

## White Paper 006

# The Color Question

Occasionally advertisers ask if the color makes a difference in advertising. While I know that I notice color ads more than black and white ads, I decided to do some research to give an honest answer on the topic. The information I found showed color ads are more effective than black and white ads.

Does this mean that you should instantly switch to color? No, honestly it is best if you designate an advertising and marketing budget that makes sense for your company and stick to that budget. If you have the budget for color advertising but did not invest in color previously because you were unsure whether color advertising was more effective than black and white, then it is a good idea to invest in color at this point. If your advertising budget allows for black and white only, then it is better to stick to your budget and advertise with a black & white ad over a longer period of time than running one color ad or a short series of color ads. Advertising should be used to not only bring people through your door, but to keep your name in front of people and build brand awareness. If a reader continually sees your ad but does not need your product or service on a continual basis, they will be more likely to remember you when they do need your service if your branding has become familiar to them.

But you don't have to take my word on the issue of color. An article entitled, Magazine Ad Effectiveness, published on the Kristof Creative website states that one important way to improve an ad's effectiveness is to add color. "A four-color page has 45% higher effectiveness rating than a black and white & white page and a four-color spread has a 53% higher effectiveness rating than a black & white spread." The article goes on to state that if four-color is beyond your budget then adding a second or color (we call this a spot color) to an ad will make a tremendous difference.

An interesting study commissioned by New Equipment Digest supports this statement. The publication hired Hagen Research, Inc. to conduct a seven year study tracking which ads gained highest reader awareness. Ninety seven of the 100 top scoring ads over that seven year period were color ads. The remaining three ads were two color or spot color ads. There were no black and white ads that earned reader's awareness in the top 100 ads. ([http://www.riger.com/know\\_base/advertising/creativity.html](http://www.riger.com/know_base/advertising/creativity.html))

At Hamilton Publishing we conducted our own reader surveys and found our own readers notice color ads more often than black and white ads. When asked in our 2008 reader survey which display advertising was most noticed by our readers, 8.2% of the readers who answered our survey chose Black and White advertising; 20.4% of respondents chose spot color and a full 67.3% of readers who answered the question said they noticed full color more than other advertising.

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If you have been swayed by this information to switch from black and white to color, the next question you may ask is whether the actual colors you use make a difference. If you are using spot color then your choices may be limited by the printer or publisher. For instance, our spot colors are blue, green and red. But if you are running a full color ad then the full color range is at your disposal. According to the article, *Developing Effective Advertising* the following colors have the following associations:

- **Black** - Mystery, strength.
- **Blue** - Depending on the shade, blue can mean formality in its darker shades and fragility, daintiness and youthfulness in the lighter tones.
- **Brown** - Age, wholesomeness, utility.
- **Green** - Suggests cheapness and coldness in its darker tones while conveying freshness and crispness in its lighter shades.
- **Maroon** -Luxury, solidity, quietness.
- **Orange** - Warmth, action, power.
- **Purple** - Royalty and stateliness.
- **Red** - Excitement, heat, strength.
- **Yellow** - Brightness, airiness, refreshment. AS you can see, yellow can be hard to read on a white background. This is something to remember. When designing your ad.

The article further states, “Research on the productivity of color in newspaper advertising invariably shows increased readership as well as increased sales from ads that use color. Adding color raises the cost of the ad, but the increased results are substantially greater than the increased costs.”

So if you are contemplating the use of color, it is a good idea if you can afford it. I hope the color associations will help you choose the correct colors for your ad. You can also work with your designer (or the publication’s design team) to design an effective ad.

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