

Exhibitor

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WHAT COLOR IS YOUR PARAPET?

Do your exhibit colors give you the blues? Here's a palette pick-me-up.

Asking any three people to comment on what the appropriate color for an exhibit ought to be is like inviting Rush Limbaugh, Howard Stern and Hillary Clinton to comment on national health care. Even though you'll hear personal philosophies that run the gamut, one tenet will hold true: The impact of color is potent.

"When a woman in a red dress walks into a room, you don't notice her earrings," says Frank Boros, president, Boros Design.

Indeed. Research has shown that 60 percent of a person's initial response to anything is to its color alone. Not to line, shape, form or even words. Just color. Of course, other factors come into play after that initial response. But color makes an important first impression.

In exhibit design, such first impressions are important in competing for attention on the crowded show floor. Yet color performs other important functions as well. "Color should attract someone, but once they're in the exhibit space, it should direct them to the product, or the graphic or whatever the customer is really there for," says Charles McMillan, president, McMillan Group.

Color can also influence actions and emotions, according to Leatrice Eiseman, president, Eiseman Center for Color Information and Training. For example, red and yellow are quickly recognized by the human eye and actually create excitement. Deep blues have a calming affect. Dark colors, like hunter green, are generally associated with sophistication and wealth. Lighter shades of green have always been associated with nature. Gold is viewed as being opulent and warm.

So where do you start in exhibit color analysis? Heed these suggestions from top designers, and see how three exhibitors went through the process in the following case examples.

Words of advice

When soliciting a new exhibit, many exhibit managers simply wish to adopt their corporate colors. It's a safe choice that keeps execu-

tives content. And, they reason, a booth immersed in corporate colors helps recognition. In other words, if the logo of Big Bill's Software Co. is red, then red should be the main color in the exhibit. Right?

Wrong. "The corporate color is usually the wrong choice," says Mitchell Mauk, principal, Mauk Design. "If you're going to use the corporate color, use it as an accent against a neutral background. Don't be concerned that people will miss you on the show floor. That's what headers are for."

Neither should you choose colors for their "trendiness." If you do, you'll soon be hawking product from a dated exhibit. "Never use color in a trendy way, because you only weaken the image of your company," says Massimo Vignelli, president, Vignelli Associates. "Trends are, after all, the lowest level of communication."

And while soaking your properties in glow-

ing neons may sound exciting, too much color can be detrimental. "Riding a fluorescent pink elephant down the street naked will get you noticed, but being noticed isn't everything," Mauk says. "You want to be perceived as being intelligent and smarter than your competitors."

So, what should drive your color selection? Designers agree that colors should support a company's marketing objectives. "The color of your booth should be an outgrowth of your company's message," Boros says. "When the booth is done, the message and the exhibit should be the same."

Illustration No. 1: Natural color evolution

Color played an important role in communicating a "natural computing" exhibit message for IBM Power Personal Systems' (PPS) exhibit at Comdex/Fall '93. PPS marketing director Lineene Krasnow approached Tim

Here's Lookin' at Hue

Interested in the philosophy of color? These positive/negative color associations come from "The Pantone Book of Color," written by Leatrice Eiseman, executive director of the Pantone Color Institute and head of the Eiseman Center for Color Information and Training.

Colors	Positive	Negative
Aqua	Cool, fresh, liquid, ocean, refreshing	
Silver	Classic, cool, expensive, glitzy, money, rich, shiny	
Gold	Expensive, rich, warm, prestigious, opulent	
Bright Yellow	Bright, cheerful, happy, hot, sunshine	Jaundice
Navy Blue	Credible, authoritative, basic, classic, conservative, serene	
Mauve	Classic, relaxing, sophisticated, soothing, soft	
Dark Green	Classic, cool, earthy, honest, rich, traditional	
Olive Green	Military, olives, camouflage, safari	Drab
Cream	Smooth, rich, soothing, neutral, soft, warm	Bland
Orange	Bright, happy, warm, hot, glowing, vital, harvest, playful	Loud
Bright Red	Fire, blood, excitement, hot, passionate, intense, sexy, happy	Rage
Deep Purple	Expensive, regal, rich, mysterious, spiritual, artistic, powerful	Melancholy
Neutral Gray	Classic, cool, sober, corporate, practical	Boring, mousy, ghostly
Dark Brown	Chocolate, earthy, rich, masculine, warm, woodsy, dependable	Somber, soiled
White	Bright, classic, clean, pure, airy, pristine	Sterile
Black	Basic, bold, classic, dramatic, elegant, strong, expensive, sophisticated, powerful, sexy	Death, depression, sinister, tough

Girvin of Tim Girvin Design to produce the new division's exhibit, which would feature the PowerPC microprocessor chip jointly developed by IBM, Apple and Motorola.

As always, the duo started with objectives. PPS's computers, which use the new chip, can support advanced voice, pen and touch technology software. As a result, Krasnow's marketing message centered on "humanizing and naturalizing the computing experience."

"We're featuring a human-centered computing experience. We're not marketing the PowerPC; we're marketing what the technology allows people to do," Krasnow says. "Therefore, I wanted natural (exhibit colors), but I didn't want the obvious—all greens—because I thought that would be dull. I wanted it to be warm. I wanted something that said human-centered computing."

Enter Girvin and his palette of exquisite colors. Using a combination of earthy blues, yellows, oranges and greens (assembled and refined with designers Chris Spivey and Carl Andrews of Andrews and Associates), Girvin gave the Power Personal exhibit an inviting look that is both contemporary and unthreatening. The colors chosen for the booth also appear in the division's product literature and even in the ties and scarves worn by Krasnow's booth staffers.

"The colors are natural in feeling, but struck with a hint of sophistication," Girvin says. "The goal was to present a hip, new image for IBM that supports Power Personal's human-centered technology."

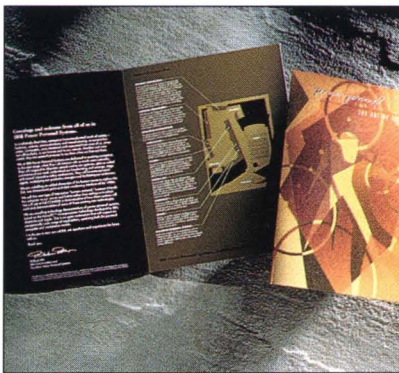
Illustration #2: The new school

For writing instrument maker Pentech, color became the vehicle and the message that separated the company and its products from the competition at the '93 School and Home Office Product Association (SHOPA) show. While other school supply companies were content to market their wares from booths as conservative as the pencils and pens they produced, Pentech marketed a colorful message.

"We sell writing instruments, so we are color," says Dana Melnick, creative director, Pentech. "I know that the current fashion is earth tones, but not too many people like to color in beige. Your colors have to support your company and its message."

Melnick's philosophy is that no color is too bright. Colors featured in the Pentech booth at last year's SHOPA show included vibrant shades of red, blue, pink and yellow. To accentuate the color, Chris Wendel, director of special projects, Exhibitgroup New York, created black walls for the exhibit, which he then pierced with giant, colored pencils. He also added black carpeting, which featured an explosion of bright yellow at the exhibit's front entrance.

"We added the black so that the colors would jump off," Wendel says. "The color and design on Pentech's products makes them jump off the store shelf. We wanted their exhibit to jump off the show floor."



Yellows, oranges, greens and earthy blues color the exterior and interior of IBM's Power Personal Systems exhibit (top and right), as well as the company's literature (left).



The bright colors of Pentech's booth mirror the company's product packaging, which appeals to the pen maker's young, school-age users.



Illustration #3

Muted shades of red, purple, blue and olive green differentiate product areas in SynOptics' booth.

Illustration #3: The intelligence of color

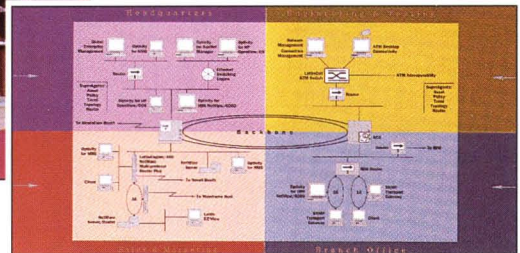
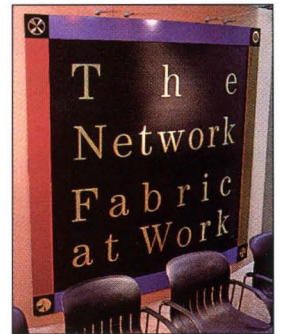
Not only is it important to select the right palette, but you need to know how much color to use and where to use it. Designer Earl Gee's use of color in SynOptics' Interop/San Francisco '93 booth is an excellent study of this situation.

Gee used muted shades of four colors – red, purple, blue and olive green – to divide the company's exhibit space into quadrants and high-

light the four networking solutions the company was promoting at the show. Against the booth's dominant colors of gold and silver, the four solution areas stood out to attendees, while still supporting a posh booth environment.

"The colors projected a high standard of quality, because SynOptics positions itself as the 'Mercedes' of the computer networking industry," Gee says. "I wanted sophisticated colors that would go

This division-by-color technique is reinforced in the booth graphics (right) as well as the company's product literature (below).



well with silver and gold, while differentiating the company's four networking solutions."

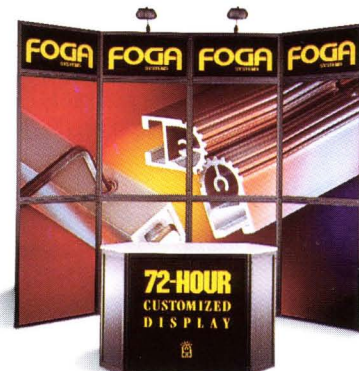
Choosing the correct booth colors and employing them intelligently isn't as simple as picking out a pair of shoes, or selecting the perfect tie, but with a little help from a good designer the colors will, as Boros says, "come naturally." ■

– By Doug Rock, staff writer. See page 89 for sources.

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