

QR codes bring email, mobile coupons to life



By Wikus Engelbrecht

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Marketers today face a dizzying array of options designed to help capture audience attention and drive sales. While email marketing through newsletters and coupons remains one of the most popular and successful vehicles for driving both online and in-store sales, mobile technologies have quickly gained momentum as the go-to choice for reaching consumers who are increasingly dependent on their mobile devices for everything from socialising to banking and shopping. *This piece was co-authored by Kara Gray from New Horizon Consulting.**

The move to mobile marketing is driven largely by the rapid consumer adoption of cellular and smartphone devices. It's astonishing that of the more than 7 billion people on earth, 5.1 billion own a cell phone, and in the US more than 90% of citizens keep their mobile device within reach 24/7 - according to findings by the Mobile Marketing Association, Morgan Stanley and Jupiter Research.

Attempting to capitalise on this immense market opportunity may at first seem like an overwhelming challenge. However, the emergence of QR code (quick response code) technology is making it easier than you might think for even the smallest businesses to take advantage of the mobile marketing movement.

Using QRs to drive email engagement, create new consumer touch points

Traditionally, email marketing has centred on distributing emails embedded with specially-encoded hotlinks to customers who are automatically rewarded with a discount, free shipping or other purchase incentive simply by clicking the link. Most often, this interface takes place on a PC and is designed primarily to drive online sales. However, as consumers increasingly turn to mobile technologies, marketers are looking for new ways to bridge the gap between the PC and mobile device to keep up with this dynamic consumer behaviour.

Embedding QR codes that launch interactive mobile experiences within traditional email messages enables marketers to not only add an interactive element to relatively static email content but also create new touch points to communicate with their audience. For the recipient, the process is quite simple and intuitive, considering that the vast majority of mobile users have their phone within reach at any time (I'll bet yours is resting nearby, right now). The recipient views the email on his or her PC screen and, intrigued by the call to action to scan the QR code, picks up his or her phone and snaps it, which immediately launches a specific microsite, video or other interactive content.

Not only is the recipient rewarded with this rich and engaging content and perhaps a coupon, but the marketer can now easily ask for the recipient's mobile number to continue sending offers directly to the mobile device, opening this important new line of communication to create yet another touch-point for ongoing interaction.

QRs make mobile engagement fast and easy

The ability to enhance virtually any static marketing piece - billboard, print ad, bus stop signage, etc. - with a QR code is a powerful, yet easy way to capture the mobile audience. Consumers love the ease, immediacy and convenience of simply taking a quick snapshot to access interactive content. Meanwhile, marketers enjoy the ability to track user access, interaction and effectiveness of the campaign. Again, engaging mobile users through QR codes also provides the perfect opportunity to solicit mobile numbers to continue the conversation with future offers.

Embedding QR codes with mobile coupons can drive both in-store and online sales, as consumers are 10 times more likely to redeem mobile coupons as they are traditional ones - according to Borrell Associates. Mobile coupons delivered through QR code can even be configured for timed expiration from the time they are unlocked to drive immediate or delayed response.

In one article - published by *Mobile Marketer* - about how a leading global fast-food chain is continuing its mobile reign by pushing QR codes - Marci Troutman, CEO of SiteMinis was quoted as saying: "Our experience shows QR codes do drive brand engagement, and these will ramp up as phones get smarter, scanning a QR code has become quite a bit easier with the number of apps available to capture any QR code quickly,"

"We believe that this method of gaining information about products/services will grow exponentially over the next few years, to product packaging, signage, direct mail and print advertising," she said.

Aside from the ease and convenience of mobile coupons, consumers are drawn to the perceived exclusivity of the experience. While anyone can read the ad or view the billboard, not everyone can take advantage of the special QR code deal - only those with phone-in-hand can get in on the secret. The mystery and intrigue of what awaits behind the code combined with this "insider" feel is a powerful incentive for users to snap the code.

In addition to driving mobile engagement, QR codes can even be used to track back to email communication, once again bridging the gap between the two media. Easy-to-use QR code generators can take any email message and convert it to a code that can be placed anywhere, in print or online. When a mobile user scans the code, it automatically generates an email message with the content you've designed, ready for sending. This tactic provides an easy way for mobile users to share your content with email contacts and potentially earn rewards for doing so.

QR codes & mobile marketing made easy

While all of this high-tech mobile marketing magic may sound overwhelming, especially for small businesses, it's actually quite easy to devise a comprehensive and integrated mobile program, complete with QR code technology.

For starters there are a number of [free QR Code generators](#) that are simple to use: just drop in the text, URL, content or action to be performed, and copy and paste the resulting image into an email, newsletter or load it onto a mobile site.

Optimising email offers for mobile customers

It's highly likely that people are reading emails on mobile devices, right now, even if the marketer doesn't know about it or plan for it.

A high percentage of people probably have no idea whether their emails are being read on mobile devices and, as a result, are missing the unique opportunity to communicate with their customers with emails that are content-, design-and offer-appropriate for today's on-the-go consumers.

Marketers can safely assume that a significant portion of their emails is being read on mobile phones. So for those who are looking to provide messages to mobile consumers that are specifically differentiated to cater for the platform, it makes perfect sense to partner with an email service provider (ESP) that offers feedback about which device and OS each

subscriber is checking emails on.

Says Barbara Ulmi, marketing head for GraphicMail: "Marketers should make every effort to get data on who in their email list views mailers on a mobile device or on a desktop. This crucial information gives you the power to further segment your audience and make a positive impact on subscriber experience."

"The trouble is, though, that often people have great difficulty in identifying their mobile audience, simply because the marketing software they're using is too limited to provide any reliable info on this."

"GraphicMail has perceived the need for adding a mobile layer to the campaign feedback that users have available to them, so we've become one the first ESP's in the industry to offer detection by device," concluded Ulmi.

Knowing which device or platform users prefer cuts both ways

QR codes have a lot of potential to increase campaign interaction, but at the same time it's also impractical to send QR code promotions to subscribers who normally read their emails exclusively on a mobile phone (since they'd have to use someone else's phone to take a snap-shot it before reaching what you want them to see) adding an unnecessary and even slightly awkward extra step to the content funnel.

Instead, messages can be differentiated in accordance with device preference so desktop email readers receive the QR code (that they can easily scan with their own phones) and mobile users are given a more direct channel - such as a page link or a button.

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