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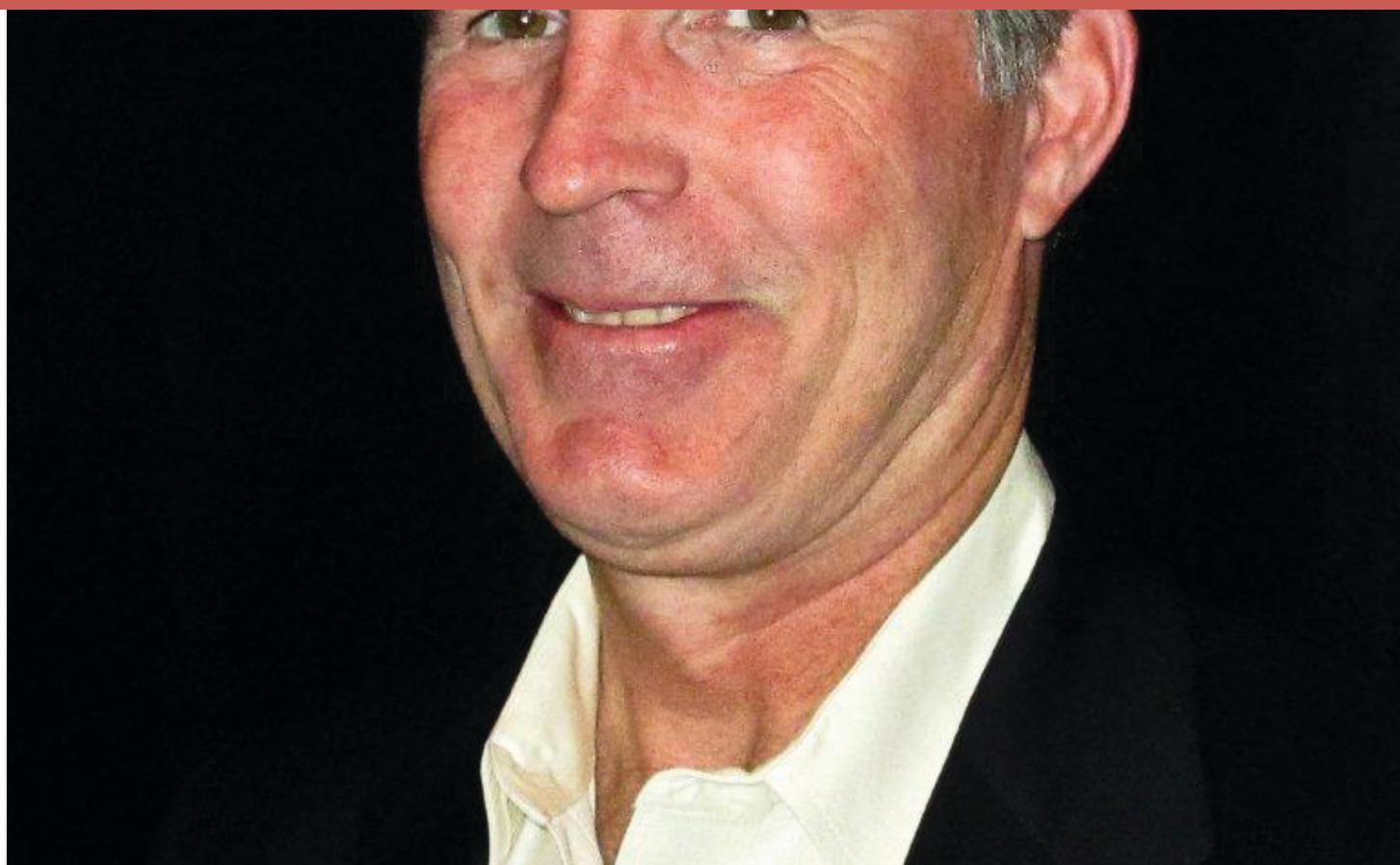
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Oct. 20, 2011

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Barcodes belong on a grocery store shelf.

That's the common attitude toward this 60-year-old technology. Consumers have long accepted barcodes as the preferred method for a quick checkout at the grocery or department store. Some businesses use them in the warehouse. But for decades, the technology has evolved little beyond these retail and supply chain uses.

Today, however, that's rapidly changing. Barcodes are breaking out of their retail mold. They're finding new ways to help businesses of all kinds build more efficiency into their operations, even enhancing marketing and training efforts. By learning more about old-school barcode technology, you can help clients simplify, organize

and optimize their organizations. The benefits will filter all the way down to the

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mistakes associated with manual data entry. The data is immediately displayed in a software application on a PC, smartphone or tablet.

Barcodes by themselves do not produce information; however, they are the catalyst or “name” that makes tracking information much easier and virtually foolproof. Here is an illustration of how a 1D barcode can be used.

A barcode is like a person's name. Consider the name *Teddy*. Just like in real life, this name can be mispronounced or misspelled. Is that person an Edward, a Theodore or a Ted? Male or female? Further, there's no way of knowing other useful information such as height, birthday or address. If you don't see that person for six months, can you remember their name or when and where you last met them?

Barcodes eliminate the need to rely on memory, as well as the time and human error of rekeying information. Using a mobile scanning device or barcode scanner attached to a PC, the user can scan the barcode. The scanner communicates with software, which identifies the item's “name” and other associated information. (Check out this [video](http://vimeo.com/21706155) for a demonstration: <http://vimeo.com/21706155>.)

2D barcodes work like 1D barcodes, but can also contain more data. 1D barcodes used in retail environments contain 13 characters, while 2D barcodes such as DataMatrix can hold thousands of characters. Newer 2D barcodes such as [QR Codes](http://buzz.waspbarcode.com/5-ways-qr-codes) (Quick Response Codes; <http://buzz.waspbarcode.com/5-ways-qr-codes>) and [Microsoft Tag](http://tag.microsoft.com/home.aspx) (<http://tag.microsoft.com/home.aspx>) are appearing on a wide range of consumer items, advertisements and more. When a user scans one of these barcodes with a smartphone, they can be directed to interactive marketing materials such as videos, websites and more.

Taking barcodes to small business

So how can your clients improve their profitability with barcodes? Here are a few

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accuracy alone would pay for any minimal investment in handheld scanners.

- **Cutting-edge marketing.** Video has become the preferred medium for marketing communications. It gives potential customers an opportunity to learn about a business, plus get a feel for the company's culture and products. Try it out yourself. Using a video camera or even a smartphone, capture your 30-second elevator pitch on video or, better yet, record a customer testimonial and upload it to YouTube. Create a QR Code that links to the video, and print the code on your company brochure. When a client receives your literature, they can scan the barcode with their smartphone and immediately watch your video. What better way to reinforce your message?
- **Fast, helpful training.** Forget burning DVDs or sending out printed instructions that soon become out of date. Instead, use a barcode to link to the information on your web page or record a quick training video. Just like the above example, clients can simply scan the barcode and immediately be directed to the video, where they will be trained to complete a simple task.

The Big Payoff: Fixed Asset Tracking

While there are countless ways to improve a business with barcodes, one proven strategy can pay off almost immediately with virtually every client you serve. By putting an asset tracking solution in place, companies can save big bucks and create return on investment in a matter of months.

Every business has fixed assets, including computers, smartphones, copiers, tools, equipment, vehicles and more. Your clients spend tens of thousands of dollars buying these items. Yet virtually every day, questions about assets arise, such as the following: Who has that projector? Where are those tools I need? Didn't we just spend thousands of dollars, and what did we buy with the money?

Most businesses attempt to track their fixed assets with pencil and paper or on a

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and no one realizes they are gone.

With barcodes and software, companies can see what fixed assets they own at a glance — and where they are. Items can be checked in, checked out and attached to a unique record with a wide range of information including purchase date, location, initial cost, service record and more. Then, when the time comes for an audit, mobile devices can quickly and accurately audit equipment in the office or out in the field to ensure all information is up-to-date.

Don't get left behind. This 60-year-old technology stalwart is breaking out with new and exciting opportunities, from simple forms to exciting marketing ideas to office efficiency. Each of these strategies represents a new way you can counsel your clients to save time, reduce costs and improve efficiency. These messages and ideas are always welcomed by businesses looking for ways to excel. And best of all, it's a conversation you can have that expands your role as a trusted advisor to clients looking for additional services and assistance that will positively transform their businesses.

An experienced strategic marketer, Grant Wickes excels at helping technology companies understand market opportunities, develop products and craft marketing programs that drive profitable growth and business value. Wickes' marketing and sales experience spans more than two decades, the majority of which has been spent growing small technology companies. Currently, Wickes serves as vice president of business development with Wasp Barcode Technologies (www.waspbarcode.com), a leading provider of small business productivity solutions.

Technology

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