

# Color by Design

**Editor's Note:** This article is the fifth in an ongoing series by industry experts David Brewster and Maurice Minno on how c-store executives can better compete in this transformative economy.

**Y**ou know that rainbow colors are layers of light. They are always organized into a color spectrum: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple. (You probably remember this from school and from every time you delight in showing a rainbow to your children.) If you were to wrap these six spectrum colors into a circle and shade them from white on the outside to black in the middle, you will have made a color wheel.

If you mix those six colors together as paint, you'll have made mud. If you do it with light, you'll have found true white. That, briefly, is the science of it.

Color in and of itself has no meaning. However, in our culture we have assigned meanings that have very important associations in our language and traditions—so important, in fact, that color evokes powerful images. Sky blue. Purple passion. Fresh green. Red states. Blue states. White as snow. Black hole. And many, many more. Color is powerful. That is where the art of it is found.

Color by design mixes physical science and artistic principles. Designing with color allows retailers to use its power to help our customers find meaning in how we feel about them and about an environment. With color we can emphasize the positive attributes in our stores and with our product offer. We can create stories, highlight important parts, hide imperfections and add impressions

and perceptions of freshness, of strength, of speed, of beauty, of heart. We can establish continuity, backgrounds, contrast and accent. In short, color is a vitally important tool we use to market ourselves, to differentiate and clarify messages, to modify attitudes.

Designing with color is also tricky. Too many colors, too few, too bright, too dull—each can flatten and diminish a store and its story. Good, strong usage often results in a color identity that customers will quickly associate with a store. BP is green and yellow. Wawa is red, white and yellow. ExxonMobil is red, white and blue. IBM is blue. UPS is brown. Strong association does not mean that there are no other colors in the environment.

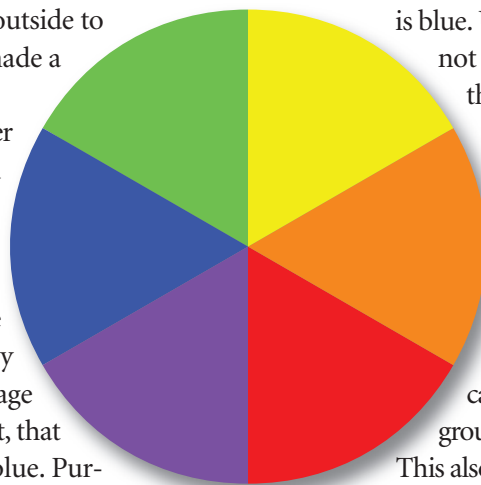
## Continuity, Focus Matter

Colors become important when, and need to be, used together to complement, to contrast each other. This means that the hue and the intensity have to be arranged so that customers can distinguish between shapes and backgrounds as well as between products offered.

This also means that colors placed beside other colors need to be different enough so that they can be distinguished. Great difference in both hue and/or intensity creates focus. Slight difference leads to continuity. A store needs both continuity and focus to tell its story.

To communicate the messages and the essential spirit in a store, and to help tell a story, a retailer needs to use color well and carefully. Color can define the flow, rhythm and the stopping places in a store. It starts and stops the eye. It defines pathways and features. It identifies the brand. Color layers light and life into an environment and beckons customers to enter. Color can help fill the world with wonder for everyone who visits or works in the environment.

Does this sound complex? Well, it is. While many are gifted with a sense of color, many are not. Using color to help communicate your intended messages and spirit must be done well. This is a job for professionals. They are trained to help design by color. They will help color your world and to delight all who enter it. ■



**David Brewster** is president of David Brewster Design and a founding partner of ISUS (Inventive Strategies & Unique Solutions). Contact him at (330) 336-7034 or [dbdisus@wadsnet.com](mailto:dbdisus@wadsnet.com).