I've been thinking...

Bar-Code Apps Proliferating
March 2010

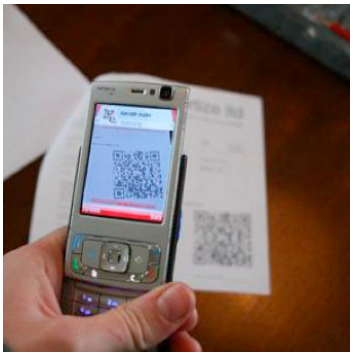
I've been thinking about the impact of mobile computing on fertility, frugality, mortality, and posterity.

Recently, I posted a picture of my sixth grandchild on Facebook. A buddy in California wrote something on my wall about knowing me when I was infertile. He's right. It took nearly a decade of trying. Finally, we adopted a two-year old, whereupon, in rapid succession, three more followed by conventional means. Four was plenty. Then we confused ovulation dates. Enter number five.

Now, my kids appear to be on pace for doubling the grandchildren every five years. We're talking about a herd of 64 when I'm 82, not factoring in twins or octuplets. BTW, I'm told that four of my six grand kids are oops babies.

Good news: Help's gone mobile. This month, babycenter.com introduced Booty Caller, a series of 18 ovulation alerts sent via text message to subscribers. Too late for me, but I've notified my kids.

Five kids means lots of shoes and mandates frugality. If only we'd had today's mobile technology back when. To find the best deals, we had to drive from store to store or call our way through the Yellow Pages. My kids can scour the Internet from their couches. Better yet, they can use their mobile phones to scan barcodes on shoes at Macy's, discover they're available for half price at Target, click "purchase" then and there, pass go, avoid checkout, and have them on their kids' feet in two days.



Beyond pulling information from our handhelds, messages are being pushed our way. Bank of America sends texts, for example, reminding us that our mortgages are due, causing us to consider canceling the flights to Cancun we bought last night.

I concluded last month's "Thinking" by asking what might happen if healthcare and grocers got together. After scanning Costco's family pack of rib eye steaks, I suggested the cashier might inform me that their interface with Group Health indicates my cholesterol levels disqualify me for the purchase.

This probably won't happen in my lifetime, especially, if I don't keep my cholesterol levels where they belong. However, while grocery shopping I can

use my GoodGuide iPhone app to scan product bar codes, which hotlinks me to useful health data about each (e.g., nutritional value, calories, cholesterol, etc.). Can it tell me if an item is on my diet? I'm sure there's an app for that too.

All this while my Distance Meter app is running in the background, tracing my GPS coordinates against the clock, tallying the miles I've walked and calories I've burned so far today.

Bar-code scanning has merely scratched the surface of our everyday cellular lives. Apps are multiplying as we speak. And Cisco estimates that mobile traffic will see a *39-fold increase* in the next five years—proliferating faster than my grandchildren.

I believe the same thing will happen with bar-code applications and utilization at *all* points of care, inside and outside hospitals. Before I die? I hope so. Not only because I want to witness it, but also because I'm pretty sure the point-of-care apps explosion will occur in the next few years.

Speaking of dying—have you heard about the trend in Japan of engraving tombstones with bar codes? In addition to viewing human-readable names, dates, and epitaphs (e.g., I told you I was sick, BRB, etc), passersby are able to scan mobile-readable QR* codes to pull up Web pages with obituaries, photos, and YouTube links about the deceased. Family members are notified of scanners who paused to pay their respects. Visitors also have the option of sending messages to loved ones of the deceased.

I've not decided if my tombstone will have a bar code. However, you don't need to wait until I'm gone. If you want to let me know that you stopped by this article, you may scan the QR code below and send me an email. If you need the mobile app to read the code, grab it here. You may thank me the next time you are shopping.

What do you think?

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*Quick Response

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