

The fascinating history of the QR code

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QR codes are used in so many areas of our lives, from tracking parcels, getting into gigs, paying for parking or hopping onto Wi-Fi. But where did they come from? Reporting for Tech Now, the BBC's Martin Sharkey has the story behind the creation of QR codes.

This video is from Tech Now, the BBC's flagship technology programme.



1. You see them everywhere. But where does the QR code actually come from?
2. **Flash back to the 1990s:** automotive engineers were faced with a challenge.
3. Japanese moto manufacturing was in a boom: production lines couldn't **keep up with demand**.
4. **Enter Mashahiro Ohara.** He was developing technologies to make Toyota manufacturing more efficient.
5. But **barcodes** were **the bottleneck**.
6. The familiar black and white stripes were used to **track** the automotive parts.
7. **Their limitation?** They could only hold a small amount of data. And they had to be scanned **one by one**, slowing down the production line.
8. **The fix?** A new type of code that could store more information and be scanned **from any angle**.
9. So, **unlike** the traditional barcodes, which store data **in a linear way**, these new codes use two-dimensional matrix of black and white squares.
10. Thanks to clever error correction, the code could even be partially damaged but is still readable.
11. And so the Quick Response code—or QR—was born.
12. **For the early years**, the code **remained largely confined to** industry.
13. And then came smartphones. And that really changed everything.
14. Suddenly, everyone had a **reader in their back pocket**.
15. But **it wasn't until** Covid-19 **that** the technology truly **hit its stride**.
16. **Overnight**, contactless **became king**.
17. Menus, vaccine records, tickets, payments. It all **went digital** and fast.
18. Today, QR codes really do it all—from **tracking your parcels, getting you into gigs, paying for parking or hopping onto the Wi-Fi**.
19. But the QR code's simplicity can also be its weakness.
20. **Malicious** QR-codes, or QR **phishing** attacks can steal your **login credentials**, steer you into fake websites or **drop malware onto your device**.
21. You can **stay safe** by only scanning codes **from trusted sources**, previewing links before you open them and **checking for tampering**.
22. In a world **driven by** fast access and **frictionless experiences**, the **humble** QR code **wins on one key aspect**—simplicity.
23. No chip, no battery, no wireless connectivity—a simple, low-tech solution connecting our digital and physical worlds. Quiet, square, **unassuming** but absolutely everywhere.

