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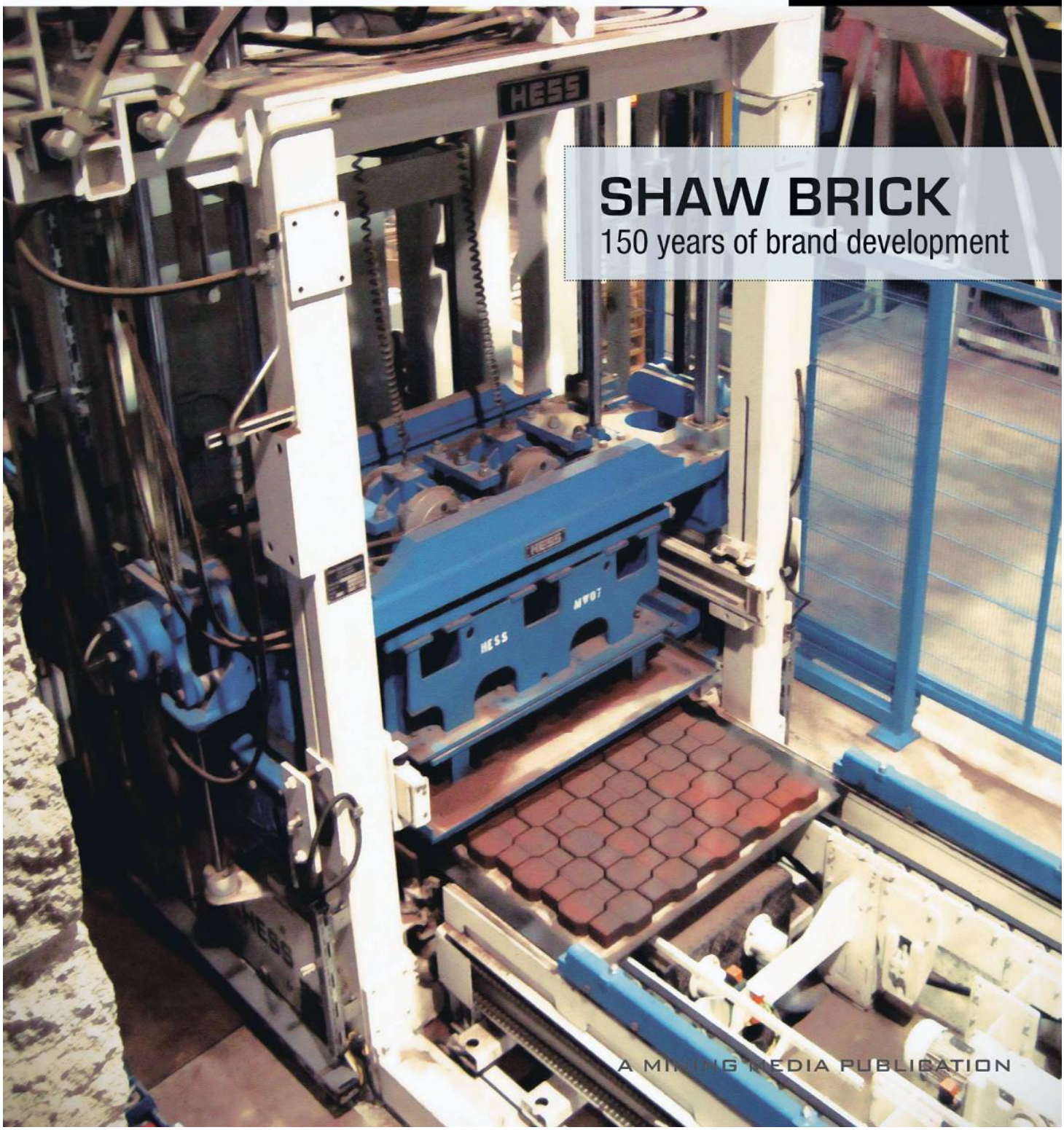


SHAW BRICK

150 years of brand development

A MINING MEDIA PUBLICATION

Concrete Products June http://concrete.epubxpress.com

BY MARK MURATORE

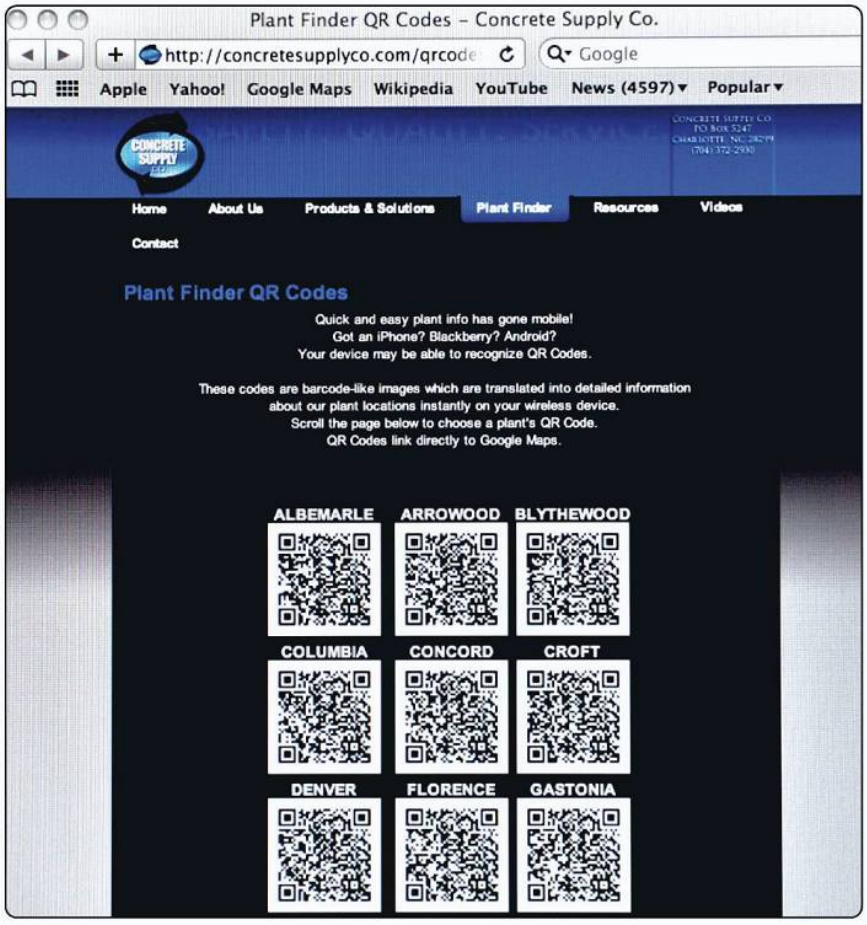
CONCRETE TECHNOLOGY FOR QUICK RESPONSE

For most of us in the concrete products industry, technology has been limited to automated manufacturing processes, websites, and financial accounting systems. A few producers have even made the plunge into the world of electronic commerce, or as commonly known, EDI. Now consider one of the newer technologies: QR or Quick Response codes.

Originally developed in Japan, QR codes and associated technologies have been around for a number of years. Many of us have unknowingly seen these codes, which are often represented in the form of a small square containing a series of dots, squares, lines, triangles and sometimes company logos.

QR codes have grown in use primarily in response to the overwhelming and continuing advances being made in the smart phone industry. The expanding popularity of these devices, some of which include iPhone, Blackberry and Android, is increasing at an astounding rate. It is estimated that more than 1.2 billion smart phones are in use today, and this number is expected to increase to a total of 38 percent of all phones in use within the coming two years. This growth is a direct result of the consumer's drive for immediate information and the growing trend to utilize the capabilities of these smart phones to access and perform research via the Internet.

Although initially used for tracking parts in vehicle manufacturing, QR codes are now used in a much broader context, including both commercial tracking applications and convenience-oriented applications aimed at the smart phone community. Within the concrete products industry, QR codes are now being used in a variety of applications including marketing, inventory control, QA/QC, advertising, and shipping.



Concrete Supply is an early mover in deploying Quick Response, posting codes online to represent each of its Carolinas ready mixed operations (opposite page). Clarksville, Tenn.-based Red River Concrete has adopted a color-coded QR for merchandising signage, while Concrete Results has programmed a QR frame for home owners and designers interested in the Castia Stone veneer product.

Some manufactured-concrete producers are associating inventory items with QR codes on shipping tickets to provide information to the end user that is relevant to their specific needs. If the customer is a paver contractor, for example, the delivery ticket might contain a QR code for the specific paver being shipped to the jobsite. When scanned using a smart phone, the code will take them directly to a dedicated web page that provides such information as hatch patterns, cross sections on typical paver base and bedding sand installation, and even photographs on proper methods to cut and restrain the pavers.

In retail applications, QR codes are being used to direct consumers to a information including how to estimate quantities needed, necessary tools, and photographs to give the shopper creative ideas on how to incorporate the product into their own landscape.

Companies that sell concrete accessories and other products have incorporated QR technology into their websites. One example can be seen on the website for Concrete Supply Company in Charlotte and can be found by visiting http://concretesupplyco.com/qrcodes.htm

These codes are also being included in many types of marketing and promotional literature to allow consumers to access a broader spectrum of product information that would be too cumbersome to be included within the traditional layout of the catalog or cut sheet.

QR codes can be used by concrete product manufacturers to promote their business, communicate with their customers, and interact with them on levels that only years ago could not even be imagined. If you are one of the millions of people who use a smart phone, you can download a QR reader for free, scan the image and see how powerful this tool can be.

Readers can be found for your specific smart phone by simply going to Google and downloading the software directly into your phone. Many websites using QR codes

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also offer direct links to locations to download readers. Since QR codes are currently free to create, there are many companies offering readers and varying formats of the scanning technology. You should do some research on which format will work best for your customer's needs. It is also a good idea to include a link to the reader you select so your customer will be able to properly access your content.

QR codes and other technologies will pave the way for our industry to grow and educate customers. Most importantly, you will be communicating with the customer on their terms. An ever-increasing number of people are using smart phones to do their homework on products and services they intend to purchase. QR technology puts your products and services within easy reach of the consumer.

Mark Muratore is President of Southlake, Texas-based Concrete Results Inc., which licenses Castia Stone and other proprietary precast exterior products, manufactures custom molds for a range of value-added precast units, and offers management and production consulting services. He can be reached at mark@concrete-results.com

RED RIVER
Concrete Products

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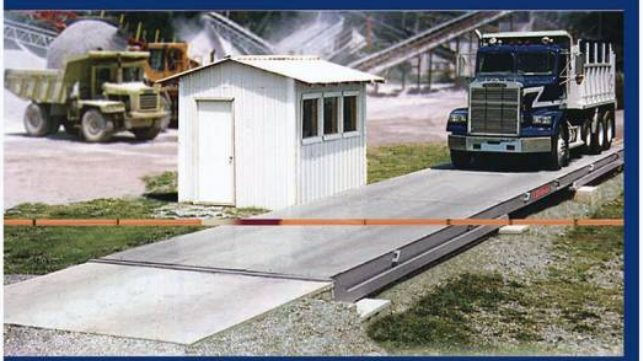

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