

DOES ORANGE MEAN CHEAP?

BY: Randall Large

Why does Ford Motor paint many of its muscle cars yellowish red, and its Probe model bluish red?

When Igloo Products Corp. wanted to boost sales of its coolers two years ago, the company brought in Patricia Verlodt, a "color consultant." Verlodt turned up her nose at Igloo's prosaic red and blue coolers and advised the company to add turquoise and raspberry colored products to the line. Scoff not Igloo reports that cooler sales have jumped 15% since the new shades hit the shelves. Igloo currently offers its coolers in purple, tangerine and lime green, and in traditional red and blue.

So impressed were Igloo's marketing people by the results of Verlodt's advice that they hired a full-time color coordinator - a job, it seems, that's becoming more common. "People today are much more color-conscious," says Ricki Gardner, Igloo's new hue guru.

Companies have always kept an eye on what colors their customer like, but selecting the proper shades was often a haphazard enterprise. The process may still be haphazard, but at least it is much better organized. There are now some 5,000 independent or staff colorist in the country, many of them highly sought after and well paid. A consultant like Pat Verlodt charges up to \$15,000 per day.

Color has become so integral to marketing that little is left to whimsey anymore. Twice a year, for instance, something called the Color Marketing Group gets together. The group's objective is clear: make sure American products don't class. The group - which includes color experts from the major automakers, paint and textile manufacturers, toymakers, and furniture producers - coordinates color schemes for the next year's products. That way members figure Ford Motor can avoid selling a customer a magenta station wagon that clashes with his just painted fuchsia garage.

If this sounds frivolous, it is actually fairly serious business. In the past three years the Color Marketing Group has grown from 900 to 1,200 members. Next year's shades are already decided. Count on a profusion of products in shades like "desert dusk", "wild orchid," "rain cloud" and "elephant ear".

"Color is more important now than it ever has been," says Davis Masten, who heads the marketing research firm of Cheskin & Masten. "With more verbiage required on packaging and with brands being sold worldwide, we need to be able to communicate without words. Color is a key to that."

An example, Masten points to Pharmavite corp., which makes Nature made vitamins. In 1983 the company brought in Masten's firm to redesign its label. The consultants interviewed more than 800 people about Pharmavite's yellow container with black and white lettering and came to a disturbing conclusion: People were mistaking the vitamins for ant poison. So Pharmavite changed the Nature Made vitamin label to beige and brown.

Last year James Mandle, another outside color consultant, redesigned the package for Kiwi Brands' Ty-D-Bol toilet bowl cleanser. Out went Ty-D-Bol's light blue and green bottles - "too wimpy," says Mandle. In came stark white bottle with lettering on a dark background to "connote power, strength and cleanliness," says Mandle. This helped sales jump nearly 40% in the last 18 months -which should help defray Mandle's \$75,000 bill.

Most of these color consultants use classic market research methods: focus groups and questionnaires, plus a little surreptitious lurking in stores tracking the eye movements of shoppers as they scan packages.

Then other's's Carlton Wagner. Wagner, a psychologist by training, maintains that some shades stimulate the endocrine and pituitary glands to send chemical signals to the brain. As a result Wagner claims, the brain associates some basic colors with basic concepts - red, say, with danger. Other colors are associated with learned responses - orange, for instance, denotes "cheap."

Wagner tried out his theories on Wienerschnitzel, a 350 outlet hot dog chain. In 1983 Wienerschnitzel's marketing people asked Wagner to help them boost sales. Wagner told Wienerschnitzel to add a touch of orange to its magenta and red color scheme. The ideas was to send a message to consumers that the chain offered inexpensive hot dogs. After a prototype store replaced the reds with oranges, sales rose 7%. Management was delighted and the new color now graces every Wienerschnitzel outlet in the chain. Overall, sales have been up 5% on average annually.

Wagner who charges up to \$35,000 for product evaluation can point to some big-name clients he has advised. For example, he told Ford Motor that men like hot, yellow-based reds - the company dubs the shade "arrest me red" - so that's the most popular nonwhite color for the Mustang GT targeted toward men. Women, according to Wagner, like reds with more blue in them. So Ford offers more blue-based reds in its Probe , aimed more at women.

We it is clear that color is an important factor in the way people perceive objects.

WHAT DOES THE COLOR MEAN?

Rose putty - a highly complex color popular with highly complex people.

Yellow-based red - men respond strongly to it, but women prefer blue-based reds.
Orchid - an unpopular color that induces sensations of nausea

Dark Blue - conveys respect and responsibility. A good color for lawyers.

Red violet - a good fashion color for women, but men aren't wild about it.

Strong orange - great around fast food and other inexpensive products.

Prestige blue green - A classy color. The highest indicator of financial success.

Pastel yellow - A real attention-getter - but it also induces stress.

Midrange blue - An apple pie and mom color America's favorite shade.

Bronze - gets a negative response. Useful when rejection is wanted.