

Green is the new Primary color.

Color has been a big part of my adult life. In fact, almost twenty years ago, I voluntarily left a successful career in Electronic Chemistry to pursue a personal mission to make sure that my young children would have brighter and more colorful art materials to use as they entered childcare and elementary grades. I had noted at the time how drab the paint products that were available to them at the time. The ten years of growing my business, aptly called Colorations, taught me how important colors are in our lives. They surround us in every nook and cranny of our existence.

Now I find that only one color is of any importance. Green.

We all remember having it drummed into us at school that Red, Yellow and Blue are the three primary colors from which all the other colors in the world can be made. The world of color has changed. Green has joined this small private club of primary colors. Everywhere we turn these days we are bombarded by Green. I can't recall the last time I received a trade publication or read a newsmagazine that didn't promote some 'Green' product nor had an article regarding the importance of being 'Green'.

Yes, Green is now perceived as a primary color with perhaps more importance than those boring primary colors of yore. But does it have the same absolute characteristics of red, yellow and blue?

Every time I go shopping I see more and more products promoted for their 'green-ness'. Government agencies, from local to federal, have more programs than ever that place a premium on environmental friendly services. The current administration is strongly advocating 'greener' cars with better gas mileage, less pollution with smaller carbon footprints.

Don't get me wrong. I love the color Green. I am very supportive of 'Green' technologies, products and programs. But, somehow I still have a problem with this color. Perhaps we should step back and reflect on what the new Green really means before it completely takes over the color consciousness of our society.

Green has different shades.

Just as there is no single shade of red, yellow or blue, there is no single shade of green. And so there are many different shades of environmental awareness. The green that one person sees is not necessarily the same for everyone.

Alas, the overuse of the word and color Green is quickly making the color and its vernacular meaning less compelling precisely because there are so many different shades and meanings to Green.

This not only leads to cynicism regarding the claims of one company's green programs or products versus another, but has and will lead to downright fraudulent claims of 'greenness'.

Needless to say there are some markets where there are well defined definitions for 'green', but without a standard that everyone can understand, 'Green' is becoming the most murky of colors. A child's finger paint concoction looks clearer in comparison.

The appeal of the three primary colors is in their absoluteness. We are taught that we can build our own entire universe of colors with them. Unfortunately the overuse or misuse of Green does not lend itself to this same characteristic.

So how do we make Green a true primary color equal to the others? We need to set well recognized and measurable means to determine the different meanings of Green.

I suggest that leading Market associations work together, perhaps in conjunction with the Department of Commerce, to develop a universal "green" symbol which could be verified, objective and lead to clarity and definition of the various shades of 'Green'. This symbol would have four areas and be graded based on industry standards in the following areas

- A) Recyclability
- B) Sustainability
- C) Carbon Footprint
- D) Safety (Non-toxic)

The symbol could be used for products, packaging and raw materials similar to the “Good Housekeeping” seal of approval. It would bring rationality, consistency and reliability to what ‘green’ means. In essence it would define the different shades of Green for us.

In addition, our schools could provide a great place to educate our children on why Green is a primary color of extreme importance. For decades we have been teaching civics to our youngsters. What could be more civic minded than teaching Green. We have seen the power of education in changing social norms. For example, teaching about the dangers of smoking at an early age has dramatically changed social habits. We can do the same things regarding Green initiatives. We can teach that being Green is not just about putting the papers or bottles in the recycling bin every week. We can teach how being Green is truly a ‘primary ‘part of responsible social interaction. Being Green is a good example of cause and effect.; certainly an important lesson to impress upon our younger generation.

Finally, Green is not a political color. It does not belong to any political party or movement. We should not let it be hijacked by politicians. Being Green is a social contract between society and the natural world in which we live. There will always be compromises and dynamic changes as social mores and environmental and ecological information becomes forthcoming.

In conclusion, Green can indeed become a primary color in our society, but at present has too many shades to be treated as such.

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