How to choose a brand color palette: Taking a spin on the color wheel

Category: Branding
written by Stephen Peate | 22 July 2019
What's your favorite color?

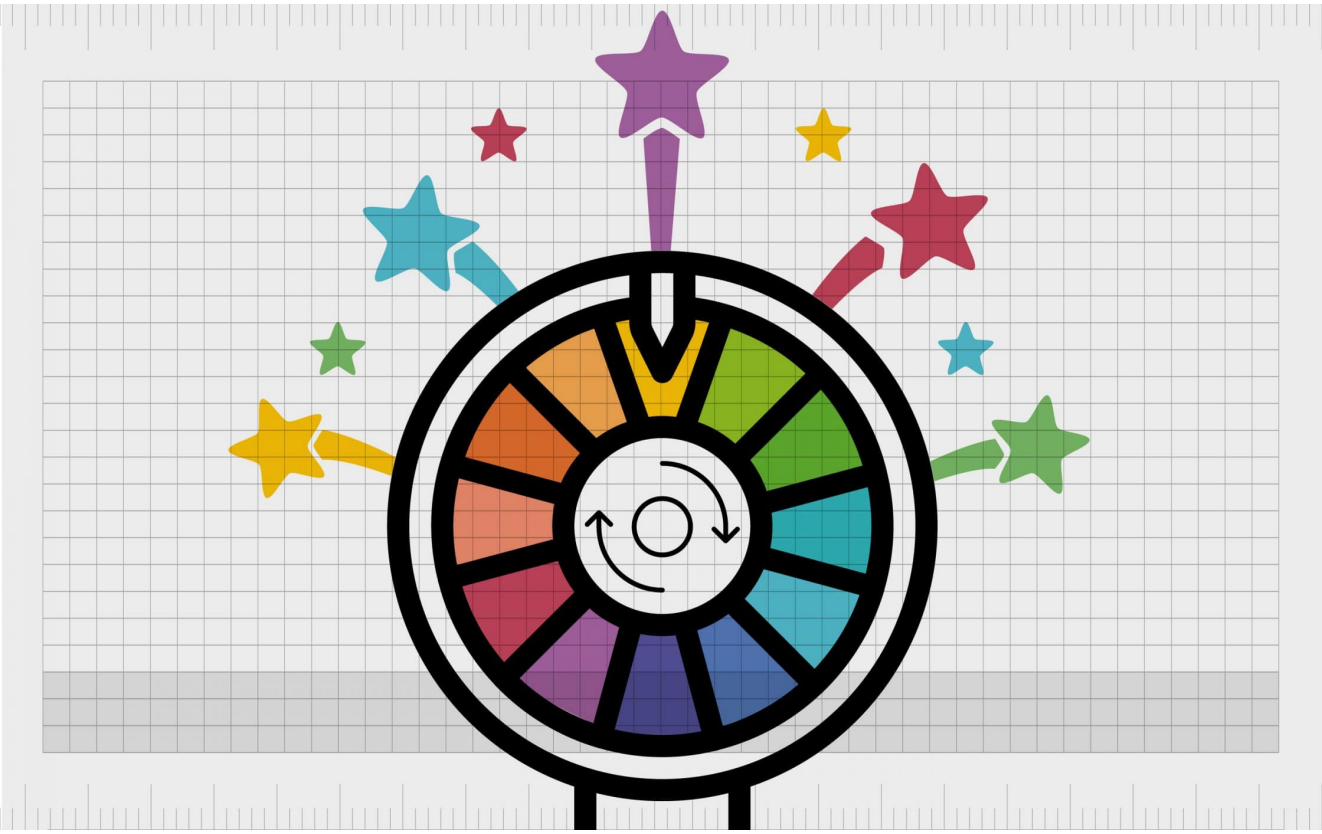
Color is such an intrinsic part of our day-to-day experiences that it's often easy to take it for granted. However, if you took the time to slow down and assess your emotional response to color, you might discover that certain shades affect your behavior more than you'd think.

According to some studies, 84.7% of consumers say that "color" is their primary reason for buying a specific product. That means companies choosing their brand color palette have a big decision on their hands.

Since color has the power to evoke emotions, encourage conversions and even generate brand loyalty when used correctly, it's not something you can look at as a last-minute decision. By assigning a brand identity color palette to your website, logo, and business materials, you're subconsciously creating psychological connections with your audience. The only question is whether you're inspiring the right emotions or not.

Color is a foundational element of any brand identity. However, with infinite shades to choose from, it's not always easy to feel confident in your decisions.

We're here to show you how to choose brand colors that paint the right picture of your company and facilitate stronger relationships with your target audience.



What is a brand color palette? Finding the right shades

The first thing you need to know is what a brand color palette is, and what it means to your company.

Brands are consistently linked with certain shades. Just think about the golden arches of McDonald's, or the iconic red of a Coca-Cola can. The simple sight of the light blue box from Tiffany's can be enough to delight a friend or family member before they've ever seen the gift within.

Your brand identity color palette is your way of creating a vibrant visual experience with your target audience, while simultaneously showcasing your unique personality. The right selection of shades don't just make your marketing materials, website and other branded content more attractive, they also change the way that people interact with your company.

According to studies from the Institute for Color Research,

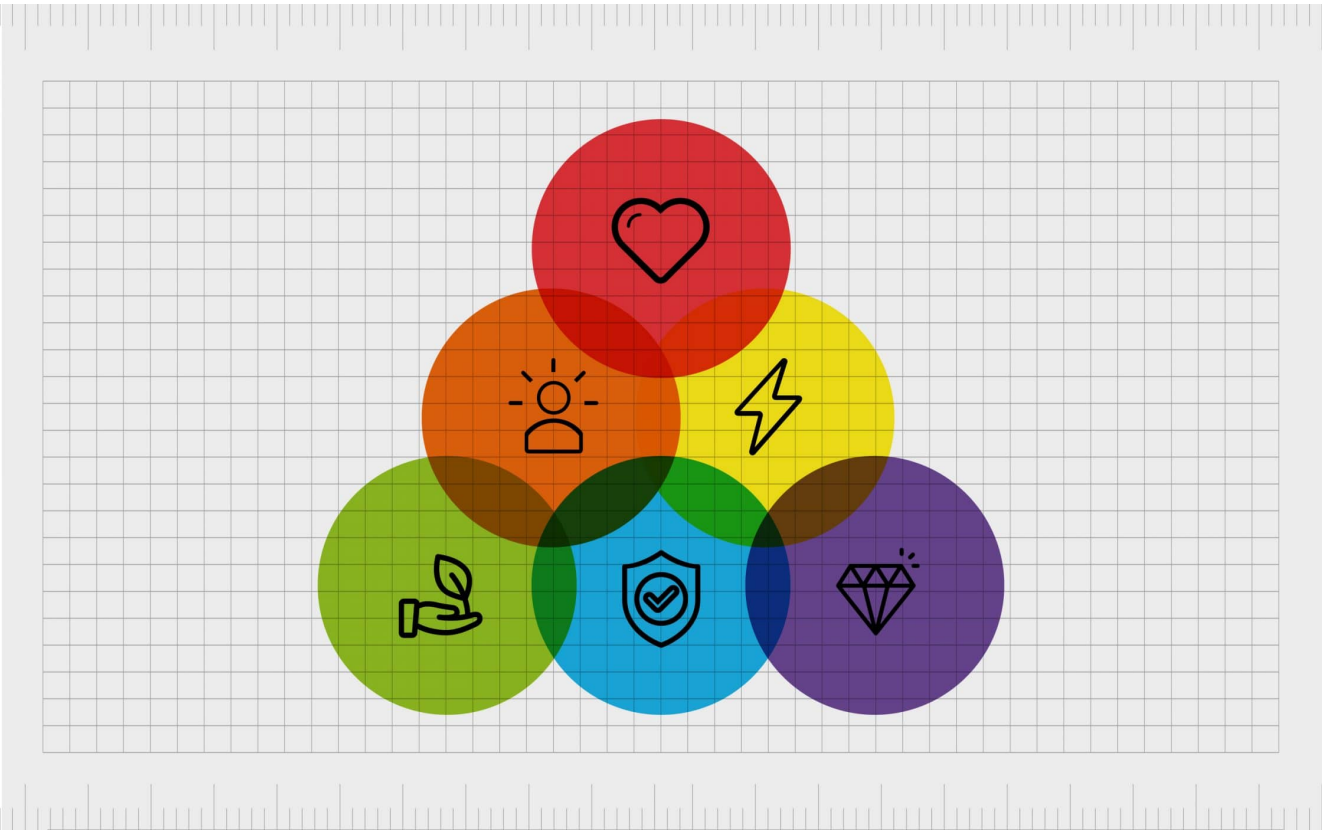
most people make subconscious judgments about people, products, and environments within less than 90 seconds. In that time, more than 90% of a person's perception of any situation is based on color. In other words, learning how to pick brand colors is more crucial than you'd think.

Importantly, many different things can affect the way people respond to your company color palette. It's too simplistic today to suggest that green always represents a natural company and purple automatically conveys luxury. The context of a color, the cultural differences, and upbringing of your target audience and many other elements will all have an impact on your corporate identity color palette. However, that being said, some colors evoke universal emotional responses. For instance, some of the most common connotations to consider when you're building your color palette include:

- **Red:** Red is a color commonly associated with passion, excitement, and anger. If you identify your brand as being loud, modern, or playful, then red may be the ideal color for you. Think Coca-Cola, Netflix or Target for instance.
- **Orange:** Orange is a naturally invigorating and playful shade, often used by companies that want to stand out from the crowd. Look at the Orange cell phone company for instance or EasyJet. If you're looking for a shade that conveys excitement, this is the color for you.
- **Yellow:** A friendly, and often playful color, yellow convey cheer and youthful energy. However, in the wrong context, yellow can also mean danger or "hazard." Be careful not to use yellow directly next to black, unless there's a good reason to.
- **Green:** Green is a very versatile shade that can convey everything from a sense of naturalism and sustainability to ideas of wealth. Green can also be refreshing, like with the "Sprite" beverage logo.
- **Blue:** Blue is a fantastic addition to any brand color

palette. Appearing in many of the most popular color palettes, blue conveys professionalism, authenticity, and trustworthiness.

- **Purple:** Most people associate purple with luxury and opulence – thanks in part to the fact that this shade rarely shows up in the natural world. Look at Cadbury for instance; they use their particular shade of purple to indicate indulgence.



The importance of a company color palette

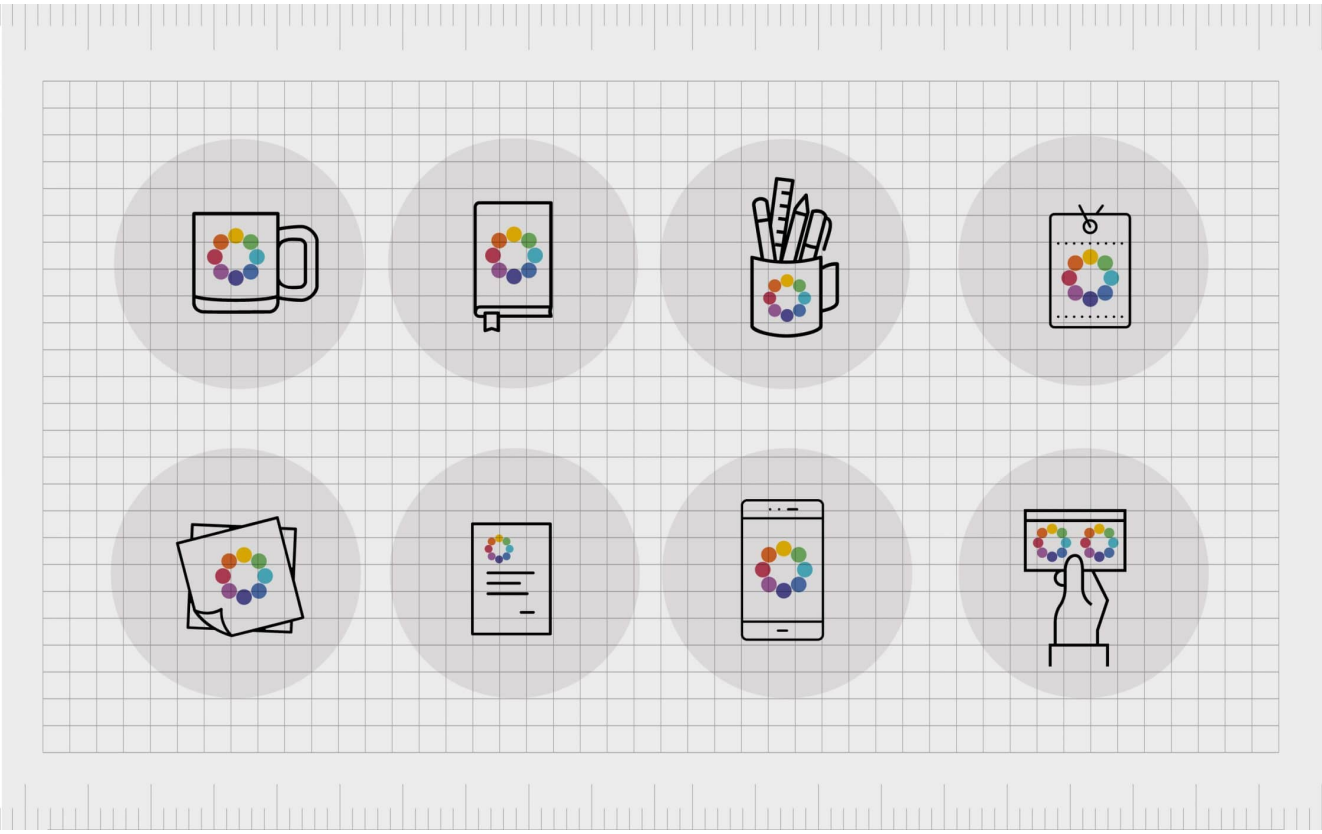
Crucially, there's more to figuring out how to choose a brand color palette than sticking with your favorite shades. While it's tempting to choose the colors that you like the most for your brand, you also need to think about how the hues you're selecting define the nature of your company. There's an entire field of psychology that explores the connections between human emotion and specific colors.

In one study titled the "Impact of color on marketing" scientists found that as many as 90% of all consumer snap judgments are made on the basis of color alone. Additionally, results from separate studies show the relationship between consumers and brands often hinges on the colors they use in their brand color palette, and the perception of whether those hues are appropriate to the company.

Your brand identity color palette is crucial because it does so much more than merely set your business apart from the competitors in your space. While color naturally makes any branding material more appealing, the nature of color psychology ensures that the shades you choose will affect the affinity you create with your customers.

One study called "Exciting Red and Competent Blue" is often quoted in discussions about corporate identity color palette choices. The study found that color choices have a significant impact on the purchasing intent of a customer for many reasons. For instance, some people define themselves through the brands they associate themselves with. Many Harley Davidson drivers purchase these vehicles above all others because of the sense of ruggedness and freedom they convey. If the Harley Davidson colors were purple, pink and yellow, then customer perceptions would be very different.

Some pieces of research also indicate that the human brain prefers brands that they can recognize instantly. Since color is one of the critical elements that we use to identify companies, it makes sense to perfect your corporate identity color palette.



How to create a color palette: Tips for success

Now that we've established what a brand color palette is, and why it's so crucial to your company, it's time to think about how you can find your picture-perfect color choices.

Remember, although you may need to experiment a little, to begin with, your color palette needs to stay consistent throughout the life of your brand to aid in brand recognition and awareness. With that in mind, it's essential not to jump into any big decisions too quickly. Before you choose your final shades, make sure that you:

1. Examine your brand personality

Building a successful brand means understanding what you want your company to convey to your customers, shareholders, and investors. Before you start figuring out how to choose your brand colors, put together a list of phrases and words that

resonate with your business and target market.

Think about what kind of things you want your organization to be known for. Do you want people to see you as friendly and cheerful, or sophisticated and reliable? The descriptors you choose for your brand will give you an insight into the kind of brand colors that are right for you. As mentioned above, research shows that different colors provoke specific reactions in your audience.

2. Assess your platform fit

Colors that work in a physical store setting might fail to evoke the same response on an online medium like a website or mobile app. For instance, while red is commonly used to evoke feelings like passion and excitement, it might come across as too bright if it is not used appropriately on a website. One study shows that nearly 60% of online consumers decide whether they are attracted to a message or not simply based on the color.

It is thus important to assess the platform fit for your brand colors. An online-first business might thus have different priorities and choices of color compared to a physical store.

3. Align your identity with evocative colors

Once you have a list of words that define your corporate identity, you can begin to search for shades that resonate with those words. For instance, if you want people to see your company as being bold and innovative, then you're unlikely to choose shades that are soft and relaxing, like pastel pinks and purples.

Examine the psychological links between emotions and color and choose shades that you think will supplement the defining traits of your brand. For instance, you can use red to convey

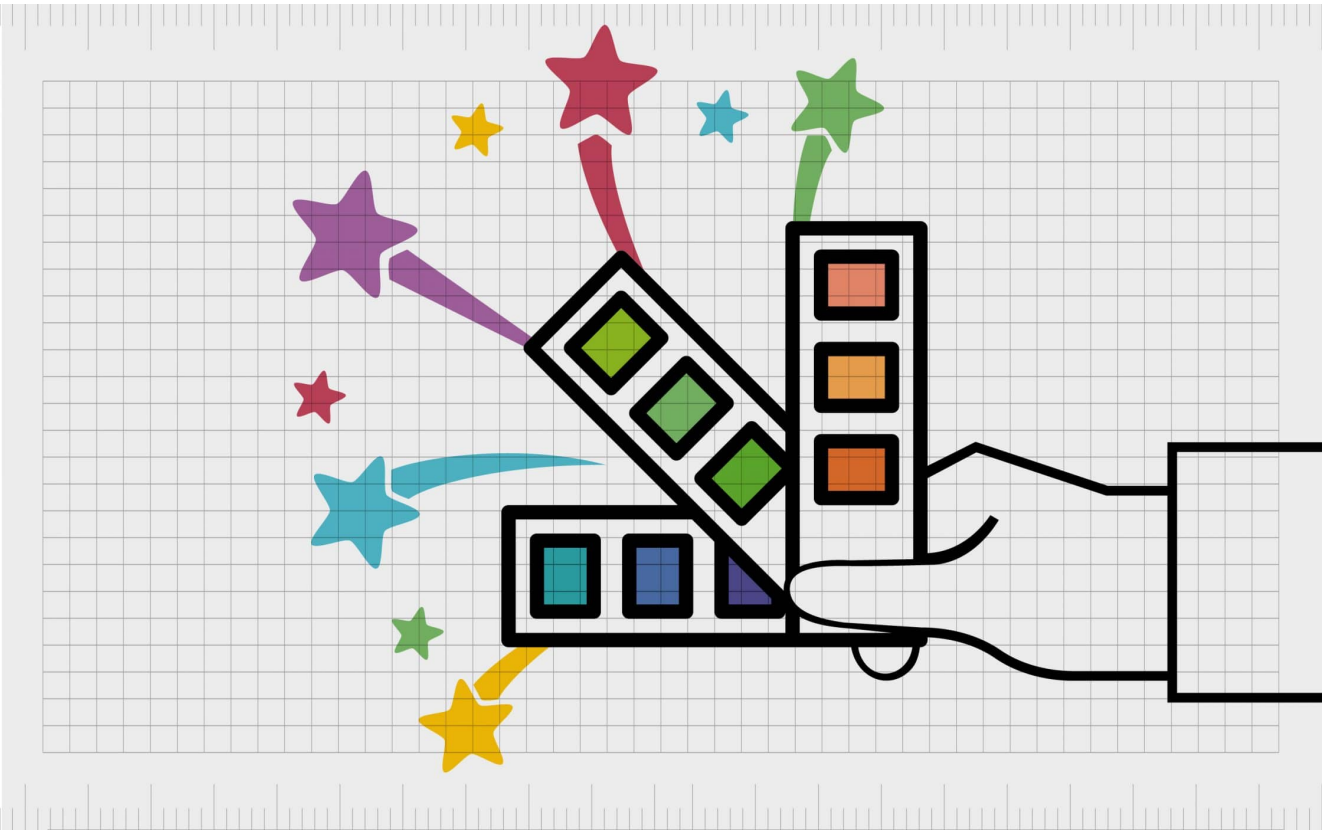
excitement, orange for enthusiasm, and yellow for friendliness and warmth.

4. Research!

Almost every successful part of building your brand will begin with extensive research. Whether you're looking to create brand awareness or deciding which shades to use in your company color palette, you need as much information as possible. Look at:

- **Your customers:** What kind of shades do they prefer? How do they identify your brand and what colors would they associate with your company?
- **Your competitors:** What are some of the standard brand colors that your competitors use? Do you want to embrace a similar theme, or choose something different to stand out?
- **Your marketplace:** What do certain colors mean in the industry you've chosen? Will your brand color palette be affected by the geographical location of your company and the places that you're selling to?

It's also worth learning a thing or two about color theory, and how certain shades work together to create a more cohesive color palette.



Color theory: Advice for your brand identity color palette

Analyzing the personality of your brand will give you a foundation that you can use to develop your corporate identity color palette. Remember, the shades you choose will play a significant part in all of your brand assets, so you'll need to make sure that they translate well over various channels, including in printed and online materials.

Once you have a broad selection of shades that seem to be relevant for the brand identity you're creating, the next step is to narrow down your options. To do this, you'll need to think carefully about which shades you can commit to for the life of your brand. Here's some advice on how to choose your brand colors, taken straight from the graphic design experts here at Fabrik.

1. Start simple, but don’t be restrictive

Just like the shapes in your logo or the words in your brand name, the shades in your brand color palette are defining attributes of your brand identity. The more colors you include in your palette, the harder it will be for your customers to remember you. Take a moment to think about some of the biggest companies in the world, like IBM, FedEx, and Vodafone. Most of these brands will only use one or two colors in their brand assets.

Even one of the companies known for being more colorful, Google, only uses four shades in their brand logo. Aim to use no more than four colors at most. You can start with a single color that conveys the most important characteristic of your company. For instance, if above all else, you want to be seen as reliable, then blue may be the shade that underpins the foundation of your brand color palette. From there, you can build out with a couple of extra colors that accent and supplement your main shade. For instance, you might choose white to indicate innovation, and green to demonstrate sustainability.

2. Translate the language of color

Today, even the smallest brands can end up going international. The growth of the internet means that you can quickly earn a reputation that spans across continents. With this in mind, it’s important to make sure that the brand color palette you choose works well in every country you might want to sell in. For instance, in most western countries, the color white is viewed as a symbol of purity. On the other hand, Eastern countries often see white as a symbol of death.

Similarly, in Belgium, mothers and fathers use blue to symbolize the arrival of a baby girl, while pink is common for baby boys. Knowing what different colors mean across the borders of the world will help you to ensure that you don’t

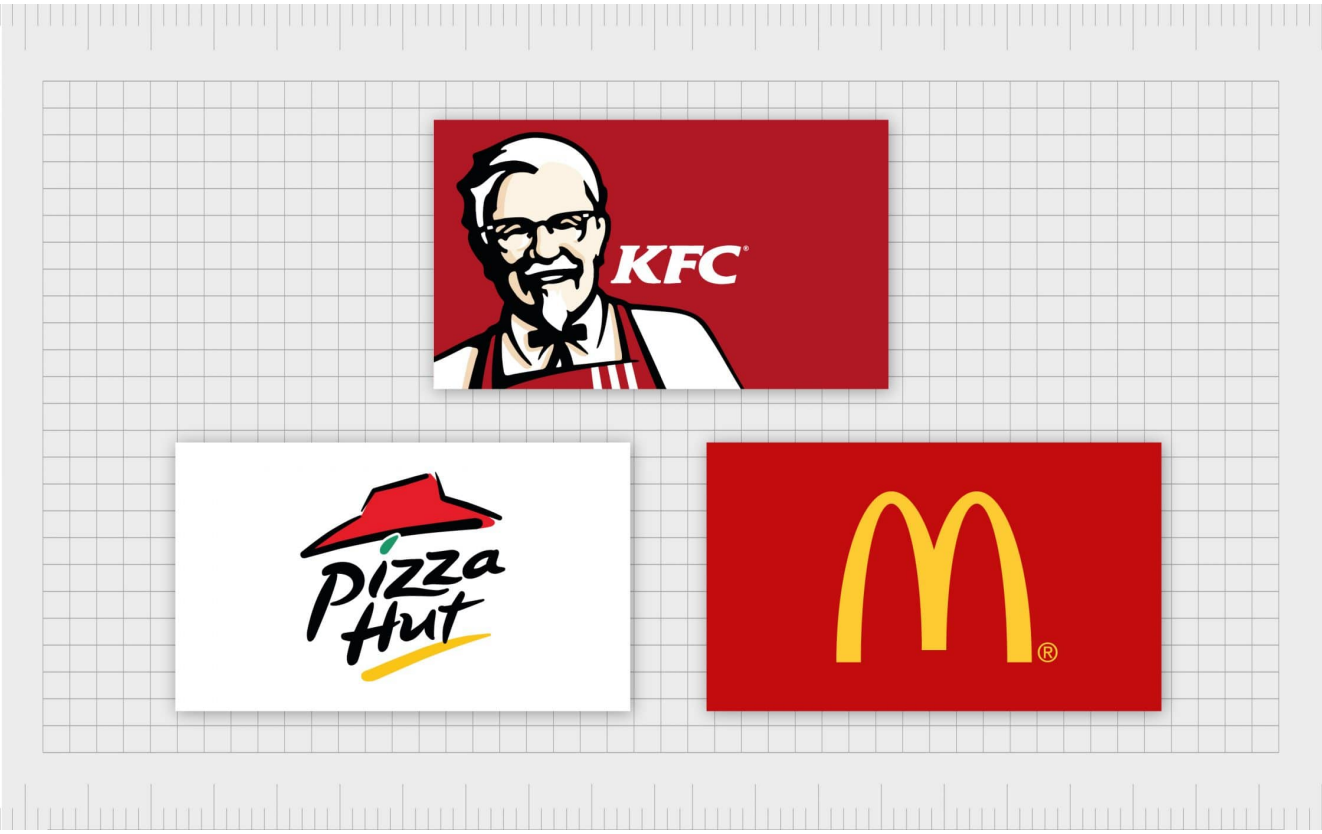
offend the wrong audience. A color chart for international color symbolism should help when you're figuring out how to create a color palette.

3. Be consistent

Finally, remember that while some companies do change their brand colors over time with rebrands and business updates, it's important to remain consistent for as long as you can. Repetition is the key to success with many elements of an effective brand. Use your color scheme wherever you can in your marketing, from your sales collateral to your social media sites.

To help your designers and employees remain consistent with their choices of brand colors, create a style guide that includes hex values. This will help to ensure that your shades stay the same regardless of which channel they appear on.

If you're concerned that you can't commit to a particular brand identity color palette yet, consider experimenting for a while first. Give your customers the chance to weigh in with their opinions on social media or do a test-run of a logo before you launch it as part of your business identity.



Brand color palette examples: Lessons in credible colors

So far, we've discussed how to choose a brand color palette that speaks to your customers on an emotional level. As you know, color psychology can be a fantastic starting point when you're choosing the ideal brand color palette. Just look at some of the biggest fast-food brands like KFC, Pizza Hut and McDonald's, they use red and yellow because that color combination has been psychologically proven to make people feel happy and hungry.

Of course, there's more to figuring out how to pick brand colors than just psychology. You'll also need to think about how certain shades work together if you want to avoid a brand identity that clashes. It's helpful to keep an eye on the color wheel when you're designing and thinking about what kind of color theory you want to work with. For example:

1. Monochromatic brand colors

When you have a single over-riding personality trait that you want to define your entire company, a monochromatic brand color palette could be a perfect choice. You can use various shades of the same color to accentuate a sleek and minimalist look for your brand. PayPal uses the sky blue and navy-blue combo to create a friendly, and trustworthy personality for their company.

The main challenge with a monochromatic company color palette is that there’s no contrasting shade to make your logos and brand assets pop.



2. Analogous brand colors

An analogous brand color palette uses a few hues that appear next to each other on the color wheel. These shades go well together because they have similar emotional connotations, which make them a safe bet for most design strategies.

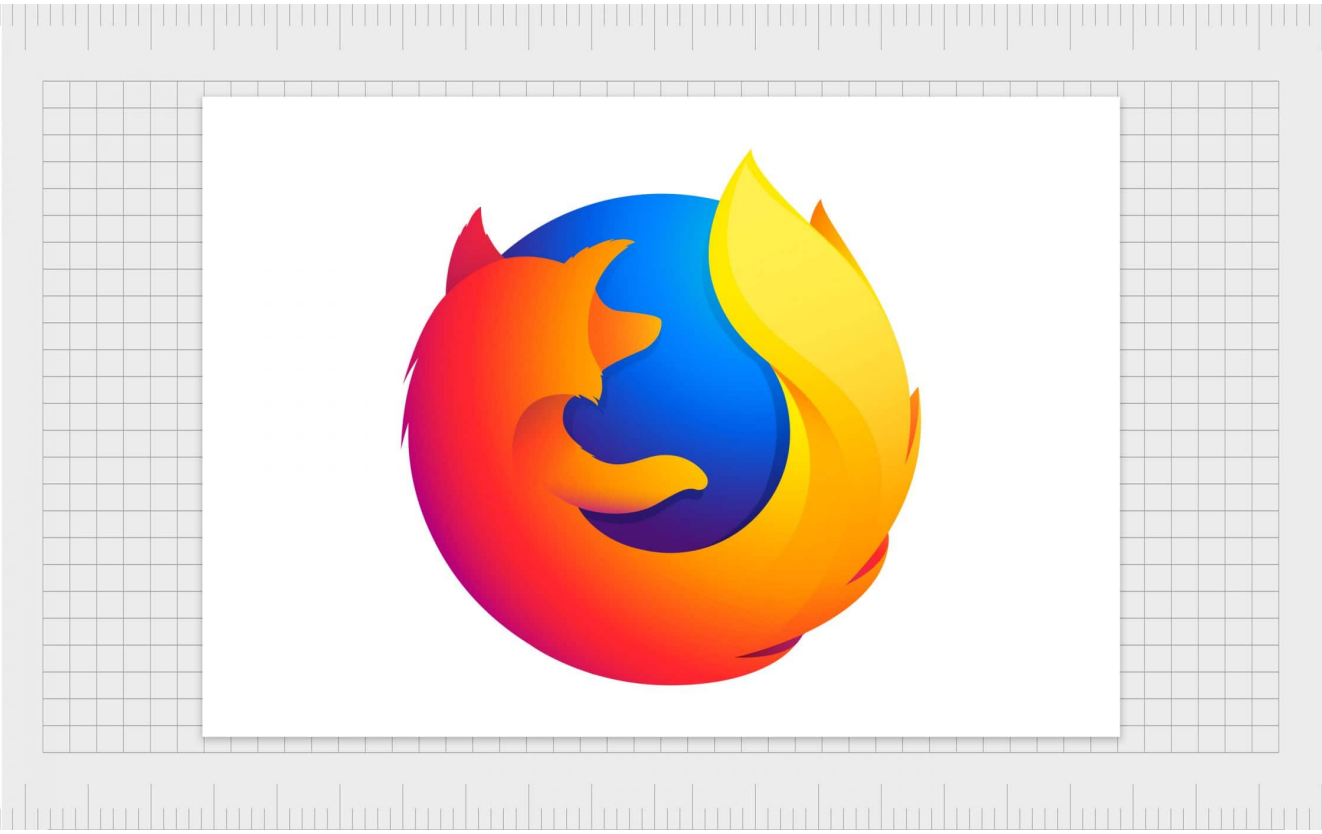
Mastercard is a great example of a business with an analogous color palette. Their orange and red shades work well together from a design perspective, and they also convey ideas of a bold and energetic brand.



3. Complementary brand colors

Complementary colors are the shades that appear opposite each other on the color wheel, creating the highest level of contrast. Complementary colors are great for clashing and giving your logo a more dramatic look. For instance, think about Firefox's orange and blue logo!

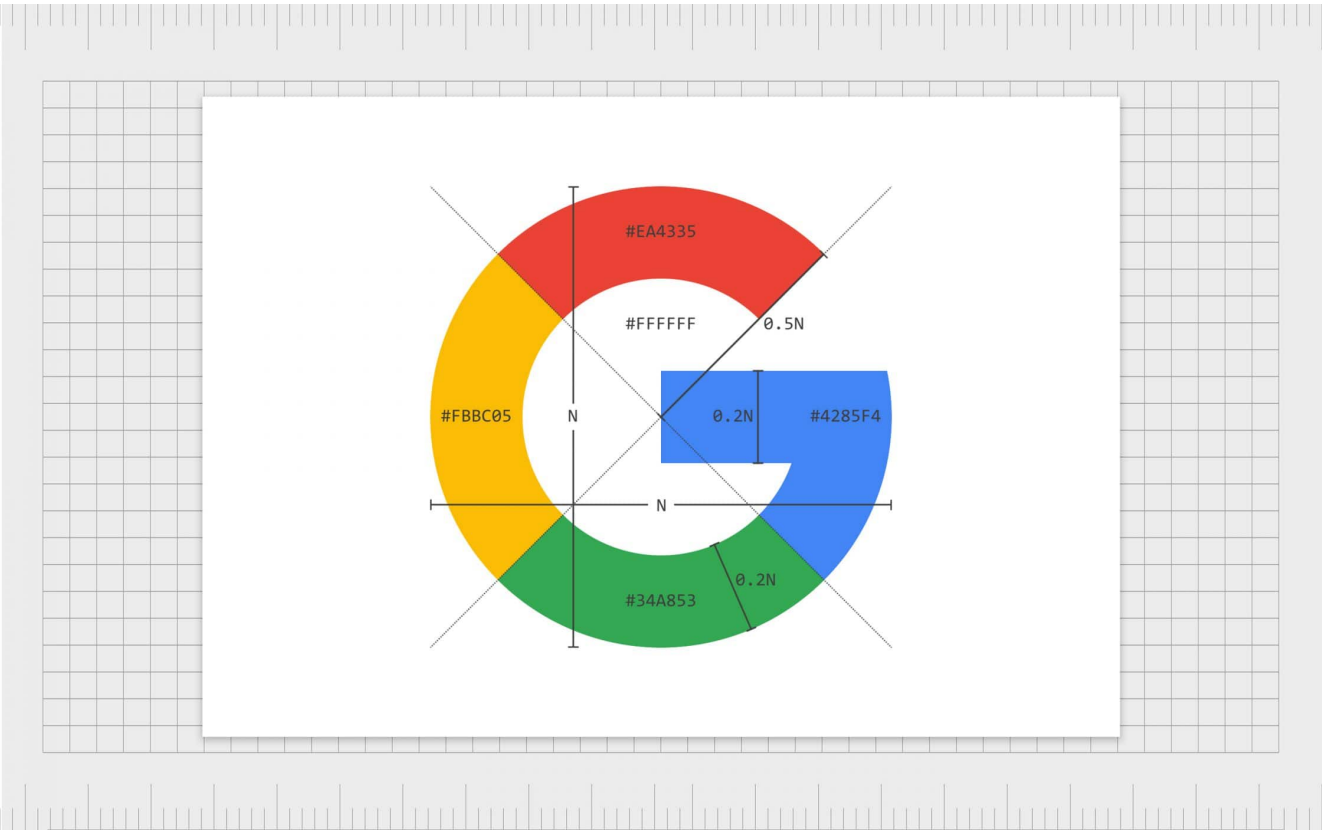
Because blue and orange are opposites, they help each other to stand out visually when they're paired. Complementary colors are visually stimulating, and as part of your brand color palette, they can convey different ideas about your company's personality.



4. Triadic brand colors

Finally, a triadic color palette draws shades in from various sections of the color wheel. These schemes are prevalent because they allow companies to play with a wide range of different colors and their meanings when they’re defining their brand. The hardest part of choosing a triadic color scheme is getting the right blend of shades to describe your brand identity.

Google uses a range of primary colors in its logos to show its universal reach as a source of information and guidance. The shades are familiar, and they work well together to represent the company as a comprehensive search engine.



Ready to show your true brand colors?

A brand color palette is a crucial part of building a successful company identity.

The shades you use to represent your company in its logo, website design and more will help to underpin the defining elements of your business and make you more recognizable to your followers and customers.

Certain shades are more common in specific industries. For instance, you’re more likely to see the combination of red and yellow in fast food companies, and you’ll find that blues appear more frequently in financial businesses and those that require a higher level of consumer trust. Finding the right colors for your corporate identity color palette will ensure that your customers have an easier time keeping your business top of mind.

On the other hand, a bad color scheme can harm your company in various ways, by going against your values and brand identity and even making your visual assets less attractive to your audience.

The crucial thing to remember here is that figuring out how to create a color palette that's perfect for your brand takes time, focus and creativity. There are no concrete rules for choosing the right brand colors, and there's always a chance that you'll get better results by coloring outside of the lines and going against the rules of color theory.

Your best bet is to work alongside a team of design and branding experts that are ready to guide you through the process of figuring out how to pick brand colors. Contact Fabrik today for help choosing the shades that best represent your brand.

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