

Press release

Project BBCG (a Better Brand Color Guide): a free framework for everyone to improve brand color communication and reproduction

Flawed brand color guides are probably the biggest issue for accurate brand color reproduction, increasing significant rework costs, especially in packaging printing

Antwerp (Belgium), November 3rd, 2022 – Today, Project BBCG (an insights4print initiative) launches its freely available framework and template to make brand color communication and reproduction easier and more consistent. Flawed brand color guides are often the #1 root cause of discussion between print buyers and printers. And often result in unnecessary reprints, which are, especially when looking at packaging, very expensive. Project BBCG: A Better Brand Color Guide, is an initiative from insights4print.ceo, in cooperation with several seasoned experts. The result is a methodology to define, transform, and communicate brand colors, including an editable template and an example ASE file that can be shared with all designers in the flow. It's high time to get the basics right: a correct and unambiguous brand color definition. Project BBCG offers the right approach.

“Brand colors are precious to its owner, a lot of time and money is spent on picking the color that expresses the brand values the best. But then it goes wrong.”, says Eddy Hagen, independent researcher at insights4print.ceo. “For a consistent reproduction, the brand color guides should be rock solid and unambiguous. And that isn't the case, as studies have shown. Most brand color guides are flawed. An example is the brand color guides of different regional offices from a worldwide NGO. Although they start from the same reference, the values for web (RGB) and print (CMYK) are different.”

“In the past, I've already published a few articles about this on my blog”, Hagen continues, “including some basic proposals for better brand color guides. When dr. Kai Lankinen recently contacted me with a simple question on the topic, he triggered me to develop Project BBCG: a Better Brand Color Guide.”

Kai Lankinen, founder of Dr. Lankinen Graphic Innovations, has over 20 years of experience in packaging printing and collaboration with international brand owners and printers: “I've been following Eddy's blog for a long time and found these posts very actual, entertaining and educational. Having previously faced the same issues with brand owners' color definitions, I noticed Eddy's post on brand color guide and our discussion started a few months ago with a small note that a 'Lab' can be interpreted in several ways... And I'm pleased to see that Eddy has once again delved deeply into the topic and compiled the scattered professional information into a simple, but very describing and fundamental tutorial. I'm sure this will be very actual, entertaining and educational for everyone!.”

Verified by industry experts

In order to validate claims made in the Better Brand Color Guide, draft versions were shared with several seasoned experts for critical reviews and feedback.

Henk W. Gianotten, long-time expert in font technology, typography, prepress and printing and author of hundreds of publications: "This publication is extremely important for brand owners, creators of corporate design, packaging designers and printers. Get rid of the Pantone suggestions for CMYK percentages. Use the ASE- and/or the CxF-technologies to define the proper colors; they are predictable, stable in production, and reliable for additional runs."

Paul Sherfield, long-time print standardization consultant (The Missing Horse Consultancy) and FESPA Color Management Ambassador: "In my many years of hands-on experience, I've seen too many brand and corporate identity manuals, both from national and internationally well known names, that are imprecise and therefore inaccurate when specifying brand and corporate color for use in the many different medias available. CMYK and RGB values, e.g., are often quoted with no reference to an ICC profile or use case. Resulting in a brand color that will look different for every combination of printing process and substrate used. Project BBCG aimed in clear terms to improve the reproduction of brand and corporate colors and the way they are specified to the many types and media, and communicated to all involved in accurate colour reproduction, including designers."

Hauke Liefferink, managing director of ACME Graphics: "The Better Brand Color Guide is a great tutorial for brands to choose, define, and communicate existing brand colors as well as introduce new colors that are entirely unique and not found in swatch books. Eddy described a straightforward and practical way to do this across both printed and digital media. The next 'color of the year' is your very own color!"

Gary Courtney, Technical GC and Training at DagwoodLinnetts experiences the issues with current brand color guides on a daily basis. "We at Dagwood Linnetts specialize in quality print, mock ups and prototypes for the advertising, design, and packaging industries. Project BBCG brings together important technologies and best practices which we have advocated for years, along with some additional rock-solid approaches to brand color standards, all in one clever package. It's a wonder that no one has suggested such an efficient approach years ago."

A free framework for all, with opportunities for prepress houses, printers

The result of this is Project BBCG: a Better Brand Color Guide. It is a methodology, a framework to build brand color guides that are not only rock solid, because on measurements of a chosen color, but also result in more 'print safe' brand colors. The Project BBCG tutorial shows how manual tweaking and getting test prints, with real ink on real substrates, will result in better CMYK combinations than fully automatic conversions, meaning: combinations that offer higher stability in print.

This also offers ample opportunities for prepress houses and printers: they can assist brand owners in measuring the chosen color, transforming it into 'print-safe colors', and providing two filetypes that can significantly improve the brand color communication and reproduction: ASE and CxF files.

ASE files for easy and solid brand color sharing

ASE files are a hidden gem in Adobe Creative Cloud applications: small color libraries that can easily be shared with others, the Adobe Swatch Exchange. And ASE files go beyond Adobe applications: e.g. also Affinity Designer, Photo and Publisher support it. This is the easiest and most solid way to exchange brand colors: when designers load them into their Adobe CC applications, all brand colors are available in the swatches panel. No more confusion, no more searching for the right color in color libraries like Pantone, ANPA, DIC.

CxF, the Color eXchange Format, on the other hand, is the most detailed color description one can get. But it takes more effort to create, and to use it throughout the workflow, some extra tools are needed, at least at this moment. Creating CxF files involves special test prints on both white and black background. Some specialized packaging prepress houses already offer this kind of service, indicating there is an opportunity.

Free to download, free to use

The Better Brand Color Guide is a completely free framework, on purpose. “Flawed brand color guides might be the biggest issue in the printing industry, leading to lots of discussions, waste and financial losses. Project BBCG offers a solution for this. Given the potential impact, we wanted to make everything available for free. Everybody can not only download an example of a Better Brand Color Guide, it comes with a tutorial showing how to get to that rock solid brand color definition and print safe CMYK combinations. A tutorial that was written with brand owners, designers, in mind: it is very accessible, even more complex concepts are explained in an easy way. And, last but not least, also an example ASE file is available for download. This way brand owners and designers can try it, and immediately see the power of this little gem.”, Hagen says.

Volunteers wanted for translation

The Better Brand Color Guide tutorial is at this moment available in English and Dutch. But given the potential positive effect for the entire brand color reproduction chain, Project BBCG is looking for volunteers to translate the tutorial into their native languages.

“All the advances we’ve seen over the last few decades in printing technology, in prepress, in color measurements and control, only make sense if we can get a rock solid brand color definition. Brand owners and designers need to make a big step forward, Project BBCG shows them how to go about.”, Hagen concludes.



Eddy Hagen - insights4print.ceo: independent researcher

Eddy Hagen started in the printing industry in 1988, at the printing industry federation. For a very long time, he was the trendwatcher and later general manager of the innovation center for the printing industry. Multiple projects he and his team executed were covered in the international trade press. Although he is no longer full time employed in the printing industry, Hagen still publishes on a regular basis on his insights4print.ceo blog. He also continues to do small scale, but impactful research projects. Project BBCG is his latest project.