

# Blooming QR Codes

Keeping customers informed, and retailers tuned in, QR codes are the next generation of social media. **BY TARA LYNNE GROTH**



IMAGE COURTESY OF DOS GRINGOS

The possibilities of QR codes are endless, as they can connect consumers to virtually anything on the Web.

**B**y now, you've certainly seen them around and wondered what they could do for your business. QR (Quick Response) codes are quickly becoming New Age bar codes. They are changing the face of traditional marketing literature, floral packaging and sell sheets, eliminating verbose copy and creating more visually compelling marketing collateral and print ads. Without extensive verbiage, consumers aren't as intimidated by flyers. Stunning and eye-catching imagery draws consumers in and the QR code teases their curiosity. Does it link to a coupon for a bouquet? What's special about this plant? Where were these flowers grown? With QR codes, consumers' shopping experience turns into a learning experience.

QR code readers are as simple as a Smartphone camera and even some computer webcams. Smartphone users scan the QR code by taking a photo and an application directs them to a URL, be it a custom Website, Facebook page, video on plant care, special pricing offer, new product or an entire product catalog. They work on any flat surface, including print ads, buses, business cards, trade show material, etc. The cost of

creating a QR code? Free. Most importantly, they are on the packages of many floral items.

## Endless Retail Possibilities

Debbie Loche, floral buyer merchandiser for Roche Bros, a chain of 15 stores headquartered in Wellesley Hills, MA, saw QR codes at the International Floriculture Expo (IFE) as one of the new introductions to the marketplace. Loche has worked in mass market floral for 23 years and believes QR codes are a great asset to educate customers. From plant care to common allergies, the possibilities are endless. She says, "I would really like to see QR codes linked to handling of the product, design ideas and possibly farms where the product is grown."

Marketing manager with Lansing, MI-based The John Henry Co., Brenda Vaughn is amazed at how quickly the codes are affecting Web traffic. The company started using QR codes two years ago, just prior to the Smart phone demographic burst. "We send stats to retailers for every single QR code we use," Vaughn reports. With its consumer websites, Vaughn is able to track analytics and watch the success of the company's video-focused codes, recipe links and plant care pages. With 34 years of experi-

ence under her belt, Vaughn's witnessed the evolution of the floral market. "Sometimes the floral industry is the last to take advantage of these technologies, but now we're leading the way," she says proudly.

Michael Schrader, director of floral for the Midwest's chain of Schnuck Markets Inc., in St. Louis, MO, saw some of John Henry's trade partners using the codes and decided to use them, too. Schnuck's is using the codes on more than just the plant tags. "We're using them in our departments and in our advertising," Schrader reports. "We generate some of our promo materials in-house and others come from our supplier."

"Retailers want anything that's new," says marketing director Susan Murdock of World Class Flowers, headquartered in Egg Harbor City, NJ. "We've seen an increase in our web traffic since adding QR codes to our price tags and POP signs." Murdock explains the company's codes direct buyers to fresh-cut care, design tips based on the size of the bouquet and details about the flowers' origins. When a local New Jersey farm is used, World Class Flowers showcases the farm on its website.

Although Murdock witnessed a slow start,

## FLORAL & FOLIAGE MARKETING

the codes have taken off. The key, she says, is keeping the content fresh. This way, those who scan the code aren't seeing the same videos and information. It gives consumers reasons to return. Another great feature about QR codes is that there is no new code creation or printing involved when a new website is needed. Simply redirect the link and the same code directs to new content.

Code creation is fast, simple and free. Free QR code generators are available online, and

it takes less than 30 seconds to generate a code image for marketing use. It's difficult to imagine why any retailer wouldn't be using QR codes.

### Consumers Benefit, Too

Although they appear tech-based and less personal, QR codes have the ability to humanize plants and flowers. Linking the consumer to a video of growers and their families adds a personal touch to the point-

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— Susan Murdock, World Class Flowers

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of-sale experience. Shoppers go home knowing who grew the flowers they're now enjoying. Plus, as consumers learn more about the plants via QR codes, they become more comfortable with their purchase and leave the store assured with their choice. What's more, should someone receive the plant as a gift, he or she now can scan the code to learn about the care needed.

Right now retailers are taking advantage of QR codes in almost every industry, providing a story behind every product. For consumers, traceability is another added value. *Entrepreneur* magazine cited reports just three years ago and forecasted that “consumers are willing to pay a small premium for traceability, but consumers are willing to pay more for traceability attached to other valuable attributes.” Walk through the local Whole Foods and it's clear consumers are often paying up to 50 percent more for organic or certified items.

Sustainable resources are an added value in consumers' buying decisions. As organic and certified flowers gain popularity, using a QR code to educate consumers about the flowers' history and traceability could close the deal. At the very least, the codes bring consumers to retailers' websites — a special landing page or discount — making it easier to view Web traffic statistics. President and “Chief Gringo,” Jason Levin of Dos Gringos Vista, CA-based grower, has witnessed a traffic spike since implementing QR codes a year and a half ago, and that's without promoting the codes at the retail level. “We saw about a 10 percent pop and it will be interesting to see where it goes,” says Levin.

For Loche at Roche Bros., whose clients are upper-income consumers, she knows they are concerned about value. Since smartphone users read the codes, retailers know they are reaching a tech-savvy client. Bringing the knowledge to floral marketing,

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— Art Conforti, Beneva Solutions

retailers incorporate QR codes into marketing collateral, advertisements and plant tags. The codes engage a specific niche of consumers who are more aware of their options when it comes to making buying decisions. Plus, the codes pull consumers into interacting, creating an opportunity for retailers to showcase their other products and services.

It's easy to see just how influential buyers' perceptions of value are when using this high-speed mode of information delivery. But it's the staying connected with consumers that retailers are thrilled about. “With QR codes we have more interaction with the end-consumer. Any additional attention we can get the better,” says Sharon Snoei, sales manager of Homestead Growers, an exclusive grower of potted calla lilies, based in Vineland, Ontario, Canada.

**Help For Retailers**

Now that QR codes are becoming a staple in the floral market, code-focused services are popping up. FloréTag, a French company, specializes in tech innovations for the botanical industry. Why use this company's service if creating QR codes is free? It can mean less work for retailers if they want access to FloréTag's already established extensive floral encyclopedia. FloréTag links users to the encyclopedia with details on plant care and history. Part of the company's services is a tracking feature, which can show where and how many times the



**The John Henry Co. began using QR codes two years ago, and sends stats to its retail clients for every QR code they use.**

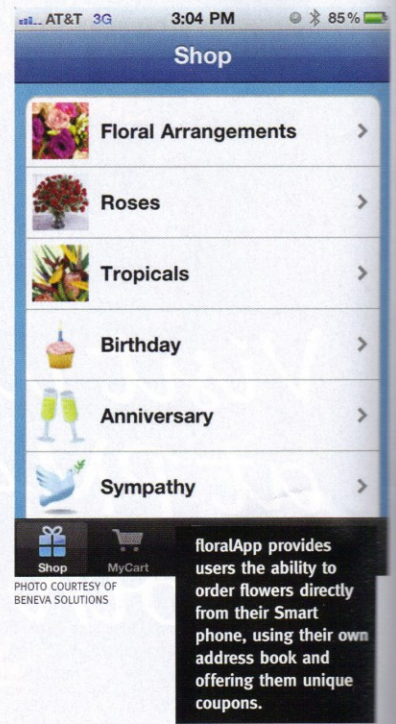
PHOTO COURTESY OF THE JOHN HENRY CO.

code was accessed. Retailers use the information to predict demand in different areas, and then amend their inventory as needed.

Outside of inventory budgets, the codes allow retailers the luxury of smaller ad sizes in magazines, since the QR code uses less space than extensive ad copy. With most retailers leaning toward educating consumers, what about connecting in a more permanent way, with an app?

Beneva Solutions, a group of floral retail marketers in Sarasota, Florida, launched floralApp only a year ago. Compatible with Android and iPhones, floralApp gives users the convenience of sending flowers from their own phone's address book, unique coupons and a one-click feature that dials the store. Users simply pick out a floral arrangement on their phone and instead of searching for the recipient's address, their phone automatically loads details from their contacts. Then, the user picks a time for delivery or pick-up and their order is complete.

“The sooner we engage customers, the better we are at keeping them loyal to the retail brand,” says Beneva's president, Art Conforti. FloralApp's convenience is enticing and, since the app is easily accessible, the propensity is high for consumers to be repeat clients and make orders for special occasions in the future. “Downloading an app is an engagement to do business,” he adds. “It just takes one or two times and the user is hooked.”



While plant tags may be the most obvious choice for QR codes, there are many other places retailers can promote their apps or QR codes. Another means of incorporating QR codes is in the floral space's storefront. Prime marketing space is available on a standard 'CLOSED' business sign. Floral retailers who add a QR code to their after-hours business sign can invite visitors to place an order and schedule delivery online.

Retailers can also turn the tables and put the code into the buyers' hands at checkout. When consumers purchase flowers as a gift, they can have the option of recording a personalized voice message, which can then be delivered to their loved one on the flower's gift tag with a QR code. The voice message plays when the recipient receives the flowers and scans the code.

When customers stop in the floral section of the supermarket and have an entire shopping list distracting them, a QR code will cause them to stop, look and shop. Chances are, consumers will make their final buying decision based on price, but the codes are still a prime opportunity to deliver incentives while incorporating company and product news. QR codes are free, attract customers, deliver information in seconds and help make buying decisions as fast and easy as it takes to scan the code itself.