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Quick Response Codes: A Marketing Tool for Accounting Firms

By James Alexander

In today's technological world, it is critical for businesses to have an online mobile presence that contacts can easily access. More than 50% of online searches now begin on a mobile phone. Approximately 500 million Facebook users have used mobile devices to access their pages. Professional networking site LinkedIn has reported that nearly one quarter of its unique visitors in a recent three-month period accessed the site from a mobile device. Yet most accounting firms don't have mobile-optimized websites, even though a weak or nonexistent mobile presence can cost an accounting firm business.

Quick response (QR) codes are a marketing tool widely used by top consumer brands to bolster their mobile marketing efforts. QR code use is also making serious inroads into the marketing strategies of professional services firms, and for good reason: according to a recent comScore study, more than 20 million Americans scanned a QR code with a smartphone in just one three-month period last fall (<http://www.comscore.com/2011/12/20-million-americans-scanned-a-qr-code-in-october/>). These two-dimensional codes can be printed on business cards, brochures, proposals, and other material in order to direct users to a website for further information.

Professional services organizations, such as accounting firms, are increasingly using the codes to provide potential clients and business contacts with additional information online. QR codes can be an excellent marketing tool, but professionals who use them should follow best practices in their QR code campaign to ensure that visitors learn something new and retain the contact information for later reference.

Delivering Value and Optimizing Mobile Viewing

The most important consideration for accounting professionals contemplating the

addition of QR codes to their overall marketing strategy is the information that they will convey with the code. It's not enough just to integrate QR codes into a firm's overall marketing campaign. If the code merely leads visitors to the standard firm website, it can even be counterproductive if the site isn't optimized for mobile viewing.

Ideally, the QR code should lead users to a site containing unique information. The site should showcase items like the firm's contact information, credentials, and value proposition. For example, the site linked to the QR code could serve as a mobile business card that allows new acquaintances who scan it to retain the accounting professional's contact informa-

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tion on their smartphone for future reference. It could also deliver one-click access to hand-picked Google search results to connect users to relevant links that make a positive first impression, videos of the professional discussing an area of expertise, access to online bios, and other relevant information.

Firms should keep in mind that the website linked to the QR code will almost always be viewed on a mobile device. For that reason, it's important to direct contacts who scan the code to a mobile-optimized site; visitors are unlikely to scroll from side-to-side to view a standard website on a small smartphone screen.

Bridging the Digital Gap with QR Codes

According to a 2012 Nielsen study, about half of all mobile phone users in the United States use smartphones, which represents a nearly 40% increase over the previous year (<http://blog.nielsen.com/>

[nielsenwire/online_mobile/smartphones-account-for-half-of-all-mobile-phones-dominate-new-phone-purchases-in-the-us](http://nielsenwire.com/online_mobile/smartphones-account-for-half-of-all-mobile-phones-dominate-new-phone-purchases-in-the-us)). Thus, accounting firms that do not have a mobile web presence could be at a competitive disadvantage.

QR codes are an inherently mobile tool because people scan them with smartphones and other mobile devices, such as tablets. Accounting firms that use QR codes can stay ahead of the curve when it comes to mobile marketing if they choose a QR code service partner that offers mobile site options, such as a microsite, that can bridge the gap between the firm's printed material and mobile information.

For example, Melissa Burnside, marketing coordinator at REDW LLC, a New Mexico CPA and business consulting firm, recently began using QR codes on accounting professionals' business cards. She observed:

QR codes are still somewhat novel on business cards. In fact, I believe we are one of the first CPA firms to implement QR codes. They make a great conversation starter with clients and business contacts, but more importantly, they fit nicely with our social media strategy because they give our accountants another way to connect with new contacts and share information on a mobile device. It's an instant mobile presence that also conveys the fact that our firm is forward-thinking.

Adding It All Up

Mobile marketing is an increasingly important component of a total marketing strategy for individual professionals and firms. A QR code strategy can be an exceptional marketing tool, but it pays for professionals to think through the approach and make sure that using QR codes will deliver their information in the appropriate form.

With the right QR code approach, as well as QR code service partner that delivers more than just a code and a link to a main website, accounting firms can effectively showcase their qualifications. □

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