax machines, iPods and iPads? Emails and the Internet, Credit Cards, Bar codes and ATM's?

It isn't just a matter of the consumers knowing what to do with the QR Code. The PR marketing departments of businesses learning how to make these boxes more relevant to mobile users is crucial. The future generations will have QR readers as a standard and

they will be cheaper. The function of scanning is in its infancy. We have to design an experience that allows for integration and multiple touch points ... they don't have to be black and white and forgettable. SET (Japan) are making designer QR Codes that are works of art ... and they are no longer the only group doing this.

"The QR Code is part of the 'look' ... the graphic design in a campaign."

We are hearing about groups such as MVS and the NFC as competitors to the QR ... They all have their place ... they offer different advantages ... all viable tools for connecting mobile users to online actions. This is for a future discussion. So too is the 'behind the scenes' needs and quirks of mastering the systems that drive these services.

A QR Code doesn't need an expensive site system to run it. The value point is the creative strategy, or communication architecture, you apply to the technology. The process of formulating a strategy is via a Whiteboard session - this has been described as "engageneering" - works for me!

Just because someone owns a smart phone will not translate to "... therefore, they must be a QR Code addict"!?? It will be like the adoption of Smart Phone Applications for extra functionality. Apps took time to reach tipping point ...now both Android and iTunes offer millions ...

Walk down the street in Copenhagen and count the codes. In London it would appear as if every business has one for something. No different in Bangkok. Let's continue to make Australia a smart country ... a leader in technology take up and implementation.

Telcos and phone providers need to be schooling customers about QR Codes as part of the selling and story telling process ... just as they did with the mobile web. Businesses need to own the education process as well. Vodafone did it well at the Australian Formula One event ... it

helped that it sponsored a race team. So too Optus and Telstra and their alliances. Most scans go directly to websites that are not optimised for mobile devices. Bad. We need to get smarter and more innovative with QR Code users and mobile friendly websites.

People who suggest QR Coding is a fad, I believe, are naive. It has been too widely adopted for almost two decades to die. It will just evolve into good, better, great.

Examine how well baby boomers have adapted to mobile technology and now can't get enough of the iPad and Smart Tablets. Humans are visual animals. We should embrace the potential of this doorway ... it's limited only by our ingineering

Yes, I believe QR Codes are a call to action in themselves. In the short term QR Codes and the creativity, flexibility and efficiency they offer will become a major way brands and communities engage and products are sold - 24/7.

What is really exciting is what we have not yet imagined or created! Start with an open mind and blank screen or sheet of paper. Manifest your future.

Reading the trends, following the trends are the proven axis to creating sound business decisions. Join me on this adventure into exploring the new wonders of cyber space by stepping on and scanning these pixilated digitiles.

