

# The Psychology of Color in Marketing

By June Campbell

What **colors have you chosen** for your marketing materials? What were your reasons for making that particular choice? Was it because you liked those particular colors, or did you have a particular **marketing message** in mind? While visual appeal is an important consideration, your color choices could be sending a specific message to the people who view them. Are you sure you know what that message is?

You'd be wise to consider the **psychology of color** when designing your marketing materials. Be it business card, brochure, web site, posters or other material, you'll be making color choices. Colors not only enhance the appearance of the item -- they also influence our behavior. You will do well to consider the impact that the colors you use will have on your target audience.

For instance, have you noticed that most **fast food restaurants** are decorated with vivid **reds** and **oranges**? It's no accident that these colors show up so frequently. Studies have shown that reds and oranges encourage diners to eat quickly and leave -- and that's exactly what fast food outlets want you to do.

It's also no accident that you see a lot of **reds** and **blacks** on adult web sites. These colors are thought to have sexual connotations.

Ever notice that toys, books and children's web sites usually contain large blocks of **bright, primary colors**? Young children prefer these colors and respond more positively than they do to pastels or muted blends.

Market researchers have had a field day identifying the colors and the likely effect they have upon us.

However, the effects of color differ among different cultures, so the **attitudes and preferences of your target audience should be a consideration when you plan your design** of any promotional materials.

For example, white is the color of death in Chinese culture, but purple represents death in Brazil. Yellow is sacred to the Chinese, but signified sadness in Greece and jealousy in France. In North America, green is typically associated with jealousy. People from tropical countries respond most favorably to warm colors; people from northern climates prefer the cooler colors.

In North American mainstream culture, the following colors are associated with certain qualities or emotions:

**Red** --excitement, strength, sex, passion, speed, danger.  
**Blue** --(listed as the most popular color) trust, reliability, belonging, coolness.  
**Yellow** --warmth, sunshine, cheer, happiness  
**Orange** -- playfulness, warmth, vibrant  
**Green** -- nature, fresh, cool, growth, abundance  
**Purple** --royal, spirituality, dignity  
**Pink** -- soft, sweet, nurture, security  
**White** --pure, virginal, clean, youthful, mild.  
**Black** --sophistication, elegant, seductive, mystery  
**Gold** -- prestige, expensive  
**Silver** -- prestige, cold, scientific

Market researchers have also determined that **color affects shopping habits**. Impulse shoppers respond best to red-orange, black and royal blue. Shoppers who plan and stick to budgets respond best to pink, teal, light blue and navy. Traditionalists respond to pastels - pink, rose, sky blue.

Want to test some of this out? Check out web sites belonging to companies with marketing budgets that allow for extensive research into what sells best.

**Jaguar** (<http://www.jaguar.com>)

A luxury car with a luxury web site. There's a predominance of black (sophistication) and silver (prestige). Jaguar markets to people with high incomes who view themselves as sophisticated and look for a prestigious vehicle.

**Volkswagon Microbus** (<http://www.vw.com/microbus/>)

Check out the predominance of yellow (happiness) and orange (playfulness). Matches the type of owners that Volkswagon is trying to attract, don't you think?

So how can you put this information to use?

First, think about your target market. Let's say that you are selling books for young children, but you are **marketing to grandparents**. You'd probably design the books in bright, primary colors (reds, blues, yellows) to appeal to the children who will use them. However, the marketing materials (web site, brochures, etc.) would be designed with grandparents in mind. You might decide to go with blues (trust, reliability), pinks (nurture, sweet, security) and yellow (happy, playful).

Of course, you would **test your ads and colors** on a small market segment before rolling out a large scale campaign.

Give some thoughts to the message you want to send and to the psychology of the recipient. Then choose your colors accordingly.

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