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[Color Issue]

COLOR PSYCHOLOGY

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Color Psychology

In selecting colors for your [brand identity](#) there are several key factors to consider.

- You and/or your designer must have a thorough understanding of your business and your target market
- Possess a basic knowledge of color psychology and apply that knowledge in creating a color palette that matches your type of business, your target market, and that translates well in both print and [digital design](#).

A well-thought-out color palette can elevate a design from "good" to "great" while a mediocre or bad color palette can detract from a user's overall experience and even interfere with their ability to use a site or app.¹

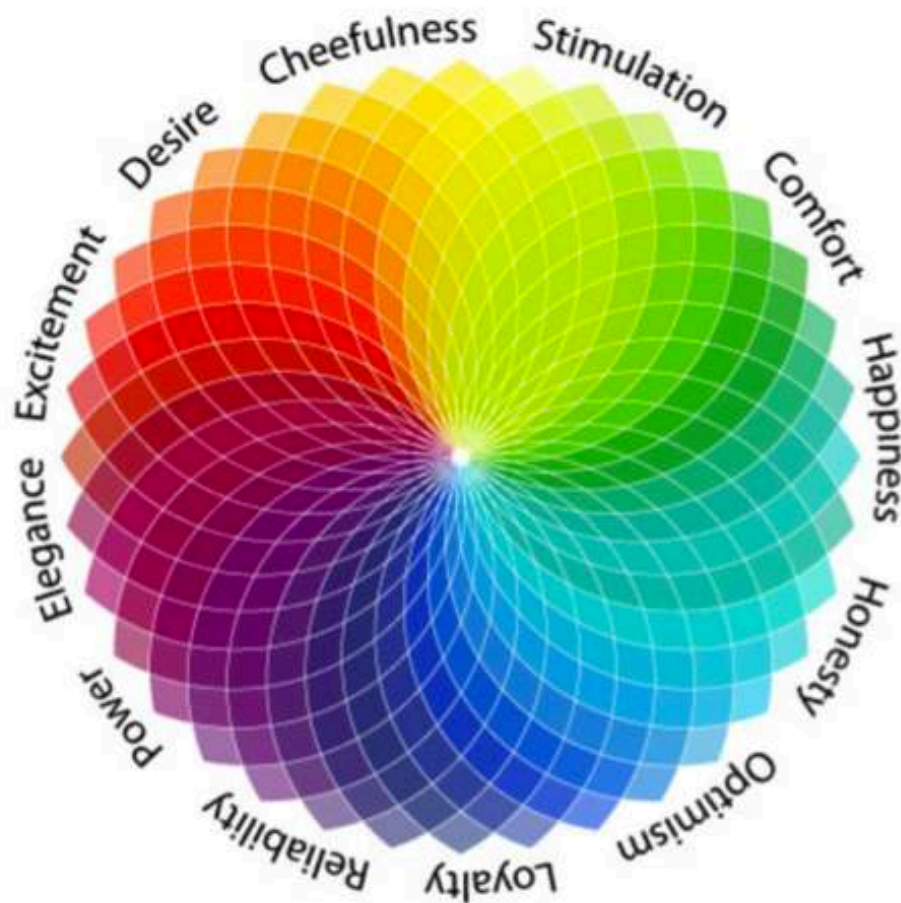
While color theory in general is a complex subject, and the use of color in UX design covers much more than just creating a palette that looks nice (such as accessibility and the psychological effects of even different shades within the same hue); designers can gradually incorporate better use of color in their designs without needing to rethink their entire process. Once a designer has the basics covered, one of the most rewarding parts of color theory is learning to incorporate more unexpected colors into their designs.

The Psychology of Color

Color theory and the psychological effects color can have on users is a complex and often subjective topic. But there are certain aspects that can be addressed on a more universal level.

Things like the common meanings of the main colors (primary, secondary, and tertiary), traditional color palettes, and cultural variations in color meanings are all fairly straightforward. Designers can easily learn these basics and apply them to their work. But there are finer points to be learned when it comes to using colors in UX design.

The emotional impact of interface colors shouldn't be overlooked. And while some colors are "universal" in UX design (such as black, white and gray, at least one of which is used in virtually every good design out there), the colors they're combined with can have a huge impact on a user's perception.



Here's a basic breakdown of what different colors mean:

- **Red** — Red is the color of danger and passion, as well as excitement. It's a very strong color and can elicit strong reactions in people. Lightening it to pink makes it more feminine and romantic while darkening the hue to maroon makes it more subdued and traditional.
- **Orange** — Orange is a very creative color that's also associated with adventure and youth. It's very energetic, too. Because of orange's strong ties to 70s style, it can also evoke a retro feeling.
- **Yellow** — Yellow is happy, optimistic, and cheerful. It's popular in designs for children and adults alike. More pastel hues are often used as a gender-neutral baby color, while brighter yellows are popular in creative designs. Darker shades of yellow become gold, which is associated with wealth and success.

- **Green** — Green has varied associations. On one hand, it provokes feelings of wealth and tradition (particularly darker hues), while on the other it's strongly associated with environmentalism and nature. Lime greens are often associated with renewal and growth.
- **Blue** — Blue is most often associated with loyalty and trust. Brighter blues can be affiliated with communication, while duller and darker blues can be associated with sadness and depression. Blue is the most universally liked color in the world, which may explain why so many companies opt for blue shades for their branding.
- **Purple** — Purple is another hue with varied meanings. It's long been associated with royalty and wealth (since purple dye was rare in many ancient civilizations, it was reserved for royalty). But it's also associated with mystery and spirituality. Purple can also evoke creativity.
- **Black** — Black implies sophistication and luxury. It can also be tied to sorrow and negativity, however. Depending on the other UX colors being used alongside black, it can feel modern or traditional, formal or casual.
- **White** — White is tied to purity, innocence, and positivity. White is also very popular in minimalist designs, due to its neutrality and simplicity. Like black, white easily takes on the characteristics of other colors it's used with
- **Gray** — Gray has varied meanings, depending on context. It can be conservative and sophisticated or dingy and dull. It can be emotionless or moody. It can also be associated with sorrow and sadness.
- **Brown** — Brown (which is actually a dark shade of orange) is associated with being down to earth and grounded. It's also associated with nature and even coziness. And, of course, it can be affiliated with being dirty or dingy.

Knowing these basic color meanings gives us designers a solid basis on which to build color palettes for any brand or product.

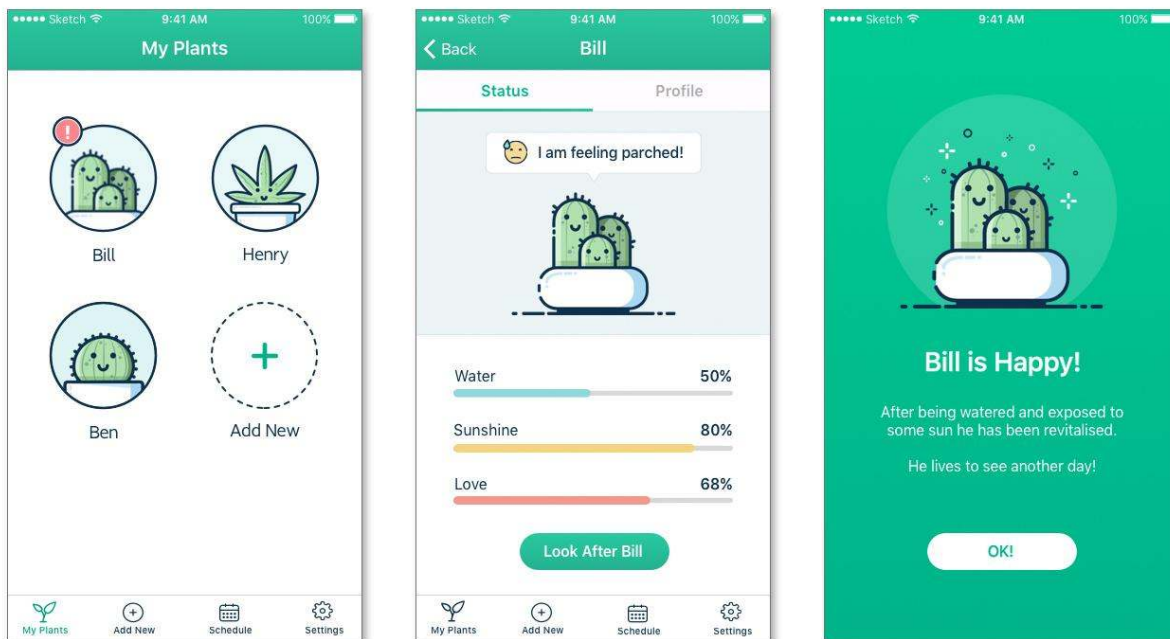
Do your brand's colors "jive" with this information?

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Part Science and Part Art

Color theory is part science and part art. Just because a color is generally associated with a particular feeling or mood doesn't mean it can't be perceived in other ways by combining it with different colors, altering the exact hue, or varying how it is used among other design elements.



This plant-watering app concept uses a nice shade of green for its primary color, with blue, yellow, and red accents used in ways that will make sense to users. (by [Amy Holley Hirst](#))

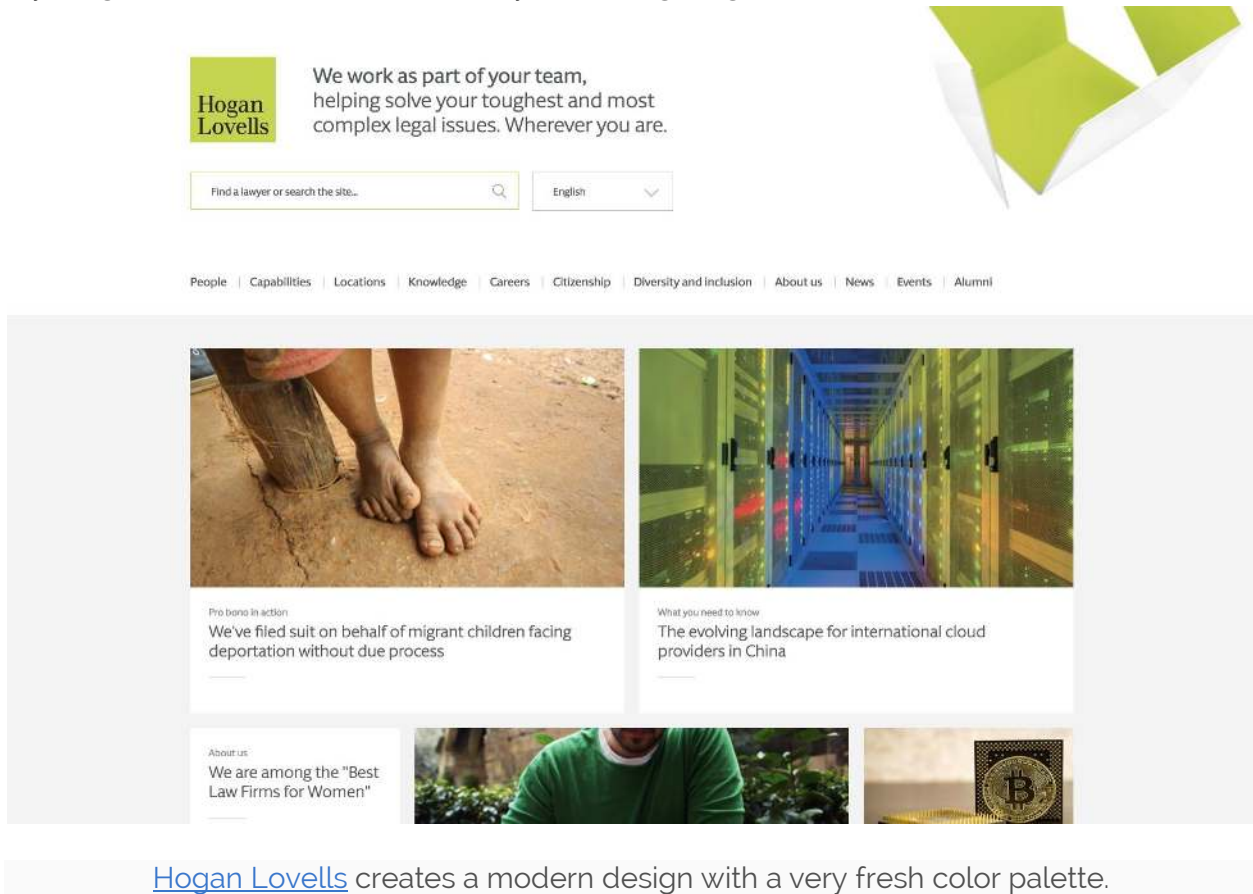
Using Unconventional Colors

Unconventional use of colors is a great way to set a brand apart. And while it takes more finesse than simply combining any old colors a designer feels like combining, it's not that difficult to learn how to use unexpected colors.

Accent colors are the easiest place to start when it comes to adding unconventional colors into a design. For example, a law firm website might use a traditional color palette of navy blue and gray. But add in some lime green accents and suddenly the design is set apart from the sea of other law firms with navy blue and gray websites. Or look at this example

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from [Hogan Lovells](#), which uses a white, gray, and lime green color palette to create a modern website that definitely stands out from other legal industry sites. It would appeal to a younger, more modern crowd than your average legal site.



[Hogan Lovells](#) creates a modern design with a very fresh color palette.

Berdan Real Estate is another site that uses an unexpected color palette. The real estate site uses shades of yellow and peach, both of which are much more energetic than your average property site (where large swaths of blue, red, and green dominate).



A different approach to buying and selling real estate.



[Berdan Real Estate](#) eschews the typical corporate color schemes in favor of something fresh and warm.

Insurance isn't generally thought of as a modern, groundbreaking industry, but that doesn't mean their designs can't be. Lemonade's website uses a gray and white color scheme with fuchsia accents. It's completely unexpected in an industry that isn't known for taking risks.

Lemonade

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Help

Lemonade's choice of fuchsia in their branding is entirely unexpected in the industry. There is a multitude of other examples of unconventional UX colors used in practice around the web that can be used for inspiration.

The 60-30-10 Rule

The 60-30-10 Rule is a simple theory for creating color palettes that are well-balanced and visually interesting. The idea is that one color—generally something fairly neutral (either literally or psychologically)—makes up 60% of the palette. Another complementary color makes up 30% of the palette. And then a third color is used as an accent for the remaining 10% of the design.

This method makes it much easier for designers to start experimenting with unconventional color palettes without stepping too far outside the expected norms within an industry or brand. Adding a pop of some unexpected hue can elevate a design that otherwise fits within what is expected of a particular company. It can also be the first step toward creating a brand palette that is much more forward-thinking than its competitors, thereby setting the brand apart and making it more memorable.

While color theory is a complex subject, it isn't particularly complicated to learn the basics. From there, designers can build on their knowledge to create more varied and sophisticated color palettes for their designs.

A well-designed color palette, particularly one that includes some unexpected hues, isn't merely an aesthetic choice. It can have significant psychological effects on users.

¹ [Cameron Chapman/Toptal](#)