



Chinese use of QR codes

In China, QR codes are a default way to share websites, contacts, WeChat accounts, and make payments — reducing language and typing barriers.

They also enable tracking (different URLs for different channels), but they must be designed and tested carefully — and protected against QR code scams.



Foundation Being seen in China articles

Discovery Being found in China article

Execution Start trading in China articles

Focus: digital habits + practical use

Audience: overseas businesses

Last modified: v5.1 – 16 October 2026

What are QR codes?

QR codes (Quick Response codes) have existed since 1994. International standards were published in 2000, making QR codes widely available.

A QR code is a way of “barcoding” a string of data. It can contain a website URL, an email address, an app link, a WeChat contact, and much more.

Why QR codes matter in China

In many Western countries, sharing information by voice, email, or text is straightforward: “Our website is ...” or “My email is ...”. This assumes a shared language and alphabet.

In China, long strings of Latin characters can be difficult to understand, spell, or transcribe. In the early 2000s, as consumer technology became widespread, QR codes helped solve this problem — especially for access links and passwords.

Practical takeaway: In China, QR codes often replace typing a domain name. If you want people to reach your content quickly (especially on mobile), provide a QR code.

Where QR codes are used

Today, QR codes are ubiquitous in China. They have replaced domain names in marketing and sales, and are commonly used for:

- Websites and landing pages
- Internet logins / passwords
- Payments (restaurants, supermarkets, taxis, parking meters)
- Billboards and printed adverts
- Information displays and public signage
- Business cards (replacing printed URLs, emails, and social handles)

Design and technical considerations

QR codes can be different colours and styles, and can include a logo in the centre. They also store more data types and volume than traditional barcodes.

- **Tracking:** because users don’t type the URL, you can add tracking parameters (different QR codes for brochures, business cards, campaigns, etc.).
- **Complexity:** the longer the URL or data string, the more complex the QR code becomes — and the harder it is to scan reliably.
- **Contrast:** the code must strongly contrast with the background. Poor contrast is a common reason scanning fails.
- **Correct prefixes:** when encoding a website, include `http://` or `https://`. For email addresses, use `mailto:`.

Important: Always test your QR code on multiple phones before publishing. Many QR issues can be avoided with a few quick checks.

Access to China — QR code recommendations

- Create QR codes and publish them on marketing materials, brochures, packaging, and business cards.
- Add QR code(s) to your website home page — readers in China often move content from desktop to mobile using QR scanning.
- Use different URLs/QR codes to track inquiry sources (brochures, business cards, campaigns).
- Check and re-test that QR codes still work for both the destination page and your tracking system.



Quick checklist

Use these checks before publishing QR codes.

- Is the QR code high-contrast against the background?
- Is the encoded URL short enough to scan reliably?
- Does the URL include `https://` (or email uses `mailto:`)?
- Have you tested on multiple phones (iOS/Android) and camera apps?
- Do you have tracking parameters (different codes per channel) where needed?
- **QR code scams – warning:** check for QR overlays/tampering and only scan from trusted sources.

Reminder: A QR code is just a shortcut to a link — treat it like a clickable link in an email. Verify before opening.

Need help?

If you’d like help reviewing China-facing marketing materials (including QR usage), contact support@accesstochina.com

- Avoid long URLs and long email addresses — they make QR codes too dense and harder to scan.
- Use free QR generators to learn design constraints; if needed, use a specialist QR design service.

If you want to generate QR codes, many free tools exist online. For example: [Unitag QR Code Generator](#).

QR code scams — warning

As QR codes become more common for payments and access, scams have also increased. This is a global problem: scammers exploit trust and convenience by placing or sending QR codes that lead to harmful actions.

How QR code scams work

- **Phishing URLs:** QR codes lead to fake sites designed to steal login or banking details.
- **Malicious downloads:** QR codes link to malware that can compromise a device.
- **Payment scams:** legitimate payment codes (e.g., parking meters, donation sites) are replaced with fraudulent ones.
- **Fake customer service:** QR codes advertise fake support channels that request personal information.
- **Fake promotions:** QR codes promise “free offers” but lead to phishing pages.

How to protect your business

- Make staff aware of QR scams and how they work.
- Check your own QR codes to ensure they haven't been replaced.
- Inspect packaging, brochures, and product materials regularly for QR overlays.
- Add supplier requirements: suppliers confirm they have checked for fraudulent QR codes.

How to protect yourself

- **Check the source:** only scan QR codes from trusted places.
- **Preview the URL:** verify the domain looks correct before opening.
- **Be cautious in public:** public QR codes are easy to tamper with.
- **Watch for overlays:** scammers place fake codes over real ones.
- **Use device security:** keep anti-malware protections updated.
- **Avoid entering personal info:** be suspicious if a scanned link asks for sensitive data.
- **Verify payments:** confirm payment QR codes belong to the merchant before paying.

Related: If you are improving visibility and performance in China, see [Improving website performance in China](#).

 [Test a web page from China](#)

 [Download "Chinese use of QR codes" paper\(PDF\)](#)

Access to China — practical guidance on QR codes for China-facing marketing and user journeys.

Last modified: v5.1 – 16 October 2026

Written by Peter Heather

Hits: 29,027