

The New Age of Color

Recently I have been looking at color management from a new perspective. I've become preoccupied thinking about what drives change in color process. And wondering why color management is such a sticky topic?

Color is often how customers base their final purchasing decision at point of sale. Yet, color is often the hardest to "manage" as its appearance is subjective.

The swatch card that dominates the textile and apparel industry is an example of a manual process utilized today. Swatches get glued or taped to cards. Notes are written and then communicated via express deliveries, faxes, e-mails or phone calls. Add to all this the fact that most people have poor color memory.

This manual swatch card process is tried and true, but also time consuming and costly in a modern retail arena that is chasing speed to market and shorter lead times.

Many in the industry concur that visual inspection and developing physical samples again and again is involved and

laborious. However, decision makers remain reluctant to financially invest in a process review, color standards or color management system software. The big question is "Why?" Especially considering there are so many studies showing a cost reduction on an average of over 50 percent and a time reduction of as much as 80 percent.

Perhaps, that's not convincing enough?

Which brings me to spectral data; the practice of sending spectral data electronically through the development and production chain is well established within the textile industry. (Spectral Data is a digital measurement of the full visible color spectrum that is recorded in a .qtx file.)

So then when I say, "let's move toward 'virtual' color approvals" why do I get looked at like an alien?

I can tell you why: It all comes down to trust and the old saying "seeing is believing" that is still driving the traditional and costly practices in the color industry.

All buyers, merchants, designers

and developers go through a process of gaining trust in the electronic communication of color. I don't take it personally – I know I'm not an alien – I'm just asking people to trust in something new.

I argue that if you gain the trust and make the changes, you will gain time and you will be more productive. When your business realizes the benefits of 50 percent cost reduction, 80 percent time reduction, first submit approvals and increased color performance that quality does for the bottom line, you will be part of the new age of color. And you will never go back. ●



Colleen Ahalt-Eagle, a senior level material and color management expert, recently moved to New Zealand

to work for Kathmandu. She is knowledgeable in fiber, textile and garment design and development, having executive experience at several activewear brands as well as teaching at the university level.

ECO-CONSCIOUS COLOR

Archroma Introduces Products Traceable from Nature to Fashion.

ARCHROMA, A GLOBAL leader in color and specialty chemicals, is combining the old and the new in a range of "biosynthetic" dyes for cotton and cellulose-based fabrics derived from almond shells, saw palmetto, rosemary leaves, and other natural products.

The new products, called EarthColors, are created from agriculture waste and can be used to provide rich red, brown and green colors to denim and casualwear.

Archroma is also providing brand owners with the possibility of complete supply chain transparency for

EarthColors via Near Field Communications (NFC) technology. Specifically, Archroma will put information about individual batches of color in a chip located on clothing hangtags. The chip will contain information such as the mill that dyed the fabric and where the garment was laundered, as well as the source of bio-based raw material. Shoppers can access the information using NFC technology incorporated in their smartphone. Archroma believes that this is the first time that NFC is being used in this way.

NFC is a relative of RFID, or Radio Frequency Identification, which many retailers already use for tracking products. But NFC is more sophisticated and more consumer friendly, according to the company. Archroma is hoping that it will provide shoppers with a more "involved" buying experience.

The new dyes, which Archroma describes as biosynthetic sulfur dyes, have been in development for four years and have the overall performance of the company's existing range

of sulfur dyes made from conventional raw materials. The new range is produced near Barcelona, Spain, with all raw materials sourced from within a radius of 500 km.

"Our aim is to give consumers a choice," said Alan Cunningham, head of textiles dyes marketing at Archroma. "We all should have the possibility to choose the fashion option with the least environmental impact and to be safe in the knowledge that there is substance behind what is claimed on the label. With EarthColors, we allow just that." ●