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Web Reviews: QR Codes for Sci-Tech Libraries

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Web Reviews

Lisa R. Johnston

Reviews of web resources of interest to *SciTech News* readers.

QR Codes are popping up everywhere…classroom walls, conference posters, and even T-shirts (http://www.thinkgeek.com/stuff/41/09shirt.html). These "Quick Response" Codes are essentially 2D barcodes that work with your mobile phone's built-in camera and a reader application (like "Google Goggles") to easily point to a web-site or application with one click…rather than typing in a full URL. They also can add a bit of excitement or tech savvy to your promotion materials, such as displays and signs in the library and are very easy to implement.

Recently a group of librarians in my library got together to brainstorm how we can use QR codes in our science library. Here is a list of our ideas, best practices and resources that we uncovered. Special thanks to Charlie Heinz, Megan Kocher, and the STS-listserv for all the help with this topic!

How to Implement

1. Create Your QR Code

QR codes must be created using a generator. Popular generators include: http://www.qrstuff.com/, http://qrcode.kaywa.com/, and the application QR Droid for creating images directly from your Android phone.

There are many types of information that can be encoded into your QR code image. Information could include:

- A URL address to a web site
- Text message or SMS
- Phone number
- Contact information
- Latitude/Longitude location (opens a map)

Then publish your image where users can find it (on the web, or printed on a poster or sign at least 1x1 inches with 300dpi print-quality resolution).

2. Track your QR Code "hits"

Free URL shortening tools like Bitly (https://bitly.com/) or Google's http://goo.gl/ will help you track how well your QR code gets used. This also lets you change or update the resulting URL so that the same QR code can be used more than once.

3. Don't go overboard

Remember, QR codes are shortcuts to help people get to a specific web source. Not all information might be appropriate and if the information is critical (eg. Library is closed) a good old-fashioned sign would still suffice.

4. Be respectful

Not all people have smart phones with built-in cameras, therefore accompany your QR code with the destination URL so that anyone can follow the link.

5. Educate

For those who don't know what QR codes are, your sign can also be a teaching moment. Our library links users to an FAQ on our website describing what these images can do.

Ways to Use Them

1. Mobile Versions of Sci-Tech Databases

- Web of Knowledge http://m.webofknowledge.com/
- Scifinder Scholar http://scifinder.cas.org/mobile

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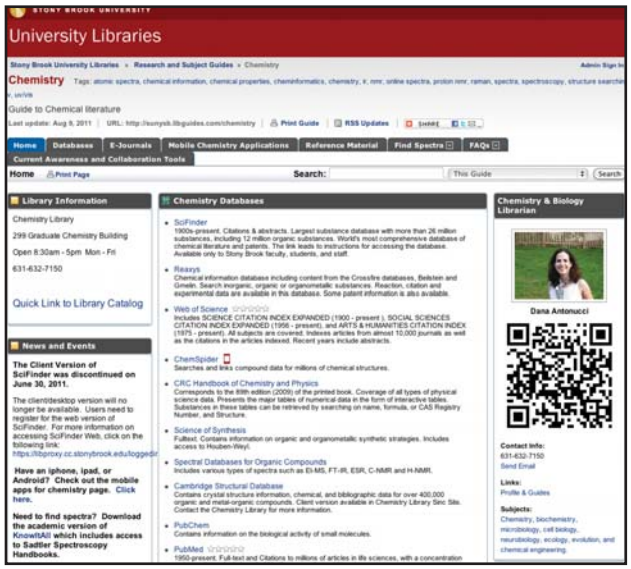
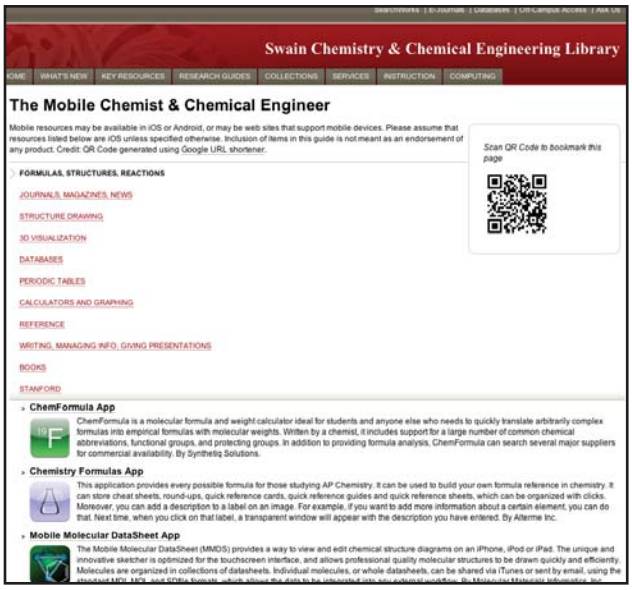
- Science.gov http:/m.science.gov
- And don't forget your library's mobile site!

2. Mobile-Applications and Guides

There are millions of mobile applications ("apps") and some have amazing potential for our sci-tech users. Some libraries have created library guides that list the top mobile applications and can be promoted through QR codes: see for example Dana Antonucci's guide "Mobile Chemistry Applications" tab on the Chemistry libguide http://sunysb.libguides.com/chemistry.

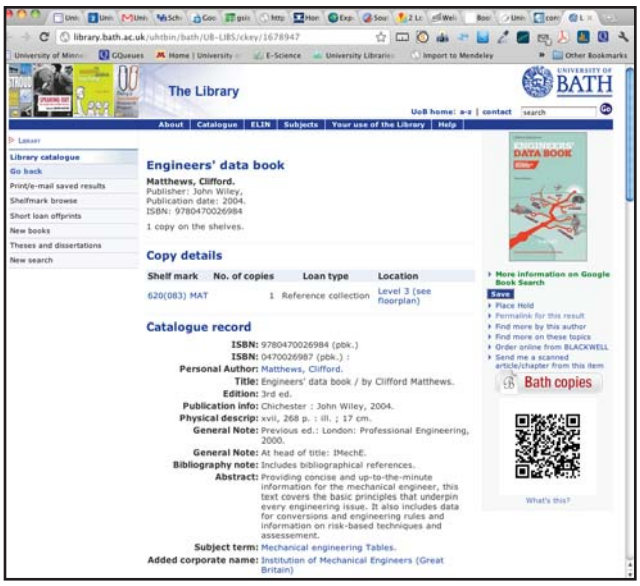


Also, using a QR Code on your web page can be useful when you are highlighting mobile resources. The users can easily switch from viewing your web site on their computer to viewing it on their phone and begin downloading mobile apps. See Grace Baysinger's page at Stanford for a great example of this: http://lib.stanford.edu/swain-library/mobile-apps-chemists-chemical-engineers.



3. In your library catalog

Some libraries have begun embedding QR codes directly into their library catalog. This would allow a user browsing your catalog online to take a quick image with their phone and walk off to the stacks with the call number conveniently located on their mobile device (much more economical that SMS texting!). See this example from the University of Bath in the UK: http://library.bath.ac.uk/uhtbin/bath/UB-LIBS/ckey/1678947



If you promote your events on posters, try adding QR Codes to embed details directly into company or university-wide calendar systems or direct users to the sign-in form for workshops to help increase attendance with your library instruction sessions.

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5. In the Stacks

Any collection in the library that has an online component is fair game for using QR codes in the stacks. Here are some of our favorite ideas for QR Code signs:

- Sticker on map drawers linking to digital versions (eg. USGS Topo Finder http://store.usgs.gov/)
- Point to DVD movie trailers from the media collection
- Promote digitized versions of microfiche collections, such as NASA Technical Reports
- Engineering standards where new versions may be online
- Journal print runs that continue online only
- Subject guides for any browsable section (Chemistry, Physics, etc.)
- Important reference works that are full-tech searchable like Sci-tech encyclopedias.
- Building hours and link to alternative libraries for off-hours study locations

More resources to get you started!

Give Away Some E-books
http://www.davidleeking.com/2011/03/07/give-away-some-ebooks/

Blog post describes library experimenting with QR codes to "give away" free e-books.

Google Kills Off Those Little Square Codes You Scan With Your Phone
http://www.businessinsider.com/those-little-square-codes-you-scan-with-your-phone-are-dead-2011-3

Article predicts the demise of QR Codes in favor of near-field communication (NFC) chips due to "Google Places" move away from QR Code support.

Augmented Reality App for Shelf Reading
http://youtu.be/NgZVI630SsI

Video by computer science professor who developed a smart phone app that scans books on a shelf using QR Codes.

QR Code Roundup: 10 Resources for Librarians and Educators
http://oedb.org/blogs/ilibrarian/2011/qr-code-roundup-10-resources-for-librarians-and-educators/
Includes topics such as how to make QR Codes more attractive looking and scanning library cards on smart phones.

Tales of Things
http://talesofthings.com/

Using QR Codes to tag physical objects, like the antique clock on your mantel. This site allows you to preserve memories by attaching them to the physical item. ❖