How QR codes can help marketers: From seamless commerce to developing a deeper understanding of customers

Article

QR codes are playing a larger role in how consumers shop, buy, and interact with brands. This year alone, over 94 million US consumers will use smartphone QR scanners, a number that will grow to 102.6 million by 2026, per our forecast.

Creative QR code use can drive conversion across physical and digital spaces. Here are three ways marketers can use QR codes to increase consumer engagement and encourage purchase behavior.

1. Remove friction from the shopping journey

QR codes can help retailers create a seamless commerce experience, which is more important than ever, according to Insider Intelligence senior analyst Evelyn Mitchell.

"Given inflation, retailers should be offering every feature they can to reduce as many barriers to purchase as possible," she said.

In-store, retailers can use QR codes to give shoppers access to coupons, additional product information, or even enable them to make purchases without having to engage in the traditional checkout process.

Brand example: The Ikea app features a mobile checkout option for users that enables them to scan the QR codes of items they want to purchase as they shop and then check out using a dedicated lane.

Offsite QR codes allow retailers to increase brand awareness, promote special offers or discounts, or direct shoppers to the nearest store location.

Brand example: Furniture rental company Fernish uses QR codes in its out-of-home (OOH) advertising, which serves the dual purpose of driving brand awareness while also enabling the company to see which pieces of creative drive the most traffic.

2. Enhance consumer experience

Beyond practical uses, retailers can leverage QR codes to create interactive experiences across physical and digital channels.

For example, using QR codes in TV ads can encourage consumer engagement via pop quizzes, games, or exclusive deals. They can also make ads instantly shoppable, removing several barriers to purchase and providing customers with instant gratification.

Brand example: In the buildup to Super Bowl LVII, Instacart partnered with Anheuser-Busch InBev on a marketing campaign that used QR codes to direct viewers to Michelob Ultra's Instacart page, hoping that once users were there, they would stock up on other Super Bowl party items.

Meanwhile, QR-launched AR can bring OOH advertising to life, offering consumers exclusive interactive experiences that blend the virtual and real worlds. Customers can see 3D models of products, uncover special deals, or see how a certain product may look in their home.

Brand example: The wine brand 19 Crimes uses QR codes to lead consumers to an app that generates an AR experience bringing the criminal characters from the labels to life, telling stories of the crimes that sent them across the ocean to Australia.

3. Target customer data and measurement

QR codes give retailers insights into when, where, and how consumers are interacting with their products and give better insights into the customer journey.

For instance, by incorporating QR codes into a loyalty program, retailers can bridge the gap between online and in-store behavior.

"You know what they're doing in the store and what they're doing online so you can really personalize your messaging to them," said Insider Intelligence vice president of content Suzy Davidkhanian.

Brand example: McDonald's customers can scan QR codes on the items they order to collect points, which they can redeem for freebies and perks. McDonald's, meanwhile, gets insight into which items customers are ordering and when.

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