



TECH TRENDS | JOHN BRANDON

New Ways to Make Contact Business card alternatives

When I hand out business cards at trade shows and other events, I always wonder if they'll end up on the bottom of someone's bag—or, worse, in the trash. Over the years, I've tried several smartphone apps designed to exchange contact information, but many of them work only if both people have the software installed. Recently, I tried out two promising alternatives, near-field communication and QR codes, at the L.A. Auto Show.

Near-field communication, which now comes standard on some high-end smartphones, makes it possible to transmit contact information and other data by tapping another device, card, or tag containing an NFC chip. I tested it using Vizibility's NFC Mobile Wallet Card, which looks like a plastic business card and contains an NFC chip and a QR code. To create my card, I went to the Vizibility site, typed in my contact details, and chose a design with a stock logo (you can also upload your own logo). I signed up for the premium Metrics Pack, which costs \$5 a month, or \$49 a year, and includes an NFC card, which was mailed to me, and the ability to track activity online. For an extra \$15, I also purchased 240 QR code stickers to slap on my old-school business cards, making it possible for people to scan the code with a smartphone app and instantly upload my information.

As I wandered the aisles of the auto show, I came across a company rep with an NFC-enabled smartphone. Uploading

my contact information was a cinch: He opened the Android Beam feature and tapped his phone to my card. But, of the three dozen people I talked to throughout the rest of the day, only one had an NFC-enabled phone. In fact, most people had

NEAR-FIELD COMMUNICATION

HOW IT WORKS: You can transmit contact information by tapping together two products containing NFC chips.

AVAILABLE ON: Many high-end smartphones, including Androids and BlackBerrys, as well as stickers, tags, and business cards with built-in NFC chips

QR CODES

HOW THEY WORK: People can scan QR codes with a wide array of mobile apps to access your contact information.

AVAILABLE ON: Business cards, stickers, and mobile apps

never heard of the technology.

I had more luck with my QR code. About a dozen auto-show attendees I approached had QR scanning apps on their phones, which allowed them to pull up my virtual business card. Some people were too busy to grab their phones, so I gave them paper cards with my code. After the show, I logged on to Vizibility.com and saw that another dozen people had scanned the code. Not bad! Unfortunately, I could not see their names or contact details, only their locations.

My verdict? Near-field communication is promising, but it may take another year or two for it to catch on as more phones with NFC chips hit the market. I was more impressed with QR codes. Now, I can rest easier knowing my contact information is safely stored in the phones of the people I meet, just a tap away.

WELCOMING COMMITTEE

Looking for a better way to acclimate hires?

Here's the skinny on two Web-based services that use games and social networking to streamline the process—and make it fun.



WELCOME NEW HIRES

This service sends an e-mail to newbies directing them to an online welcome page with personal greetings and advice from colleagues. On their first day, employees log on to play basic trivia games about the company's history, culture, and products. Managers can customize content and track employee progress. **COST:** Starting at 50 cents per employee

ALLABOARD

A more robust option, AllAboard lets new hires log on to view company videos and slide shows and earn prizes by answering trivia questions. Much like Welcome New Hires, it lets new employees see how they rank on a leaderboard and chat in discussion forums. Managers can log on to view detailed reports on their progress. Unlike Welcome New Hires, the service has apps for Android tablets and the iPad. **COST:** \$30 per employee
—Jennifer Alsever