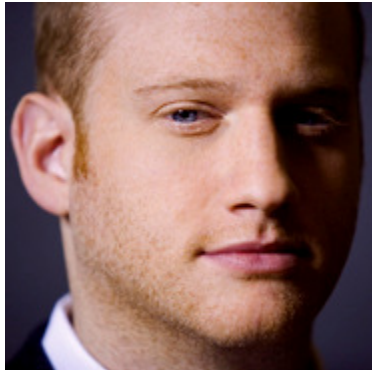


2D or not 2D, that is the bar code question

July 31, 2009



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By [Scott Debson](#)

I first saw 2D bar codes in Britain in 2002. I loved how simple the concept seemed and how seamlessly the process worked when demoed to me on a Sony Ericsson T68i mobile phone, with a camera attachment (remember those?).

My fascination for 2D bar codes continued as I saw mass adoption in Japan and the creative ways that marketers and content owners were using them.

I will confess to having a slight shopping addiction and as any addict knows, Tokyo's Harajuku is like heaven. On one of my first trips there in 2005 I remember walking around amazed at the fact that every one of the cool, boutique stores worth knowing had a 2D bar code atop a custom-built stand.

Users were able to create a personalized shopping guide – a Zagat on the fly, if you will – by tagging their favorite stores and swapping contact info for future communication.

As a shopaholic, cool-hunting, mobile-loving marketer, my imagination ran rampant as to how we could use the technology in the same way in the United States. Unfortunately, that is where my hopes were dashed.

Reading trends

While there have been a few attempts by mobile marketers to break through to the mainstream with proprietary 2D bar codes in mainstream media – most recently through campaigns by Sports Illustrated and the movie, “Notorious” – broad adoption seems a long way off.

It seems long ago now, but remember back in the day when cross-carrier short codes in the U.S. seemed like a futuristic dream? Well, the same issues are plaguing 2D coupons.

The idea of 2D codes is great, but as mobile marketers we need to ensure that response rates and mobile consumer experiences are optimized.

The last thing we want a prospective customer to do is to have their mobile device fail to read a 2D coupon, and become frustrated by a campaign, or even worse, simply ignore it and subsequently any other campaign using the technology.

In Japan the handset manufacturers and carriers have all agreed on a 2D format with the reader pre-installed on the vast majority of handsets. This ensures the ubiquity of 2D couponing.

This ubiquity ensures penetration, which over time, will become 100 percent. This, in turn, helps the process become second nature to consumers. Fast forward to today and isn't that where we are with SMS nationwide, thanks largely to the co-operative efforts of groups such as the CTIA, Mobile Marketing Association and NeuStar?

Being a mobile marketer, as we all know, has been frustrating as we wait and wait for critical mass and brands' adoption of mobile as a marketing vertical. It has been the "year of mobile" for more years than I can remember, but we are at critical mass to ensure that mobile campaigns are successful and effective.

Familiarity breeds content

Familiarity is a huge part of adoption and, for mobile nationwide, texting is very much in the mainstream.

According to the CTIA, more than 227 million mobile phones nationwide can be reached using text messaging – 160 million subscribers are on a text plan, amazingly. Also, texting is not only for kids. The average age of a texter is now 38 years old.

SMS calls to action can be used essentially on any medium and are ubiquitous across all handsets and carriers.

SMS marketing had a seminal moment this past month when electronics big-box retailer Best Buy added SMS codes for consumers to request product information across its Sunday circulars. On the flip side, try putting 2D bar codes on television, radio or a billboard.

Until the carriers, handset manufacturers and vendors are all on the same page, the U.S. will not reach a critical mass using 2D bar codes.

I would love to plot my journey through New York's Lower East Side and have the stores reach back out to me because I used the 2D bar code advertised in store.

We are getting there slowly, but it is still years away. We have all been talking about the "year of mobile" for far too long and it is finally here – honestly, it is. Now that it is, let us help ensure

that after the years to come are also the years of mobile by generating response rates that are high enough that brands come back.

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