

ColorProse™

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Communicating Color Expertise To Color Professionals Worldwide

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The Seven Characteristics of a Great Color Standard

Over the past several years, the "color pro's" at Archroma have accumulated a vast amount of information about the use (and yes, occasionally, the misuse) of color standards in the textile and apparel supply webs.

Tremendous energy and effort are being channeled into developing and optimizing color systems and global color management organizations. But regardless of where a retailer or brand owner is in developing their company's color management structure, one all-important truth must be acknowledged and confronted before real progress can be made: No Color System Can Be Optimized Without Good Standards!

No matter how sophisticated the organization or how technically advanced the methods and instrumentation, if the color standards are not reliable, you simply transmit bad information very effectively.

At Archroma Global Services, our fundamental objective is to help retailers and brand owners co-manage their color standards to achieve faster, easier, smarter delivery of the right colors at the right times.

Great color standards, like Engineered Color Standards™ from Archroma, have several important characteristics:

1. They are ENGINEERED.

Engineering means the color standards do more than merely occupy a point in colorspace. They are created with dyes that meet the retailer's or brand owner's require-

ments for global availability and performance. Although the physical standard may prescribe the color on cotton using a particular process, with an engineered standard, there is also a process to scientifically and dependably confirm that reliable dye formulations meeting the retailer's/ brand owner's requirements are available on other substrates, polyester and nylon for example, that may be important.

2. They are CERTIFIED.

Every standard that Archroma inventories for distribution is spectrophotometrically certified to be within a stringent tolerance range compared with a master, digital standard. The tolerance brackets may vary from retailer to retailer, but guaranteeing that all standards fall within close tolerance eliminates much of the variation from multiple suppliers for a single color or garment. As unbelievable as it may seem, we have seen examples of competitive "standards" for the same shade as much as 3.5 CMC DE apart...no wonder things don't match at retail!!



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3. Where necessary, they are **CONDITIONED.**

It's unfortunately characteristic of the chemistry of some dyes and pigments that their dyed shade changes with different temperatures and humidities. At Archroma we strive to meet the requirements of the retailer or brand owner without using sensitive dyes, but sometimes that is impractical or impossible. It's important to know how a physical standard might react to surrounding conditions, and it's very important that shades be conditioned to standard temperature and humidity before a digital standard (31-point reflectance data) is established.

4. Great standards are **CENTRALIZED and CONSISTENT.**

With the tight color tolerances required by today's fashion industry, it's extremely important that all suppliers in the retailer's or brand owner's system use the same standard. Leading-edge color organizations will move rapidly into digital color communication over the next few years. This shift will occur because it allows better management and central control of color standards. Archroma Global Services' just introduced MatchWizard™ Communicator, a Web-enabled software program that is designed specifically to help global color organizations achieve this and other objectives. *(See box, this page.)*

One of the biggest drivers for decentralizing color standards is a long-standing industry practice, still active in some circles, of declaring a supplier's approved lab or mill submit as the "working standard" for that particular dyehouse or supplier. Though this may have worked in the days when one dyehouse or fabric supplier generally was relied on to meet all requirements, in today's world of multiple suppliers for a single requirement, this practice virtually guarantees non-uniformity on the retail shelf...and unhappy customers at retail.

You can download a demonstration version of Communicator at www.matchwizard.net. This version has all the functionality of the fully licensed version except the ability to connect to a spectrophotometer or to Web folders. It does provide, however, an excellent "inside look" at the imminent future of global color communication.

5. Great standards are available in **DIGITAL and PHYSICAL formats.**

Supply chains are rapidly moving to digital communication of standards, submits and approvals. It's time to grow in experience and confidence with 31-point reflectance information as a digital standard.

6. Great standards are the **RIGHT SIZE!**

Standards should be large enough to present in the way specified by the retailer or brand owner to a spectrophotometer. More importantly, they should be large enough to be properly viewed by a mill dyer or color manager. We are all acutely aware of the metamerism between standard and submit that is caused by different light sources when different dye combinations are used for standard and submit. Metamerism can also be a result of the field of view. Large colored samples simply look different from small colored samples. Practically speaking, if the colored standard is small enough, it becomes impossible to match effectively. One of the most harmful industry practices we see is the persistent practice of cutting standards into smaller and smaller pieces for distribution through the supply chain.

7. Great standards are **EASILY DISTRIBUTED.**

For digital standards, Archroma's new MatchWizard™ Communicator is the perfect answer to faster, easier, newer, better, smarter standards distribution. For physical standards, Archroma works closely with retailers to co-manage a secure, reliable Web-based distribution system at www.myarchroma.com.