



Control Your Own Product Aspirations Buy for results, not for personal gratification

CONTROL YOURSELF: It is common for people who influence product selection to make a basic mistake. They confuse their personal taste with the preferences of their target group. Sure, you may never carry a tote bag, or you may hate desk calendars or you may not use a coffee mug. Even though you might not value those products, they might be *exactly* the ones that accomplish your organization's marketing or fundraising goals. Conversely, just because you love fountain pens, collect pewter miniatures and wear sun visors doesn't mean those products will appeal to your market. Leave your own preferences at the door; don't personalize product selection by imposing your own tastes. That's a beginner's mistake.

Here is the rule: *Whether you like the product or not is almost immaterial compared to whether the intended end-user likes it...and values it...and uses it...AND makes a favorable association between the product and your organization.*

Case In Point: Some years ago we were introducing a T-shirt with a new program logo to the audience of one of NPR's most beloved programs. The host of this program is one of our favorite business associates, a long-time friend who we never thought would give us unnecessary grief. As production was about to begin his personal preference intruded. The broadcaster decided to change the T-shirt color to yellow.¹

Understand that VisABILITY doesn't create market tendencies. But we do track them carefully and report them to clients. We also have access to HANES research that backed our own observations. So we were on solid ground when we explained that yellow will turn away part of the market. Here are the reasons we gave our friend:

- Many women avoid yellow, believing it doesn't harmonize with their skin tones.
- Somehow a number of men decided yellow is a feminine color; they'll reject the yellow T-shirt.
- We are the ones who invest in inventory. To us it is particularly persuasive that, since we take the financial risk, we should make product color decisions.
- Another pretty good reason – *our friend is color blind!* In a perfect world he would stick with broadcasting and we would handle matters of color for his program's products.
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Despite these arguments he couldn't control the urge to impose his own personal preference. He insisted the shirt be yellow. So we cut back on the production run and offered the new logo on a yellow T-shirt to stations. Six months later – after they failed to sell – he relented. *We then went back to Plan A and reintroduced the logo on a T-shirt of the color we originally intended. Public radio stations purchased thousands. It was no longer a dead investment – in the right color, everybody benefited: stations, their contributors, the program and VisABILITY.*

We mention that example because of the amusing irony that he who insisted on his color preference is also color blind. But in one way or another this mistake happens consistently. Closets of nonprofits across the nation are filled with leftover imprinted products that were selected because they appealed to an official of the organization. The point that you MUST keep in mind: *whether or not you like the product is of little significance compared to whether the end-user will like it. Don't bully the process by imposing your personal preference. Instead, think only about what your target group might like to own and use – embellished with your logo, of course.*

¹ - If you listen to public radio, you know this guy and probably love him as much as we do. Nevertheless, as this incident shows, even a beloved national figure can sometimes be a pain in the neck.