

THE RETAIL DOCTOR | BY BILLY CUTHRELL

Scan Me, Please

Remember the days of paying a gazillion dollars for a little *Yellow Pages* ad? A few years ago, as Google was ramping up, I irritated a phone book rep when I kept asking if he could show me analytics on how many people view my ad. I've had the same conversation with plenty of irritated newspaper reps, too. Show me my ad is being seen, and I'll gladly pay for it.

Jump to 2011, and the *Yellow Pages* and newspapers may have a small chance to survive. The last phone book that showed up at my door had ads employing QR (quick response) codes. Smart move, but before you let a sales rep charge you a QR code "setup" fee, let's look at ways you can create the codes for free — and why you should be taking advantage of them.

For those who haven't used QR codes, they're simple two-dimensional images that you scan with a smartphone. They contain any information the code creator wants to embed, such as a URL address, text ad or coupon. They cost nothing and can be an easy way to give customers value-added incentives.

I've used QR codes to offer potential customers free music lessons and coupons for product discounts, as well as to alert customers to secret sale events and giveaways — all with tremendous success. I think of QR codes as value-added advertising since the customer can receive further information via videos, coupons or other promo materials. Best of all, they're free, and it only takes a few minutes to create a code. Here's how to get started:

1. Generate codes. This service is free through such sites as qrstuff.com and qurify.com, and you can also download QR code readers for free through your smartphone's app store. (I like i-nigma by 3GVision for iPhone.) Once you create your code, download the image to your computer and place the code in ads and on your business cards — anywhere

you advertise your company's name, promotions or sales events. I made a QR code that embeds our store contact information on customers' smartphones, so they don't have to go through the trouble of typing it into their contact lists. It happens automatically when they scan the code on my business card.

2. Show 'em you're great. You can embed your Web address

in the QR code, and if you have a YouTube channel, you can point your potential customers to that page, as well. A picture or, even better, a video, is worth a thousand words. Imagine a person seeing one of your ads with a QR code in the local paper. They scan the code and get whisked away to your YouTube video. It features a segment showing why your store is so friendly and well-loved in the community. You've broken the ice with that customer before meeting him face to face.

3. Give it away. A recent watch ad featured a QR code that said, "Scan with your phone for a chance to win this watch." I scanned it, along with a million other people. I didn't win, but I spent 15 minutes on the manufacturer's website being schooled on why its watches are the best. Use the code to bring people to your website or special promotions.

4. Track the results. QR codes can help track ad and Web page visitors. I set up a private, nonpublic page on our website that can only be accessed via the QR code I place in certain ads. This way, I can track how many times the ad has been scanned and how many leads it generated. So jump on the QR code bandwagon before the competition. I'm sure you'll be rewarded for your efforts. **MI**

Billy Cuthrell operates Progressive Music Center and askourmusicians.com. Contact him by scanning the pictured code with your smartphone.



Jump on the QR code bandwagon before the competition. It's free value-added advertising