

# THE SEYBOLD

REPORT

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## Pantone/X-Rite Covers the Gamut

By Ron Roszkiewicz

For many years, Pantone has been the recognized world leader in color communications based on its Pantone Matching System. Over its 45-year history, Pantone has expanded beyond supporting the graphic arts industry into other color-critical industries, including textiles, plastics, architecture and interior design. Pantone ultimately evolved from a provider of analog fan books of color chips to a technology leader supplying digital equivalents of those same color chips to software developers. The recent announcement of X-Rite's acquisition of Pantone pre-empted by a few days Pantone's announcement of its new Goe System.

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## Kodak's Plan To Manage Color

By Laurel Brunner

Managing color is getting harder. Apart from color's inherent complexity, the industry is stampeding toward distribute-and-print production using digital printers to print color on demand in unpredictable environments. The range and color capability of the devices in color workflows has become increasingly harder to predict, making it even more difficult to achieve the goal of open color management. Also, many parts of color workflows still function in isolation. While in some cases, such as digital image capture with a mobile device or digital camera, there is no alternative, managing data processing on any networked digital device, including color data, should nevertheless be possible. This is where manufacturers such as Fujifilm, Heidelberg and Kodak sniff opportunity.

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## TransPromo Summit 2007

By C. Clint Bolte

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More and more, companies are trying to use transactional mailings — the bills customers get every month from their utility or telephone company, for instance — to promote other goods and services. The inaugural TransPromo Summit 2007 on high-volume transaction output drew 300 attendees to New York in August.

## Mature Technology for AdvanStar

By Ron Roszkiewicz

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When it began upgrading its workflow, AdvanStar's priorities were quality and accuracy, and one of its primary underlying issues was support for transparency. Accurate output was also important, considering AdvanStar's significant reliance on advertising, and advertisers demand accuracy.

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# Pantone/X-Rite Covers the Gamut

By Ron Roszkiewicz

In case you missed it, the color and calibration world has recently gone through some uncharacteristic ground-shaking changes. The activity in this relatively mature landscape rivals what we've come to expect from companies such as Adobe, Apple and Microsoft.

**T**he recent announcement of X-Rite's acquisition of Pantone pre-empted by a few days Pantone's announcement of its new Goe System. We now have to consider the implications of Pantone's new technology in the context of a much larger organization with a broader product offering.

The first hint of impending changes came more than a year ago, when Pantone expanded its iconic software offerings with low-end calibration tools for professionals and prosumers through its partnership with Gretag/Macbeth. In July 2006, not long after this partnership began, X-Rite acquired Amazys under which Gretag/Macbeth was a key subsidiary. The combination of Pantone, X-Rite and Gretag/Macbeth into a single color company is impressive, as it covers consumer through professional markets for both hardware and software.

## Pantone's Years of Color Leadership

For many years, Pantone has been the recognized world leader in color communications based on its Pantone Matching System (PMS). Over its 45-year history, Pantone has expanded beyond supporting the graphic arts industry into other color-critical industries, including textiles, plastics, architecture and interior design. Pantone ultimately evolved from a provider of analog fan books of color chips to a technology leader supplying digital equivalents of those same color chips to software developers. Today it's difficult to find a company that doesn't have a Pantone color defining its logo.

Pantone began making the transition from analog color chips to a digital version 15 years ago. It licensed its technology to the major desktop players, partnering with Adobe and Quark as a digital OEM supplier to bring the Matching Color system to software applications. While we might take for granted all of the color-picking options we have today, at the time each new addition was a small revolution. Of course, back in the day there was still the problem of preserving these extra colors in the output file and representing them as an additional piece of film. The transition was a little bumpy, as digital equivalents were converted into PostScript and CMYK values in prepress. Over the years, with each iteration of PostScript and every rollout of a new RIP, the industry has overcome these processing issues and now has a foundation that can be enhanced with expanded offerings.

While graphic arts has remained a mature and stable niche, in recent years the company has been acclaimed for its color creations in the fashion and textile industries. Even the principals at Pantone were surprised by the acceptance of PMS in textiles, plastics, automotive, Formica and paints. During a time when there were few standards as we know them today, printers came to appreciate the consistent color language that Pantone brought to the table. Pantone provided extra colors as an optional service.

## Ready, Set, Goe

On Sept. 5, Pantone announced a new way to deliver color libraries. Under a banner proclaiming, "We envision, explore, share/borrow, commit, share/archive, employ," Pantone released a new system for color selection, a mere 45 years after it introduced the original Pantone Matching System. What was once a color specifier for spot colors (and in the early days a nuisance to some printers) over time has become *the* standard color specifying tool for branding in graphic arts. But it became so much more.

Every company seems to have its favorite PMS color to which its logo is inextricably tied. Web sites are typically built on harmonious palettes that reflect the trends of the time — some of them started by Pantone in the fashion world. In fact, new markets and opportunities often suggest new colors, and not only in the fashion world, where Pantone has in recent years established a reputable name for itself. Even the original PMS's skin tones of 45 years ago don't reflect the skin tones of today. According to Doris Brown, VP of marketing at Pantone, designers are requesting more greens because of the upsurge in products serving the green revolution.

So to answer the needs of designers, Pantone introduced the Goe System with 2,058 new solid colors compared with the original Matching System's 1,114 colors.

In addition to the calls from the user community for a larger palette, printers and paper manufacturers also had some requests. They asked for more ink mixing efficiency; the ability to offer more colors to their customers; more readily available, environmentally safe ink mixing bases; inks that are compatible with aqueous and UV coatings; and a switch from Pantone's traditional cover weight basis to more commonly used text weight as the basis. Pantone responded to all of these requests in its Goe System.

The biggest difference has to do with access. Changes had to be made so that using the color guides and color pickers became more intuitive. This follows trends in the software industry as a whole. Designers working with color often have no formal color science training and respond visually as they work. They are also accustomed to dragging colors around a virtual canvas in addition to an analog pasteboard. And they're learning to expect consistent color from one media or application to the next. Today's designer might be using InDesign in the morning, Photoshop in the afternoon and Dreamweaver at night. Moving among them should not present a problem getting to their Pantone library. Consistency is also true of the increasing prevalence of an all-digital workflow. Designers move from one color model to the next, depending on output and screen view.

Pantone realized that replacing its Pantone Matching System with a new paradigm would cause problems for any company whose branding identity is based on Pantone colors. With the introduction of Goe, Pantone created a new matching system with a new intuitive logic for numbering color chips and representing them on the color wheel, switching to a three-part numbering system that represents the full-strength color (color family), page and placement on the page. The colors are now presented chromatically. On the color picker the locations of colors separates the wheel into pizza-like wedges. Designers using this color picker often will soon become familiar with the color ranges reflected by each wedge.

### The Book of Goe

When I first heard of Goe, I immediately thought of the ancient Chinese game of Go. Although the briefing did not include much background on the genesis of the name, it is anything but a monochromatic strategy game played out on a grid. In fact, Pantone's Goe is a suite of products — Pantone GoeGuide, Pantone GoeSticks, myPantone Palette Software and myPantone.com — that is actually more evolutionary than it is revolutionary. It is essentially PMS 2.0 with a new tool to access the color picker and user interface improvements to all of the analog and digital elements of the system.

### The Pantone GoeGuide

The first thing you notice about the GoeGuide is the packaging. The monolithic box consists of a silver metal base with a red transparent cover to house the guides and stick books. The box itself looks like a 3-D color chip (PMS 293?). Pantone says this attractive touch is its museum style. The color chips are displayed on fan books as they've always been except they are now organized into the new numbering style mentioned above and include a mixing formula and an RGB value. They are also printed on standard bright white No. 1 grade 100-pound coated offset text stock. The



Goe System components, including the GoeGuide, GoeStick books and myPantone software.

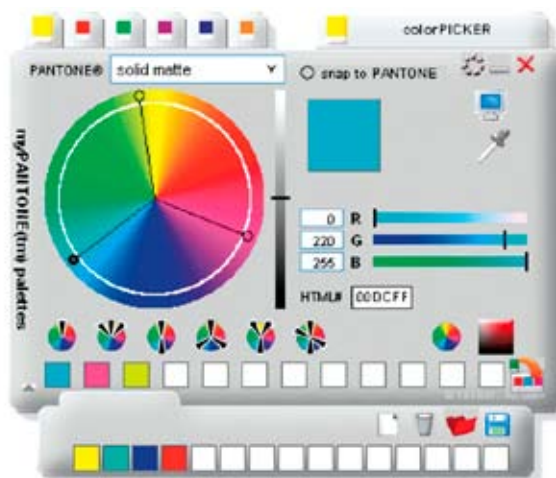
overall numbering system is based around 165 full-strength colors and the color families derived from them. As in the past, Pantone recommends replacing the guide every year because of wear and deterioration due to skin oil, coffee stains, etc.

### Pantone GoeSticks

Each Goe System includes a two-volume set of adhesive-backed color chips that can be torn out, used and replaced for a fee by Pantone when they run out. The GoeStick Guide includes a “playground” for assembling color sets. It's like an analog of dragging and dropping colors into a well in a color picker. The playground is a smooth plastic sheet and the chips can be lifted up and replaced in the guide for later use. Palette cards are also supplied for more permanent placement of chips for sharing with others and archiving.

### myPantone Palette Software

During the Goe demonstration, Brown went to great lengths to equate the versatility and friendliness of the company's new color picking, collecting and management software with the desktop widgets familiar to Mac users and recently introduced to Windows users in Vista. Of course, this software is not a widget



Stand-alone color picker application window.

but a stand-alone application meant to float above applications and through the use of an eye-dropper interact with images displayed in them. Widgets lack integrated color picker functionality or sophisticated color data capability.

One area of particular interest in the myPantone Palette is what Pantone considers its best practices support. The first area where this plays out is with monitor calibration. When the software launches, it checks to see if the monitor is calibrated and reports if it isn't by crossing out a small icon on the face of the application's main window. Another area where color science support is built in under the hood is through a set of icons that allow the eyedropper to create sets of color harmonies in the following styles: complementary, monochromatic, analogous, split complementary, triadic and tetradic. When a color is selected, the metadata relating to the color number, RGB and HTML values are displayed. In addition, a unique color blender function allows for two end points to be selected and up to 83 individual color steps to be automatically defined between them.

The image palette builder is another interesting feature. Choose an image and the software will automatically generate a palette using dominant colors within the image. Up to 12 different colors can be generated. If you don't like the choices the application makes, hit the button again and view a new set. Those of us who have played with Adobe's Kuler online application at the Adobe Labs site have had a taste of this automated palette generation and can appreciate its potential. Of course, Pantone's approach implemented in myPantone leapfrogs Kuler.

**myPantone.com**

The introduction of the Goe System coincides with the debut of a new online color-oriented community called myPantone.com — an appropriate step from a leader in color and color knowledge. This new online community will be a clearinghouse for color palettes created by members. As with other online sharing sites, users who are active participants will be recognized for their good works. The most popular of the sets will also be recognized by the site as one of the top five downloaded.

Pantone expects this site to act as a color information gateway and will provide RSS feeds from the site on any new color-related information that should arise.

**Conclusion**

From a distance, the net effect of this consolidation of companies provides some efficiencies, stability and new sales channels. The operating efficiencies are pretty clear. X-Rite expects to save millions of dollars from more efficient use accounting, production and so on. The range of products represented by the union covers every professional graphic arts market, textiles and any other application where precise color is required. Add



Image palette builder.

a soft-proofing solution and throw Trumatch color picker into the mix and the company would have the graphic arts industry locked up.

The stated intention is to operate Pantone as an independent subsidiary. It's not clear how far Pantone's products can be integrated across the X-Rite product line. Pantone's new products will be successful and will add fresh revenues to the overall bottom, but they essentially stand alone. One potential benefit for X-Rite and Macbeth will be the overall evangelizing and cross-promotional opportunities presented by the myPantone.com portal and e-commerce at the Pantone site. While the huey calibration system does have its place in the prosumer desktop mix, it does not support the precision required by soft-proofing calibration software solutions.

The terms of the transaction seem to indicate that Pantone was carrying in excess of \$200 million in debt. X-Rite is committing more than \$400 million to the purchase, half of which will be in cash.

The deal is expected to close this fall. Over the coming months we will learn what plans X-Rite has for integrating Pantone technology, customer base, e-commerce and Web portal and products into other lines. If one result of the union is an expanded offering of user-friendly tools for using color more effectively, it will be as big a win for users as it is for Pantone. **TSR**

**Pricing and Availability**

Announcement date: Sept. 5, 2007

Availability: Oct. 1, 2007

System Pricing:

- Complete Goe System ..... \$499
- GoeSticks with myPantone Palettes software (Mac and Windows) ..... \$369
- GoeGuide with myPantone Palettes software (Mac and Windows) ..... \$129
- Pantone Fashion plus Home and Paints plus Interiors Libraries ..... \$19.99 each