



Different colours can influence or interfere with the message of a meeting. Katherine Elton finds out how

# Change the tone

**D**o your objectives require you to inflame the passions of your delegates or would you prefer your presentations to boost productivity and long-term energy?

Be warned – the aims of your meeting can literally be shaded out by the colour of the room, PowerPoint slides, paper handouts, even the presenter's tie.

The effects of colour have long been harnessed by big brands: the golden arches and reds and yellows of McDonalds stimulate the brain, signalling to peckish drivers that a Big Mac and fries is on offer just a few metres away. And Coca-Cola cans do the same, using red to convey the potential burst of energy fizzing from the can.

Numerous studies have demonstrated how use of colour can affect memory retention. In 1999 Finnish neuroscientist Virve Vuontela and others studied the effects of colour on children's learning by comparing verbal cues for recall with colour cues. The researchers found that learners retained information better when colour was used. So, for example, an organiser could use a handout or slide with a coloured background if they wanted to convey a key fact.

US-based trainer Lenn Millbower incorporates scientific research on colour into the advice he gives to event organisers. And he warns that different colours can influence or even interfere with the message of a meeting. Millbower outlined one

'Learners retain information better when colour is used'

event he had worked on where the client's colour choice could have left delegates physically and emotionally seeing red. He explains: "A prospective client approached me with a problem. The session she was about to deliver would inform 200 notoriously difficult employees about the possibility that their work schedule would drastically change. It threatened to be an acrimonious session. The client was looking for tools to make the message more palatable and asked for my opinion about the PowerPoint presentation.

"There was, in fact, a potentially serious PowerPoint issue. The client had placed red text on a black background. The look was dynamic, bold, exciting, demanding. The colour scheme was likely to inflame passions

and make the session more difficult to present and the audience more challenging to control.

"The presenter changed the presentation colours to a dark navy background with pale blue text and key positive message points printed in yellow. The presentation went off without major complaint. The client was amazed. I was not. Although it was not certain that the PowerPoint colour scheme was responsible for the lack of reaction, the changed colour scheme did allow the message to be presented without provocation."

So what colour should you use for your PowerPoint slides? Millbower says slides should show light off-white or pale coloured text with, like the example above, important words showcased in yellow popping on a

calming dark blue, purple or green background. In some circumstances, a dash of red can be added to hint at energy and excitement.

Even the presenter should be briefed on what to wear to ensure the message conveyed meets the objective – the outfit must fit with the overall message, whatever that may be. Millbower explains: “The presenter should be neatly dressed in colours that complement the environment including dark colours for a calming influence and a smattering of bright colours to indicate the adventure to follow. And, for learning situations, where the instructor is seeking a casual and responsive atmosphere, no black clothing.

“Each situation is different and requires specific colour choices aligned with the content, much in the same way that businesses apply colours aligned with their brands,” adds Millbower. “An awareness of colourful applications is helpful. For without this awareness, you could be inviting disengagement or, much worse, hostility. Smart instructors use every tool at their disposal, including colour. Do so and you will have coloured your world for learning success.” ■

'A dash of red can hint at energy and excitement'

### Millbower's meetings palette

**Bright colours** spark energy and creativity, elevating and maintaining energy levels

**Lighter colours** such as off-white, beige and grey are mostly neutral in effect

**White** represents purity and innocence but, because of its brightness, can be disruptive to the eye

**Red** is the most emotionally intense colour, stimulating a faster heartbeat and breathing. It fosters excitement and short-term high energy but can trigger aggressiveness when people are under stress

**Yellow** is the first colour the brain distinguishes. It enhances concentration, is conducive to positive moods and physical activity but can become overpowering when overused

**Orange** has characteristics half way between red and yellow

**Pink** is restful and calming with a tranquilising effect

**Darker colours** lower stress and increase feelings of peacefulness

**Blue** causes reactions which are the opposite of red, so it increases a sense of wellbeing and is conducive to studying, deep thinking and concentration

**Purple** suggests sophistication and creates a tranquilising mood

**Green** is calming. It is the easiest colour on the eyes and aids productivity and long-term energy

**Brown**, evoking the hues of the earth, is solid and reliable

**Black** projects authority and power.

With thanks to Lenn Millbower [www.offbeattraining.com](http://www.offbeattraining.com)  
And the Meeting Support Institute [www.meetingsupport.org](http://www.meetingsupport.org)



## Suppliersoundsoff

This month, our outspoken supplier calls on agencies to look beyond the preferred supplier list and try something new

# Time to tickle the jaded palate



Just how difficult is it to book a meeting room? Not that hard, surely. All you need to do is go on one of the various venue search engines, load up your requirements and a steady stream of facilities awaits. And in among the chain hotels are high quality independent suppliers so, in other words, there's lots of choice.

Yet some planners limit their choice by using agencies preaching from approved or preferred supplier lists. Agencies might not admit to this but in reality they want to use preferred suppliers as it means less work for them, they get paid commission quicker, sometimes before you have paid the bill, and in many cases it is because they get an override on their commission. So, basically, you as the buyer earn the 'free to use' agency more by allowing them to limit your choice of suppliers.

You might not be too bothered because you might not know what you are missing out on. But imagine going to a restaurant and choosing from the wine list only to be told by the sommelier that “you can't have that one”. You are then given a new, much shorter list of house wines

limited to a few familiar dull names, from which you have to make your choice!

Procurement-aware agency Grass Roots selected around 60 global hotel companies and representation companies to participate in their RFP last year. Sixty global chains chosen from more than 450 worldwide, after taking views from staff as well as clients and using their expectations based on criteria such as financial stability and dedicated account management. Alan Newton, the procurement guru at Grass Roots, told the industry that the process has enabled suppliers to recognise the high standards Grass Roots has set and ensured the selection of like-minded suppliers – so ensuring consistent service delivery to their clients.

I am sure it will be consistent, of a good standard and create a benchmark – but used alone it is potentially a bit dull. Why just select hotel chains? Do you only choose house wines? If you want to try something new the next time you book with an agency extolling their preferred suppliers list, ask them to also look outside of it. Embrace choice and find something exciting for your travel-jaded delegates. ■