



# What's black and white and scrambled all over?

## Law firms warm to QR codes

By Jane Pribek  
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You've probably seen the black-and-white scrambled boxes in newspapers, magazines, and on the backs of catalogs or even cereal boxes.

They're quick response codes, or QR codes.

Each is a two-dimensional bar code that smartphone users can snap a picture of, and, using code reader applications that they've downloaded or that were already installed when their phones came out of the box, they can immediately tap into information about businesses, products and people.

QR codes were initially developed in the mid-1990s by Denso Wave, a Japanese company and subsidiary of Toyota.

According to the Denso Wave website, they were first used to track vehicle parts.

But they have caught on recently in a big way in marketing consumer goods and services.

They are preferable to traditional bar codes because the latter can hold a maximum of only 20 digits, compared with the former, which can hold up to 7,089 characters. They also can be much smaller.

By the end of this year, about 80 percent of law firms will start using the codes, according to projections from Vizibility, the New York-based online personal branding and marketing company.

Vizibility surveyed legal professionals last summer, including members of the Legal Marketing Association, about their use of the codes and found that 85 percent of legal marketers are aware of QR codes — and that 35 percent already used them. It also found 45 percent plan to start using QR codes within the year.

"It's gradually being accepted by law firms around the country," said Minneapolis legal marketing consultant



Donna Erickson. "It's been more widely used in retail, and law firms are just starting to find their way."

### Minnesota firms experimenting

The state's largest firm, Faegre Baker

Daniels, has jumped aboard by using QR codes on seminar materials.

Since the predecessor Minneapolis firm, Faegre & Benson, recently merged with Baker & Daniels at the beginning of the month, the combined firm is just now strategizing on future uses for QR codes, said Web and Communications Manager Aaron Reiter.

They have asked attorneys to think about what types of collateral materials they typically give to clients or prospective clients, and what types of information they believe those audiences would want to see from scanning a QR code. Then they'll tailor their use to practice groups and individual attorneys.

Winthrop & Weinstine in Minneapolis has also used QR codes at events. For example, the firm recently hosted a women clients' networking event, and QR codes on the materials they distributed took smartphone-clicking attendees to biographies of the firm's women lawyers.

Deb Cochran, the firm's director of marketing and business development, said, "The code takes them to a landing page for events. We've seen that once we get them to our website, they tend to visit other pages. So we've been very pleased with our initial foray into QR codes and plan to continue their use in that way and to



Aaron Reiter



explore other uses for the future."

Those other uses, Erickson says, might include opening a URL to profiles, blogs, articles, videos, client alerts or newsletters and recruiting information. QR codes can also open vCards, so that contact information is directly stored into the smartphone, eliminating the need to key it in.

### Tips

One of the most attractive features of QR codes is low cost, Reiter and Erickson agreed.

Creating the QR codes can be done in about a minute, for free, at <http://goo.gl>, Google's QR code generator, Erickson said. Other options include <http://mobile-barcode.com> and [www.qrstuff.com](http://www.qrstuff.com). There are many other free applications available, but some generate codes that aren't readable, she cautioned, so testing is critical.

With the Google option, you can use Google Analytics to track the use of the QR code. But there are other tracking options as well, Erickson said.


Tracking is important because it will help to identify trends regarding their use. For example, if a sizeable number

of seminar attendees use the code, the firm will know to continue and potentially expand their use for that purpose.

You'll also want to test the code's readability across several devices, she added. "It'll be embarrassing if you create a code and it doesn't work when the client tries to use it."

Along these lines, Reiter said to make sure the QR code takes viewers to information that's mobile-friendly. He said he has clicked on codes only to be taken to websites that are difficult to read because he's not at a desktop or laptop.

One of the common uses so far for QR codes in legal marketing is to display an attorney's biography, he noted.

But for his part, Reiter thinks the better strategy is to be a little more creative and give viewers something more, a "bonus," of sorts — perhaps a white paper or something of real use to them, and something that isn't widely available elsewhere. 

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