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THE RAPID RISE OF MOBILE

Is today's technology making you feel so yesterday? Get used to it, because your customer's smartphone is already so tomorrow.

By Steve Cissel

Since technology changes so quickly, I thought I'd mention that I'm writing this on Tuesday morning, September 7, just in case you find my commentary to be 'so yesterday.' Seriously though, things are changing fast, especially in the world of mobile computing, and it would be wise for all of us to be in-the-know about this stuff.

The energy behind the rapid rise of mobile is the personalization and computing power of the mobile device. Today's smartphone is a personalized multi-tasking personal computer — a phone, camera, video recorder, voice recorder, contact manager, web browser and app enabler — that knows where it is on the globe. You may share your laptop or desktop with a co-worker or a family member, but you're not likely to share your phone. Now that is personal.

For us, those involved in the retail lawn and garden market category, local/mobile advertising is an area that requires our attention. We are moving into an era where messaging/advertising can be extremely relevant and targeted. Based on the consumer's location, the mobile device delivers the right message at exactly the right

time, to exactly the right person.

Take the 2D barcodes for example (Microsoft Tags and QR Codes). They will be widely used in the retail stores in 2011. Using a smartphone, the consumer can 'snap' a picture of the 2D barcode and the phone will immediately retrieve the intended message for the consumer. How's that for timely and targeted?

Also in the mobile space, we have seen the arrival of the 'check-in' mobile business model. Some of the leading players are Foursquare, Gowalla, Loopt, Whrri and ShopKick. They are getting a ton of buzz. Recently Facebook and Google have launched their respective location awareness features.

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New Networking

The new business cards at Anderson's Home & Garden Showplace in Newport News, Va., are worth a second look. The back of the card shows two things: the company's logo and a 2D barcode that

can be scanned with a smartphone application. Anderson's general manager Jason Blanchette says, "I got the idea from the different magazines I get."

From trade publications to consumer magazines like *Men's Health* and even one for triathlon enthusiasts, Blanchette couldn't help but notice the growing

visibility of 2D barcode technology. And from the first time this general manager snapped a picture of a 2D barcode with his Blackberry, he was hooked. "It's a really cool way to get information," he says.

Blanchette adds, this new technology hits a sweet-spot with his smartphone-toting generation — Generation Y. "This can be great for those who might not want to ask questions. With their smartphone, they can take a picture of the barcode, which will then take them to a site for more in-depth info about a plant or product."

The 2D barcodes are currently limited to the business cards at Anderson's; the code takes the customer to the garden center website's homepage.

The Virginia retailer is looking to expand this new technology to signs throughout its store this spring, and with the help of an in-house graphic designer and sign printer, Blanchette has plans on saving his fair share of trees.

"Like most garden centers, in the past we'd print out a care sheet for everything, like for each variety of rose we carried," he explains. "This will help us save a lot of paper. Things have gotten to the point where you don't have to write anything down anymore."

There's no doubt 2D tags are a cool new way to market and obtain information, but does it have a legitimate place in your garden center? Blanchette believes it does.

"If this was just something our industry was trying, I'd be cynical, but I'm seeing it everywhere, by companies and industries big and small," he says. "I think we're on the front edge of this; this is just the beginning. We need to find ways to be cutting edge and react better to new technology. Big boxes don't have the ability to change quickly, but we can."



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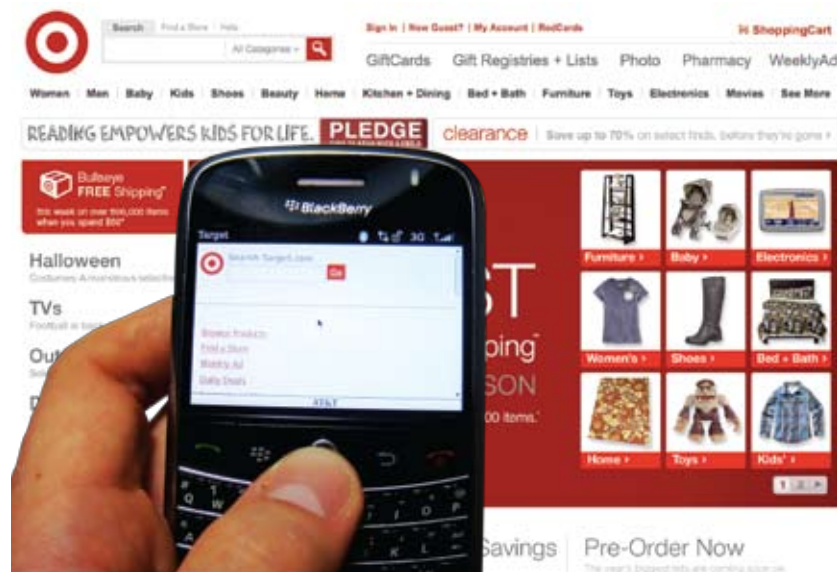
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Take a look at this example from Target. As the number of smartphone users continues to grow, it's important to take into consideration how your website appears on a mobile device.

A recent *New York Times* article describes the huge numbers of subscribers to these check-in businesses, but goes on to say that most of us do not want to broadcast our locations to the world. My crystal ball is not clear enough to see where the check-in model will influence the lawn and garden retailer, but the cross between local and mobile will be of influence for sure.

Yet to raise its head in our lawn and garden marketplace is text advertising. Again, it is local, mobile and personal. In the future, your retail business may one day send out text messages to those who have opted-in to receive those messages. For example: You'll be able to send out messages to those who want to know when certain categories of items are on sale. A quick text message to the target group will prompt them to come into the store (limited time frame) to take advantage of the offer.

Did you know that a check-out scanner can read a barcode off the smartphone screen? In the future, you'll send out barcodes (coupons) to targeted customers that they can use at check-out, then measure the results with your POS system. How close is the day that your loyal customers can swipe their smartphones to pay for their purchases? It is closer than you think. Mobile wallets are already mainstream in Japan and Europe.

Something else to consider: What does your website look like on a mobile phone? Chances are that your site does not read well on the phone's display screen. Does this mean that you stop the bus and go build your mobile site? No, but the conversation about your mobile website needs to be had with your webmaster. You're sure to learn a lot about your site and about your webmaster.

No need to get your overalls in a wad about this mobile computing stuff. But I am suggesting that we as an industry pay attention so not to be last to the game — again.

Steve Cissel is an internet marketing expert and the CEO/founder of 10-20 Media, a home and garden marketplace data aggregator. Steve can be reached at steve@10-20media.com.

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