Understanding how color harmony works helps designers create aesthetically inviting products and packaging that speak to consumers.
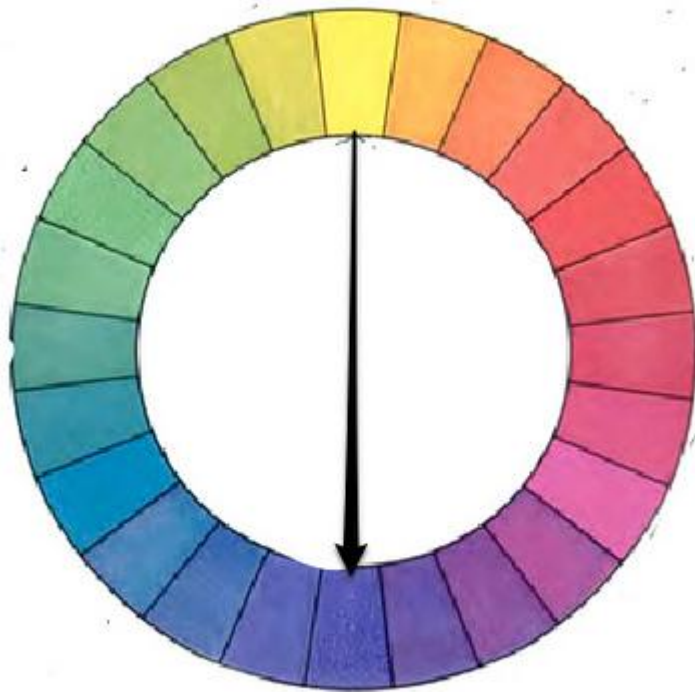Image Source: Flickr user Team Dalog

Color is a visual language that allows us to establish an emotional relationship with and ascribe vital qualities to things before we ever touch, taste, or use them. Research shows that color is one of the most significant variables affecting customers' choice of virtually all consumer goods, from **the foods we eat** to **the clothes we wear** to **the medications we take**. Selecting the right color is vital to guiding consumer choices. As such, understanding how color theory works is essential to your ability to fully harness the potential of color to attract customers and enhance their experiences.

Often, the design process begins by establishing a key color. This is the color that will be the central building block of a color scheme and the one that remains unchanged; it's the constant variable. Developing an understanding of the **psychology of color** can be extraordinarily useful in selecting your key color, as this will be the focal point of your design and the primary source of chromatic information. However, visually pleasing designs are rarely monochromatic and designers typically work with numerous colors to create an aesthetically harmonious product. According to *Color Matters*:

In visual experiences, harmony is something that is pleasing to the eye. It engages the viewer and it creates an inner sense of order, a balance in the visual experience. When something is not harmonious, it's either boring or chaotic. At one extreme is a visual experience that is so bland that the viewer is not engaged. The human brain will reject under-stimulating information. At the other extreme is a visual experience that is so overdone, so chaotic that the viewer can't stand to look at it. The human brain rejects what it can not organize, what it can not understand. The visual task requires that we present a logical structure. Color harmony delivers visual interest and a sense of order.[1]

Color harmony, then, is critical to satisfying the brain's desire for organization and shaping customer relationships with your product. But there is no one way to create color harmony; instead, designers have a range of options available to them when developing product and packing color schemes and selecting the right combination of hues can be crucial to a product's success.

Direct harmony can be used to make a visual splash, but it's important to make sure the effect isn't too intense. For a softer look, choose split complementary colors.
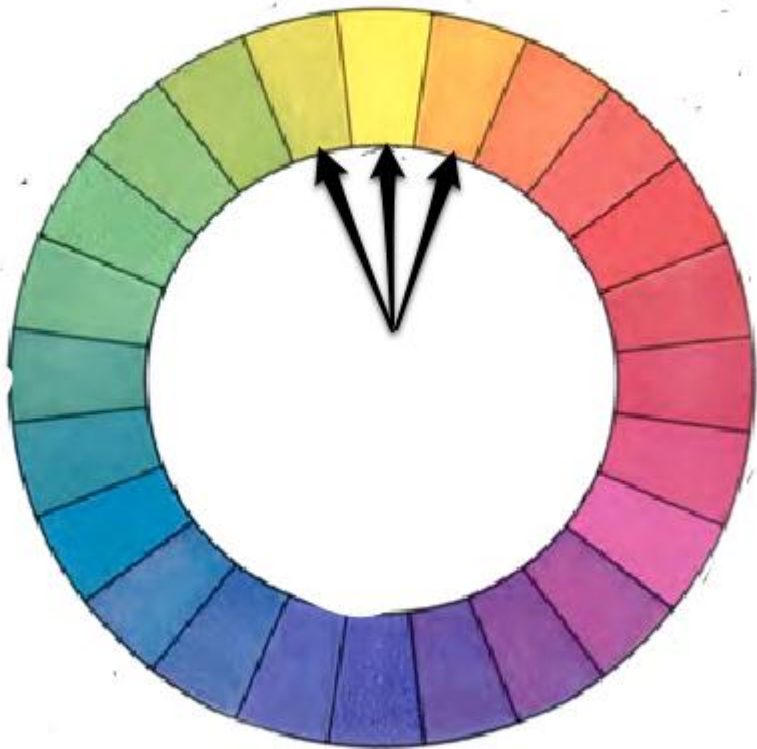Image Source: Flickr user Linda Hartley

Direct Harmony

Direct harmony, also known as complimentary colors, means pairing your key color with the color sitting on the opposite side of the color wheel. Red and green, blue and yellow, and orange and green are the primary examples of direct harmony. As *Tiger Color* points out, "The high contrast of complementary colors creates a vibrant look, especially when used at full saturation."[2] Although direct harmony can pack a visual punch, it should be used thoughtfully. "This color scheme must be managed well so it is not jarring. Complimentary colors are tricky to use in large doses, but does work well when you want something to stand out."

Split Complementary

A split complementary color scheme is a variation on direct harmony, but instead of selecting the color directly opposite of your key color, you select the colors adjacent to the complement. For example, green would be paired with magenta and burnt orange while red would be paired with turquoise and lime green. This form of color harmony can be as interesting as direct harmony, but because it is slightly less bold, it is less likely to be jarring or over-bearing.

Analagous harmony is often found in nature and is pleasing to the eye.
Image Source: Flickr user Linda Hartley

Analogous Harmony

Analogous harmony works by combining your key color with colors that sit adjacent to it on the color wheel. Because these colors are closely related, this color scheme is also known as related colors. In contrast to direct harmony, analogous harmony produces a calming and comfortable look and most viewers find it pleasing to the eye. Part of the reason we like analogous harmony may be that we are used to seeing it in **natural environments**, which we associate with serenity.
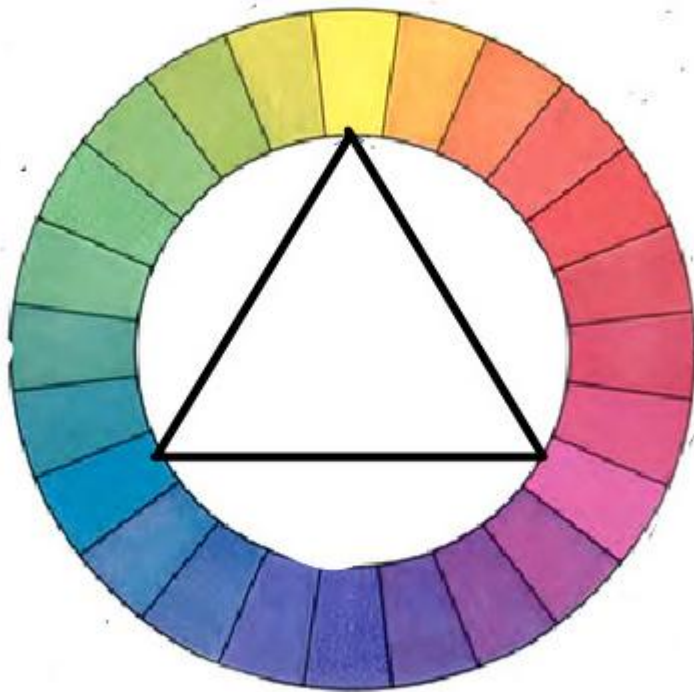
Triadic harmony is a favorite amongst designers and viewers alike.
Image Source: Flickr user Linda Hartley

Triadic Harmony

Triadic harmony, also known as triads, pairs your key color with the hue two spaces on each side of your color's complement; in other words, this color scheme draws on colors that are evenly spaced throughout the wheel. This can be a highly vibrant and visually appealing strategy, and works well with less saturated versions of your colors. To make the most of triadic harmony, *Tiger Color* suggests letting "one color dominate and use the two others for accent." Rikard from Zeven design adds, "This is my personal favourite of the four color harmonies. These are much more restrained in their color usage and give a touch of contrast with spots of other colors."[3]

Spectrophotometric Color Measurement

To ensure that the colors you select are reproduced throughout the manufacturing process, colors must be continuously monitored. Spectrophotometers allow for the most accurate and precise color measurement possible, regardless of sample type. With sophisticated optical geometries, these remarkable instruments allow you to establish the highest level of color quality control at each stage of production, guaranteeing that the colors you want your customers to see are the colors that are released into the marketplace. At HunterLab, we are renowned for creating the most modern, innovative color measurement tools on the market today. With a complete line of **portable, benchtop, and on-line spectrophotometers** to choose from, you have the ability to capture detailed,

reliable color information in any environment. Combined with our user-friendly **EasyMatch QC**software, we open up the door to more advanced color measurement capabilities than ever before. **Contact us**to learn more about our spectrophotometric instruments, customizable software packages, and world-class customer support services.

1. "Basic Color Theory," http://www.colormatters.com/color-and-design/basic-color-theory

2. "Color Harmonies: Basic Techniques For Combining Colors," http://www.tigercolor.com/color-lab/color-theory/color-harmonies.htm

3. "Color Harmonies," March 27, 2011, http://www.zevendesign.com/colour-harmonies/