

Experiential Meeting Design

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Dianne Devitt
EMPOWERING CREATIVITY TO BUSINESS LEADERS FOR INCREASED PRODUCTIVITY



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Visual Dynamics™ & the Effect On Meeting Design

By Dianne Devitt, author of *What Color is Your Event? The Industry Resource on How to Think and Plan Creatively*

True meeting design requires vision, thought and creativity. It demands a deep understanding of the goals and characteristics of the people living, working and assembling in a space for a respective purpose. How a building looks immediately envelops the visitor in the same way that a well-designed event engages attendees with visual impressions—from the first impression to the last.

Humans are visual beings. In the research that I have amassed on sensory communication, it is no surprise that sight is rated the top sense among all generations. Events are dependent on sight in all aspects of planning, as all visual statements will remain in the guest's emotional recall for years.

Meeting design demands attention in three areas:

- 1) Kinetic Engineering™ —how to design an environment that supports flow, movement, kinesis, and physical access directed through design to branding experiences.
- 2) Visual Dynamics™ —everything the attendee will see that connects the pre-event, on-site and post-event experience. Every component that the guest processes in the visual cortex

contributes to the mental picture of the event.

3) Risk Management—from a visual perspective, includes understanding which guidelines need to be followed to avoid issues with design elements, from logos to gobos.

Meeting and event designers must constantly ask: “How can this element of the experience engage people in a way that supports the event's strategic purpose?” Strategy, design and décor must be intertwined to keep people engaged and to encourage them to Go Play—to feel safe in a secure environment where they can interact in a productive way.

At its core, visual creativity is a process of finding a solution or means to achieve an outcome.

The Theater Of Events

Acknowledging this necessity for style in your event means acknowledging the link between vision, conception, strategy, logistics and production—the link between the elements that are used in the event and the event as it is experienced in real time. I call this the Theatre of Events™.





All the deliberate choices the event designer makes must align with the Visual Dynamics™ relevant to the message involving line, balance, form, personal taste, venue, architectural details, shapes, color, pattern, textures, social media and any technology, and how each engage the audience. That is the key focus, as connecting people is the purpose of any gathering.

The emotional reactions the décor produces are an intrinsic part of the psychology of the event. The live experience designer works in both realism and symbolism—both derived from the theatre.

The Emotion Of Color

One of the most powerful elements to speak to any one person, or group of people, is through color. Whether you recognize it or not, your event is using color to send powerful emotional signals to participants—minute by minute and second by second. Color choices are too important to be left to chance or whim, but all too often, that is exactly how they are made in design choices. The most talented and effective event designers know that colors can have a powerful affect on emotions.

Think of color as a communication tool—not a personal preference. Don't make color choices impulsively, make them strategically. Show different color combinations to people and get their reactions: Which combination best supports the theme and message? Which conflicts with that message? With the venue? With the destination? Which combinations of colors evoke the emotions you want participants to feel?

If you're looking for a good way to maximize a limited budget, or to get maximum results from a substantial budget, working with color is one of the best answers. The simple principle of using variations of one single color will allow you to leave an enduring impact on each participants. The varying-shades-of-a-single-color approach is simplicity itself, and it is far more powerful than a variety of colors chosen at random, or mindlessly repeating the same color. In fact, this is one of the most cost-effective event design tricks of experienced meetings and events professionals.

Fashion designers know that using bright colors that “pop” and cause powerful reaction may distract the observer from the fact that the actual design is relatively simple and inexpensive. Take a modest garment, choose your colors aggressively, and you can get by with less expense on labor and materials.

The same concept holds true for the meeting and events designer. If your budget is tight, you can use a strong, impossible-to-miss color choice everywhere to distract people from the details you can't spend money on.

As a yogi, we learn that each of the seven chakra points, or energy centers in our bodies, relate to a specific color like the rainbow. Beginning with red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet and ending at the top of our heads with white—purity. Each of these chakras is related to varying emotions, from grounding to courage, compassion, clarity and focus. The designer of the future will incorporate this knowledge into planning to affect behavior and maintain harmony.

COLOR RESEARCH BY THE NUMBERS

80%

PERCENT BY WHICH COLOR CAN INCREASE BRAND RECOGNITION, ACCORDING TO A UNIVERSITY OF LOYOLA, MARYLAND STUDY.

\$23 M

NEW SALES, IN DOLLARS, ATTRIBUTABLE TO HEINZ'S DECISION TO RELEASE A VARIETY OF GREEN KETCHUP – THE LARGEST ANNUAL SALES INCREASE IN THE COMPANY'S HISTORY, ACCORDING TO COLORMATTERS.COM

42%

PERCENTAGE INCREASE IN COMPREHENSION AMONG MEETING PARTICIPANTS ATTRIBUTABLE TO COLOR CHOICES. SOURCE: JOHNSON, VIRGINIA, "THE POWER OF COLOR", SUCCESSFUL MEETINGS, JUNE 1992

LESS THAN .67

NUMBER OF SECONDS THE TYPICAL BLACK AND WHITE IMAGE SUSTAINS INTEREST

2 OR MORE

NUMBER OF SECONDS THE TYPICAL COLOR IMAGE SUSTAINS INTEREST

73

PERCENTAGE BY WHICH PHONE BOOK ADS IN COLOR EXCEED BLACK AND WHITE ADS IN MOTIVATING PEOPLE TO ACTUALLY READ THE AD; WHITE, JAN, COLOR FOR IMPACT, STRATHMOOR PRESS, APRIL, 1997



It's hard to overstate the importance of color trends, forecasts and predictions in our society. Often, these forecasts start in the world of fashion and eventually cascade into interior design, restaurants, hotels, and, yes, meetings and events. That means that perceptions of, and emotional associations with, colors can and do shift from year to year.

The Business Of Color

Marketing and branding experts know and respect the aspects of basic color theory, spending countless hours developing guidelines on how to use this information in a way that supports the objectives. Meeting and event planners could do the same—and those who don't are missing a major opportunity.

The science of choosing the right color for a brand often makes the difference between a company's success and its failure. Because each color has a distinct association, brand choices that apply to products and brands will play a large role in determining the reactions of consumers and other stakeholders—and the very identity of the company. The same can apply to an event.

Here's an example: In Philadelphia, there was once an annual event called the Beaux Arts Ball, hosted by the American Institute for Architects. What I remember most about this event was looking forward each year to receiving the invitation, because whatever color was used for the invitation also told me about that year's color theme. This was important, because in order to attend, you were required to dress in colors that matched that year's color choices. It wasn't just the décor and collateral that focused on the color themes the designer had selected, it was the guests as well.

Here we have yet another color-related secret of meeting and event designers: Asking guests to wear a specific color. During the event, color choices come to life, becoming fluid rather than static, a dynamic, self-propelled organism. This is an extremely simple, extremely compelling way to use color to turn your event into what it really should be—a work of art.

Culture-Specific Color Associations

The meeting and events professional must understand the intonations and meaning of color in different cultures. Failing to understand this means leaving yourself open to huge and unforgivable mistakes, like, for instance, using a color for celebration that represents death or insult within the society where your event is being held.

Whenever you are working in a culture that is unfamiliar to you, you must do your research and ask local experts to share their knowledge. What works in Indiana may not work in India; what works in India may not work in Indonesia.

Individual color responses can come from cultural mores; reaction to color is based on those powerful learned responses as well as innate physical, mental and involuntary emotional references.

What follows is based on culturally dominant color references in the United States:

WHITE

Strongly associated with innocence, cleanliness, goodness, simplicity, purity. In some settings, may also be used to send messages of glamour, sophistication, excellence.

BLUE

Promotes feelings of peace and calm. Supports increased sensitivity. Promotes feelings of loyalty, security, contentment. Reinforces tradition and lasting values. Lowers blood pressure and pulse-rate. Suggests safety, trust. Deep blue may be associated with a conservative world view.

GREEN

Promotes optimal use of willpower. Creates a cool, relaxing, soothing feeling. Establishes balance and harmony, friendly feelings. Supports concentration and focus. Reinforces analysis, precision, accuracy.

RED

Stimulates appetite. Associated with impulse, desire, passion. Promotes vitality and intensity of experience. Provokes the urge to achieve results and succeed. Increases blood pressure and pulse-rate. Warms, enriches.

ORANGE

Instills a sense of energy. Heightens cheerfulness, social interaction. Encourages movement, gives vigor.

YELLOW

Instills happy, carefree feelings. Restores personal balance. Supports Optimism. Improves memory and creative expression. Promotes a positive attitude.

PINK

Strongly associated with femininity. Suggests a loving, nurturing, soothing environment. Encourages healing, resting. Stimulates intellect and clarity of thought.

PURPLE

Supports creativity. Seen as regal, dignified, royal, and powerful in some settings; others may yield notions of being mystical, magical, full of surprises, or enchanting. Lighter shades may suggest an irresponsible or immature nature.

BROWN

Suggests a reduced sense of vitality. Perceived as passive, receptive, sensory. Suggests desire for family, a home, physical ease, solid roots.

BLACK

Creates an authoritative, somber attitude. Perceived as mysterious, sophisticated, stylish. Carries overtones of being, contemporary, sturdy, substantial. When used effectively, may suggest power and indomitability.

GREY

Strongly associated with neutrality and borders. Suggests solidity, security, objectivity, and professionalism (Warning: Grey is bland and uninspiring when used alone).



A meeting environment is proven to have a direct and powerful impact on attendees' moods and attitudes as well as their energy, creativity and productivity levels. Every day, Kingsmill Resort sets the stage for success with its sensory-stimulating setting on the banks of the James River in historic Williamsburg, Virginia.

Researchers have long espoused the psychological benefits of exposure to green space—which Kingsmill offers in abundance—but in the last decade, blue space (bodies of water) has been found to produce a similar boost to well-being.

To leverage green and blue space benefits for groups, Kingsmill Resort's IACC-certified conference center offers indoor and outdoor venues overlooking the property's inspiring natural surroundings and sparkling James River. These venues deliver meeting planners a blank canvas to apply custom décor, branding, lighting and audiovisual elements to enhance their attendees' sensory experience.

Of course, the sense of taste is one of the primary drivers of a positive attendee experience. The Kingsmill Culinary Team crafts dishes with an emphasis on fresh, local and sustainably-sourced ingredients. Menus include cuisine with a sense of place—such as the Local Virginia Break, Historical Williamsburg Buffet and Chesapeake Oyster Roast—in addition to other themed options. Meeting planners can also collaborate with their Kingsmill Conference Services Manager to customize a menu to perfectly parallel their meeting design.

Rounding out how attendees experience Kingsmill through their senses are accommodations that make them feel right at home and resort amenities that never fail to delight and inspire.