Marketing Minute ~
The Color Palette and Your Website
Some Color Theory

I don't mean to get technical, but I guess I will be here. Have you ever gone to a website and wondered, "Why on earth did they use that horrible mix of colors?" Or, then again, "Wow, I love the color palette on this website." There is actually some color theory behind all of this. And when you finish this article, you will know a little more about it when you look at the next website, or even better, design your own.

What is color theory?

Color Theory is a set of principles used to create harmonious color combinations. Color relationships can be visually represented with a color wheel — the color spectrum wrapped onto a circle.

The color wheel is a visual representation of color theory.

According to color theory, harmonious color combinations use any two colors opposite each other on the color wheel, any three colors equally spaced around the color wheel forming a triangle, or any four colors forming a rectangle (actually, two pairs of colors opposite each other). The harmonious color combinations are called color schemes — sometimes the term 'color harmonies' is also used. Color schemes remain harmonious regardless of the rotation angle.

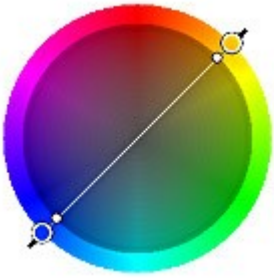
Classic color schemes supported by Color Wheel Pro:

Monochromatic Color Scheme

The monochromatic color scheme uses variations in lightness and saturation of a single color. This scheme looks clean and elegant. Monochromatic colors go well together, producing a soothing effect. The monochromatic scheme is very easy on the eyes, especially with blue or green hues.

Analogous Color Scheme

The analogous color scheme uses colors that are adjacent to each other on the color wheel. One color is used as a dominant color while others are used to enrich the scheme. The analogous scheme is similar to the monochromatic, but offers more nuances.



Complementary Color Scheme

The complementary color scheme consists of two colors that are opposite each other on the color wheel. This scheme looks best when you place a warm color against a cool color, for example, red versus green-blue. This scheme is intrinsically high-contrast.

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Split Complementary Color Scheme

The split complementary scheme is a variation of the standard complementary scheme. It uses a color and the two colors adjacent to its complementary. This provides high contrast without the strong tension of the complementary scheme.

Triadic Color Scheme

The triadic color scheme uses three colors equally spaced around the color wheel. This scheme is popular among artists because it offers strong visual contrast while retaining harmony and color richness. The triadic scheme is not as contrasting as the complementary scheme, but it looks more balanced and harmonious.

Tetradic (Double Complementary) Color Scheme

The tetradic (double complementary) scheme is the most varied because it uses two complementary color pairs. This scheme is hard to harmonize; if all four hues are used in equal amounts, the scheme may look unbalanced, so you should choose a color to be dominant or subdue the colors.

Color theory does not analyze tints, shades, and tones

Color theory analyzes only the relationships of pure colors; it does not take color lightness and saturation into account. While your color scheme can use any tints, shades, and tones, color theory pays attention only to the hue component.

Color theory considers both these schemes equal:

History of color theory

The first color wheel was invented by Sir Isaac Newton. He split white sunlight into red, orange, yellow, green, cyan, and blue beams; then he joined the two ends of the color spectrum together to show the natural progression of colors. Newton associated each color with a note of a musical scale.

A century after Newton, Johann Wolfgang Goethe began studying psychological effect of colors. He noticed that blue gives a feeling of coolness and yellow has a warming effect. Goethe created a color wheel showing the psychological effect of

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each color. He divided all the colors into two groups — the plus side (from red through orange to yellow) and the minus side (from green through violet to blue). Colors of the plus side produce excitement and cheerfulness. Colors of the minus side are associated with weakness and unsettled feelings.

The current form of color theory was developed by Johannes Itten, a Swiss color and art theorist who was teaching at the School of Applied Arts in Weimar, Germany. This school is also known as 'Bauhaus'. Johannes Itten developed 'color chords' and modified the color wheel. Itten's color wheel is based on red, yellow, and blue colors as the primary triad and includes twelve hues.

http://www.color-wheel-pro.com/color-theory-basics.html

Visual vs. Mixing Color Wheel

Mixing (red-yellow-blue) color wheel

Traditionally, artists used a color wheel composed of the primary colors red, yellow, and blue. Currently, the mixing color wheel is commonly accepted as a visual representation of color theory. This color wheel was invented by Johannes Itten, a Swiss color and art theorist. According to Itten, the primary use of his color wheel is for mixing pigments. However, many artists use this color wheel to create visually harmonious color combinations.

Visual (red-green-blue) color wheel

As opposed to the mixing version of the color wheel, the visual color wheel is based on the primary colors red, green, and blue. The RGB primaries are used for computer monitors, cameras, scanners, etc. The secondary (subtractive) triad of the RGB wheel is CMY (cyan, magenta, yellow), which is a standard in printing. Also, the human eye contains RGB receptors. Because of this fact, many artists believe that the visual RGB color wheel should be used instead of the traditional RYB wheel to create visual complements.

Which wheel to choose?

The purpose of Color Wheel Pro is to create visually harmonious color schemes, but not to teach you to mix pigments. So we recommend that you use the visual RGB wheel because it reflects human color perception correctly. Of course, you can experiment with both types of the color wheel.

At the right is a picture of color, and how it can be used in a commercially applied 'ad'. Take a look sometime at the ads out there as well as websites and see if you can figure out which color wheels were used and why. Colors can add power to any marketing activity where you want attention or want to make a point. It can also be used to create a specific feeling or thought. In this case, it definitely grabs attention as well as a feeling of "OOPS".

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