

The Impact of Color in Your Exhibit

By Barry Siskind

The success or failure of your exhibition plans can sometimes be linked to something as simple as color. Color appears everywhere, from your website homepage to your brochure, but at a show the place color makes its greatest impact is in your display. Yet without some forethought, a small miscalculation in choosing the right color can spell disaster.

It used to be so simple. The discussion of color came down to cool or warm colors. Cool colors being blues, greens, and whites, the warm colors, reds, oranges, and yellows. But, there is so much more to the discussion.

Which Color Should Dominate

Color ties your display to your product. When it is well done, color creates a visual image that sparks the imagination of the visitor. Your ultimate goal is to focus attention on your product with the display as background. While this is the general rule, some products in themselves are rather uninspiring visually and need the help that the display can offer. If your products fall into this category—for example, products such as small automotive parts, some hardware items, software, certain packaged goods, etc.—then you must create a display that compensates visually for what your product lacks. For these examples, a strong color for the display will draw attention to the product, yet not overshadow it. You can select contrasting colors on the color wheel.

If, however, your product easily lends itself to color—such as giftware, linens, clothing, etc.—then highlight the color in the product and let the display blend into the background with subtle tones.

Another scenario is where the product color and display color work in harmony. For example, an upscale line of clothing might be well displayed in an exhibit that has colors that reflect the quality of the product.

Corporate (Brand) Colors

Part of your brand is color. But in an increasingly competitive world there are few brands (and their colors) that are powerful enough to achieve universal recognition.

If you have strong, identifiable corporate colors, use them in your display; think about Starbucks' green, Coca-Cola's red and DeWalt Power Tool's yellow. Every brand, large and small, is attempting to build a level of awareness. These recognized colors become a crucial part of your display. Consumers get familiar with the logo and color. If they attend a show and don't see corporate images, they might simply walk-by the display without recognizing the exhibitor.

Color and Culture

Various cultures have their unique interpretation of colors. For example, in Japan the color yellow represents grace; in the United States it represents caution and in China the imperial color is yellow. In France, red represents aristocracy, while in Britain it is purple. White is the predominant color in North American bridal shows, yet in Japan it's the color of mourning. In China, red symbolizes good luck, and in South Africa red is the color of mourning. If you are creating a display for a particular culture, it's important to pay attention to its color sensitivities. However, if you are creating a display for a global, multicultural audience, then consider using an array of colors found in nature.

If you conduct a Google search for “color and culture,” you will find information that focuses on cultural interpretation of color.

When you are developing your display, it is well-worth having a discussion with your display builder about color. The discussion should include, in addition to a description of your product and brand, a detailed list of the countries where you plan to exhibit.

But what if your trade show plans are limited to a domestic market; does the discussion of culture become irrelevant? The simple answer is that it is highly unlikely that a domestic marketplace is one homogeneous mass of people; populations are a mixture of cultures and ethnic backgrounds. If you have identified your customer profile properly, it will give you strong clues that need to be incorporated into your exhibition plans.

Color can make or break an exhibit, so plan carefully.

Barry Siskind, President and Founder of [ITMC](#), is a trade show consultant, trainer, speaker, and an internationally recognized expert in trade and consumer shows. Each year, he addresses numerous conferences and association meetings around the globe. Over the past twenty-five years, Barry has traveled throughout the world working with thousands of public and private sector clients in virtually all industry groups. He creates, facilitates and delivers a wide range of services to companies involved in exhibit marketing. Barry is also a best-selling author of trade show business books: *The Successful Exhibitor*, *The Power of Exhibit Marketing*, *Making Contact*, *Bumblebees Can't Fly*, *Eagles Must Soar*, and his latest book *Powerful Exhibit Marketing*.