

This month I'm discussing spot colors.

The issue for the past fifteen years with spot colors is that the the conversions from one color model to another in terms of spot colors has changed on a regular basis. Again we are discussing the pre-output side of the equation even though we will need to pop into the output side a bit. Now at last it seems that the publishers of the main two sign software companies synchronized about a year or two ago. Pantone always controlled the specification for the conversion of their colors, first CMYK, RGB and now in my opinion the best choice LAB. Adobe and Corel bounced in front then behind each other as the release cycles of their software coincided with the changes in the specifications.

Let me say this as a file creator and output provider I needed to make a choice as to where the conversion from spot color to the media profile or to another color model was going to take place. We produce a good deal of wide format but buy all of the grand format so controlling the process was a serious issue. Do we convert in the application or in the RIP? The problem with RIP conversions is that we do not control all the RIPs we send files to, also even if we do control all the RIPs there are some that we do not wish to continue to upgrade so the spot color LUTs (look up tables) do not get updated for that device. What this means is that different devices covert spot color differently, this happens all the time with devices out of your control.

I saw this issue over a decade ago and always converted the spot colors to RGB or CMYK in the creation application, capture A shows the fill dialog from CorelDRAW X7 notice the fill display is split into two showing the spot color and the converted color, this feature has been available since I believe version four which made CorelDRAW the only choice for the process. For me working in cross color models in Adobe products has been a challenge that I have never been equal to.

Now that LAB has been selected I believe there will be no more changes to the conversion specifications so for the most part a straight conversion from any application that supports the LAB spot color conversion specification will be the same. With that said I still do some manually in CorelDRAW as it produce better results on the printer for some colors.

A word about the LAB color model for conversions of spot colors, L, Lightness, A, (red green components) B, (yellow blue components). In short it's a theoretical three dimensional color space used as a connection space for converting colors from one model or color space to another, it's also used as a color model in image editing and is very useful. Again in short converting a spot color to the LAB color model then converting to RGB or CMYK can in many case produce a better conversion. LAB as a connection space has been around since the beginning of computer color and I believe now that its the standard results in a stable conversion process for the end user in terms of spot color conversion.

To sum up spot color conversions the user needs to decide, convert in the application or in the RIP. Even then if the end user is critical you may need to create specific color builds that are not standard to use in your application or in the RIP. This does not mean that what the end user wants is correct color, it just means that they want what they expect and since they pay the bill this is ok as long as they pay your fee.

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