Street Smart COLOR MATCHING

BY DAVID GROSS

I MAGINE being able to produce sublimated products with complete certainty that the colors will come out the way your customer expects them to. Is it even really possible? Of all the challenges digital decorators encounter, none is greater than the need to deliver the right colors.

By arming yourself with a little knowledge on color palettes and charts, you'll be able to adopt a new approach toward color matching that promises to bring new efficiencies to your business. You'll save time and money by dramatically reducing the time it takes to produce various products and by eliminating product waste caused by incorrect color.

Here are some common color matching situations:

My customer has requested a specific Pantone color.

My customer wants me to match the color of a sports jersey.

My customer has provided a digital graphic to sublimate onto fabric.

My customer wants to see all of her color options before making a decision.

STEP ONE: CHOOSE A COLOR PALETTE

A palette is a menu of colors. There are quite a few different palette options—from familiar names like PANTONE® (which has eleven different palettes in CorelDRAW) and TRUMATCH® to strange names like LAB or LUV.
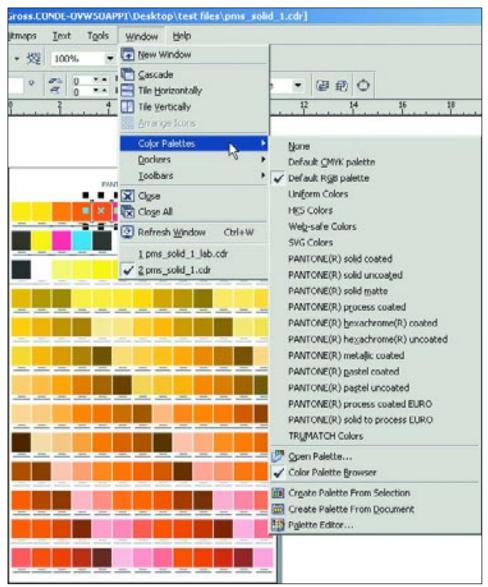
Which one is right for you depends on the type of work you do. I have used many different palettes and have never found one that works for everything. See the side bar for more information on choosing the right palette.

First, let's talk about selecting a palette. Open a new or existing file in CorelDRAW and then go to pull-down menu Window > Color Palettes to view and select your palette choices. You can open as many palettes as you like and close them in the same way they were added.
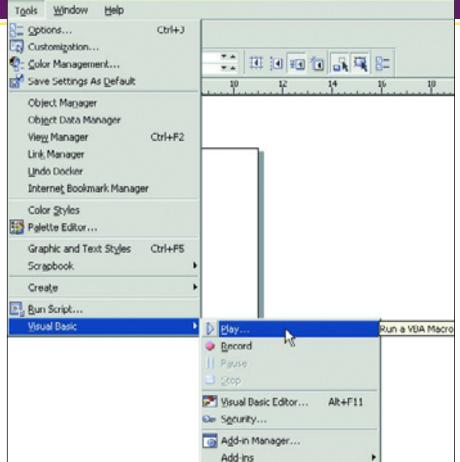
I would suggest starting off with a simple chart like the Default RGB Palette instead of the Default CMYK Palette (that happens to be the default CorelDRAW palette). To see all of CorelDRAW's palettes, go to pull-down menu Window > Color Palettes > Color Palette Browser to display any custom or fixed palettes.

STEP TWO: BUILD A SWATCH CHART OF YOUR PALETTE

The next step is to create a printable color chart of your selected palette. CorelDRAW easily creates the printable version from your selected palette using a Visual Basic program.

components (Version 10) or modify (Version 11 & 12). You may also choose the repair option to reinstall VBA. Various Windows upgrades can disable VBA from working.

STEP THREE: PRINT AND TRANSER

Print each page of your color palette and transfer them to a selected substrate. I have a set of color charts transferred onto fabric, Unisub products, metal, etc. due to the fact that colors will look slightly different on each substrate.

Be sure to write notes on the back of each substrate describing the "transfer technique" used (such as type of paper, printer, transfer time, and transfer pressure). Following this same "transfer technique" each time will ensure consistent results each and every time.
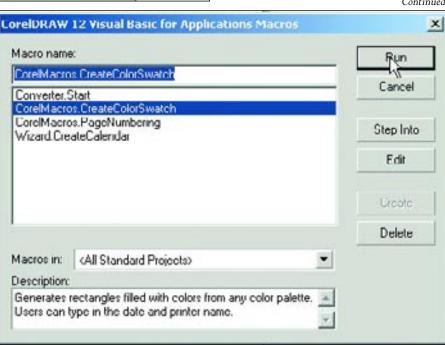
Note: Make sure that your printer is healthy by doing a nozzle check before and after printing. The "after" will confirm that the charts indeed printed correctly.
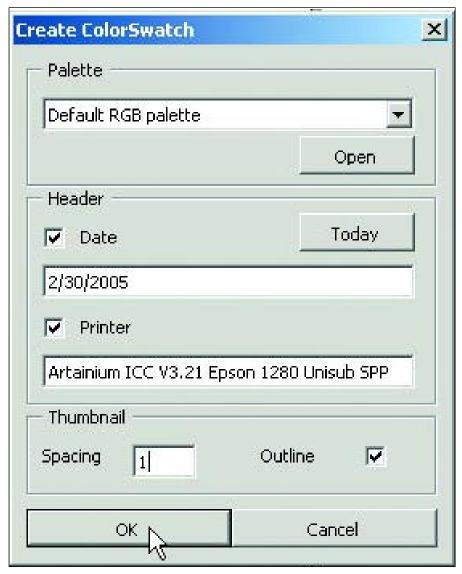
Go to pull-down menu Tools > Visual Basic > Play. Once the Visual Basic menu pops-up, click on the "Macros in" option, select <All standard Projects>, select "CorelMacros.CreateColorSwatch", and then click "Run". Once the Create ColorSwatch menu pops-up, select your palette and then click on the "Printer" box to include brief reference notes in the header of your chart (such as inks, color management, and print driver settings) and then click "OK".

Note that the name of the color is printed below the swatch. This will be our way of making sure we select the right color back in CorelDRAW. Once these pages are built, they can be saved.

Note: If Visual Basic will not run, insert the CorelDRAW CD #1 and follow the prompts to add new

STEP FOUR: PUTTING COLOR CHARTS TO WORK

With the sublimated charts in hand, you can "see" how each color will look transferred onto a selected substrate. Let's review some real life situations:

Your customer wants to choose colors for a new plaque:

Show your customer the "color chart plaque" and let them pick colors from it. Create the plaque in CorelDRAW using the selected swatch's reference name/number.

Your customer wants a new T-shirt that matches the colors of a team jersey:

Compare the team jersey to the "color chart T-shirt" and select the closest match. For this kind of matching, I recommend a palette with large swatches, like TruMatch®. Create the T-shirt's design in CorelDRAW using the selected swatch's reference name/number.

Substituting colors in a graphic:

Now we will substitute "unknown colors" with the "known colors" of our swatch chart. Open an existing file in CorelDRAW and then go to pull-down menu Window > Color Palettes > Create Palette From Document. Save the custom palette. This amazing feature will build a palette with all the colors used in the document. We can then re-map these colors to the colors of our swatch charts.

For color replacement, I prefer another VBA program called "Color Replacer" available free at www.oberon place.com. Download this VBA program and install it in CorelDRAW. CorelDRAW's version will substitute either fills or outlines but not both at the same time. This VBA program will do both together.

The new palette is now docked and ready to use. Run the "Color Replacer" by going to pull-down menu Tools > Visual Basic > Play.

Once the Visual Basic menu pops-up, click on the "Macros in" option and select "Color Replacer". Click on "Find Color" and click on the palettes tab. Pull-down at Palette and choose your
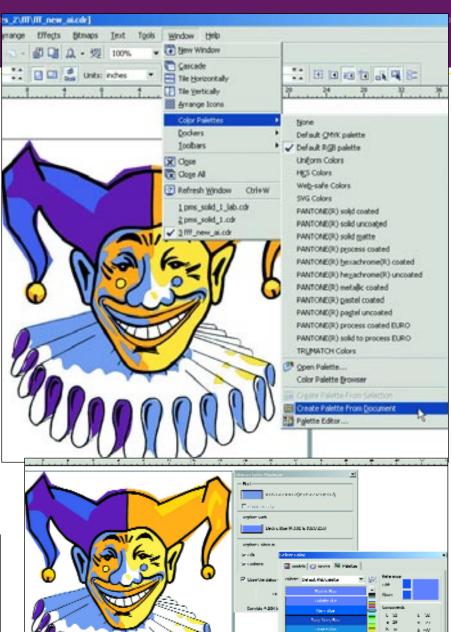
custom palette. Select the color you would like to substitute. Next, choose the replacement color and click OK. It's that simple.
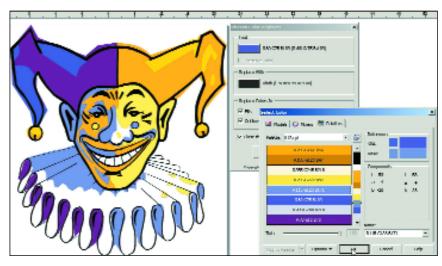
If all of this is interesting to you but sounds complicated, perhaps training is in order. Check with your distributor for resources they offer such as equipment, profiles and training.

Color management and matching is a work in progress: it may almost always be considered a challenge but never an impossibility. I hope this information will help you confront and solve your own color matching demands. Feel free to email me with your results, suggestions and questions at dgross@conde.com.

Continued

Color Profiles

In short, color profiles (also known as ICC profiles) are the glue that connects color to your computer with all other components such as monitor, scanner, printer and digital camera. Your computer uses a profile to "understand" the color going to or from a device. This connection is sort of like a common language for color.

If you have a high-end monitor such as a Sony brand, you should install the profile available from the manufacturer. For really accurate color, purchase a monitor profiling package from a company like Monaco (www.monacosys.com). With your sublimation printer, it is essential that you have a profile if you ever intend to match Pantone colors or your profiled monitor.

Also, check often for updates, as most companies continue to improve their profiles. The better the profile, the more accurate the color. Shown here is CorelDRAW's Color Management console. Please note that CorelDRAW and Corel PHOTO-PAINT use separate color settings. Be sure to set your color settings in both programs.

Color Palettes

If you have peeked at the palettes available in Corel, you may at first be overwhelmed. For a simple palette, I prefer the default RGB Palette. For complex color matching, I prefer the TruMatch Palette.

Since I have an excellent profile for my Epson 4000, I do use the Pantone solid coated palette for matching customer Pantone numbers. Please email me with your thoughts on your favorite palettes.

Pantone

Pantone is the most popular color matching system in the world. Most of your customers who use Pantone will provide you with a Pantone Solid Coated number. You must purchase a Pantone Solid swatch book so that you will know what color the customer is expecting. I suggest you build a Pantone Solid Coated swatch chart as described earlier.

If your printer's color profile is accurate, you will be pleasantly surprised by the accuracy of your chart. Yes, some colors may be off, but most will be close enough. Ask your distributor for help with your profile and CorelDRAW settings.

Reprinted from
THE SUBLIMATION ALMANAC 2005

Please visit
A&E magazine's
website at

www.a-e-mag.com

David Gross is president of Conde Systems, a position he has held for 13 years. Prior to that he worked for QMS, where he designed and marketed color and monochrome laser printers. He holds a BSEE degree in Electrical Engineering from Auburn University and has written many articles dealing with digital imprinting technology. In addition, David has served on boards of various organizations such as the Greater Gulf Coast Literacy Council and the Mobile Ballet. He is married with three children and resides in Mobile, Alabama.