



## What Color Is Your World?

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If you were asked to choose a palette of colors to represent the city you live in, what would it be? Reds and fire tones for heat and energy...and passion? Blues and ices for strength and clarity...and cool? Green variations for environmental ideals and transcendental conscience? Subtle and understated or bold and brassy? Clean and clear...or subtly gray and complex?

Recently I had the pleasure of re-branding the Chamber of Commerce in Camarillo, CA where I live and work. The project encouraged me to look at my surroundings in a brand new way. Searching for geographic influences, architectural details and cultural heritage elements (and combining them with the stated future vision of the chamber itself), I sought to create a brand that connects with its intended audience.

### What Colors, Camarillo?

Visiting Camarillo for the first time, you would appreciate a few distinctive, common denominator elements:

- The Spanish-influenced architecture -- terra cotta roof tiles on warm off-white stucco.
- The Canary Island Date Palm seems to thrive in our coastal climate in both the city and surrounding agricultural areas. Its' warm, yellow-based green is a perfect compliment to the rich terra cotta tile.
- The weather (ranked in the top ten for the entire country) is a profound contributing element. Blue sky has meaning beyond the obvious. It represents the future and open-minded, creative thinking inspired by sunshine and mild temperatures.

All these factored significantly into my thematic, graphic and color decision.

### The Winners?

Terra cotta red, sun drenched white, Warm yellow-based green and a Clear blue sky. When viewed together these colors communicate the feeling of Camarillo in a comfortable, familiar, yet forward-thinking context.

Colors that were immediately rejected from consideration? Bright primaries (red, blue, yellow) and cold metal colors -- too juvenile or too high-tech for the desired effect.

### The Color Fingerprint

Translating the colors of the outside world into ink on paper and the computer screen is seldom easy... and it always involves some compromise. It is, however, necessary. As necessary and as vital as deciding on a name for your company or business.

When it comes to constructing a brand identity for a client, establishing a singular palette of colors is as important as creating a brand logo. That compendium of colors is an integral part of the "fingerprint" that uniquely represents a client and connects marketing materials and campaigns over a period of time.

The color red is as much a part of the Coca-Cola® logo as the name. Brown is arguably more recognizable as the trademark for UPS® than the three letters themselves. And could 7up® ever, ever, ever, be anything but green?

Colors can work for or against your cause. There are solid marketing reasons

to use certain colors to convey certain messages. Some colors are deeply ingrained in our minds, like a red stop sign.

And if using the right colors can increase sales of consumer products and increase brand retention, how much is it costing a company to use the wrong colors?

### Examples From The Real World...

A large insurance carrier was ordered to return millions of dollars to their customers in a class action settlement. They retained a color expert to choose the absolute most distasteful brown envelope in which to mail the checks.

Sent in careful compliance with the settlement ruling (and in hideous brown envelopes), most were never even opened. In fact, when it was all over, less than 15% of the checks were ever cashed. The insurance company saved millions of dollars -- the result of a simple, yet strategic, color choice.

On a smaller scale, I was recently interviewed by a local food preparation business that had designed their own brand. They insisted on incorporating their own logo colors, based upon the owners personal color preference.

Well, the emotional connection of fresh, healthy food with blue and purple never took hold with the target audience. And that retail space is now vacant, awaiting the next hopeful entrepreneur.

OK, yes, I am sure there were many more factors beyond color choice which contributed to the downfall of this particular business, but why fight the odds? It's hard enough getting a business off the ground, without courting disaster on additional fronts. Color and its associative ambience must certainly be considered part of the equation for a successful business strategy.

Think about it. Then think hard about how simple colors -- your favorite colors, for instance -- influence the many buying or support choices you make during the course of a day, over time, over a lifetime. How many items of clothing do you own in those colors? What color is your car...the car you covet? What shade of lip gloss do you use? What color beer do you prefer? Keep going. See? I told you. 'Bye for now.

Barry Ridge is the founder/principal of Barry Ridge Graphic Design in Camarillo, CA. Celebrating it's 29<sup>th</sup> year, his company specializes in all aspects of design strategy and management, including brand identity, color consultation, corporate communications, direct mail, display and signage, print management and product packaging.

Barry is also a senior chair holder in the Color Marketing Group (CMG) -- an international professional association specialized in providing insightful color and trend forecast information for application in a wide variety of industries.

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