



Brilliant Brand Color

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE
TO HARNESSING
THE POWER OF COLOR
TO BRAND YOUR
BUSINESS

*by Pamela Wilson
of BIG Brand System*

BIG BRAND
SYSTEM

About the Author



I'm Pamela Wilson of **BIG Brand System**.

Big Brand System is devoted to helping people like you who are building an online business.

I'm an author, keynote speaker, and online educator. I've been helping large organizations and small businesses get their ideas out into the world since 1987.

This guide is an educational resource and isn't a substitute for working with a business consultant. Business is risky — we all know that! I can't guarantee the outcome of following the recommendations here. Read on, and if you need professional help, consider hiring a business consultant.

The Ultimate Guide to Harnessing the Power of Color to Brand Your Business

Color is one of the most baffling topics for non-designers. There's all this strange vocabulary: RGB, CMYK, analogous, tertiary, complementary and spot color, hue, saturation, web safe ... it's enough to make your head spin.

You don't need to know all that, though. In this guide, we're going to focus less on the *theoretical* aspects of color and more on putting color into *practice*.

What You'll Learn in This Guide

Color is a crucial component of your visual brand.

When your prospects see your brand, your colors make an important first impression. Color keeps working for your business the more your prospects and customers are exposed to it over time.

If you've done it right, that is. If you aren't using the right colors, you may be attracting the wrong kind of prospects to your business, or sending the wrong message to your customers.

And if you don't use color consistently, you may not be sending any message at all.

This guide will teach you how to make color work for your business.

I'm going to show you how to choose an effective color palette, and make color an integral part of your brand. We'll talk about techniques for picking colors, and how you can keep them consistent across print and the web.

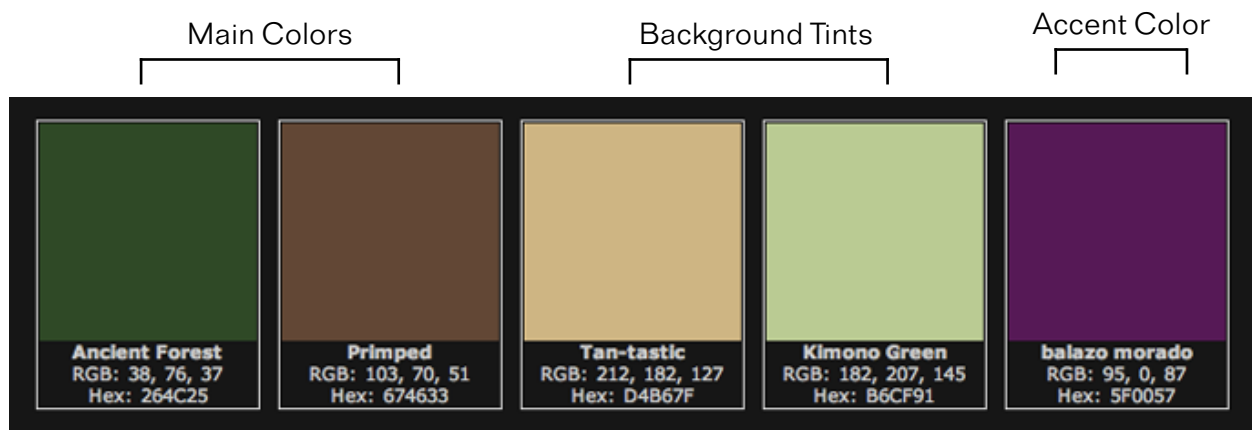
How to Use This Guide

First, read through the material once, from start to finish. Don't do the exercises at first: it's more important to understand the concepts behind creating your color palette before you start choosing swatches.

Once you've read through the material, decide if you want to choose your two main colors based on **similar colors** or **opposite colors**.

Watch the companion video to see how to use the powerful free tools at <http://Colour-Lovers.com> to build your five color palette, which will include your two main colors, your two background colors, and one accent color.

By the time you get to the end of this guide, you'll be the proud owner of a beautiful, versatile five-color palette that will build your visual brand as you build your business.



Brand Power Through Color

A recognizable color palette that's applied consistently over time can be a powerful asset for a company. Let's play a game. Can you match the international courier services to their colors?

Dark Brown and Gold
White, Purple and Red
Yellow and Red

DHL
UPS
FedEx

These companies have all done an excellent job associating their colors with their brands. If I saw a truck painted with one of these color combinations coming down the road, I'd know what company it represented without seeing a logo. Would you?

When you pick colors, start with the obvious choices. Look for colors that:

- May already be associated with your product, service, or niche
- Are flexible and reproduce well in a variety of mediums
- Are classic so they'll stand the test of time
- If your business is about fashion, music, or another area that closely follows cultural trends, you can pick trendy colors, but expect to need to change your palette in less than five years

The effort you spend devising a great color palette will pay off over time. Once you've got colors you're happy with, you'll enjoy applying them to all your materials, and you'll create consistency by using them in everything you do. People will start to recognize your business based solely on its colors.

Your Two Main Colors

As you look at different color combinations, think about what colors are associated with your product or service. Don't shy away from using the first colors that come to mind: there may be a deeply ingrained association with that color and it's a good idea to build on the link.

There's a lot of information about color meanings available online. A better guide to the colors that will work for your business, however, may be to look around at what already works in the marketplace. Many of your large competitors chose their color palettes after spending thousands of dollars on research, etc. You might as well put their research to work for you!

If everyone in your industry tends to use a particular set of colors, it's probably best to create your own version of those colors to build on the thousands of dollars that have already been spent establishing them in the minds of your target market.

High Contrast or Low?

The first decision you'll need to make about your color palette is will your two main colors be analogous pairs or complementary pairs? But that's hard to remember, isn't it? So let's call them **Similar Colors** and **Opposite Colors**.

Similar colors lie near to each other on the color wheel. Choosing two colors that lie close together on the color wheel means there will be less contrast between the colors. They are more closely related, and this familial relationship is more harmonious and serene.

Color wheel with slices of **similar colors** revealed.



Opposite colors lie more or less across from one another on the color wheel. Pairing two opposite colors together create tension, as each color “bounces” off the other.

Color wheel with slices of **opposite colors** revealed.



There's no perfect answer here: it's all dependent on the kind of feeling you want to convey with your color choice. Choose your approach based on your ideal customer.*

Do you want to convey **serenity** and **harmony**? Start with similar colors. Do you want to convey an **active, dynamic** feeling? Start with opposite colors.

Tension=Attention

Contrast creates tension, and tension=attention.

The color combinations you choose will be influenced by the amount of attention you'd like the color to draw to itself.

As mentioned in the previous example, if you'd like to **create harmony**, choose colors that are close "family" members on the color wheel. If you want to **draw attention**, create tension by using color wheel opposites.

Here are some other ways you can use **contrast** as you build the rest of your palette:

Other Ways To Use Contrast in Your Palette

Value Contrast: Dark vs. Pale



Using a very dark color that looks like it has black in it against a pale color that looks like it has white in it creates **value contrast**.

Temperature Contrast: Warm vs. Cool



Using a warm color (one with a lot of red, orange or yellow) next to a cool color (one with blue, green or purple) creates **temperature contrast**.

Intensity Contrast: Saturated vs. Desaturated



Using a tint of one of your colors creates **intensity contrast**. Tints are pale versions of your original colors, and this is one way to find background colors that will work with your palette.

A Word About People Who Are Color Blind

If you are designing information where communication is **crucial**, keep in mind that a small percentage of the population is color blind in some way.



Let's say you're drawing a map that will be used by hikers to show them where they can find fresh water. Rather than indicating water with a blue square, use a drop-shaped symbol that's blue. This gives someone two ways to interpret your information: color and shape.

There are many sites that will allow you to check your website to see if your colors may be problematic for people who are color blind. Here's one I like:

<http://www.checkmycolours.com/> Plug in your website URL and this site gives you a color blindness report card of each element it finds.

Approximately 8% of men live with some kind of color blindness. Only .5% of women do. If your target market is overwhelmingly male, use these sites to check your colors, especially if color is crucial to communicating your information.

Good design sense should prevail over the results from any electronic resource, though: make sure you're using sufficient contrast overall, and don't use blue type on a green background!

Shopping for a Color Palette

Good marketing creates associations between colors, typefaces, images and copywriting and a product or service. This takes place over time: often a customer needs repeated exposure to your brand before they will remember it. Color is a very important part of this marketing.

When picking your color palette, why reinvent the wheel? Spend some time surfing the web to see what color palettes are already in use in your industry. Look for a common theme: is everyone using blues and greens? Is the best-selling product in your industry packaged in a bright red box?

If you sell a consumer product, spend some time in retail outlets where your competitors sell their wares. What colors do they use?

You don't need to try to copy the colors in use exactly. You want to come up with your own version of a color palette that works. The important thing to remember is that if there are colors that are already strongly associated with your product or service, your marketing job will be easier if you build a color palette that's inspired by these already-strong associations.

Hire Your Backup Singers

Once you've decided on your **two main colors**, it's time to find two colors that will work as **background colors**. These two supporting hues can be used for a variety of purposes such as backgrounds for text boxes, website backgrounds, frames around images, etc. They need to be light enough that they don't compete with your main colors.

Think of it like a musical group. Your two main colors are like the lead singers. You want two additional colors that provide the "ooohs" and "aaahs" in the background that add to the overall color song, but that never compete with the main melody.



Background color examples

To choose them, look for pale neutral hues. You can look across the color wheel from your main color choices for inspiration, then go very pale.

Usually, background colors look best if they have just a little black mixed in. You know how the backup singers are usually back in the shadows on stage? That's the effect you want to go for.

Now for the Soloist

The last element of your five-color palette is the accent color. To continue to stretch the musical group metaphor, this is like the soloist you might hire for your musical group. This color “voice” doesn't sing out on every song, but they have a distinctive sound that stands out whenever you hear it.

Your accent color can be **brighter** than the others.

If you've used complementary colors, the accent color could be a **darker** or **more saturated** version of one of your two main colors.

If you've used similar colors for your two main colors, you can use something on the **opposite** side of the color wheel for your accent.

Whatever accent color you pick, choose it *after* you've found two main colors and two background colors, because this color needs to stand out from those.



Accent color examples

Before you start creating your color palette now, be sure to watch the video that comes with this course. In it, I demonstrate the concepts here, and show you how to use a free online tool to build your palette.

Color Environments

When creating marketing materials, there are two main color “spaces” it’s important to understand.

WEB

On the web, colors are expressed with the **HEX** or **RGB** color space.

HEX stands for hexadecimal colors and is expressed with six digits which are a combination of numbers and sometimes letters, like this: #65BDD3.

RGB stands for Red, Green, Blue, and represents the colors your computer monitor combines to come up with the different hues you see on screen. Color can vary from monitor to monitor, so it’s a good idea to check your color palette on more than one monitor before you finalize it.

RGB colors are expressed with three colors, like this: 101/189/211, where 101 is the value for red, 189 is the value for green, and 211 is the value for blue. Each color value is from 0 to 256.

It doesn’t matter whether you use RGB or HEX numbers: they’re just two different systems for naming web colors. I find HEX colors are more widely used and a little easier since they’re shorter.

You might also see HSV and HSL mentioned when looking at color websites. HSV is Hue, Saturation and Value. HSL is Hue, Saturation and Lightness.

In my opinion, they’re not terribly useful: there’s no standard for measuring them, and it’s probably TMI: Too Much Information! But now you know what they mean.

PRINT

In print, colors are created using inks. **Full color** or **four-color process** jobs are printed using the four basic ink colors, which is called the CMYK color space. CMYK stands for Cyan, Magenta, Yellow and Black. (*K=Black? Yes, because if B=Black, people might confuse B with Blue.*)

All full color printing is done by combining tiny dots of these four colors. When these dots are applied next to one another in different proportions, our eyes combine them to make the colors we see. This kind of printing is called **offset printing**.



The other kind of color printing you might hear about is **spot color printing**. Spot color printing is almost always two color printing. Because the printer is using two ink colors only, he or she only has to make two plates, and fill two ink fountains on the printing press. This makes your job less expensive to print, but the range of colors available isn't as wide as in four color printing.

Inks are still combined using small dots, but since there are only two colors to combine, your color palette is limited. Spot printing colors are selected from an international standard group of printing ink colors called **Pantone** swatches.

I have many clients who prefer to use two color printing for their materials. In some cases they are nonprofit organizations that don't wish to appear as if they've spent a lot of money on printing their marketing materials.

If you decide to use spot color printing, consult with a designer or commercial printer who can let you see the colors available in this system. You need to see printed swatches on paper: screen representations of printed colors may not be accurate.

Around the year 2000, **digital printing** became widely available. Commercial printers that offer digital printing with CMYK colors use machines that are the industrial equivalent of the inkjet printer you might have on your desk top.

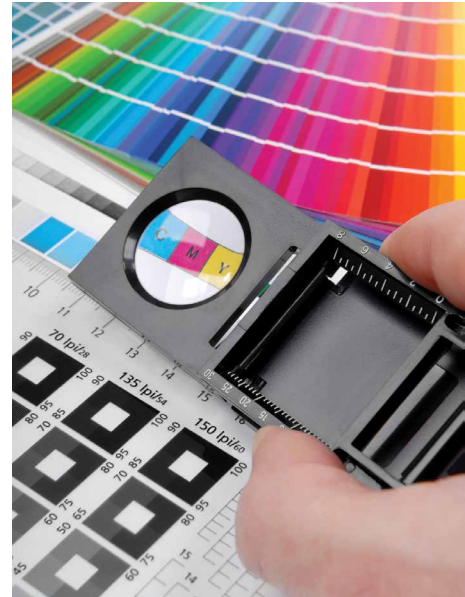
Cyan, magenta, yellow and black inks combine to make the color photo at the right.



Talk to An Expert

When deciding on how to print your color marketing piece, talk to your local commercial printer and ask him or her for options for printing your piece. Usually any marketing piece that you plan to print less than 1,000 pieces of can be printed least expensively on a digital printing machine. More than 1,000 pieces are usually handled on an offset printing machine.

There's usually no perceptible quality difference between the machines, but depending on the commercial printer you use, your paper choices may be more limited when using a digital printing machine.



Is Your Print Color Crucial? Look at Swatches

Color on screen is created very differently than color on paper. Very bright, vivid screen colors often can't be reproduced in print. If you plan to print a lot of marketing materials and exact color matching is important, it's best to select your print colors first, and work backward to screen colors.

You could set up an initial palette on screen, but then you'll want to meet with a printer or designer and ask to see a swatch book of Pantone or CMYK colors. Let them help you match print and screen colors using their swatch books.

I wish I could offer a shortcut for doing this online, but *if it's crucial that your printed color reproduce accurately*, you really need to make the effort to meet with a designer or commercial printer who can give you access to ink swatch books so you can check colors before you use them in print.

It's an Art, Not a Science

Keep in mind that once you actually start applying your colors you may find you need to change them. It's one thing to look at squares of color lined up next to each other, but once you apply them to actual marketing pieces, you may find you need to change them

because when you put the colors to use they don't work as you'd expected. This happens to all of us, even designers who do this work every day.

So pick a palette to start, but know that going forward you may want to make revisions as you apply the colors you've chosen.

Tune in to Color Around You

Finally, color is a difficult subject to teach, because it's quite subjective. I've given you guidance and some general rules to follow, but trust your own cultural references, your eyes, and the feedback you get from the people you share your color palette with.

There's no scientific, perfect color solution that I can hand you. That's one of the aspects of color that keeps artists painting, weavers picking new thread colors, and photographers forever playing with light: it's a puzzle that has many solutions.

My hope is that by learning about design, and in the case of this ebook, color, you'll start to see the world differently. Instead of "oh, look, it's a stop sign," you might think "oh, look, that stop sign is the **opposite color** of the leaves behind it, so it "pops" out and is easy to see. (Just don't drive off the road while you're thinking about it!)

Or you might notice that the stop sign is a **similar color** to the colors behind it, so it blends in with the background more.



Take what you observe and what you've learned here and try out color ideas. It may seem awkward and strange at first, but just try, then *try some more*. The more you use color, the easier it will be. Remember to have fun and don't be afraid to experiment!

It's Your Turn

It's time to take what you've learned and create your own business color palette. Watch the video I created for you, then log on to the <http://ColourLovers.com> site, create an account, and get started!

Remember: your first attempts at creating a color palette may not be your best. Don't be afraid to try several palettes until you create one you're happy with!

Once you apply your new color palette to your website and other marketing materials, you may find you need to adjust it. That's to be expected! Use the colourlovers site to update your colors so your palette is always current.