

First Friday Fraud Facts+

October 3, 2014



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The Idaho State Controller's Office distributes this newsletter as a cost-effective method of increasing awareness about ways to detect and prevent fraud, waste, and abuse in government.

Welcome to First Friday Fraud Facts+ (F4+). This edition will discuss scanning scams.

QR codes (or quick response) have become increasingly popular. They can be found everywhere, on fliers, catalogs and even at tourist sites. QR codes make it convenient to scan with your smartphone and take you to a website with more information, a video clip, or even news coverage. With the increased use of QR codes, scammers have increased opportunities.¹

It's easy to make a QR code, so anybody can make them. QR codes can be very helpful and useful, but also harmful. Scammers can and have made use of the barcodes as well.

Helpful Ways to Use QR Codes

QR codes can be very helpful and informative. Here are a few ways they are used:

- Catalogs and magazines – The companies can keep publishing costs down and still inform readers.
- Tourist monuments – By scanning the QR codes you can be instantly directed to details about the site you are visiting.
- Business cards – The QR code allows associates to add contact information directly to their phone.

Where Scammers Use QR Codes

Because QR codes are used in many places and for many different things, scammers have taken advantage of this opportunity in a few different ways.

- Stickers – Scammers may use stickers to put over top of the legitimate QR code or stick it to something that does not already have a code.
- Random high traffic areas – Scammers have placed stickers randomly on building walls and floors, hoping for curious passers-by to scan the code.



QR Code Scams

- Phishing – The QR codes that scammers use may send you to a website that asks for personal information.
- Malware – Scammers may direct the code to a website that downloads malware to your mobile device.

Prevention

The following are ways to help avoid being caught in a QR code scam:

- Never scan a code that is just stuck to a wall or floor. If information is not linked to the code you should not scan it.
- Be wary of scanning codes in public places.
- If the code is on a removable sticker, do not scan.
- If the code sends you to a website asking for personal information, do not key in the information.
- If you scan a possible fake QR code attached to a product, advertisement, poster, or building, contact the responsible party and let them know.
- Use a QR code scan app which checks the website the QR code is directing you to before it takes you there.²

¹ Robert E. Holtfreter, “Scanning scam (and other frauds) QR codes, telecommunication and photo sharing,” *Fraud Magazine*, Vol. 28, No. 6, November/December 2013, pp. 58-60.

² 5 Ways to Avoid a QR Code Scam. <http://www.scambusters.org/qrcode.html>. Accessed January 10, 2014.