

Your TurningPointe

Revealing Secrets About the Color of Marketing

Your Monthly TurningPointe Newsletter, November 2005

What if you could incite action in a target buyer, just by choosing the right color? Did you know that you can comfort, soothe and calm with color? Or that you can let them know you're stable, reliable, and always there for them?

When it comes to using color in your marketing materials, it's both an art and a science. In my recent interview with Karen Loehr of Two Sisters Creative, we looked at how color impacts the emotions and actions of your target audience.

Here's what to consider, so that color supports your intended message, and doesn't work against you.

Kelly: Why should we take color into consideration when it comes to marketing?

Karen: Actually, let's back up. Color is our worldview – it's instinctive, human and intrinsic to who we are. So we have an emotional, unconscious response to different colors. This is what matters in marketing – the emotional response – and color is a piece of that.

Kelly: So we're having reactions to a logo or website based on color, and don't even know it?

Karen: Yes, and there are also scientific ways of thinking about color, that help us elicit a certain response. For example, if you consider the color wheel, there are warm colors and cool colors. And each of these tones will provoke a different response: warm gets an active response, cool gets us a calming response.

So with marketing, you have to ask – what's going to work with your message? Warm colors in nature, like red and yellow (think sun and fire), indicate action. When you see or feel fire in nature, it can either draw you in or be a sign to get out of danger. Either way, the unconscious message is to "act now!"

On the other hand, cool colors don't elicit action – they invoke serene, calm, stability (like our earth and sky) – so the message is "steady as she goes," and "we're stable." If you're trying to calm the viewer or impart a sense of timelessness, blues and cooler colors are good.

And then there are all the variations – combinations of the three primary colors – that are very complex, when it comes to our unconscious responses. An interesting example is how pink is used in prisons to stimulate a more human response.

Kelly: So now let's apply this to marketing. How does color impact our brand identity and our marketing message?

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Karen: In marketing, you're looking to connect with your audience. So it's important to include some form of warm tones to help people feel comforted, and bring in the sense of humanity. Even if you're going after an industrial or serene feel, you need to temper cool neutrals with something warmer. Blacks, grays and blues tend to be very cold and sterile. By just adding an element of warmth, you can completely change the response a logo or identity triggers.

You see red a lot in logos because it means action. When you work outside of the primary colors (anything but red, yellow or blue), you create an edgier, more complex feel. So orange is warm, but edgy, because it's not a prime color. And purple is very complex – it's warm and cool, and can shift depending on light and other colors around.

Kelly: What advice do you have for how to use color in marketing materials? Where and when does it matter to pay attention to color?

Karen: Obviously color matters everywhere...the first place to pay attention to it is in your identity. It's your first chance to say if you're contemporary and hip, cool

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and industrial, warm and humanistic, intellectual and solid, stable and traditional...and you can combine things. Like if you sell to the federal government, you could portray "intelligent and stable" using blues and grays...but if you're in the homeland security business, you'd want to demand action - address an urgent issue - so you could add shades of orange.

"We just did a tradeshow booth with wild, hot colors, for a conservative audience...but they stood out in the cold, austere convention center. They were really in-your-face and it worked great - people just flocked to their booth."

On the other hand, an Asian antique company in the city is completely different - we'll look at jewel tones as a nod to the orient, but make it hip and urban, using slate gray in the color scheme.

Color can be a fairly inexpensive way to make a statement. For example, a bright red postcard with large-font type on it is more likely to be picked up than something gray-blue. Using a hot color - and a lot of it - may be all the design you need. Now this wouldn't work for a hip urban spa, so you have to keep in mind what you're selling. If you're selling "tranquil" - bright yellow isn't the answer. But something with a warm color, like beige, mixed in with the serenity imparted by gray or green would work.

Kelly: So what's the one thing you wish your clients would do that would make it easier for you to help them when it comes to color?

Karen: Not think that blue is the only color on the planet! Really, it's a safe color...it's everywhere around us...in large doses - the sky, the ocean. So there's a comfort level with it. I also think people are afraid to take a risk. But if you think of very successful companies that took big risks with color, think of UPS. Nobody was using brown in their logo back in the 60's! For small companies, this can feel like they're putting everything on the line.

The smaller the business, the more compelling the reason to take color risks - you don't have a whole team out there marketing for you, so your logo and business card have to do a lot of work for you.

Kelly: Do you have a story or example you'd like to share that illustrates what we've been talking about...maybe a client success story or surprising outcome?

Karen: A couple come to mind. One is TurningPointe's colors. I pay attention to off-hand comments - so when you joked about using pink and black to reflect your background in ballet...and I thought, why not? So playing with warmer variations led us to your pink and warm brown palette - a combination we hadn't done before. Your pink and brown is much warmer, human and comforting. The fact that they turned out to be such popular colors was just luck.

Another example is that we just did a tradeshow booth with wild, hot colors, for a conservative audience...but they stood out in the cold, austere convention center. They were really in-your-face and it worked great - people just flocked to their booth.

In another case, we adjusted color from purely cool and industrial - what the client said they wanted - to add more warm tones. So without changing the design layout, it made all the difference.

Kelly: Where can people go to learn more...do you have any favorite websites or resources?

Karen: Go to Pantone.com - this is the industry standard for color, period. The Pantone Institute has lots of helpful resources and articles. They also do color forecasting, so you can see predicted color trends for the coming years.

Kelly: Any final thoughts?

Karen: Trust your instincts. There is a science to color, but it's not complicated. It's also okay to choose a color because you love it and it makes you happy. I'd go back to where we started - color is about eliciting

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hidden human emotions. So pay attention to your own, when it comes to choosing color.

To see Karen's ideas in action and sample of their design solutions at Two Sisters Creative, go to <http://www.twosisterscreative.com>.

For more ideas to color your world, you'll find articles like the ones below at:
<http://www.pantone.com/products/products.asp?idSubArea=0&idArea=1&showNav=2&idArticle=802>

Guidelines for Business Presentations
How to Make Color Palettes
Beyond the Four Walls of Color
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Dare to Go Beyond Web-Safe Color

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