



Color Systems: Web vs. Print

Oh my! There are millions of possible color options for your design projects. Below are explanations of the print and web industry standard color systems:

Pantone Matching System (PMS) for Solid Spot Inks:

Solid colored inks, or referred by printers as “Spot” inks, are printed as solid premixed paint from a can and are identified as “PMS _(number)_”. Text and solid line art can be printed in spot inks. Color photos or multi-toned images cannot be printed in spot inks. They must be printed in process inks....see next description...

Pantone Matching System (PMS) for Process Printing Inks:

Since color photos or continuous-toned photographic images or illustrations have an unlimited number of colors, tones, and shades within them, it is necessary for printers to break them down into fine dots using the three process colors of cyan, magenta, and yellow, plus black. The final effect gives the illusion of a continuous-tone image. Care must be given by the designer to select a quality paper that will produce the most crispness of the fine dots. Colors are identified in percentages of the **C**yan, **M**agenta, **Y**ellow, and **blacK**. (Ex: **C**: 20%, **M**: 50%, **Y**:0%, **K**: 10%)

Pantone Matching System (PMS) for Coated Paper:

Coated papers (i.e., gloss, matte, and aqueous coated) have a harder surface, so therefore, inks tend to stay brighter and crisper since they don't get absorbed into the paper as much as non-coated stocks.

Pantone Matching System (PMS) for Non-Coated Paper:

Non-coated papers absorb more ink and therefore, tend to darken and soften more than on coated stocks. Recycled papers can alter the look of the ink colors even further depending on the quality of the brand and amount of recycled content.

Pantone Matching System (PMS) for Metallic Inks:

Metallic inks are opaque and consist of metal flakes in a clear base. It is usually best to use coated paper to get the best metallic effect. The true metallic effect cannot be produced by non-metallic spot or process inks.

Web Color System:

For web use, a different color system exists because our computer screens use RGB (i.e., Red, Green, Blue) and the light within visually brightens the colors. The web hexadecimal system uses a hash (#) symbol, followed by six digits of letters and/or numbers. Please keep in mind that colors will vary on different computer displays and in various browsers, so it is impossible to maintain “true” colors consistently over multiple devices.

I hope the above explanations help to clear up some of your questions about colors. Please don't hesitate to contact me with any questions. I will be happy to work with you on selecting the best colors for your project.

Cindy Leadingham