



Wired News - 2004-05-18

<http://www.wired.com>

Article URL:

<http://www.wired.com/news/technology/0,1282,63493,00.html>

Camera Phones Link World to Web

By Chris Ulbrich

Technologists have long dreamed of a clickable world, where machine-readable tags link physical objects to the universe of information on the Web. That dream came closer to reality this month with the release of Semacode, a free system that lets camera phones convert bar codes into URLs.

In many respects, bar codes make ideal URL tags. Ink and paper are cheap. Translating URLs into bar codes is easy. Unfortunately, hardly anyone owns a Web-enabled bar-code reader. (...)

Canadian programmer Simon Woodside, the creator of Semacode, had been tinkering with modified CueCats when he started to consider the possibilities of using camera phones as bar-code readers instead. Market penetration would take care of itself, he reasoned. Equipped with the proper software, the camera phone would make a dandy URL bar-code reader.

(...)

Semacodes themselves are standard URLs in the form of two-dimensional Data Matrix bar codes. A Java applet on the Semacode site transforms text URLs into Semacodes. In turn, the downloadable reader for camera phones translates Semacodes into URLs and loads them into the phone's browser. The process requires little more than centering the Semacode in the camera's display and pressing a button.

But unlike the commercial products, Semacode is an open system. Rather than putting a tollgate between the physical world and the Web, Semacode simply bridges the two.

(...)

What do you do with Semacodes? In theory, you can stick a Semacode on any physical object about which people want more information. At San Francisco Bay Area transit stops, people have pasted Semacodes linking to real-time arrival information from NextBus. This week, the art group etoy will issue Semacoded uniforms to 500 children participating in its etoy.Day-Care-2 project at the Nieuwe Domeinen arts and architecture festival in Amsterdam. A quick scan of the uniform would link to the children's Web page with real-time information about them. (...)