

## QR Codes – The Good and the Bad

The ubiquitous QR Code has become a very useful tool, highlighted by the COVID pandemic and their ability to replace menus at restaurants. But, like any technology, something that can be used for good, can also be used for not such good purposes.

The QR Code was originally designed by a manufacturing company to expand on the usefulness of the barcode to assist in tracking parts, vehicles and other inventory. The QR Code can hold up more than 4,000 characters compared to the 43 characters found in the most common bar code. (Specialty bar codes can carry 100's of characters). The QR code has been called a 'bar code on steroids'.

{Trivia Time – at the end of this article, see what QR stands for}

As opposed to the bar code, which carries its code, and relating information, horizontally, the QR Code carries/stores its information both horizontally AND vertically, which allows the exponential increase in stored data over the bar code.

Today's QR codes are easily scanned by our smart phones, and the resulting translation allows for the following uses:

- Business Cards – instead of collecting, storing, sorting, etc business cards, we can simply scan the QR code and easily the information to our contacts, including social media profiles.
- Product packaging – codes on products might include uses, recipes, store locations, social media sites, etc
- Exercise – gyms, trainers, etc might provide QR codes to take us to videos that show how to use specific equipment, the proper technique for certain stretches, exercises, etc.
- Personal - more and more people are using QR codes to add information to invitations, allowing the invite itself to retain a simple, uncluttered look.
- Brand identity – a simple QR code in an ad can take a client, or potential, client to a site with much more information that what is available in a small ad.

QR code usage has exploded as almost daily we find more uses for this little square.

Unfortunately, scammers love the QR code too. QR codes can be tampered with to allow scammers to steal personal and/or financial information. A fake QR code could be placed over a legitimate one, or a scammer may send a QR code via text or email, stating that it is a link to a coupon, prize, etc. Once again our 'phishing' radar need to be engaged. Are we expecting a message from that sender? Is there a sense of urgency to do something that we wouldn't normally do? Etc. By clicking a scammed QR code, we could download malware on to our devices. There are apps available to will determine if a QR is fake or legitimate. Do your research online before selecting for this specific purpose.

Some final recommendations –

- Do not download an app from a QR code, instead use your device's app store and do your research on the app, including reading the reviews
- It is not necessary to download QR code scanner app. Most phones today have a built in scanner in the camera.
- Verify suspect messages that request the use of a QR code, such as receiving a text or email that a payment failed, and asking that a QR code be used to complete the payment – call the company to verify.

Answer to Trivia – QR – Quick Response