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From Print to Phone to Web. And a Sale?

By **STEPHANIE CLIFFORD**
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Print may be a flat medium, but that has not stopped magazine publishers from trying to add dimension to their pages. For at least a decade, they have been experimenting with bar codes and icons that could take readers to Web sites, trying to add a bit of Internetlike interactivity to their pages.

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Black-and-white codes on a page from the March issue of Esquire can link Web-enabled phones to styling can advice for items in the magazine.

But the average consumer did not own a bar-code reader — until now. With the sudden ubiquity of smartphones, which have apps that can read bar codes, and cameraphones, which can easily snap pictures of icons, magazines like Esquire and InStyle are adding interactive graphics to their articles, while Entertainment Weekly and Star are including them in ads.

Meanwhile, publishers using text-messaging programs to try to enliven their pages are packing information into the messages and using reader responses to calibrate their coverage.

The idea is not new. Back in 2000, a company called Digital:Convergence introduced a product called the :CueCat. The premise was [advanced, but simple](#). Pages could be printed with bar codes, which readers could scan, and then be connected to specific Internet sites. That would help them find the shirt being advertised, or specs on the Ford truck they liked.

But the technology was clunky. Publications using the :CueCat, including Forbes and Wired, had to mail a [hand-held scanner](#) and a CD-Rom with :CueCat software to their subscribers. The subscribers had to install the software, then attach the device to their computer and wave it over the printed bar codes. It wasn't portable or easy, and, in most cases, it was more trouble than doing a search or typing in a lengthy Web address. That's a major reason the :CueCat [disappeared](#).

Today, though, consumers don't need a :CueCat — they have a cellphone.

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“This idea is basically the same — it’s just everyone has a scanner in their pocket,” said Jonathan B. Bulkeley, the chief executive of Scanbuy, which is working on a mobile program with Esquire, among other publications.

Of course, 10 years later, some concerns remain. Publishers can print bar codes to their hearts’ content, but getting consumers to understand and use them is another matter. While bar codes are [integrated into everyday life](#) in countries like Japan — people get nutrition information from bar codes on [McDonald’s](#) hamburger wrappers — American consumers have never quite picked up the habit. And now that search engines are fast and accurate, advertisers and publishers will most likely need to offer something spectacular, not just a plain Web page, to get people to bother scanning anything.

In its March issue, Esquire will print Scanbuy codes in a spread on “The Esquire Collection” — “the 30 items a man would need to get through life,” said David Granger, editor in chief. Printed near each item will be a small code that looks like a group of black and white squares. Readers scan the code into an Internet-enabled phone, and the code takes them to a mobile menu that provides Esquire’s styling advice for the item and information on where to buy it.

An application called ScanLife, widely available online as a free download, turns a phone into a bar-code reader. Versions exist for the [iPhone](#) and BlackBerry as well as Android-based handsets, and the app comes preloaded on many [Sprint phones](#) in the United States. ScanLife can also read many standard bar codes on many phones, so it can perform price comparisons, for example.

“We kept hearing about different technologies that enabled people to close the gap between the inspiration of seeing something in a magazine and then going to do something about it,” Mr. Granger said.

Though Esquire will be giving readers information about stores where they can buy items, Mr. Granger said, for now the magazine would not be seeking a percentage of sales resulting from use of the technology.

“I’m not sure we have a smooth way of getting a cut yet,” he said, “but it would be nice if this takes off.” Mr. Granger added, however, that Esquire would need to carefully consider questions about editorial integrity raised by such technology.

Mr. Bulkeley said that Esquire’s choice to introduce Scanbuy with its editorial pages, rather than with ads, made sense. “I think advertisers will see that and say, ‘Hey, can we do that too?’ But it is important for editorial to lead, to show advertisers they are supporting it, because there is an educational component necessary,” he said.

Levi’s Dockers khaki pants are among the items featured in the Esquire spread. Jennifer Sey, vice president for global marketing for Dockers, said the company was interested to see how readers respond, adding that running ads containing a code “is a really interesting idea — it’s certainly something that we would consider.”

Rather than running a printed code on its pages, InStyle is using photographs of clothes as the key that links print and online.

In its March issue, InStyle will run a “clothes we love” article, and will direct readers to hold up the pages featuring each of six items, like a miniskirt and a safari jacket, to their Web cameras. The browser will then open related three-dimensional videos.

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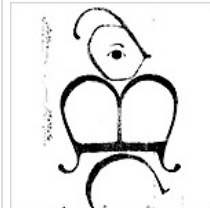
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