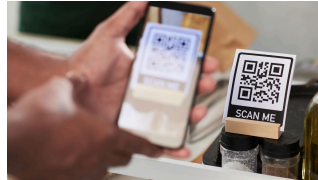




State Privacy Office January Privacy Tip

BEST PRACTICES WHEN SCANNING AND USING QR CODES



QR Codes are (quick response) barcodes for mobile devices. QR codes offer businesses a way to get their audience to act quickly and effortlessly. These codes have become a popular way for brands to engage with their customers and potential customers in new ways.

Best practices when scanning QR codes as a consumer:

- Be aware of your surroundings. If you scan a QR code in public, pay attention to who else is nearby. Scanning a QR code could lead to you downloading malware or opening up your device to hackers — so don't let yourself get distracted by social media or other apps while scanning.
- Use antivirus software and firewall protection on your phone. Antivirus software can help protect your phone against viruses and other forms of malware that can come from scanning QR codes. Firewall protection will keep hackers out of your device when you're connected to the internet through Wi-Fi or cellular data networks. Both types of software should be installed on all devices used in public places like airports and cafes where there are many people using public Wi-Fi hotspots.
- Don't scan a QR code that looks like it's been printed on a piece of paper or cardboard or one that has been written out by hand. If you are unsure whether the QR code is real or fake, don't scan it. Also, be careful when scanning codes found on vehicles, especially if they have been defaced in some way.
- Before scanning any QR code, make sure you know where it came from and who created it. If possible, ask someone about its origin to determine if it is safe to scan.
- Always scan from a secure connection, but if you are scanning from an insecure connection (such as public Wi-Fi), do not enter any personal information into the app or web page that pops up after scanning the code! This includes usernames and passwords. If a website asks for personal information (like credit card numbers) before offering any content or services in exchange, this is likely a phishing scam and should not be entered into your device!

QR codes are an amazing technology and a convenient way to share or access information and links. While QR codes themselves are safe, they can still be risky due to other devices and parties involved. Whether you're a business wanting to use QR codes to engage with your customers or a customer using a company's QR code, being aware of the risks involved and following the best practices above will steer you away from being caught out.

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