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OH SNAP!

As if we needed more technology…

For the past year, mysterious little doo-dads have increasingly begun to appear in advertising and other media. To the uninformed – like me up until a month or so ago – they seem to be a square made up entirely of squiggles. Almost like a UPC code drawn with a Crayola or some kind of hieroglyph. Yet, they are hardly primitive.

They are called QR codes or "snap tags" most commonly. Here's what the great and terrible Wikipedia has to say about them:

"A QR Code is a specific matrix barcode (or two-dimensional code), readable by dedicated QR barcode readers and camera phones. The code consists of black modules arranged in a square pattern on a white background. The information encoded can be text, URL or other data."

I am told that all the cool kids are using their smartphones to "snap" a close-up photo of these thingamajigs. Also, according to Wikipedia, when you snap the picture, "a tiny elf jumps from the tag into your phone and he uses his wee little hands to quickly draw a pretty little picture on your screen."

(*Note to self: stop trusting everything on Wikipedia.*)

Seriously, something techy happens inside your phone and said web page is opened automatically and you are treated to an informational goodie right there on your fancy device. Some companies use these for specific product information, downloads, digital coupons, links to social media or just as a way to infotain customers with a video or game.

By way of disclosure, the companies aren't doing this just to be all hip and such. Marketers often use these gizmos to collect data about you. For sure your e-mail address, where you snapped it from and whatever else you volunteer. That's pretty much status quo for marketing these days…reveal a little about yourself, get something cool in return and hope the other party doesn't abuse the privilege.

We've already been using them here at GCI in print and online to offer downloads of our iPhone/iPad app. Nearly 3,000 of you have grabbed the app so far, but we have no idea how many of you did it using the QR code option. Apple won't tell us anything about who downloads the app or how they did it. This is why Steve Jobs will eventually rule the known universe.

We've also seen advertisers like FMC, Aquatrols, Toro, Deere and others use them in the magazine and as part of trade show promotions. "It's a mobile society and we need to put exactly the right information into the hands of superintendents and other customers," says FMC's Adam Manwarren. "The codes are a way to do that instantly."

Anyway, I think the future holds some interesting possibilities for QR codes beyond marketing and fun. Imagine if every part in your shop had one and you could simply snap the code to get the assembly instructions you lost five years ago. How about a code on a bentgrass bag that directs you to a specific site with up-to-date seeding instructions based on current climate and germination info? In short, these little doohickeys attach the Internet to any object and that is very cool.

So, we're going to break some ground here and find out just how many of you are boldly going where few turfheads have gone before. Just to make it fun, we've cleverly positioned a tag right in the middle of this page. Snap it and you'll get something fun and exclusive from us AND earn a shot at owning one of our fabulous, VIP-only, limited edition GCI long-sleeved golf shirts.

Mostly, we just hope you'll all play along and give this a try so we have a sense for how useful these things are.

And we promise, by the way, not to misuse your e-mail or other information. I give you my word as one of America's most trusted journalists that we won't screw you for snapping this! Wait… sorry… let's make that more believable: I give you my word as a Kansas Jayhawk we won't spam you. That's a very solemn promise with March Madness looming upon us.

(*Nerd alert: If you have a smartphone with a camera and want to try this, you'll need to download a QR or barcode scanning software like Optiscan, Microsoft Tag or something comparable. I'm told there are hundreds of free ones out there that can be installed in just a few seconds.*)

So, with that, I humbly ask that you snap my tag. Hold on… that sounded dirty. I want you to scan my thingy. Rats! Oh hell, I give up… just point your camera at it and push the appropriate damn button please. **GCI**

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