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QR Codes

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- Get started with QR Codes and plan your strategy
- Create codes and link them to mobile-friendly content
- Track your results with a code-management system
- Deliver value to your users

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QR Codes For Dummies[®]

Chapter 3: Creating a QR Code

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Chapter 3

Creating a QR Code

In This Chapter

- ▶ Creating a QR Code online and on a mobile device
- ▶ Making sure your QR Code works
- ▶ Customizing your QR Code

Some people are happy to spend their days scanning QR Codes and never think to create their own codes to use in their everyday lives. Others see these nifty, useful codes and ask, “How can I create and use my own QR Code?” This chapter is for the latter.

In this chapter, I help you choose a QR Code generator and show you how to make your own QR Code or find someone to do it for you. Next, I help you customize your QR Code with color or your logo for added appeal. Finally, I show you how to ready your QR Code and protect it from the untidy masses that will soon be touching, poking, and scanning it.

Choosing a QR Code Generator

You can easily find a QR Code generator online or in your device’s app store. Many of the readers I recommend in Chapter 2 are also generators. The following sections outline some important features you want in a generator and explain the different ins and outs between online and mobile generators.

Eyeing important features

Regardless of whether you’re creating a QR Code online or with a mobile app, consider these features when choosing a free or paid generator:



- ✓ **It creates a QR Code in a minute or less.** The goal is to have you use QR Codes in several different ways, but you can't if you can't create one on the fly. The generator you use, regardless of all the extra features it comes with, should allow you to create a QR Code in under a minute.
- ✓ **It produces a QR Code in a standard size.** Some generators, especially those found online, generate larger QR Codes when long URLs are inputted. But large, unwieldy QR Codes aren't practical or attractive. Stick with those generators that produce a standard-size QR Code with the option of making it smaller or bigger based on your needs, not on the size of your URL.

In general, use shortened URLs with your QR Code. Your QR Codes will be less dense, scan more quickly, and will be less likely to fail. Most generators can shorten URLs for you, or you can shorten them yourself at www.tinyurl.com, Goo.gl, www.bitly.com, and many other sites. Just type *shorten my URL* into your preferred search engine.

- ✓ **It gives you the flexibility to redirect the QR Code to a different destination whenever you want.** Some generators allow you to create a QR Code, but then you can't change what it links to unless you create another code. What a pain. Yours truly found this out the hard way when I included a QR Code in a brochure, and then a website redesign changed the URL that the code pointed to. Suddenly, I had a QR Code that went nowhere and I couldn't redirect it without reprinting the brochure. Avoid an awkward conversation with your boss and choose a generator that allows you to change the URL without changing the code itself.
- ✓ **It doesn't limit your QR Code campaigns to URLs.** Maybe you want a QR Code that dials a phone number, passes on contact information, opens an e-mail, or links to a map. Pick a generator that gives you the flexibility to choose what the code links to.
- ✓ **It gives you a way to track the QR Code.** I talk more about the types of information you can track with QR Codes in Chapter 6, but at a minimum, the generator should track the number of times the QR Code was scanned. This is a key data point in measuring the success of the code.

Picking the best online generator

If you type *QR Code generator* into your favorite search engine, you'll literally get hundreds of results. If QR Codes are a niche marketing tool, as some claim, you wouldn't know it from all the generators available. Here are my picks for the top three online QR Code generators.

Kaywa

Kaywa's QR Code generator (at <http://qrcode.kaywa.com>) is one of the easiest generators to use on the web (see Figure 3-1). Here's all you need to do to use it:

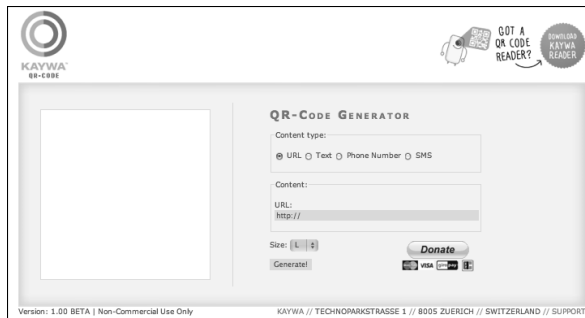


Figure 3-1: Kaywa's QR Code generator is quick and easy.

1. Select the appropriate Content Type radio button.

You can choose from the following:

- *URL*
- *Text*
- *Phone Number*
- *SMS*

2. Enter the content.

3. Choose the size of the QR Code.

- *S*: One square inch (perfect size for your business card!)
- *M*: One and a half square inches.

- *L*: Two square inches.
- *XL*: Three square inches — a good size for a poster.

4. Click Generate!

5. Copy or save the QR Code by right-clicking on it.

Kaywa gives you the option to use the code's permanent link or to copy-paste the HTML code.



Kaywa's generator is a great first stop for the QR Code newbie.

QRStuff.com

QRStuff.com (www.qrstuff.com) has an easy-to-use interface (see Figure 3-2) with more options than Kaywa offers.



Figure 3-2: QRStuff.com generates QR Codes in four easy steps.

1. Select the appropriate Data Type button.

This indicates what you want to use the QR Code for (such as a URL, e-mail, phone number, and so on). QRStuff.com gives you some good additional options, such as QR Codes for iTunes links, PayPal purchases, or a vCard.

2. Enter the content that's appropriate for the data type.

If you're prompted to enter a URL, you can enter a URL as is or use its URL shortener, which I recommend.

Using Goo.gl to shorten URLs

The URL for this one, `Goo.gl`, is strange; I know — but just type it in as you see it! This service from Google

generates a trackable, shortened URL and a QR Code all at one site. Follow these steps to use Goo.gl:



The figure above shows an example of Goo.gl.

- 1. Type or paste your URL in the text box and click Shorten.**

You see your URL in the first row of a table below the text box.

- 2. To the right of the screen, click the Details link for your URL.**

A QR Code is automatically created.

- 3. Save the image.**

On a Mac, you can Alt-click the QR Code to copy or save it. On a PC, right-click the QR Code to copy or save it.

This generator includes free analytics that report scans, country, device, and browser.

The downside of Goo.gl is that you can use it for URLs only. The good news is that it's free and includes analytics. Acknowledging that most QR Codes link to a URL, Goo.gl is a good option.

If you use Google Chrome for a web browser, you can download an extension in the Chrome Web Store that allows you to shorten the current website URL with Goo.gl. With one click you get a shortened URL, a QR Code, and access to analytics. I use the extension and love it!

3. Choose a foreground color for your QR Code.

If you don't plan on using black, read my suggestions in the later section for "Adding Bling to Your QR Code" to spice up your QR Code.

4. Choose an output type.

You have the following choices:

- **Download:** You can download the QR Code to your computer so you can copy or save it for use.
- **Print:** You have the option to use label templates to print multiple copies of your QR Code onto standard sheets of Avery round and square stickers. The Avery product code is shown below each label layout.
- **Email:** Click on this option and you can email your QR Code.

QRStuff.com meets my basic criteria for QR Code generators, but the analytics come only with the paid version. For \$11.95 a month, you can see the date, time, location, and device type for scans of as many QR Codes as you can create and use.

Picking the best mobile generator

In Chapter 2, I review some of the better QR Code readers for Apple, Android, and BlackBerry operating systems. Many of these readers can also generate QR Codes.

Generating a code with an app on a mobile device is similar to creating one with their online counterparts Kaywa and QRStuff.com. I use the example of the most popular smartphone on the market, Apple's iPhone, with the free version of QR Reader for iPhone, the most popular QR reader (and generator) in the App Store.

1. **Open QR Reader on your iPhone.**
2. **Touch the QR Code displayed on the bottom left (see Figure 3-3).**
3. **Touch the Creator button, with the wrench icon, at the bottom of the screen (see Figure 3-4).**

4. Choose the data type and input the requested information.

You can see your choices in Figure 3-5.

5. You then have the choice to rename the QR Code or change the data.

Presto! You have a QR Code that you can download to your phone or share via e-mail or on your social networks (see Figure 3-6).

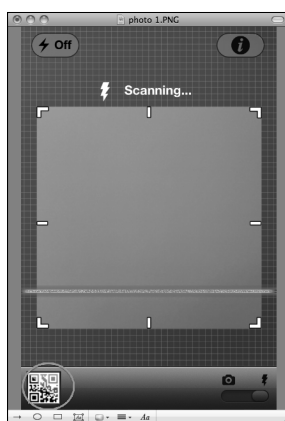


Figure 3-3: Access the QR Code generator by touching the QR Code on the bottom left.

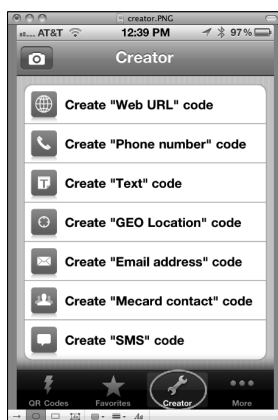


Figure 3-4: Touch the Creator button at the bottom.



Figure 3-5: After choosing the data type, plug in the requested information.



Figure 3-6: After creating your QR Code you can save or share it.

Creating QR Codes with other mobile apps for Apple, Android, and BlackBerry devices involves similar steps and is perfect when you want to use QR Codes on the go.

Getting Help Making Your QR Code

You can easily make your own QR Codes on your computer or mobile device, but if you're planning a marketing campaign

that will include a QR Code, you can ask your graphic designer or printer for help creating one.

I'm a belt-and-suspender kind of guy, so if you rely on someone else to create your QR Code, you'll want to make sure they follow the guidelines I outline at the beginning of this chapter. Here's another handy list to follow:

- ✔ **Make sure the QR Code is a standard size.** You don't want it to be so big or small that it's unsightly or unreadable.
- ✔ **Review the code generator's capabilities.** Double-check to make sure the QR Code generator they're using will allow you to change the destination of the QR Code, if needed.
- ✔ **Make sure the QR Code generator can accommodate these four most common data types:** These four include URL, plain text, phone, and SMS (also known as *texting*, which any tween or teenager can explain to you if you're unfamiliar with it).
- ✔ **Make sure you have the ability to track the QR Code on your own.** It's up to you, not your designer and printer, to track the results of your QR Code campaign.
- ✔ **Test the code.** Ask your printer to give you a final proof so you can test the QR Code you'll ultimately use. Again, check twice; use once.

Testing Your QR Code

After you create a QR Code, you want to test it before you use it in a campaign, to make sure it's working. Here are some suggestions for testing your QR Code to make sure it works in the real world.

- ✔ **Scan the QR Code in different lighting.** If it doesn't work, you can increase the contrast of the code (a darker color on a lighter background if you started with something lighter than a black code on a white background) or you can take steps to make sure it's displayed in an area with the right amount of light.
- ✔ **Try it out on multiple devices.** Scan the code with as many different types of devices — old and new — and QR Code readers as possible to make sure it works.



- ✓ **Test the code at the distance it will be scanned by people.** Sure, the code works correctly when you scan it on the table in your office. But what about when the QR Code is on a billboard and hundreds of yards from where people will scan it? Will it work then?
- ✓ **Test Internet access in that area.** Make sure people have Internet access at the very spot at which the code will be scanned. Everyone knows how temperamental mobile and Wi-Fi service can be — one spot might be a dead zone, but ten feet away you might have coverage. It's frustrating but a reality you need to prepare for. Giving people a QR Code with no Internet connection is like giving them a car with no wheels. Using a QR Code at a trade show is a great idea, but not when it's in that part of the exhibit hall that has a notoriously bad Internet connection. You won't know until you try to scan the QR Code at the very spot others will be scanning it.

The bottom line is test, test, test as closely as possible to where, when, and how regular people with ordinary technology will be scanning the QR Code.

Adding Bling to Your QR Code

Most of the QR Codes you see in the real world will be like the QR Codes you see in this book: black squares on white background. But people love to accessorize, and QR Codes are no exception. Here are some easy ways to customize your QR Codes.



- ✓ **Add some color.** QR Codes don't have to be black and white. They can be any color you want, or multiple colors. You can also use a color gradient without impacting the scanability of the code.

The code itself should be dark and have a light-colored background. The less contrast between the code and the background, the harder it will be to scan. Also, a light color code on a dark background won't work with most scanners.
- ✓ **Round out those hard edges.** One of the most jarring features of QR Codes is all those hard edges. So rough and cold . . . brrr. Make them more appealing by rounding them out and giving them a softer look (as in Figure 3-7).



Figure 3-7: No hard edges makes for a more appealing QR Code. The palm trees in the middle help too.

- ✓ **Add some artwork or your logo.** Doing so really turns the QR Code into something other than a bland black-and-white square. It increases the attractiveness of the code and may lead to more scans. You can find QR Code generators online to help you customize your code, or if you're familiar with Photoshop, you can make your own or have a graphic designer make one for you.



I've never used Photoshop, so I searched for an online generator to help me add the logo from my blog, Selfishgiving.com, to a QR Code. Again, I was happy with the code I generated at www.unitaglive.com/qrcode.

It was easy. I just chose a data type (in my case, a URL) and colors, uploaded my logo, and it generated a QR Code for me (see Figure 3-8).



Figure 3-8: Unitag generated this QR Code with my logo and blog colors (red and gray). It took just a couple of minutes.

- ✓ **Understand error correction.** Up to 30 percent of a QR Code can be used for your artwork or logo without impacting scanability. Some generators allow you to adjust error correction from 0 to 30 percent. The lower the number is, the fewer squares that can be removed to add a logo or artwork. If you set the error correction at 0 percent, removing even one tiny square from the QR Code may render it unscannable. In general, keep error correction above 20 percent if you plan to accessorize your QR Code.

Preparing Your QR Code for the Real World

I've talked a lot about how to correctly generate a QR Code, but where you put that perfectly scannable QR Code after you've created it requires almost as much forethought. Keep these tips in mind:

- ✓ **Be careful of laminated surfaces.** The reflection can sometimes make the code difficult to read.
- ✓ **Stick with flat surfaces.** If the QR Code is printed on an object that's uneven, creased, or wrinkled, people will have trouble scanning it.

- ✓ **Don't make the QR Code too small or big.** Make it just the right size — but at least one square inch — to get the job done. Treat it like the tool it is.
- ✓ **Keep it simple.** The primary value of a QR Code is what it links to. Overvaluing it is like decorating the handle on a hammer instead of admiring what it can make. Sure, make your codes attractive if you want to. Just remember that the QR Code isn't the Big Show. What it links to is what's interesting, exciting, and valuable.
- ✓ **Give an explanation.** Tell people what a QR Code is (an offline link to the digital world), what it does (for example, starts a video that shows the strict quality control steps your company uses), and how to access the information on it (such as, download a QR Code reader from your mobile device's app store). See Figure 3-9 for an example.

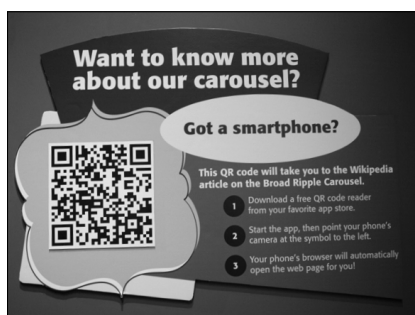


Figure 3-9: Explain to people what a QR Code is, what it does, and how to use it.

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