

Color on The Web: Its Many Shades of Meaning

Content is king. You've heard it declared ad nauseam. And no marketer worth his salt would dare to disagree. But what about other equally royal elements that comprise the user experience? Can his highness spare a little love for, say...ingenious use of color?

THE EYES HAVE IT

Human beings are visual creatures. Buyers are human beings. Therefore buyers are visual creatures. Not convinced? Witness the explosion of web-based video. People seek out visual cues and information, and in web development, the use of color matters greatly.

Color expert and visual survey guru Paul Veugen drives this point home beautifully in an article for Website Magazine. Veugen exhorts marketers to remember the emotional and behavioral sway color holds over users. "Colors on the web can make a design interesting and appealing, catch our attention and help us differentiate between brands and products—even influence what we think of them," Veugen says.

His list of six "semantic" color levels provides an insightful framework that helps explain color's meaning and context. **Before** using or choosing color on the web, remember that every color has:

- **Psychological meaning:** Which is based on personal experiences and preferences (not always rational) capable of arousing a full range of emotions.
- **Symbolic meaning:** Human beings also associate colors with experiences. Colors become symbols of things we've done or seen, such as red-white-and-blue and the Fourth of July.

- **Cultural context:** A biggie for international marketers. In the West, for example, white symbolizes purity and goodness (think wedding dress), whereas in Asian culture white stands for death.
- **Political meaning:** Red state, blue state...need we say more?
- **Traditional meaning:** Green is the color of money, red is the color of blood. Blue food? As George Carlin would tell you, there isn't any.
- **Creative context:** Here Veugen refers to how color's function, significance and visual impact change when used in combination with other colors.

THE PERFECT PAIRING

The proper use of color (paired with killer content, of course) keeps customers coming back. Too much, too many, or shades that are out of sync might frustrate users and squelch conversions.