

Color Management or Managing Color

Learning how to control the variables related to producing predictable, expected color.

BY DAVID HUNTER

Any company that deals with color has to manage their color if they are going to continue to have a business that deals with color. But what does color management really mean? You can ask 10 different people and get 10 different answers. For the purpose of this article we will call color management the process of controlling the variables related to producing predictable, expected color. This may sound like an open-ended answer and in many ways it has to be. Color is a phenomenon that is much more sophisticated and complicated than most people will ever realize.

Those of us who deal with color everyday know that the more we learn, the more we need to learn. I like to use the analogy of an onion. Just when you get through one layer, there is another and another and eventually it will make you cry; but the more you understand, the more you realize how you can control the variables to provide you with the result you want.

The challenge is how to educate people on color management so it is applicable to the student's envi-

ronment and experience level. I have been teaching color classes for more than 20 years to all knowledge levels, and I have found that it is virtually impossible in one class to take a person with a low level of knowledge to a high level of knowledge—there is only so much the brain can take in during any given period of time. Don Hutcheson and I started teaching a three-day course at GATF 13 years ago. We, along with our students, discovered three days was not enough time. People would come back and take the class a second time because they would get overwhelmed with the content.

They needed to come back and hear it again, and they would eventually understand all the concepts. When I saw these people returning, I thought I had not been successful in my teaching. However, upon speaking with them, they would state that they learned more than they thought they would, but they still did not understand the basics well enough to take the concepts to the next level.

So when IPA approached me to head a development effort to build an online course on color management, I took it as a personal challenge to address many of the concepts that could not be addressed in a regular live class.

► First, the idea of making the content available for one year with unlimited access allows students to go over certain aspects as many times as necessary to master the concept being taught.

► Second, there was the advantage of separating the concepts into levels so if a person already fully understands the lesson topic, he or she would have the option of testing out of that section. I know how frus-



trating it can be to take a class from someone who does not know as much as I do. Anyone providing this type of course would be sadly mistaken to believe he or she knows more than any one taking the course so we developed a modular program allowing students to test out of sections where they already had the expertise.

▶Third, the modular nature of the program allowed us to structure an introduction module covering the basics and fundamentals that need to be understood in order to appreciate all the variables that can serve as obstacles when reproducing color.

▶Finally, we segmented different areas of expertise so designers can learn concepts important to them and not have to sit through issues related to prepress unless, of course, they want to. Thus, there are different modules for different job functions.

The program begins with an extensive course on *Color Management Fundamentals* where students can achieve certification as a **Color Management Associate**. This is followed by additional modules where students can obtain **Professional** certification in specialty areas including:

Color Management for Photography

Color Management for Creative/Design

Color Management for Prepress

Color Management for Premedia

Color Management for the Pressroom

Color Management for Packaging/Printing

Color Management for Print/Premedia Buyers

The goal of the introduction is to provide a fundamental foundation to move forward with color management. Sections include: *Basics of Light*, *Basics of Color Theory*, *Basics of Color Capture Devices*, *Profiling*, *Calibration*, and *Conformance*. Once through with the introduction, students can take a test that confirms they have mastered a sufficient level of understanding of the content to progress to the next level.

We worked long and hard to ensure the test measured understanding of relevant concepts and not esoteric color management jargon. We had a number of color veterans vet the content and the test. Preliminary feedback from people who have taken other color-related classes is that we have achieved a good balance.

We approached the job discipline modules from a “best practice” for helping students in the given discipline understand what is relevant from a color perspective for their job function. Thus, we cover specific requirements expected for the given job function. For



example, we deal with how Photoshop color management should be configured based on “best practices” because almost everyone has Photoshop, but we stop short of getting into specific applications that are not so pervasive such as how to use XYZ camera interface or ABC Printer interface.

We have approached many complementary vendors that have “product specific” solutions that fit into each of our job discipline modules and have asked them to develop content for their specific solution that follows the guidelines we have established with our best practice curriculum. Vendors would be responsible for updating their own modules when they upgrade their products—this should allow them to reduce the amount of support their product requires for any user purchasing this curriculum.

Students of this curriculum will be more likely to purchase products that have formal modules prepared as part of the program, which will motivate manufacturers to write product specific modules for their own solutions. So do not be shy, request that your favorite manufacturers build modules for their products that fit into the *IPA Color Management Certification Program*.

The depth of the best practices is enormous and we have received many positive reviews, even from people who have gone through numerous color classes. If you want to master color control for your organization, this is without a doubt the most complete, most efficient, and least expensive option available on the market. For more information, go to www.ipa.org/cmp or call IPA at 800-255-8141.

So that we can continually make the program better and stronger, please send any comments to me at david@pilotmarketing.com. 