Mobile Barcodes Link To New Opportunities In Publishing

By Laura Marriott

Two recent trends in the publishing industry are intrinsically linked: the steady migration of publications and advertisers into mobile digital and the appearance of mobile barcodes in many publications in the U.S. and Canada. Publications have made the move into the digital space to provide on-the-go readers with interactive content that extends beyond the printed page and onto the Internet through their smart phones.

Indeed, the proliferation of new media channels has allowed brands and publishers to engage consumers in new and interesting ways by creating campaigns that fuse traditional methods with new digital media. By incorporating mobile barcodes in traditional print, outdoor and online campaigns, publishers and marketers can make print and online media interactive and even more compelling, delivering multimedia content straight to a consumer’s mobile device to enhance the printed content.

A publisher can use this new mobile call to action to facilitate greater loyalty and repeat purchases of a magazine or newspaper. USA Today, for example, has added 2D barcodes to its daily print edition, linking its offline and digital efforts and enabling readers to scan the codes to see photos, videos and other online content that didn’t make it into the print edition.

Mobile barcodes enhance editorial pieces by allowing readers to access additional editorial and video content or links to other articles. Articles that feature certain products also can have an accompanying mobile barcode to tie into a consumer competition for those products. Mobile barcodes can be particularly effective in co-branded promotions, with each barcode activating custom content produced by the magazine or multiple advertisers and sponsors, offering the marketers more bang for their buck. Mobile Europe is one example of a European publication that recognized the value of integrating a NeoMedia mobile barcode with its editorial content. In the February/March edition of Mobile Europe, the publishers launched a competition for readers to win an iPad by scanning a mobile barcode that linked to additional editorial content and the competition entry form.

2D barcodes also give advertisers a way to allow readers to discover more about their products or services. Additionally, mobile barcodes provide a nice up-sell for advertisers looking to bring ads to life. By placing a mobile barcode on an ad within a publication, the advertiser is able to collect information by way of statistics on the interaction, including how many readers scanned the ad. What better way to prove the
value of advertising in your publication than with this new measurement option?

What should brands and publishers bear in mind to ensure that mobile barcodes work effectively?

To be most effective, mobile barcodes should be integrated into a campaign or editorial schedule from inception and should be linked to relevant and interesting content that justifies a consumer scanning them. Also factor in updating and refreshing the content so it remains relevant (the code can remain the same, but the destination page can be changed).

It’s also important to pick the right mobile barcode vendor and host. Make a list of your company’s goals and the elements that will be essential to the project. Your list might include type of code, desired interaction, reader, geography and reporting requirements. Select a vendor who, in addition to the barcode solution, also provides analytics, such as usage statistics and demographic information so that brands and publishers can make informed decisions about how to continue to leverage 2D barcodes in subsequent initiatives. If your company doesn’t want to invest in developing in-house expertise, companies like NeoMedia can provide mobile barcode reader applications, barcode creation, resolution, management and data reporting, while ensuring appropriate geographic coverage and high-quality user experiences.

Another consideration will be whether to use a global standard code, such as QR codes, or a proprietary code like Microsoft Tags. QR codes can be scanned by the majority of readers, whereas proprietary codes require a specific reader, which could limit the number of scans. Working the code into your design is also important to relating the code to your brand and ensuring a strong consumer response. The barcode should be prominently placed in a location in the publication where it can be easily identified and scanned. It should be on a flat surface with white space around it rather than between the folds of a magazine, which will hamper scanning. Mobile barcodes printed in black and white might also be easier for the majority of devices and barcode scanners to read. Also, given the relative novelty of barcodes in the mass market, you should also place descriptive copy next to the barcode explaining what the code is, how it is used and where to download a reader to scan it.

Most consumers and marketers in North America are not familiar with mobile barcodes, and some educational work needs to be done, but there is no doubt about the efficacy of barcode implementations for publishers. Mobile barcodes provide readers with access to relevant and interesting content and enhance a consumer’s relationship with a magazine, newspaper or advertiser. Given the low barriers to entry, mobile barcodes are something you want to integrate into your media strategy today.

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Total Produce, a European fresh fruit provider, said that it will be using QR codes in its Smart Packs range of fresh fruit and vegetable packaging. The Irish company said that the codes will allow consumers to access immediate relevant information on the fruits and vegetables on the pack code. Smart Packs are being introduced to retail partners across Europe this spring. The decision to use QR codes was prompted by research showing that consumers wanted more information about the fresh produce they buy. Once consumers scan the code, they will automatically be directed to the appropriate area of Total Produce’s new website, topfruit.com. As an example, a consumer who scans a QR code accompanying a pitaya (dragon fruit) will be linked to a three-minute video explaining how to prepare and serve the fruit.

Along with extensive videos, the site will include nutritional advice and recipes, and a recipe of the week will be available each Friday. Irish nutritionist Paula Mee and South African chef Rozanne Stevens will provide fresh content to ensure that information is always up to date and consumer focused.