NCSC

An Lárionad Náisiúnta
Cibearshlándála
National Cyber
Security Centre

Quick Guide:
QR Code Phishing & Scams

ncsc.gov.ie

A helpful guide for the public.

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What is a QR Code?

A QR code is a type of barcode that stores information, such as website links. QR codes are very easy to create and can be scanned using the camera on a smartphone to access the information stored in the QR code.

This convenient shortcut has led to the popular use of QR codes to help users access websites, menus, and online payments without having to type in a long website address.

QR Phishing and Scams

However, as QR codes have become more common, fraudsters now exploit them to scam people. This is known as "quishing" (QR phishing), and like other phishing scams it involves tricking people into visiting fraudulent websites.

Frausters do this to:
- Steal account credentials like usernames and passwords.
- Gather sensitive financial information, such as bank or credit card details.
- Pay for a fake service

Regardless of the method used, cybercriminals and fraudsters will often impersonate trusted organisations to gain your confidence.

Please also see our Quick Guide to Phishing.

What you need to know

Cybercriminals are quick to adopt new methods to take advantage of people who may not yet understand how QR codes work. Two primary methods are used in QR code scams.

1. **QR Code Sent via Email**

Phishing emails are sent containing a QR code in an attached document or image. As email security systems often focus on detecting suspicious links or attachments, QR codes can bypass these protections.
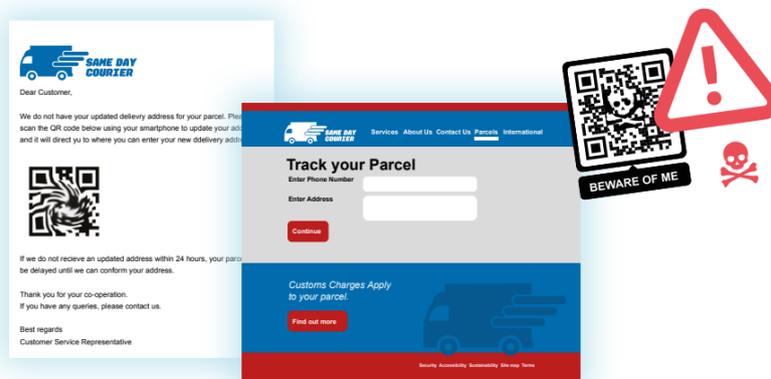
When scanned, they direct the user to a fake login page or site designed to steal the users account login information or other personal information.

2. **QR Codes when you're Out and About**

Criminals place scam QR codes over legitimate ones in high-traffic locations, such as:

- Restaurants.

- Parking payment points.

- Public posters or leaflets

Many personal mobile devices lack the security protections that a corporate or work device may have, like antivirus software or website restrictions. This makes them an easier target for scam QR codes.

Unsuspecting users scan these codes, thinking they are legitimate and are instead directed to a fake website where they enter payment details or personal information.

Avoid QR Code Phishing

To protect yourself from QR code scams, always:

	Use a trusted QR code scanning app that can block or warn against suspicious links.
	Look at the preview in your QR code scanner or browser. Does it match the official website?
	Scammers often pressure you to act quickly, like asking for payment to avoid a fine or service disruption.
	Is the QR code tamper-proof, such as behind glass or on a digital display? Is it a sticker?

If the QR Code appears supicious, don't use it.

Think you've been scammed?

If you think you've fallen for a phishing QR code, take these steps:

	Change your passwords immediately, especially for accounts linked to the scam
	Contact your bank to report the incident and get advice on securing your accounts.
	Run a full antivirus scan on your device to detect and remove any malware
	Report the scam to your local Garda station

Reporting Quishing or Phishing Scams

All phishing scams should be reported to An Garda Síochána at your local Garda station.

- o https://www.garda.ie/en/contact-us/station-directory/

If you suspect that a QR code is fake, contact the organisation it is impersonating to verify the code or report it to them. Reports can also be sent to phishing@ncsc.gov.ie

For More Information

To learn more about phishing and quishing the following resources are useful:

- An Garda Síochána – https://www.garda.ie/en/crime/cyber-crime/i-ve-been-caught-out-by-an-online-scam-what-should-i-do-.html

  - o https://www.garda.ie/en/crime/fraud/

- NCSC IE Phishing https://www.ncsc.gov.ie/pdfs/NCSC_Quick_Guide_Phishing.pdf

- Age Action https://www.ageaction.ie/sites/default/files/29253-age_action_a5_scams_and_frauds_leaflet_web.pdf

- NCSC UK

  - o Phishing & Scams https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/collection/phishing-scams/spot-scams

  - o QR Code Risk https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/blog-post/qr-codes-whats-real-risk