

Socially Speaking



MY Social Network is YOUR Showroom

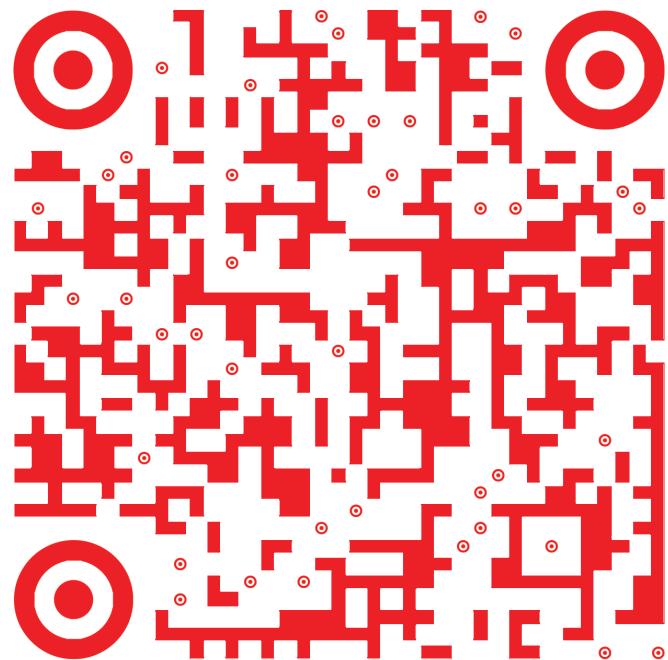
BY: DAVID GOSMAN

Target® did something really cool for this holiday season. Well, cool from a retail-geek perspective. Like several of their fellow retailers, Target has been experimenting with several different options to fend against 'show-rooming.' Show-rooming refers to the recent phenomenon where consumers view a product in a store but then buy from another company online because of pricing, stock levels or convenience. Target is placing QR codes on shelf tags next to the 2012 holiday season's top-20 toys. Consumers can scan the QR code with their smart phones, order right from the device and have it shipped straight to their homes. The shipping is free, and the toy will supposedly ship regardless of stock levels at that specific store.

The new tool from Target makes it easier and faster to shop, and holds many obvious advantages versus traditional in-store transacting. There is, however, a not-so-obvious opportunity for retailers to expand the benefits into the social-sphere. Most products within retail stores are marked with a standard, manufacturer-provided UPC code which serves one simple purpose – identification of the product. The UPC bar code can't do a whole lot more, and each UPC code is generally consistent throughout all retailers. QR codes, however, can be dynamically generated by a retailer and can hold more data than a UPC code. They can, for example, identify a specific promotion for a specific product, at a specific retailer.

The fun all starts there. People love 'getting a deal', and many people like to share those deals on Facebook and other social networks with their friends and family. It's currently very easy to share an online deal – copy and paste the link, hit 'Post' and widen your smile a bit more for each friend that clicks 'Like' (come on Facebook addicts, you KNOW you like it when someone 'Likes' your comments). And make no mistakes – some of those 'likes' turn into a purchase. It's a little more difficult, however, to share a deal you found in the store. You've probably seen comments on your social network such as 'Got an awesome deal on a blu-ray player at Best Buy' from friends on your social feeds. However, you have no idea the price, model number, location, number in stock, valid day or time of the sale. You are missing the crucial information you need if you wish to partake in the sale your friend spotted.

The fun can continue with a QR code and some technology to help a customer share it. Imagine finding that blu-ray player deal in Target... with a well-placed QR code that you can use to not only buy the product, but share the deal. Scan it – buy



it – share it. If that QR code appears on your Facebook wall, your friends can now access the EXACT same deal. And a little more...the retailer knows who you are. They can even further customize the QR code to specifically (and privately) tag your information as the referral source. If the retailer decides to reward you for sharing or influencing a purchase, they can enjoy some serious success.

Every retail store can and should be a showroom – but if retailers connect the dots, YOUR social network can be THEIR showroom. C

This article was written in November – by the time this is published, there may already be some results available to gauge Target's success with this strategy. Watch for this article on the RSPA Blog where we will publish such results as they come in!

Let's make this interactive. We'd like to hear from you. If you have any questions, comments or suggestions, please reach out to our "Socially Speaking" author on Twitter (see contact info below) so others can follow the dialogue, or email us at Publications@GoRSPA.org.



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David J. Gosman is the CEO of pcAmerica, a Pearl River, N.Y.-based ISV, which provides retail, restaurant and fuel POS software to an established VAR and distribution channel.