



## January Newsletter

### Colour me Bad

Colour is at the heart of what we do as reproduction artists. Correct colour communication is key; making sure you and the customer are talking about the same shade of 'dog pecker pink' is paramount to achieving that elusive reverie of a happy customer.

The default system for the longest time has been Pantone, with books, chips, and electronic libraries widely used in our industry.

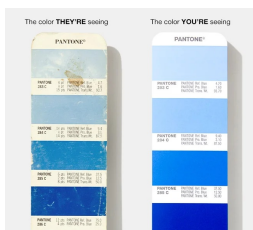
In a statement that confused many users, Adobe recently quoted:

*> Standardized pre-loaded Color libraries, also known as Pantone Colour books, will be phased out of Illustrator, InDesign, and Photoshop in software updates released after August 16, 2022.*

*> Customers who rely on Pantone colors in their creative workflows will need a Pantone license via the Pantone Connect plugin available on Adobe Exchange.*



Many are upset by this change, and the real reason is as hard to match as Pantone 807U. Adobe says that the licensing model changed, and Pantone says that Adobe libraries were no longer accurate. We may never know the real reason, but the fact remains that the most widely used colour matching system now requires a subscription to continue using.



The accuracy of using a standardised colour system has been significant in print reproduction. When the customer has a book in their hands that accurately matches the book in your hand (unless it's the one from the shop floor that has dubious stains and the occasional page missing),

we can guarantee accuracy: *disclaimer for lighting and perception.*

The Pantone book has become the staple in every print shop, even when someone decided to put the colours in chromatic order and printed the index so small that people like me with Mr. Magoo glasses can't decide if it's a 6 or an 8! We still stand by the bible that is the swatch book.

The typical life of a new shiny £180 Pantone book is almost the same in every print shop. The designer decides he needs a new one as it's been 11 months and 28 days since he last got one; he orders a pack and gets the set of Uncoated (U) and Coated (C). The uncoated version goes straight into the drawer next to the last five years' worth of U books and the Pantone Home Interiors Harmony book that was bought by mistake! The 12-month-old book now begins its journey to the shop floor.

## Hand me Down

First port of call for this pre-loved edition of the colour bible is:



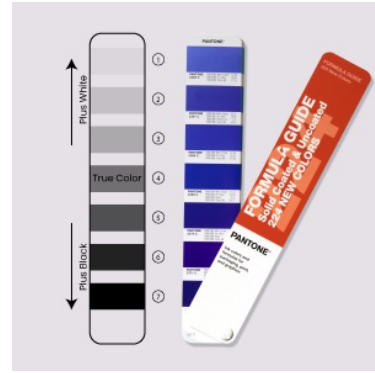
Print Manager's office; our beloved PM swaps out his old book, which has become dog-eared but is still clean as no one is allowed to use it except him. The PM's old book then makes its way to the lead printer, the guy on the shop floor who really keeps everything moving, his only reward being a lack of a social life, plastisol in his car, and a 'nearly new' Pantone book. The Lead Printer's book, which has pages missing and all the yellows from 100 to 107 look the same due to an unfortunate pigment concentrate incident, the book is then passed to the girl in the ink room. It's not like she can be trusted with a new book! Most of her best swatches are visible on her work dungarees!

Now that we have a colour book, we need to translate it into a printable ink.

Each ink manufacturer has invested heavily in a Pantone Matching System (PMS); this is a series of recipes according to the ink type. These systems are more complex than we give them credit for! With over 2000 Pantone colours (and it seems new ones being invented every day), it's almost impossible for ink companies to formulate

every colour, printed through every mesh onto every substrate. Most companies will use mathematical computation and historical mixing records.

When we look at the Pantone book, we note that there are 7 swatches per page; the true colour is usually in the centre with additions of white going up the page and additions of black going down the page. This would explain why colours that were close matches to each other were often 7 numbers away from each other. The introduction of chromatic order and new colours has seen this phenomenon disappear lately.



The ink manufacturers that utilize cloud-based recipe systems have been using us, the printers, as formulators for accuracy, with the option to submit a color query; we are fine-tuning the recipes as we use them. The big 3 plastisol RFU systems that I prefer (UK-based, mature, and stubborn that I am):

- 1) **Wilflex** – Accuracy is high; colours are consistent.
- 2) **Rutland** – Similar accuracy and more economical price-wise.
- 3) **International Coatings** – Great accuracy and price but limited stock in the UK.

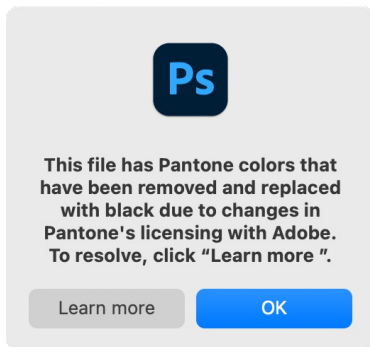
Water-based systems can be a little more challenging; the option of several base types and lots of changing substrates, with white base or without, can seriously affect the shade and strength of a colour. I find most water-based printers have a unique library of tried and tested recipes, most using the manufacturer's recipe as a starting point and adjusting to fit substrate and coverage.

I have my favourites, and it's all personal preference. I still think the inks are getting weaker as the colours get cleaner, and anyone that has tried to get 280C blue or Reflex Blue to look good on a white base will back me up on this.

The easiest and best solution was to run a swatch system that we send to the customer, renaming the colours to 'Macy Gray', 'Barry White', 'C-lo Green', 'Aloe Blacc', 'James Brown', 'Green Day'—the list goes on; please feel free to add your own! Asking the customer to pick from a

closed list in a similar way we ask to pick from HTV or embroidery thread will eliminate any bad mixing as it just so happens that our bespoke swatch list matches the off-the-shelf inks we buy that are ready for use.

Of course, now that every prospective customer has a copy of Illustrator and owns a Pantone book, the chances of limiting the choice to an easy mix are very slim. It is more likely they will pick the new 5,000,000 range colour that means we all have to buy new Pantone books, and the hand-me-down process starts all over again.



I believe that Pantone has made an error by not including swatches inside design software, but what do I know? I just pull ink through holes for a living. If the customer does not supply a reference, it's a dangerous slope! I would let the design software pick a colour from its display values and tell the client that is what we will use and please check.

Trying to match from a monitor is a big error as all monitors display differently! Correct lighting is key in colour matching, and the books all have two brown squares at the back to check for good lighting conditions.

A light box is the only way to control variations in opinion! TL84 was the light tube of choice as it was used in all M&S stores around the world. This made it the standard light to check colours under. Now we have LED lights that emit different temperature light, and it's important to check in a controlled environment.



