The idea of implementing Microsoft Tags in the *San Diego Union Tribune* came from seeing them in *Lucky* magazine last summer. The possibility of using our printed product to deliver information that would both engage our readers and create a digital interaction, as well as help us outpace the competitors in our market, was too great to ignore. So we started to investigate the benefits and potential pitfalls of using this technology in our editorial and advertising products.

Among the questions we asked ourselves were: What might happen if we used Tags in our newspaper? How would the market react? Would it be successful? Where else could we implement Tags?

Our research revealed that our market ranks second in the nation in smartphone usage, and with smartphone usage growing substantially year over year, the decision to implement a mobile feature seemed appropriate. We reasoned that along with money and keys, the one thing everyone was likely to take with them when they left the house was their cell phone. So implementing technology that would allow us to reach users no matter where they were at any time of the day or night was very appealing. Not to mention that it seemed more natural for readers to use a smartphone to interact with a printed story or advertisement than to go to their computer to type in a URL.

Despite the high concentration of smartphones in our area, however, we weren’t sure whether our readers or advertisers would be interested. So we polled our audience and discovered a very strong interest in what Tags could do to engage them.

Once we decided to go ahead with the project, we placed MS Tags on our masthead and throughout the newspaper. The news department used Tags to keep readers abreast of incoming results during last year’s election, for example. 2D barcodes allow you to change where a code takes you without changing the physical code itself, so we varied our Tag destinations. Some dialed phone numbers, others sent text messages, and some took the reader to a mobile website. The results
from scanning a Tag are instantaneous and the information about how many people scanned them and the types of handsets they used can be easily accessed.

Implementing a Microsoft Tag usage strategy is very simple and falls into three categories:

1. **DEVELOP A WORKFLOW PROCESS.** Determine who will be creating the Tags, how the information about the scans will be delivered to the creator and where the Tag graphic will need to be delivered for printing.

2. **TRAINING.** Ensure that your users and creators understand the process and the importance of utilizing Tags to extend the reach of print and engage readers. Explain what the Tags are and where the customer can go to get the best experience for their phone. (For Microsoft Tags, it’s http://www.gettag.mobi/)

3. **MARKETING.** Determine how this new product will be shared both internally and externally.

   The first step we took in creating our process was to set up an “account” at www.tag.microsoft.com. We used a common e-mail account, which could be accessed by multiple users for sales, and a separate account for editorial. We set implementation deadlines and assigned people to create training presentations. We also developed presentations about how to create a Tag and pull reports and created a sales presentation about why Tags are important for advertisers and how our clients can benefit from them, as well as an editorial presentation about how Tags can be useful for readers.

   We also defined the workflow process and identified who would use the Tag software to create Tags, both from a sales and editorial standpoint, and developed a submission form for sales from which salespeople would pull information to create a Tag. The form emphasized the need for an ad number identifier that would be the key in relating a Tag to body copy and our front-end system, and included customer information and data for the Tag to point to when it was scanned, whether it was a Web URL, text message, VText contact or phone number.

   We trained our creators to make Tags on the common account in folders labeled specifically for them in the proper format accepted by our graphic artists, who would marry the Tag with the body copy for final publishing.

   We held several sales training presentations in which our entire sales staff learned the impact that Tags could have in our industry, how to integrate them into sales pitches and how to think creatively about how our clients could use them. We outlined the workflow process and gave salespeople a "point" person to answer additional questions.

   We also outlined a marketing strategy to include publishing Tags in our promotional ads, wrote weekly columns about the benefits of Tags, created sales sheets and identified key clients to assist in sharing the knowledge throughout the market.

   We identified early adapters from various segments in our client base and empowered them with interactive and engaging Tag abilities, as well as demographics about how many smartphone users were in our market and who they were likely to be.

   To continue to motivate our staff and audience, we introduced ongoing sales promotions and contests for implementing Tags in advertising, as well as contests for the best creative use of Tags in the newspaper. At our weekly sales meetings, we share creative uses of Tags and continue to promote the use of tags in our market by sharing the technological possibilities at industry events, association meetings and sales calls.

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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Brandy Luscalzo-Stemen, currently the Emerging Media Product Manager at the San Diego Union-Tribune and author of TechnoTalkFromPapr8tzi Wordpress Blog is constantly looking for new ways to integrate technologies into business solutions, allowing consumers to interact with information in multiple platforms. She enjoys unveiling the novelty and new possibilities emerging in the marketplace, and has worked in the Media sphere for the past 17 years in various positions as a Journalist, Creative Pre-Press Department Manager, Systems Administrator and Online Sales Manager to name a few. She has worked for Media companies of all sizes, from Gannett Inc. to Brown Publishing Company, and has had the pleasure of learning the Media business inside out from sales to circulation. She believes that Media companies of today have unique opportunities to diversify and strengthen their business today by integrating technologies of tomorrow.