mixing
MAIL
and
DIGITAL

Creative ways direct mailers are incorporating digital technologies.

BY **SHARON M. GOLDMAN**

When it comes to mixing mail with digital, you can't go wrong. It's the ultimate blend, and is always a go-to option to help increase ROI, response rates and brand awareness. And the possibilities are endless, as there are so many exciting and dynamic digital options available to take a campaign to the next level. Here is a look at four technologies and how they successfully integrated with direct mail.

SnapTags

Going beyond the QR code's black-and-white blot, SnapTags use the marketer's brand logo with a code ring around it as a barcode, and drive users to a variety of interactive experiences each time they scan or "snap" the code with their smartphone or standard camera phone (no app is required to activate, but users who prefer can download a proprietary app to scan the SnapTag).

SnapTag recently completed a direct mail campaign with Kaiser Permanente, a managed healthcare consortium, as part of the launch of a new medical center in Washington, D.C. A SnapTag on the mailing, with separate code rings for members and non-members of Kaiser, drove users to a virtual tour of the medical center. Kaiser could compare the activation rates between the two groups and discover segmentation information that could help with future customer engagement.

Benefits: SnapTags offer the opportunity to go beyond the indecipherable blot of QR codes and create a version that is a marketing moment in and of itself — that is, an interactive brand logo. Marketers can also embed analytics options — and create campaigns that are uniquely customized based on prior customer behavior and consumer-provided information.

SLIDESHOW
SCAN THE FOLDING
SCREEN ABOVE TO SEE
PHOTOS OF THE HOUSE
FROM HB'S ARCHIVES
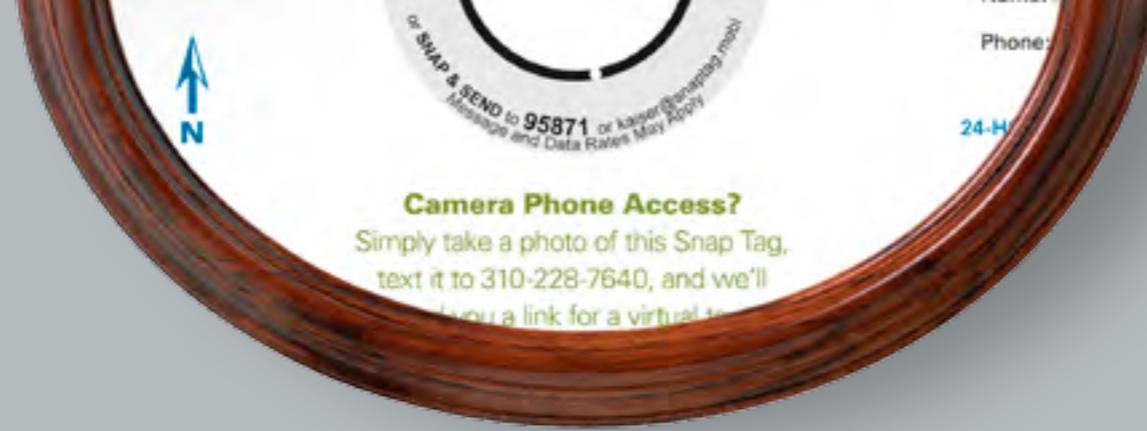
Digital Watermarking

Originally developed to fight currency counterfeiting, digital watermarks now offer marketers the ability to embed invisible barcodes into images or behind text, creating infinite design possibilities for code-related campaigns.

House Beautiful, a Hearst-owned publication, placed digital watermarks behind several photos in its ads for Glidden Paint in its February 2012 issue, with directions to readers on how to download the Digimarc app and how to access the content by focusing their mobile device on the photos — which led users to videos, photos and other content.

Benefits: The biggest benefit of digital watermarking is the visual possibilities — so it's no surprise that visually based brands such as magazines have taken to the technology. Because the watermark is invisible, it can be placed anywhere or put behind any image.

PURLs

PURLs are personalized web links — that is, a URL specific to each user — which allow marketers to drive mail recipients to a just-for-you (personalized) online site.

Aon Affinity, which provides insurance products to members of professional associations, used PURLs in a direct mail campaign to members of the various affinity groups. A simple mailer highlighted one product, Group Disability Insurance, and the PURL drove recipients to apply online for coverage. The response rate was twice as good as a previous traditional mail package.

Benefits: For mailers looking to reach customers without smartphones, PURLs are the way to go — an Internet connection is all the recipient needs to access an offer on a customized landing page. Campaign measurement is also straightforward, as PURLs allow marketers to track which recipients visited their personalized page and gather additional data.

QR Codes

QR, or quick response, codes are small, square, black-and-white patterned barcodes which allow consumers, using a QR code reader downloaded on their smartphones, to receive everything from product information to mobile coupons.

Hearst Magazines and HP worked to create the first fully personalized "onsert" mailer for a magazine print marketing program — 300,000 subscribers to Hearst's *Popular Mechanics* received the mailer in their November 2011 issue. The QR codes in the mailer drove readers to an online sweepstakes and to other web content, generating more than 10,000 unique sweepstakes entries in the first 28 days. Interested in learning more about QR codes? **We have you covered.**

Benefits: A QR code turns a direct mail piece into a mobile call to action. Unlike with a PURL, the customer doesn't need to be at a computer with Internet access to check out the offer. Another pro is the ubiquitous visual, which has turned into a cultural touchpoint: After all, who doesn't recognize the familiar black-and-white matrix? Finally, PURLs can be embedded within a QR code campaign, offering a one-two digital punch.