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## Scan This: New Research Offers Insight on the Effectiveness of QR Codes

by [Nancy Pekala](#)

They're everywhere. From print ads, direct mail and in-store signage to television and billboards, QR (Quick Response) codes are hot. While the popularity of these 2D black and white square images which can be scanned into smartphones continues to grow, so too does the uncertainty of their marketing effectiveness.

What QR codes offer the marketer real advantages or are they just the latest fad? To find out, strategic marketing firm Russell Herder recently conducted an online survey of over 500 U.S. residents to gain awareness levels of QR codes and attitudes toward their use among consumers.



The results? The [research](#) study, "*The QR Question: Are QR Codes an Effective Marketing Tool for Engaging Customers,*" suggests that a substantial number of consumers demonstrate a significant lack of understanding as to what QR codes are or how they work. Additionally, respondents indicated that the process of using the marketing device often is just not worth the effort.

Key findings of the research include:

- Seventy-two percent of consumers say they have seen a QR code, yet nearly three in 10 *do not know what it is*.
- Nearly four in five of those who have scanned a QR code have done so more than once.
- Only 31 percent report that what they receive in return is worth their time.
- Consumers who have seen a QR code, know what it is and have scanned one with their mobile device tend to be younger (ages 18-34), male and regularly go online via their phone.
- Among people who know what a QR code is, and own a mobile device that is capable of going online, 54 percent say they are likely to scan one.

Carol Russell, CEO of Russell Herder, suggests the research can help marketers better identify effective applications for QR codes to reach consumers and optimize results.

"The mere employment of QR codes is not enough to drive consumer engagement and marketing results," she said. "It is important for marketers to know their audience and how they will react to this tool and, ultimately how to maximize the opportunity."

## Five Takeaways for Marketers:

How can marketers ensure their QR code campaign is effective worth consumers' time and effort? Russell Herder offers the following five recommendations:

- **Understand Your Demographic**  
The novelty of digital technology sometimes causes marketers to lose sight of their demographics' behaviors. It is important to remember that although smartphone adoption and usage is increasing across virtually all demographics, the heaviest users (and documented QR devotees) still skew younger (typically ages 18-34) and male.
- **Consider the Medium**  
Brands that place QR codes in 30-second television spots or roadside billboards must realize the inherent time limitations these mediums present. Marketers should be wary of using a QR code when an easier means of engagement is available. The ideal location for a QR code is one where the user has both enough time to pull out their phone to scan the code and no other means to quickly engage with the messaging.
- **Add Value**  
Novelty alone is not going to motivate people to pull out their phone and scan. If you expect people to engage with your marketing, you need to give them a reason to do so. Consider the example of European clothing retailer Diesel which placed QR codes on in-store signage that enabled scanners to "like" specific products publicly via Facebook.
- **Cut Through Clutter**  
Since the vast majority of QR codes appear to be virtually identical, it is easy for them to become "invisible" to consumers. So long as enough contrast exists between the foreground and background elements, there is virtually no limit to the creative expression that can be explored with QR codes. Sandcastles, sugar cubes and even Tetris blocks have been used to creatively construct readable QR codes.
- **Track Results**  
Even if you are not employing a platform with robust analytics, there are still ways to measure the success of your QR code initiatives. Proper UTM coding of links can isolate traffic to a website generated by QR codes. Similarly, measuring opt-ins (email, SMS or both) generated via QR codes can provide another metric of success.

[Paul Prisco](#), Founder and Principal at Dog Food Design, a design and direct marketing agency for brands, agrees that it's important that marketers evaluate the effectiveness of QR campaigns. Writing in the Marketing Research Group of [AMACONnect](#), the AMA's online community for marketers, Prisco suggests that marketers avoid three key QR code blunders:

- **Placing QR Codes in Remote Areas**  
QR codes are useless if they can't be scanned. If you're placing QR codes in areas like subways it's not going to fly. Scout out the area first to make sure you'll get service.
- **Directing QR Codes to A Desktop Rather than Mobile Web Site**  
You can't measure anything in marketing without isolating the call to action, Prisco points out. If you're directing people from a print ad to a desktop site you're making measurement

difficult. Ideally, you want a simple mobile site, which is effortless in terms of usability and has a support mechanism for a call to action. Consider directing consumers to a YouTube video, map or phone call—without a mobile site. A landing page that coordinates with your call to action or offer will also do the trick as well, Prisco suggests.

- **Crafting QR Codes that Don't Scan**

There is room for creativity when creating QR codes but there are technical limitations. A QR code needs to be at least 1" x 1" with the vast majority falling into the 1.75" x 1.75" size category. QR codes will work on color backgrounds—but it's important to test, test, test! Make sure they work on different phones, different angles and on different substrates and keep testing!

Prisco added, "Placing your customer first and thinking of ways a QR code will add value to the process should be top of mind."

[Nancy Pekala](#) is the AMA's Senior Director of Online Content. Continue the conversation about QR codes in the Marketing Research Group of [AMACONNECT](#), the AMA's online community for marketers. Connect with us on Twitter [@twitter.com/marketing\\_power](#).