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Unilever reaches for the 'Holy Grail' of mobile coupons

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ADOTAS — I'm lazy. Printing Internet coupons always seemed to be just as big a pain as cutting them from newspapers, and then making sure I brought them with me was just a larger problem.

But mobile marketers have been talking for a long time about eliminating both of those problems, and now Unilever is testing that theory. I think it's going to be a smash hit if they get it right. [According to the WSJ](#), the company plans to begin a trial run at a ShopRite store in Hillsborough, N.J., will include discount offers for some popular brands, including Breyers ice cream, Dove soap, Hellmann's mayonnaise and Lipton tea. Samplesaint, a Chicago mobile-technology firm, developed the system.

"This has been a Holy Grail thing that people

have been trying to figure out," Marc Shaw, director of integrated marketing at Unilever, told the WSJ. "I think this is on target for where consumers' heads are at right now."

To get the coupons, users must visit [Samplesaint.com](#) to download the offers to an Internet-enabled cellphone. At checkout, the cashier scans the bar code on the phone's screen, redeeming the coupon and deleting it from the phone. The test will run for four weeks.

In a [recent survey](#) by Burst Media, 34 percent of respondents said they were using coupons more frequently than they had been six months ago, and nearly 70 percent of respondents would print and redeem an Internet coupon for a product they would be interested in purchasing. The survey also found that Internet coupons are particularly effective in attracting consumers' attention. EMarketer expects U.S. mobile-ad spending to grow 17% this year.

But Steven Boal, CEO of printable-coupon site [Coupons.com](#), noted that checkout with a mobile coupon still has obstacles, including incompatible devices, software bugs and phones that get dropped while being passed back and forth. In addition, many retail scanners can't penetrate a cellphone screen to read the coupon.

It might be too early in mobile field to see coupon scanning easily overcoming problems like that, but when the glitches are worked out, and they will, even I'll figure it out.

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