



Trends reflect people's attitudes, their values, desires and dreams. From the popularity of retro fashion skinny jeans to the rise of the Internet as a social tool and pretty much everything in between, the science behind what sets a trend continues to fascinate. Whatever your field, the ability to tap into the zeitgeist, to implement it effectively and then to be able to ride a commercial wave to success is a rare and very precious commodity. And the truth is, that task is not getting any easier.

In the 20th century, the world did not only feel smaller, but also a lot slower than it does today. Trends were both easier to spot and easier to immerse ourselves in. However, today trends are born, mingle and intersperse in a radically different, faster and more fluid way, driven by billions of imaginative minds all around the planet. On the one hand we have the consumer, subject to and responding to

more diverse interests than ever before and on the other, we have designers who today are faced with unparalleled choice and have access to a wide range of materials and application techniques.

So, where do these shifting sands leave product designers and those companies whose job it is to deliver their conception of colour? At the recent Plastics Design & Moulding (PDM) Conference, which took place in Telford during April, Greg Hammond from Gabriel-Chemie UK, a global masterbatch specialist, sat on the Design Trends Conference panel alongside PDM's Design Resource Centre curator Chris Lefteri; Alloy Total Product Design's, Gus Desbarats; Graeme Paterson from Brightworks and Ian Jones from AME Designs. Leading the session with a fascinating keynote speech were Sarah Clark and Graham Moore from London-based design consultancy, PDD. The PDD pres-



Ulf Trabert takes a closer look at colour trends in product design

Follow the trend



entation - Colours, Materials and Finishes (CMF) - centred on the cultural and theoretical models for predicting CMF trends.

According to Clark, CMF is about bringing together two differing visions of the future - one which is standing on the edge of a brave new world - the technical, material, hardware future - and another which can be defined as the emotional, software future of 'I'd never wear that!' Predicting future trends in this context allows the consultancy to define what is likely to be less of a certainty and more of a probability.

Gabriel-Chemie's experience with colour trends echoes this PDD position. Bringing colour into the marketplace effectively requires a combination of roles, skills and talents from all those in the supply chain - researchers, chemists, engineers and artists - to achieve a successful result. Gabriel-Chemie commits ongoing investment into analysing the consumer market, evaluating social trends, looking at behaviours, colour preferences and tastes and involving its business with industry bodies, organisations and events. The company employs trend scouts from design and marketing disciplines, who work alongside expert colourists in its six European laboratories to research, monitor and assess the factors at work, to examine the socio-demographic changes and identify other shaping influences driving trends in colour.

One of the biggest drivers in the market at the moment is sustainability and the environment. The growing corporate responsibility agenda is working in partnership with consumer interest and awareness into how and where

products are manufactured. Obviously, this has a huge impact on the choice, type and quantity of material being used and, in an increasing number of cases, recycled and re-used. But it also impacts upon colour and presents practical challenges not only for the chemist and the engineer, but also for the designer seeking to realise their creation. For example, in response to environmental concerns, the industry is now increasingly working with natural colours and polymers.

Other factors are also proving significant. Authenticity and the use of authentic materials are a major force. So too are innovative surfaces which demand a tactile response as much as fulfilling a functional need. Evolving from this idea, in our increasingly global, complex and remote world, designers are tuning in to the appeal of products that transcend this distance, simplifying the consumer experience and creating a personal affinity or connection with the consumer.

We must also react to the tastes and needs of the ageing society in which we live; the mixing and merging of cultures and peoples, especially across Europe; the polarisation between the wealthy and the poor; and the increasing importance and influence of women in society, business and politics.

Each year to help product designers make sense of these issues, Gabriel-Chemie releases its COLOUR VISION edition (top of page 28), 36 colour trends that are the result of meticulous research carried out at the company's various laboratories. This gives designers an

invaluable insight into a range of outstanding new and special colours and effects, providing a framework that they can employ in colour, packaging, new product and brand strategies. For example, the three core themes of this year's COLOUR VISION edition include: the 'Colours of Life' tier which responds to the environmental challenge with a series of natural colours as well as active reds, blues and yellows; the 'Virtual Crossover' tier, which seeks to reflect the fast-changing world of web 2.0 and features active colour impressions, digital green nuances, electrifying blue, deep wine red and coloured anthracite; and the 'Selective Fusion', which tier embraces ethnic cultures and the influence it has on the design and development of new products and features colours that show white impressions, elegant grey and blue tones as well as a new orange and deep brown.

However, understanding and appreciating the winning trends in colour is one thing, implementation is quite another. In realising any of these colours into successful products, the colour masterbatch company is in the hands of the designer. Involving a company such as Gabriel-Chemie early, and tapping into its knowledge of materials and how colour can be affected by the chemical reaction with different polymer types, additives and moulding processes of polymer is essential. And, of course, will help in creating a product that appeals to the consumer on every level. |

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