

QR code security

Mendlesham Computer Club

By Giles Godart-Brown

What is a QR code?

- QR means “Quick Response”.
- A QR code is a square pattern that stores information.
- Your phone camera can read it and open a website, app, payment page or other information.
- QR codes are convenient — but the code itself does not tell you whether the destination is safe.



Where you might see QR codes

- Cafés and restaurants — menus
- Museums and attractions — extra information
- Tickets and travel — entry passes or tickets
- Product packaging — instructions and details
- Posters and leaflets — event pages or booking forms

How to scan a QR code

1. Open your phone's Camera app.
2. Point it steadily at the whole QR code. You usually don't need to take a photo.
3. Wait for a link or notification to appear.
4. Check the website address, if the full address isn't visible and you cannot inspect it, don't open an unfamiliar QR link. Visit the organisation's known website directly instead.

If it doesn't scan

- Move the phone slightly closer or further away
- Keep the code and phone steady
- Try better lighting and avoid glare
- Make sure the whole code is visible
- You can stop at any time if you feel unsure

The golden rule

- STOP before you scan.
- Ask yourself: Do I know where this QR code came from?
- Would I normally trust the person, company or organisation displaying it?
- If the QR code was unexpected, treat it with suspicion
- If a sticker looks as though it covers another code, don't scan it.
- A QR code can hide a dangerous website just as easily as a link can.

What not to do when you've clicked on a QR code

- Never enter private data - email addresses, passwords or bank details just because a code asks
- Never use it for payments.
- For parking, use the official parking app, machine or website.
- When in doubt, find the organisation's official website yourself.

The biggest QR code scams

- Fake parking-payment QR codes
- Fake parcel or delivery messages
- Fake bank or account-security warnings
- Fake charity or fundraising QR codes
- Fake invoices or bills
- “You have won a prize” or competition scams
- QR codes leading to fake login pages designed to steal passwords

A QR code can hide the destination

- A normal-looking QR code may take you somewhere completely different from what you expect.
- Scammers can make a fake website look almost identical to a genuine one.
- Look carefully at the website address before entering any information.
- Never assume that a QR code is safe just because it is printed on official-looking material.

Check the website address

- Look at the address shown after scanning.
- Watch for misspellings, extra words or unusual endings.
- Be especially cautious with addresses you do not recognise.
- A padlock or HTTPS means the connection is encrypted, it does NOT prove the website is genuine.
- If in doubt, close it and type the organisation's known website yourself.

QR codes in emails and texts

- An unexpected QR code in a message is a warning sign.
- Scammers may use QR codes because you cannot see the destination as easily as with an ordinary link.
- Do not scan a QR code merely because the message says your account will be closed.
- Contact the organisation using a phone number or website you already know is genuine.

What if your phone shows a warning?

- Take the warning seriously.
- Do not override security warnings just to continue.
- Close the webpage.
- Do not download an app or install a profile because a QR code tells you to.
- Never give remote access to your phone or computer because of a QR-code message.

If you think you have been scammed

- Stop communicating with the scammer.
- If you entered a password, change it from the genuine website and change it anywhere else you reused it.
- If you entered bank or card details, contact your bank immediately using its official number.
- Keep screenshots, messages and other evidence.
- In the UK, report fraud to Action Fraud or, where appropriate, contact the police.
- Do not be embarrassed — scams are designed to deceive.

Remember these 5 things

- QR codes are useful, but they are not automatically safe.
- Unexpected QR codes deserve extra suspicion.
- Always check the website address before entering information.
- Never make a payment because a QR code tells you to.
- When in doubt, use the organisation's official website or phone number instead.

Some safe examples



Health information and services

www.nhs.uk/



Official UK government information

www.gov.uk/



UK weather forecasts

www.metoffice.gov.uk/