# is this really the color?
## A BRIEF GUIDE TO COLOR ISSUES

Only 20 years ago, mockups were done by hand and you didn't get much of a preview before you went to press. Today, with PDF file previews and the ready availability of instant color proofs, you can see what your job is going to look like beforehand. Well…almost. Color proofs, whether on screen or on paper, are great, but it's easy to forget that they're only proofs, and the product that comes off an offset press isn't going to be exactly the same. Having a good grasp of the four major methods for viewing and creating color in publications will help you avoid unpleasant surprises the day your job is delivered.

## in the office

### MONITOR

It's easy to get a PDF of your job as it progresses, but keep in mind that the color you're seeing on screen can't possibly be the same as the color you'll see on the finished paper product. Why not? Well, computer monitors use red, green and blue dots (RGB) to create a range of colors. These dots are illuminated by shining light through a glass surface, whereas your printed piece is going to be created using ink on paper. To make matters more complicated, every monitor is slightly different, so what looks red on your monitor may appear pink on your coworker's.

### INK JET PRINTER

Ink jet proofs can come close to matching the color of a finished offset document, but they can never be exactly the same. Ink jet printers combine and spray four ink colors together to approximate the colors described by the computer, while an offset printer applies specific inks to the page and has the ability to control and adjust the ink in order to achieve the exact color desired. Also, the paper you insert into an ink jet printer is specifically designed for that technology, but the paper used for offset printing is much more complex and color results vary according to the type of paper you choose.

## on the press

### 4-COLOR PROCESS

This method of reproducing color uses cyan, magenta, yellow and black (CMYK) inks mixed together in varying tints of each. Because thousands of colors can be created, it is impossible to create a single guide book to show all of them, but tint books are available to demonstrate a very large selection of CMYK screen mixes on coated and uncoated paper. If you're using 4-color for your project, ask your designer to show you the tint book—it will give you a relatively accurate idea of what the final colors will look like.

### PANTONE

Many organizations choose Pantone colors for their identities and printed materials because the colors can be reproduced accurately and consistently anywhere in the world. The Pantone system is comprised of over 1,000 custom colors with each color having a designated number. Pantone produces guides for solid colors on coated and uncoated paper, as well as guides showing each color's halftone and tints in varying percentages. Ask your designer to show you the guides when you're meeting to plan the project—they'll give you an almost exact idea of how the color will look on your printed piece.

### TIPS

Everyone has favorite and despised colors—but that's not what you should rely on in choosing ink colors. Instead, work from your agency's established color palette; if you don't have one, choose colors based on your publication's message and target audience.

Color will be affected by the paper you choose. Coated papers produce vibrant colors and sharp detail because more ink stays on the surface. Uncoated papers absorb more ink so colors are less vibrant but give a more natural feeling.

A press check is an opportunity for the designer to watch your publication on the press to make sure the color and print quality are acceptable. It's a last chance to adjust any color problems. Client changes made at this stage will cost you time and money.