SELECTING COLOUR FOR
packaging

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Preface

Although colour is not the only factor in achieving good packaging, there will be little argument with the axiom that the effective use of colour is an important marketing tool and is the key to packaging that sells. However, the effective use of colour as part of the graphic design of a package presupposes selection of the right colour or colours, and this book is intended to help those who have to make that selection and thus ensure that a package has maximum impact in the market place.

The plan has been to bring together the best available information on the subject and to provide a source of reference to the characteristics of colour in the marketing and packaging concepts. The result will, it is hoped, answer three basic questions:

- Should colour be used at all?
- Which colours should be used?
- How should colour be used to best advantage?

These questions are faced by all those responsible for the supply and design of packaging including users of packaging, designers, advertising agents, marketing experts and management generally. The questions are also faced, although less directly, by manufacturers, producers and converters of packaging and packaging materials, not forgetting those who sell packages in a range of standard colours. It is believed that all these categories will find help and interest in the pages that follow.

Selection of the most effective colour for packaging does not mean following a few simple rules, or using guesswork, or relying on the prejudices of individuals. It is a complex process which embraces marketing considerations, design considerations and practical considerations before the physiological, psychological and optical aspects of colour can be applied to a specific situation.

It is not advisable to make any final decisions about colour until the nature and shape of the package has been determined. Colour, by itself, will not make a poor package into a good one; packaging design is a total concept and any package has to be designed in a positive way. To that end, the designer needs to be furnished with an adequate brief setting out all the factors that have to be taken into account.

This is not a manual of packaging, and it does not attempt to discuss the advantages or disadvantages of different materials or different types of pack. The general principles of package design are discussed in a broad way, together with those considerations that should be taken into account when preparing a brief for the designer, because the same considerations are equally applicable to the selection of colour.

The principal emphasis has been placed on packaging for new consumer products because this is where colour is most important and consequently where the marketing aspects of packaging have priority. However, if a package is to be successful and to play a positive part in the marketing process, the functional and other aspects of the package must not be forgotten and must be included in the design brief. These aspects are just as important as the visual aspects and they have been listed and discussed where appropriate. Sections dealing with changes in existing packaging, and with the packaging of industrial products, have also been included.

This book has been planned to bring together the best available information, and the material has been divided into five parts as follows:

- Part I deals with packaging in general terms, its function and the principles that add up to the ideal package. It also includes a section dealing with packaging assessment and notes on changing packaging. The material included may be described as background to packaging.

- Part II sets out the principles governing selection of colour for packaging applications, explains the nature of trends and summarises the factors that should govern colour selection. Perusal of this part will explain the reasons for the recommendations made in the remaining parts.

- Part III lists the various points that should be included when preparing a brief for the designer and includes notes on the effect of each point on colour selection. It forms a comprehensive checklist of the many factors that have to be taken into account when designing a package and which have to be reviewed when preparing a colour specification.

- Part IV underlines those points which require special attention

when preparing a design brief or colour specification for the packaging of specific types of products such as cosmetics or food. It also includes a note on the packaging of industrial products.

- Part V describes the mechanics of colour selection and outlines the preparation of a colour specification that will pinpoint the various attributes and characteristics of colour needed to achieve a successful result. This part also includes a comprehensive colour index from which it is possible to select individual hues having the right characteristics.

- Finally, there is a selection of sources of further information, and an index to all the products mentioned in the book.

Parts I and II may be described as background material which helps the reader to understand the principles involved. Parts III and IV are the planning stage, where marketing and other factors are brought together and used to identify those colour characteristics which are essential to a satisfactory outcome. Part V outlines the colour selection process.

During the course of some thirty years experience as a colour research consultant, I have frequently been asked to suggest sources of information about the use of colour in packaging. Hardly a week goes by without letters and calls from budding marketing executives who have been assigned the task of writing a thesis on the subject of colour and packaging and are frantically seeking basic information on the subject.

My answer to these enquiries is that I do not know of any source to which easy reference may be made. Although the subject is frequently discussed in the trade and technical press, the articles usually have a limited objective and are not easy to track down. So far as I am aware there is no one source of information which is at all helpful. This book is an attempt to fill that gap.

The material in the book is based on my own files, researches and practical experience and reflects knowledge acquired in making colour recommendations to many well known companies. It also includes the results of an extensive study of published information dealing with both colour and packaging and the interface between the two; this study has extended over many years.

In addition, I have had the inestimable advantage of access to the files and experience of Faber Birren, the world's leading authority on colour, whom I have been privileged to call a friend and associate for many years. I owe a deep debt of gratitude to Mr Birren for permission to use his material when writing this book.

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Part I
GENERAL PRINCIPLES

1 About packaging

1.1 The functions of packaging

One dictionary defines packaging as the design and manufacture of packages for retail commodities, but it is a good deal more than that and applies equally to consumer and industrial products. Packaging has come to mean the art or science of using a package as a marketing tool, and that is the meaning intended in this book. Packaging is a complex subject which has become an essential part of the promotion of any product, although particularly consumer products, and it cannot be separated from selling.

Even in the Stone Age there were undoubtedly packages because things had to be carried around and protected from frost and rain, and a package remained a functional concept for many centuries. It is only in this century that the package has become something more and that the concept of packaging has become an essential part of the economics of existence. There are two main reasons for this. The first is that a more complex civilisation and higher standards of living make it necessary to have more elaborate packages in a functional sense. The second is that the package has become an essential part of the process of selling. This is due partly to the efforts of the packaging industry in creating new ideas and partly to the development of package design; together, these have created something which did not exist before. However, there have also been changes in the nature of retail trade, such as the development of supermarkets, which depend on packaging.

In order to understand the changes it is desirable to draw a distinction between packaging and packages, although the two are often treated as being synonymous. Packaging embraces the whole concept including the immediate package, the outer, the wrapper and so on, and the part that the whole plays in marketing and merchandising. A good package

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