

QR Codes



You may already have seen or used the QR (Quick Response) code like the one above, but since pandemic measures have been relaxed, the QR code is being seen more often especially in pubs and restaurants.

So, what is the QR code? It is simply a shortcut to a webpage, just like the link or shortcut we are used to in an email or other electronic messages.

To read the QR code, simply point your phone camera at it and your smart phone will read it and tell your phone browser to display the webpage it relates to, it is that simple. (There are also QR code reading apps available)

People like shortcuts, and criminals know we do.

Although the use of the QR code has benefits just like the link or shortcut in an email, it could be exploited by cyber criminals so I just want you to know how, and then you can make your own mind up whether to scan or not.

The image below was taken in a shopping centre the QR code is printed on a professional looking 5-foot-high banner outside the shop. Because the banner looks high quality and is in a secure shopping centre with cameras and security, it unlikely that it had been placed there by a criminal. (Not guaranteed of course, but on balance I would scan it but not provide any personal information)

Another example of when I would consider scanning a QR code, would be when I have entered a restaurant or pub, and on the table is a guide to ordering food and drinks. The laminated sheet gives me the choice of downloading an app from Google Play or the App Store, or I can scan the QR code.



If however, I was in public and I read a poster with a QR code on it advertising a service or product, I will be far more cautious of scanning it because it is in a far less secure environment which a criminal could exploit. How? It is technically possible for the criminal to create their own QR code, print it and place it over the original QR code on the poster, they then create a fake website and have it hosted on the internet. If this QR code is scanned by a third party, then their device will display a fake website deceiving the user to submit private information to the criminal. Exactly how phishing emails work.

So, if you are going to scan a QR code, just assure yourself that the QR code you are scanning is genuine, does the poster look genuine? Is it printed to a high commercial standard? Can you tell if there is another layer of paper over the QR code that suggests the poster has been tampered with? If in doubt, don't scan it, and if you want to find out more about what the poster is advertising, consider using your browser on your device.

The good news, I am yet to read a crime report that suggests anyone in the UK has been caught out in such a way, could this change in the future?

Being aware of the tactics used by cyber criminals to steal our data and money, helps us to defend ourselves and families.

If you have any questions or concerns involving QR codes, then please contact me.

Regards

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