

IN THIS ISSUE:

Feature Article

Seven Steps to Make Sure You and Your Agency Are On the Same Page

Page 1

On Digital

2D Barcodes: The Next "Hot Thing" In Digital Marketing?

Page 2

On Direct

E-Mail Guest Column: Get More Profile Info From Customers

Page 3

On Creative

YourCover.com Creative Makeover

Page 3

Seven Steps to Make Sure You and Your Agency Are On the Same Page

By Mark Kolier



Are you getting what you pay for when it comes to marketing? As U.S. and world economies bump along the bottom, customers repeatedly ask their marketing agencies (among other vendors) to do more with less. Our agency is no different.

Many clients have the perception that e-mail marketing, social media marketing and 'guerilla' marketing tactics are great ways to save money. And those channels should be considered a part of the marketing mix – but not solely on the basis of cost savings. For some clients a social media campaign may bear little fruit. You should view your marketing agency as your partner in achieving your sales goals. That's how we have always worked with our clients. How can you be sure you are getting what you pay for? Here are 7 things to think about:

1) Be sure you can measure it. Aside from broadcast television/radio and magazine advertising most marketing channels today offer at least some ability to measure performance. Satellite radio and cable television offer better tracking capabilities than broadcast and these capabilities will only improve over time.

2) Set a realistic marketing budget.

Your budget should be aligned with your sales goals, with a clear depiction of how a successful marketing campaign will be evaluated. Low/medium and out of the park scenarios should be included. I've seen far too many 'budgets' that are very small and totally out of line with their objectives; i.e. "We want to sell \$20 million worth of our product/service and we have a marketing budget of \$100,000." How exactly is that supposed to work? Is 200 times your investment an achievable goal?

3) Be prepared that some tactics may not work. If you eschew all or most traditional marketing channels in favor of new media marketing, be prepared that they may not work. Sure it's possible you will extend your marketing budget but also be sure that in ignoring traditional channels you have not ignored many current or potential customers who simply do not use social media.

4) Allow your expert partners to do their jobs. It sometimes seems that everyone wants to play art director or copywriter. Client-side ideas are very valuable (since who knows the product or service better than you?); but would you make tweaking suggestions to your doctor or attorney? Not likely. Marketing agencies are staffed with professionals, just like your doctor's or lawyer's offices. Years of training and experience have gone into their decision making processes.

5) Incentive based deals are acceptable for marketing agencies. For certain products, this may not be true. And an agency willing to take some of its final compensation on the back end

still needs to be compensated along the way. But if you enter into a speculative deal it should be a deal you would want for yourself if the product truly excited you. "You win, they lose" is not a basis for a successful long term partnership.

6) Ask your marketing agency to provide prices for creation of different channel efforts. Remember you are the client. It's not taboo to ask questions like: How much is a print ad? An email or survey? A direct mail package? An outdoor ad? A PURL campaign? Writing a broadcast or cable spot? Even knowing what setting a Facebook fan page or handling a Twitter feed will cost is not out of bounds. If your agency is not willing to give you details like this, you may want to look around.

7) Allow your marketing agency at least a year to leverage their understanding your business. Yes there are times when you will know relatively quickly that the fit is wrong. But all the time invested in bringing your agency up to speed will be lost if you change agencies like you change socks.

Don't be hesitant in discussing your marketing budget with you marketing agency. Let them tell you what they feel can and cannot be done. Both parties will come out of that discussion with a much better idea of the expectations and deliverables.

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On Digital

2D Barcodes: The Next “Hot Thing” in Digital Marketing?

By Greg Wells



Haven't heard about 2D barcodes yet? I have to admit they are really cool but seem to be a long way from making a significant impact on marketing.

What the heck is a 2D barcode anyway?

A 2d barcode is a means of representing specific bytes of information in a graphical manner using a matrix of black & white dots. Ok, that was a mouthful – it is simply a code that holds a lot of marketing information such as website addresses, names, addresses and telephone numbers etc. The 2D barcode was developed in Japan back in 1994 by a division of Toyota to track vehicle parts in inventory.

A particular type of 2D barcode, called a QR code, is license free and can be used by anyone. Unlike more well-known horizontal barcodes, QR codes store information horizontally and vertically, allowing them to hold up to several hundred times more information than ordinary barcodes. QR codes are generally smaller than normal barcodes and are much more readable having much more error correction capabilities built within the platform.

So how do they work?

QR Codes cannot be scanned by typical laser scanners like you would find in a supermarket. They can only be scanned by using a digital camera such as a webcam or Smartphone such as an iPhone or Blackberry. QR Codes require a simple application to be downloaded to your mobile phone. The application uses your phone's camera to capture the image and then scans the image to read and execute the barcode. The QR code can be created to launch a particular web address, send an email or text message, play video and much more.

So how do I use them to market my business?

The applications for marketing seem great – a few that come to mind are:

- Billboard – Scan a QR code from the car at a stop light for a new movie coming out and receive a coupon or purchase advance tickets or enter a promotion.
- Signage – ads on commuter trains promoting real estate, entertainment venues and more. Imagine having a QR code that scans from your seat on the train that launches a location map or a video tour.
- Restaurant Menus – place QR codes in the menu to display nutritional information or fun facts about food dishes, or video cooking demonstrations.
- There are many, many more applications – the above just a few.

To Barcode or Not? That is the Question.

In my opinion, we are simply not ready for QR codes as a regular means of creating leads or making sales, at least not for the near future. They are really cool but have a few significant hurdles to cross before they are truly useful here in the US.

Technology Adoption – QR codes require web-enabled smartphones and relatively tech-savvy users to work the scan process easily. There aren't enough of either yet to create widespread applications for marketing. It does appear that there is certainly a trend towards adoption of smart phones for broader data usage, but carriers need to make data plans more affordable – and this could take time.

Ease of use – I have download a number of different apps for my blackberry and have not found a single one that does a good job of scanning the codes effectively. It usually takes 2-3 “snaps” for them to work and that's in good lighting and a flat surface. I haven't scanned any codes while I'm on the go but am somewhat pessimistic about the idea of it working easily.

Summary:

QR codes are fascinating and have a lot of applications but I think they have a long way to go before they are truly useful in the marketing arena. If mobile marketing is something that intrigues you, as it does me, than you might want to join me in looking at “scan tags” as a more useable alternative.

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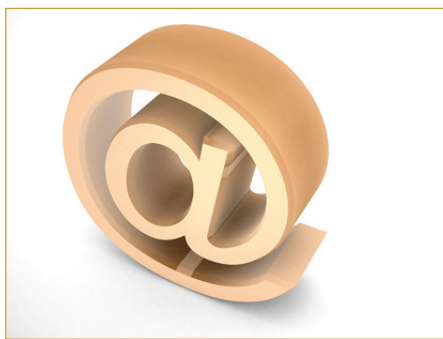
2D Barcode Examples:



On Direct > Email

How Do I Get More Profile Information for Customers Without Asking Them?

By Amanda Hinkle, StrongMail - Reprinted from BtoB's Email Marketer Insight



There are many ways to make your e-mails relevant to recipients and, as your sophistication level grows within the e-mail channel, so should your segmentation and targeting strategies.

Many marketers use demographic and preference information to provide customized versions of messaging that appeal to each subscriber's interests. But providing relevant messaging is not based solely on using self-reported profile questions that you ask during the registration process or surveys.

The most successful e-mail marketers take previous brand interaction into account. Who are the recipients most engaged with your organization? How long have they been customers? Are they active or just "window shoppers"? Finding behavioral data to use in creating dynamic content that speaks to individual interests is not as difficult as some think. In order to understand when your customers interact with your brand, keep a log of behaviors that identify the actions customers take and track engagement behavior over time and in multiple channels. Look at such behaviors as previous clicks in e-mails, information accessed or requested on your website, products viewed or purchased, programs attended, social media activity and such user-generated content as customer reviews or other information that's housed in your outside CRM system. Leverage these data to create dynamic messaging that is highly personalized. Make your use of this information obvious enough that the customer recognizes the relationship but discreet enough to not come off as "big brother."

Using this information to segment your audience and provide customized versions of your e-mail will go a long way toward creating messages that appeal to each subscriber's interests and, ultimately, lead to increased engagement for your e-mail program. Highly engaged consumers are more loyal; the more you can customize the experience for your customers, the better your messaging and brand will be received.

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On Creative > Makeover

YourCover.com Creative Makeover

CGSM NewsDesk



Yourcover.com is a personalized magazine cover creator aimed at consumers, and it is in the process of a creative makeover by CGSM.

There have been many steps taken in this complex process, but as a creative case study, here are the standout differences.

It starts with a solid brand.

YourCover has been re-branded by CGSM and the process started with the development of a new logo. The logo includes the new brand

color, which is prevalent on the new yourcover.com website. Additional branding initiatives are underway, including research, standardized procedures and processes and many more.

(Continued on next page.)

On Creative > Makeover

YourCover.com Creative Makeover

CGSM NewsDesk



The new YourCover brand logo.

A New Website

Part of the makeover has also included an in-depth re-architecture of the YourCover.com website. First, CGSM analyzed site usage trends and determined how consumers primarily interacted with the site. Then, a new information architecture system was developed to meet consumers at their most pressing needs. Finally, the entire process was simplified. You can preview the new site (coming soon) at www.yourcover.com

A Redesigned Interface

One area of the new website that has been totally re-imagined is the cover generator platform. Here, YourCover has created an interactive interface for consumers to click, drag and type their way to a personalized magazine cover. CGSM was instrumental in both the design and the technology recommendations for this interface, and early returns have been very positive!

New Magazine Covers

What good is a personalized magazine cover generator if you don't have great-looking magazine covers for people to choose from? The final - and probably the most important - phase of the YourCover.com creative overhaul included the redesign of more than 100 magazine covers ranging from simple occasions like birthdays and anniversaries to niche sports and specialized hobbies. Check them all out at www.YourCover.com!

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