

INTERFACE: TECH TRENDS

SCAN THIS

Quick response codes make it easy, via smartphones, to link the real world with online data. It's a trend that's catching on around the world, **Rachel Botsman** writes

AT A conference last year, I bumped into technology commentator Robert Scoble. When we went to swap business cards, Scoble pointed to a black-and-white pixelated square pattern on his T-shirt and said: "Just scan me."

"Huh?" I replied. When I looked closer, I saw the design was indeed not a Mondrian painting but a QR code. Did he seriously want me to wave my phone across his chest? I awkwardly pointed my device at his shirt and it beeped like a supermarket check-out. Within a few seconds, his live Twitter feed from the conference popped up on my phone.

This was my first experience of interacting with a QR code to get digital information from a physical object in real time – a process called hardlinking. (Note to self: before you scan, you need to download the free QR code-reading app.)

Fast forward to 2011 and QR codes are popping up on plane boarding passes and shop windows, in magazines, adverts, product labels, flyers – things we might need information from or to interact with.

QR is short for quick response. The little square patches are essentially barcodes, with links to information such as contact details, web page

addresses, videos and coupons. You can create them at numerous websites, such as goqr.me, and they are easily scanned and read by smartphone cameras. Denso Wave, a subsidiary of Toyota, created them in Japan (no surprise there) in 1994, to track vehicle parts during manufacturing.

Now they are catching on around the world, mainly due to the huge take-up of smart phones. In Australia, we are seeing them integrated into marketing campaigns for big global brands such as Citibank, entertainment venues like Luna Park and small producers such as regional wineries. The jury is out on whether they increase sales, but the real value is in the easy, relatively cheap way they link physical products to digital content in myriad ways.

11 WAYS TO USE QR CODES FOR BRAND VALUE

1 Labelling

Australian wineries such as Coonawarra and Capel Vale have been testing the ability of QR codes to help people navigate the scores of bottles they face in a wine store. A quick scan takes users to Cellar Key, with its tasting and



wine-making notes, reviews and even recipes. Would you be more likely to buy a wine you were knowledgeable about?

2 Producer-consumer trust

Webster, a Tasmanian company, uses QR codes to let people to see where their foods are grown, as well as the chemicals and fertilisers used on produce. Meat and Livestock Australia uses the technology to inform buyers about traceability and quality assurance for Australian beef to help meat exports to Japan.

3 Multi-channel competitions

Luxury fashion house Orotan ran a multi-channel QR campaign in *Marie Claire* in 2010 with impressive results. The codes were integrated with print ads and in shops. If you scanned the code or sent an SMS, you were linked to a website where you could view exclusive video footage from the runway, learn more about the range and enter a competition. About 30 per cent of Orotan customers and *Marie Claire* readers entered the competition – about eight times the industry average, mobile marketer Mnet says.

4 Paperless check-in

Qantas has joined other airlines in introducing paperless QR code boarding passes. The code carries a unique link to a traveller's flight information. So if, for example, you want to change your seat, the data is automatically refreshed – no need to spend time waiting at the gate for a new ticket.

5 Mobile giving

The Salvation Army created a billboard that had a QR code next to "Please Donate Now" in its bottom corner. After scanning the patch, viewers could find information about Melbourne's 15,000 homeless people that the campaign was supporting. Donating to the cause was then only a button click away.

6 How-to videos

If you have ever tried to assemble IKEA furniture, you know there's never a handy helper named Sven around when you need one. A QR code that links to instructional videos and clear step-by-step guides would help. There's a long list of product categories that would benefit from

offering such access to this sort of how-to data, including food, cosmetics and home improvement.

7 Real-time prospectus

Turn your standard print brochure into an engaging multimedia experience. Queensland University of Technology (QUT) embedded QR codes in its 2011 course booklets. Prospective students can scan for videos about real QUT graduate experiences.

8 Business card facelift

Most business cards end up in a drawer somewhere. Adding QR codes can extend their purpose by sending people directly to your website, blog, Twitter feed, LinkedIn profile and so on. You can instantly upload those contact details to an address book as well.

9 Loyalty cards

eCoffeeCard (www.ecoffeecard.com.au) and similar programs enable café goers to track loyalty points from different shops in one place on their phone. More than 330 cafés in Australia are already participating. You download

TRACK THAT

Part of the value of QR codes over, say, print, is that you can gather valuable data on whom the code reaches and how they respond. This means you can deliver customised content to consumers, creating more personal interactions and building on transactions to set up relationships.

As with any marketing tactic, it's crucial to track how your customers are interacting and adapt your campaigns accordingly.

Here are four measures to track and analyse:

Source: What is the most common location of the QR codes (packaging, magazine ad, poster, flyer) your customers scan?

Location: Where are consumers scanning your brand's QR codes? Home, office, in transit, in store?

Audience: What is the profile of the group doing the scanning?

Conversion: What offers or information do people act on?

the app, scan the code (usually at the register) and collect "My Cup Stamps" and the like to redeem. Retailers can gather data about customers and make special offers based on usage and location.

10 Fan pages

See something in a store window you love, or finished reading a great book and want to recommend it to friends? Likify is a new platform that generates QR codes, so you can instantly "like" real-world stuff on Facebook. Nike ran a successful campaign in Belgium using Likify. It integrated QR codes on posters with images of routes people run through Antwerp. When the code was scanned, users "liked" and shared the routes on Facebook walls.

11 Interactive shopping

Sportsgirl recently launched QR code signage in 111 stores nationally, as part of its Join Us campaign. The codes take shoppers to style guide videos and an mCommerce platform where they can shop for the looks. It's an example of using technology to build engagement with a mobile-savvy demographic.

FIVE CLEVER QRs

A taste of how the codes are being used and a hint of things to come.

Animated tattoo

As part of whisky brand Ballantine's Leave an Impression campaign, a Paris-based tattoo artist incorporated a QR code into a design he applied, on camera, to a friend's chest. The code unlocks a video animation (a singing head floating out of the flower design of the tattoo) when scanned via live streaming on the

brand's Facebook page. **High-tech, high-fashion** US fashion magazine *Meets Obsession* commissioned Sydney-based digital artist Yiyang Lu to use QR codes to interact with readers. Lu incorporated codes into illustrations of fashion personalities, including Mary Kate and Ashley Olsen (QR earrings), and Anna Wintour (QR-patterned shirt). Scanning the codes takes readers to Lu's site, where they can download the free artwork.

Need an appointment? Do you forget to schedule your health check-ups? Athens Regional Medical Centre, in Georgia, US, has integrated QR codes into its advertising. A scan links to the hospital website for appointments and more information. Online mammogram scheduling has risen 15 per cent since the campaign began.

Interactive gravestones In Japan, the embedding of QR codes into gravestones is becoming

popular. When you wave your smartphone over the stone, you can interact with the person's life story. **Building permits** The City of New York recently introduced QR codes on building permits to provide people with quick access to information about a construction project – including what's being built, the property owner, and an optional link that allows you to call and register a complaint.