

how to work with color opposites

Baby's naturally warm palette buffers the cool, fresh green, allowing incompatible colors to work side by side



It's a common problem. You have a distinctive “company” color and a beautiful photo, but they don't go together!—one is warm, muted, soft, while the other is cool, vivid, edgy. Your artistic eye rebels at the sight of both occupying the same space, especially when the subject is as cute as this one. But this is where artistry and commerce differ. While the designer seeks visual harmony, the company needs visibility. And what better way is there to be visible than to be opposite? So our challenge is to put not just opposite colors but opposite goals together in a way that gets the best from both. The good news is, this can actually be done. We'll begin the way we always begin, by finding the color palette in the photo; it will play a key role in making this marriage work. After that, our working tools will be scale and position. Watch.

The problem



Brighton Health is a care provider whose trademark color is Pantone 347C*, a cool, clear green that suggests freshness, springtime, new growth. It is a highly saturated color—pure, bright, visible. Interesting is that our baby actually is fresh and new, but her colors are warm, soft and muted; they are desaturated. These couldn't be more opposite.



How will they go together? First step is to sample the colors in the baby, then sort the results by color and value:

ColorVANTAGE

Place the photo atop a swatch of each color, and you'll see that all harmonize naturally and beautifully. This is the baby's natural color palette. We will in most cases use one or more of these natural colors to buffer the green.



*Simulated here with C100 M0 Y86 K3

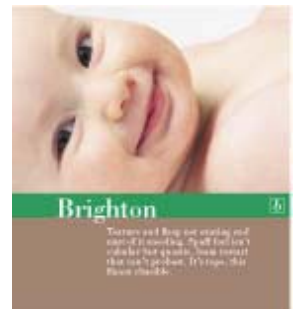
A lot of color The baby on a big field of green is the instant focal point. This is the straight-at-you approach; the two elements are so different—and so obviously different—that the eye makes no attempt to combine them. Position, though, is key. Off center and unbalanced (left), the image can no longer compete.



A little color Here the baby's natural colors are added to make a large, light expanse of soft bands. Contrasts of light and dark, muted and vivid, force the green to become the point of interest. This is an excellent solution; overall, it's nursery soft, while the company name and logo are clearly visible and appropriately low-key. White type yields a sixth level of depth.



Same values Baby's brown hair and opposite green have similar dark-light value, which adds tension to the image. Tension creates interest but is tricky to handle. Key is proportion. Equal amounts compete (far left); thin stripe against light relaxes the pressure.



Eye contact Dark eyes hold their own against the green for two reasons: 1) they're dark, and 2) they're eyes. The softest and simplest of the ads, name aligns with baby's eyes, making a very strong focal center. Text is baby-soft color, a mere breath punctuated by the green logo.





Think gravity Heaviest color on the page belongs at the bottom like a foundation stone; BIG Brighton name in a light tint anchors the message (a desirable impression) without dominating. Baby and adjacent field (it's her hair color) just float.



Now look at all five ads together . . .

They're consistent:

- The ads use only the baby's colors and Brighton green. No colors have been added "for effect"
- The Brighton name and logo always appear in green or as white on green
- Because they're color opposite, the Brighton name and logo are always highly visible, yet don't dominate the space (okay, once)

They're diverse:

- Every layout is different
- Every color scheme is different

They work as a group

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