



PREPRESS TWO CENTS: Spot Color Swatches vs. CMYK Swatches

OR: A swatch is a swatch is a swatch...isn't it?

Who would have thought something as small as a color swatch could cause such big problems? Page layout and illustration programs are full of color swatch libraries and with all those lovely choices built in, everything that's available should be up for grabs, right? Well...not really. So here we are again, delving into the exciting world of printing details.

Spot Color Inks and Swatches:

True spot color inks are mixed at the factory, often using special additives which make it possible to create colors that are not reproducible in CMYK. Most of us realize this is true for metallic or pastel inks, but many people *don't* realize it's also true for many of the other color choices as well.

This isn't a problem if you plan to actually print your job using a factory-produced spot color ink. If, however, your job will be printed CMYK only, there's a good chance that some of your spot colors aren't going to look the way you had hoped.

For example, particularly in blues and oranges, there are colors that look completely different in their CMYK equivalents. Companies that use these colors in their logos, for instance, will often find it necessary to use CMYK *plus* spot color printing in order to keep their color consistent and accurate on all printed pieces.

In your document you can tell if you've created a spot color or imported one by looking at the swatch or color window. To the right of the color name there's usually a little box that has a dot or "spot" in the middle that indicates the color was chosen as a spot color ink.

Choosing the Correct Color:

So, how do you select the right color to begin with? First and foremost, trust the paper, not your screen, when choosing a color. By paper we mean an ink book.

Pantone ink books are readily available and can be invaluable when designing. The "Color Bridge" guides (either coated or uncoated) can be one

of the most useful since these books show each spot color ink and its CMYK equivalent. Once you've found the desired color in the Pantone book, be sure to select the same color from the appropriate swatch library in your program.

Building a Color from Scratch:

What if the color you want isn't in the Pantone process libraries? Is it ok to use one of the other libraries? Probably not. Some of the other libraries are designed specifically for use in Europe or Japan. Others are meant for 6-ink (Hexachrome) printing systems. Selecting one of these will put you in the same boat as choosing a spot color ink that has no CMYK equivalent.

So what should you do? Is it ok to find the closest spot color and then adjust the values until you get the color you like? The answer to this question is a definite "**no**".

Why not? Let's say you choose spot color Pantone 219, which is a dark pink. Let's also say you want it to look more orange, so with the color swatch open, you adjust the yellow slider from 0 to 25. But when you get your high quality color proofs back, that beautiful pinkish/orange is back to being just dark pink? What happened?

Since your job is printing without spot colors, when the file was ripped, the program was instructed to convert all spot colors to their CMYK equivalents. In order to do this, the program refers to its built in color swatch library information.

The built in library shows that the percentage of yellow in Pantone 219 is 0%, so that's how the color is converted.

In order to be sure you'll get exactly what you intended, create an all-new color swatch rather than manually overriding the settings for a preset spot color. Be sure the new swatch has its own name and is NOT designated as a spot color.

As always, if you have questions about your specific project, please feel free to contact us.