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# A quick guide to QR codes

**Pam Coca provides proven tips for creating QR codes using online services or MadCap Flare.**

Let yourself be enticed by the wonderful world of Quick Response (QR) codes. They represent one of the most exciting breakthroughs in making information easier and more intuitive to access – and for technical communications professionals to create. In fact, the only serious time you will spend is reading this article because creating a QR code takes less than a minute, and scanning one takes mere seconds.

By now, everyone is familiar with the small maze-like boxes that appear on magazine pages and billboards. Visually, QR codes are squares with horizontal and vertical lines criss-crossing each other. The tiny squares that occur where the lines intersect are called modules. These modules are where the information is stored.

The most common use of QR codes is to publish it on printed materials, so users can scan it with their mobile phone to access more detail online.

My own first foray has been providing QR codes on laminated quick-reference cards. I work at Compressus Inc., USA, which makes the MEDxConnect family of digital medical solutions software. The reference cards slide under user keyboards to provide menus of styles and other useful commands. QR codes on these cards give customers instant access to our online help.

More recently, I added QR codes directly into our online help, including Welcome page dropdowns for our WebHelp and HTML5 help. This lets our customers jump to a topic or video that helps provide a greater understanding of our products.

## Creating QR codes

The success or failure of a QR scan is based on three factors: the quality of the mobile phone or its scanner, the generated code and the platform on which the user will view the end

result. QR codes are scanned with a mobile device, so the destination of the code must be mobile-oriented. In other words, test, test, test to ensure that your user gets the aesthetically pleasing results you want them to have.

Many sites have free code generators that enable the user to create a vCard, a URL, or a text message, for example. After creating a code, you just right-click the image, and save it to your computer. From there, the code can be inserted into any document or online help file the same way you add any other image.

QR code generators typically enable you to create QR codes in a selection of colours. However, I have found that black or red is the easiest colour for a scanner to read.

Also, not all online QR code services produce codes that can be easily scanned. I have had the best success from three sites: <http://zxing.appspot.com/generator>, <http://snapmaze.com>, and [www.barcode.link.net](http://www.barcode.link.net).

## Flare for single-source QR codes

For users of Flare from MadCap Software, there is an even more convenient option. Since the Flare 7.0 release in 2011, the publishing software has provided one-click QR code generation. Just press 'Ctrl + Q' to open the *Insert QR Code* window. Create and save the QR code to use in that Flare project, copy it to other Flare projects, or save it external to Flare for use elsewhere. I save them as PNG files to insert into our quick-reference card files, which are in Adobe InDesign.

Another benefit of using Flare is that I can create a single row, two-column snippet that has the QR code in the left column and the text contacting support in the right column. Because the QR code is a snippet, if any of the support information changes, I just edit the snippet, and the content updates itself. It is the epitome of single-sourcing.

Whether using Flare or an online service, creating QR codes provides new opportunities for helping customers to reach online support, a service and support centre, training events, and more. No longer are we limited by technology, but only by our imagination. **C**

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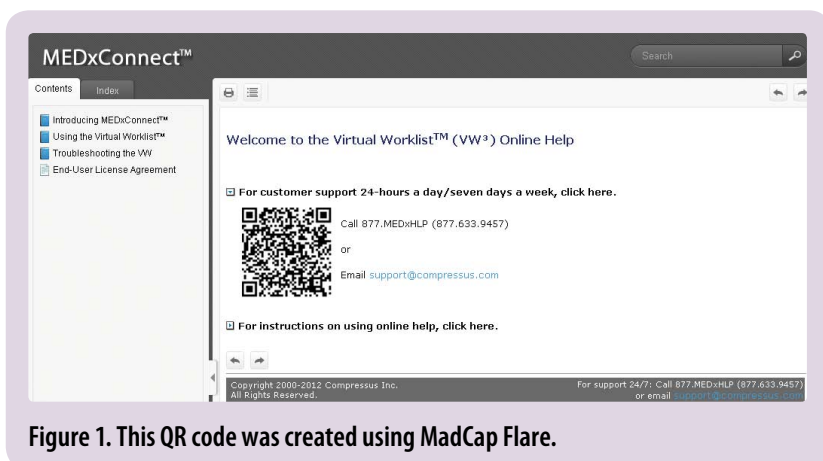


Figure 1. This QR code was created using MadCap Flare.