With the development of the Internet, it became possible to engage individuals (rather than groups) in a dialog and to electronically measure the depth and breadth of their interest by observing online behavior and anticipating what a consumer might do in the future and which ads might be most relevant. Social media has taken it a step further, so the conversation can extend to the consumer’s networks of connections. The path is no longer a one-way “push” of information. Consumers can now rank or review services and products, make suggestions for improvement and, most importantly, act as an additional sales force, rapidly spreading the word about both the good (and bad) aspects of their experience with a brand. Smart mobile phones add yet another dimension to these capabilities, with a personal, portable device that many, if not most people have with them at all times.
THE MOBILE WEB

Not all the information contained in the larger desktop website is necessary or even desirable on a mobile website. Mobile sites are specifically designed to provide mobile-friendly layouts and navigation on the smaller screen of a mobile handset. Despite the recent popularity of mobile apps, spawned largely by Apple’s iPhone store, most businesses and organizations can get all the information they need to their audiences through a mobile website. Mobile websites can be built to accommodate a variety of mobile platforms without investing the time and expense of developing an app for each platform. Mobile sites also are easier to update; one change to the site instantly appears on every platform. Apps will have a place for operations or functionality that simply aren’t available (yet) through a mobile site and will probably mostly be used for entertainment and small programs for specific computational or organizational needs.

QR CODES

The rapid adoption of smartphones has led to a proliferation of QR codes as a convenient way to literally link the physical world of print, such as signage and labels, to the virtual world of almost endless, instantaneous information. When scanned with a smartphone, the QR code (or other 2D barcode) can link to a website URL, a video, text, e-mail or telephone number link—anything textual. This returning information can direct the smartphone to open a Web page (preferably mobile), show a video or dial a telephone number.

The inherent power of mobile devices and easy-to-create 2D barcodes comes together in an exponential way when they are paired. But with that power comes the responsibility of creating a valuable user experience. Otherwise you risk squandering the opportunity for engagement because of a lack of user interest, which is arguably the greatest obstacle facing widespread adoption of QR codes. Scanning a code should never take the user to a desktop Web page, which forces the user to navigate a tiny, almost unreadable font size by pinching and expanding the screen to read and navigate. The frustrated and possibly exasperated user is left to tap minuscule links and then repeat the whole process when taken to the next page. On the other hand, linking the user to a simple, well-thought-out, easy-to-read and navigate mobile site can greatly enhance the value of your brand and help ensure a repeat scan in the future.

NEW MARKETING OPPORTUNITIES

The first step is to create an engaging, quick-loading and relevant mobile website (even if you never use QR codes, this step alone will be a great way to get started in mobile.) Next, create a QR code program that ties into the new mobile site. You might already have content available from your desktop site that you can re-purpose for mobile devices. Or you can create new exclusive content, giving the mobile space and QR code linkage some added value by presenting information or offers that are only available to mobile users.

QR codes placed in print ads, on products or in signage can greatly leverage a print buy. A full-page ad with a relevant QR code can engage the consumer in ways not previously possible. Or a QR code can make available instructions for using equipment in the field without lugging along a possibly
TIPS AND TRICKS

1. Understand what kind of response you want from your customer and then make it very easy to get that response on the mobile device. Create a call to action or a valuable “reward” for using the QR codes and mobile site (coupons, discounts, special offers, etc.).

2. Test, test and then test again. Is your QR code large enough and simple enough to be easily scanned? Is there enough contrast? Can you use white ink on a dark ground (on a T-shirt, for example)? Current scanners don’t seem to recognize “knocked-out” or white QR codes.

3. Make sure you offer analytics and metrics not only for the mobile site but also for the QR codes. Once you’ve established a baseline through traffic analysis, you can measure different campaigns’ effectiveness and understand and use QR codes.

4. Use a service such as http://qreateandtrack.com to create and track QR codes. Make sure the code is clean and sharp for easy reading. Use http://tinyurl.com to create simpler URL addresses that will result in easier-to-scan QR codes.

5. Include the ability to “share” or “like” mobile Web pages to take advantage of the viral nature of social media.

6. Make certain the mobile site is relevant to mobile users. You might not want to include every single page served on the main site. See the engagement from the user’s point of view and think about what mobile users are looking for and how quickly they want that information to appear. Avoid large graphic and image files that take forever to download and don’t use Flash, as this does not appear on most mobile systems.

JUST GET STARTED

We’ve found that clients often will respond favorably to the idea of leveraging the print message they are already developing by simply setting aside a little space to add a QR code. The mobile site these codes link to doesn’t have to involve a huge investment of time and money. A simple one-page microsite could suffice for many initial implementations and can be expanded into a robust mobile experience as clients begin to see the benefits of usage and want to add more interactivity and functionality.

Creating a simple three- or four-page mobile site can cost from $2,500 up to around $10,000, depending on such factors as complexity and the amount of data to be organized and served, etc. Most sites that we develop fall below the $5,000 range.

We often suggest that clients and their customers start with just a simple code that links to the main mobilized page of their website. We’ve developed simple, three-page sites with an accompanying QR code program for as little as $1,850. Once the client or customer has established and used the mobile site, we can easily add other QR programs (and even other mobile code programming in the gym). More gym members have been using the site over the past several months and are requesting more information.

The most important thing is to just get started. Once you do some research and test out a few sites, you will begin to see other possibilities specific to your business and customers. QR codes and mobile sites might not last forever as other technologies, such as augmented reality and near field communications begin to offer even more possibilities. But by taking a gradual approach and starting simply with a mobile website and QR codes, you will be able to expand to include these new technologies as they emerge while taking advantage of what’s available today.

Scan the code with a code reader on your smartphone.

Think of all the possibilities for making your print communications interactive.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael Philipson is president and co-principal of Rochester, N.Y.-based The Philipson Group, an innovative communications, marketing and new media group with a focus on engaging clients and their customers. This group of intense creatives leverages new technologies, collaborative partnerships, social media, special theatrical event presentations, guerrilla and viral marketing and, yes, even traditional graphic and web design to create memorable and artistic engagement for clients and their customers.

The Philipson Group
585-287-5555
137 East Avenue, Suite 201
Rochester, NY 14607