



Gary Brown, (front), Ken Hatterick (center) and Dennis Smith of Beck Atlanta study color targets, keeping brand intent foremost in mind.  
Photo: Beck Atlanta

# Brand Intent—A New Perspective

## Beck Atlanta Utilizes Technology, Enhances, Beauty, Maintains Consistency; Delivers Measurable Results

By Mark Samworth

While beauty is in the eyes of the beholder, when it comes to packaging, beauty is also big business. If a package is not powerful enough to draw the consumer's attention, or attractive enough to resonate with the customer's feelings, it is unlikely to be successful. This is why packaging designers have a strong influence on the beauty and the success of the brand.

"Beauty is what we make of it," says Beck Atlanta President Kent Hatterick. "As an industry, it's our responsibility to

safeguard a brand's beauty. Beauty is not accidental. It is intended."

For more than 100 years, Beck, an FTA member, has been leveraging the power of beauty to drive business. Team members consider themselves a boutique B2B company providing graphic files for print reproduction that enables consistently beautiful imagery on-shelf, outdoors and at the point of sale. Beck customers desire to meet the highest quality color reproduction needs to help make the brand "pop" consistently.

Over the years, Beck has developed a compact, condensed, coordinated graphic workflow that reduces steps and maintains consistency. Staff refer to it as "The Beck Advantage." The compression process shortens cycle times, raises quality and provides significant improvements in speed to market. With this, the firm works to create beauty throughout the entire color process and across all mediums.

The team of proactive, consultative thinkers shares a deep passion for its clients' brands as portrayed in beautiful packaging. "We're fanatically committed to enhancing brand images better than anyone else," says Dennis Smith, Beck executive vice president and COO. Yet Smith is quick to point

### PIONEERS & INNOVATORS

- Impose fewer rules
- Design for the brand, rather than for flexo
- Ensure maximum optimization of design intent
- Articulate process from the client's and converter's perspectives
- Manage color from concept to shelf
- Leverage innovative technology to lower costs and provide repeatable, consistent results

out that everyone in the industry can approach business this way—and similar processes can benefit everyone.

## LIMIT THE RULES

Brand owners invest a lot of money in focus groups to make sure they connect with a package. When they see how it can die through the printing process, it can be disappointing. Often they discover that they do not get the same impact due to the loss of color intensity and the intent of the reproduction process—or were just limited by the technology.

“How can any of us make people more creative? That’s a difficult question,” says Gary Brown, vice president and process consultant. “But, we all know how to make people less creative. Just impose more rules. So, when we are asked how to make people more creative, we just impose fewer rules. That will free designers to focus all their attention into what they want to create for the brand.”

For the most part, the flexo community has found it necessary to teach designers to design to flexo. Historically this has included, among other factors:

- The number and specific set of colors that a designer can work with
- The inability to fade vignettes to zero
- The reluctance to create drop shadows
- The inability to blend colors in vignettes, shades and textures

Beck considers that backward. What the industry has needed to do is introduce technology to let designers design for the brand, rather than for flexo.

Its approach begins with understanding what kind of end result is expected from its clients. The team tries to define and quantify what beauty is. It measures the difference between the artwork that is sent in and what is finally delivered—what the printer ultimately reproduces.

Beck’s enhancement is the intent to ensure that beauty or maximum optimization of design intent is not lost. It attempts to intensify what is technically feasible to visually connect to the brand. If, with color, definition and vibrancy, it can enhance what is possible to be reproduced, allowing clients’ packaging to be different than everything else on shelves, it has done its job.

“The better you understand the process, the more you are able to expand the enhancements,” explains Jeff Hall, quality and color process manager. “We use the process to limit the number of rigid rules. Our process allows designers and printers to expand the opportunity for great packaging.”

For example, by utilizing expertise in Expanded Color Gamut (ECG) separation with state-of-the-art expanded gamut prepress software, Beck is able to free designers from the restriction that the number of colors used must not exceed the number of ink decks on the printing press.

ECG has allowed Beck to tell designers to use virtually any number of colors. Designers can narrow in to what they are looking for in terms of color intent. They’re no longer designing large billboards of spot colors. Their packaging can be more organic in nature, fading in and out of colors. This type

of design allows a package to emote more of a feeling than an advertisement.

“The goal is to completely free the designer,” says Mark Causey, director of color technologies. “We’re not 100 percent there, but, by using this process and technology, we’re closer than a few years ago.”

## PRINTER & COLOR PARTNER

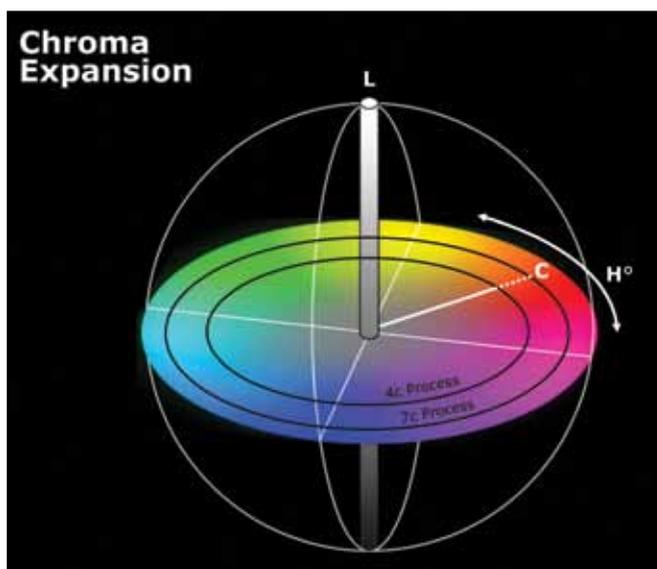
While Beck’s mission is to help brand owners make an emotional connection to the consumer. Beck’s strategy is to introduce technologies to tear down the rules, or the limits of the rules.

With all of this attention to the brand owner, it is significant to remember that Beck is a staunch advocate for the printer. According to Beck, it is a partnership between the brand owner, Beck and the print supply chain—using advanced technology—where everyone wins. They can be successful with the brand owners but, if they do not get “buy-in” from each stakeholder on the parameters to achieve the design, they will never get the desired end product.

Beck realizes it must give printers the tools to understand technologies like high-definition flexo. Its staff works with printers to improve the processes to adapt to this new evolution of design.

“It truly is a consultative partnership. We often encounter resistance and uncertainty from printers when introducing them to our process, technology and methodologies. However, once they live it, it’s an easy sell. We know that the printer must ‘win’ as well,” says Hall. “We spend a lot of time making the printer feel comfortable about the process.”

Beck outlines to the printer the key performance factors that will be needed to achieve success, such as fades to zero and consistent, impactful solids. Then the two work together to determine how to accomplish the job, with technologies like ECG and high-definition flexo. The team finds when



**Figure 1:** Printing with seven colors increases the color gamut about 70 percent over 4-color process. Beck Atlanta attests that with the larger gamut it achieves greater stability, with a nicer, cleaner, higher chroma image.

they suggest an ECG process, people are uneasy at first. They are concerned Beck will be unable to create accurate separations without press tests and trials—and they are not necessarily comfortable with proof-to-press matches due to negative experiences in the past.

Beck walks printers through its workflow and explains how the technology it uses will help alleviate their concerns. Printers fret over dirty print in the highlights. Beck explains how it uses high-definition flexo and new plating technologies:

- MicroCell screening strategies offer a more consistent, clean sheet on wide web
- Plates, themselves, have improved
- With proofing, Beck has developed a process to get to color data—including linearization, fingerprint and confirmation

As expected, proofing plays an enormous part in the process. A good amount of testing and fingerprinting is conducted upfront to understand color gamut and how the printer is printing. It's done so by the time they get on press and reach their correct densities, they "are there."

"If you can show a customer a proof of what they expect, then compare it to the printed result and show that it actually matches, the credibility of what we offer is enormous with printers," says Causey. "I do not like press trials to get to color. I prefer to gather as much information in the fingerprinting process and let our proofs set the expectation. Then, when printers run their first press trial, they are excited.

Communication is key. Beck articulates the process from the client's and converter's perspectives. It explains in advance what everyone will be seeing each step of the way, setting expectations upfront and detailing what it can guarantee. Once the brand owner sees better than expected results compared to past experience, that's when everyone wins.

It's crucial to manage color from concept all the way to the shelf. According to Beck, great looking TIFFS are useful, but if

the process, as a whole, is not managed, the desired results will never come. It is vital to manage the color downstream on every pressrun.

When done right, print quality and productivity are improved. "We can help reduce press setup and downtime when changing from job to job," adds Brown. "Brand owners are changing the way they market to the consumer and it is forcing a change in the print industry. Long runs are less frequent than in the past. There are lots of short runs due to specialty designs created by the brand owner to keep the consumers' attention. There are many design changes."

### ENABLING & FACILITATING CREATIVITY

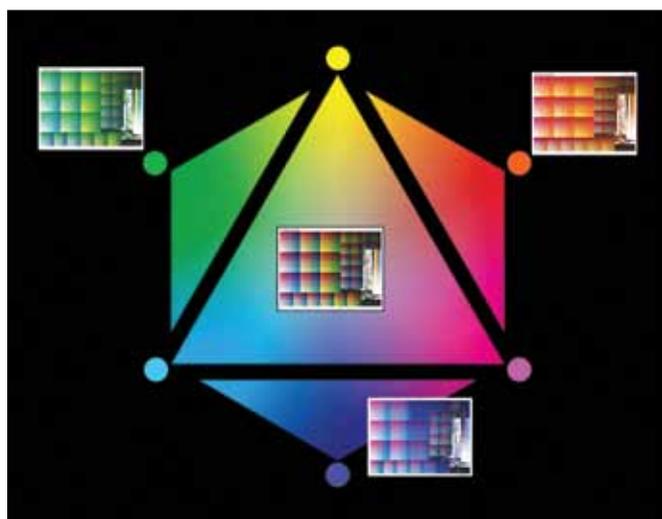
If the ultimate objective is to eliminate flexo rules to free the designer to focus on creativity—while offering each printer the tools to make it happen, cost effectively—there needs to be technologies in place to make this happen.

Beck has been able to weave many new prepress technologies to help eliminate flexo rules and, in the process, help to reproduce brand intent. Two of the technologies that have made a very significant impact to the Beck process and reaching brand goals are ECG (or multi-color printing) and high-definition flexo. With these technologies, screens are able to fade to zero and designers have an almost infinite number of colors to work with.

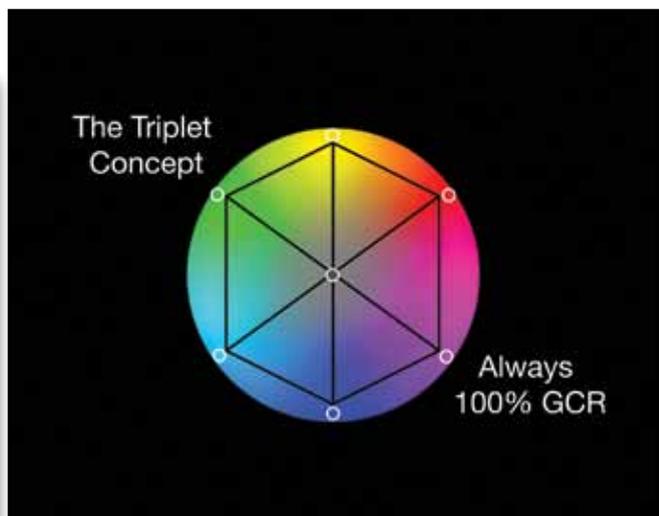
"Color is the core of what we do," notes Hall. "If you do not have a measurable color management process to help converters stay on track, you are not going to reproduce print on a consistent basis."

### EXTENDING TONAL RANGE

In the past couple of years, the technology that manages multi-color printing to provide ECG has been considerably enriched. It is more economical and images look better than ever.



**Figure 2:** In 7-color printing—adding orange, green and violet to CMYK—colors are cleaner. It's the Triplet Concept. Looking at a hue wheel, every color influences only one-third of the hues. For example, cyan influences 100 percent of the colors in a CMYK model, but only 33 percent of the color when you add OGV.



**Figure 3:** The Triplet Concept applies to spot colors, as well as images. A Pantone 185 red, for example, is far more stable when built with orange and magenta than with yellow and magenta, because orange is closer to Pantone 185 than yellow is. It used to be common belief that there was no benefit to printing with seven colors to match a 4-color image. Now it is proven that printing with seven colors is more stable.

While it is certainly true that printing with CMYK will cover a reasonable gamut, printing with seven colors extends it considerably more. What printers realize quickly is that while certain tint builds will not perfectly match all Pantone colors, they do become their own color standards.

When they show these standards to a customer, while assuring that they can always match those colors, the entire process is more stable. While they may not be able to match a Pantone 186 red by mixing an ink, the printer and the designer can agree that their tint build to that color will always be very close—and always, consistently, the same. The reason is quite simple. The printer is using the same inks and tooling on every job. If the designer knows that upfront, there is no problem. The printer is not blending inks in a kitchen before every new job—which has its own variations—nor is the printer mixing and matching different aniloxes or chemistries. Even press settings can remain the same with ECG printing.

Most printers will assert that they are more consistent with ECG printing than with either 4-color process or with spot colors. They can also get to color faster on the press.

Printing with seven colors increases the color gamut about 70 percent over 4-color process (see Figure 1.) Beck Atlanta attests that with the larger gamut it achieves greater stability, with a nicer, cleaner, higher chroma image.

In 7-color printing, adding orange, green and violet to CMYK, colors are cleaner (see Figure 2). This is the Triplet Concept. Looking at a hue wheel, you can see that every color influences only one-third of the hues.

For example, cyan influences 100 percent of the colors in a CMYK model, but only 33 percent of the color when you add OGV. Cyan drops out of two-thirds of the color space.

This means that colors that get dirty or muddy, such as oranges and reds, remain clean. The Triplet Concept (seen in Figure 3) applies to spot colors as well as images. A Pantone 185 red, for example, is far more stable when built with orange and magenta than with

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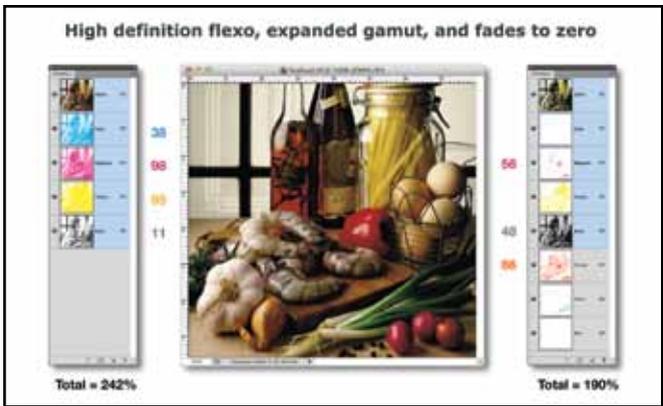
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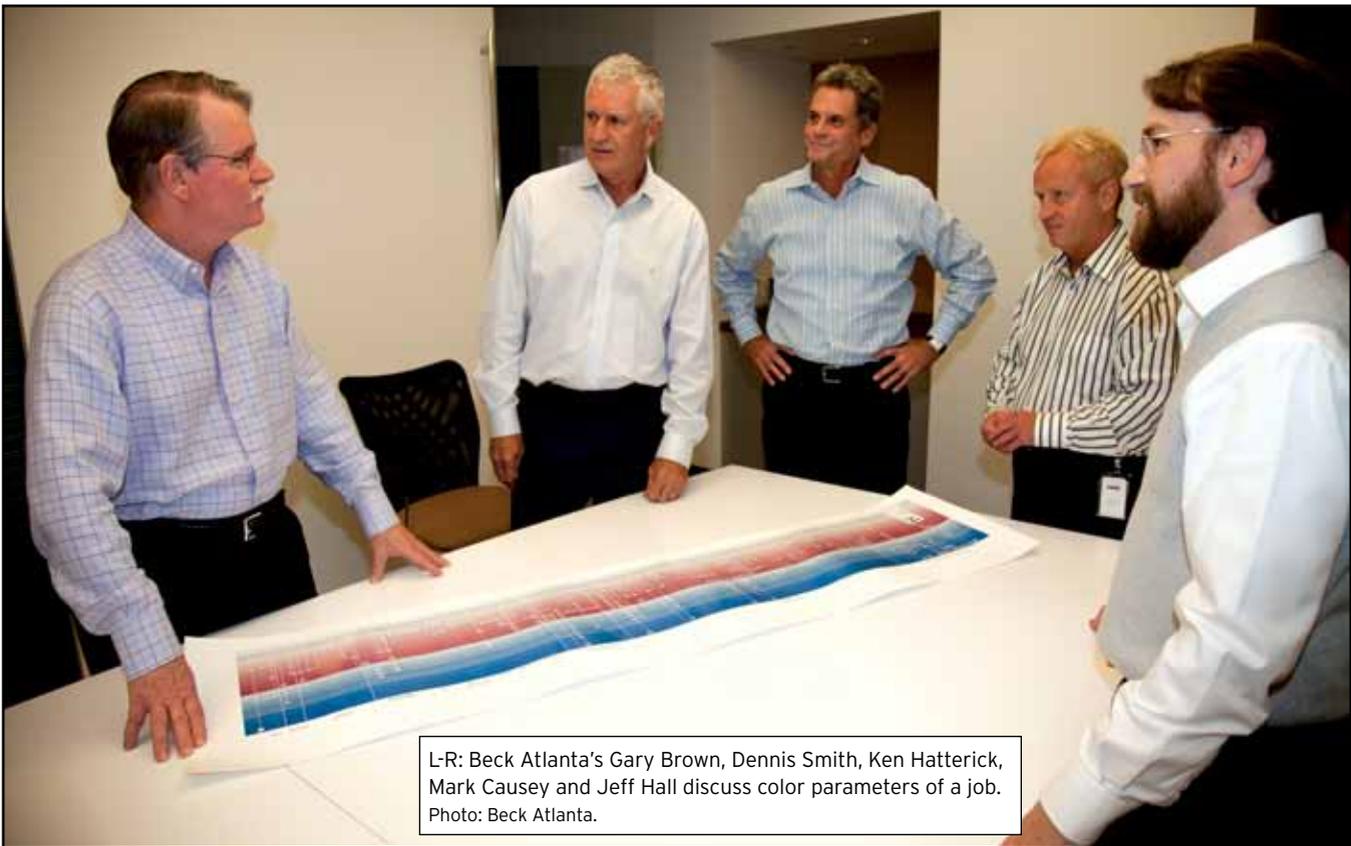
yellow and magenta, because orange is closer to Pantone 185 than yellow is.

It used to be common belief that there was no benefit to printing with seven colors to match a 4-color image. Now, it is proven that printing with seven colors is more stable.

The second note is that it costs more to print an image with four colors than with seven colors, when the press is set up that way, completely, on a daily basis. You can see, from *Figure 4*, that 22 percent less ink is used to match the image, because less ink colors are needed to create each tonal build.



**Figure 4:** With ECG printing, 22 percent less ink is used to match the image since fewer ink colors are needed to create each tonal build. Printers are impressed with the economics in the pressroom with a fixed ECG ink set. With a fixed ink set, makereadies are faster and a printer can run multiple products in the same run—and get better quality along with extended chroma.



L-R: Beck Atlanta's Gary Brown, Dennis Smith, Ken Hatterrick, Mark Causey and Jeff Hall discuss color parameters of a job. Photo: Beck Atlanta.

Printers are impressed with the economics in the pressroom with a fixed ECG ink set. There is not as much ink used, units are not swapped with different inks and makereadies are faster. In addition, while there could only be one product per pressrun, due to specific spot color requirements, with a fixed ink set, a printer can run multiple products in the same run—and get better quality along with extended chroma.

### OPTIONS = OPPORTUNITIES

Much of the ECG is due to high-definition flexo technology. By providing a fade to zero, high-definition flexo offers an extended option of colors that were previously not available, by the nuanced tones that are now reproduced in the highlights and the shadows.

The ability to produce smoother tints also allows the art director to work more comfortably with design components, such as vignettes and drop shadows—something extremely difficult to reproduce just a few years ago.

Advances in high-definition flexo provide both better solids and better highlights. The advantages of round-top and flat-top dots are better understood today than ever before. In general, round-top dots provide better highlights, while flat-top dots provide better solids.

New plate imaging technologies, which incorporate the plate exposure source in the computer-to-plate device enable plates to have round-top dots in highlights and flat-top dots in shadows—providing the best of both technologies in the same plate.

So, ultimately, there are lighter highlights, stronger solids and the ability to extend the 7-color gamut even further—but with the stability that printers require.

### CREATIVE ENGINEERING

Beck is keen to the experience of the process. Everyone involved in the supply chain process needs to have a good experience. The brand owner is creatively limited when told that something is not possible and the printer does not want to be pushed into a process that it is uncomfortable with.

By using a process intertwined by great engineering and enabling technologies, Beck can offer a good

clean process and experience, where everyone feels good about his/her contributions and connection to a project. Meanwhile, innovative technology is leveraged to lower costs and to provide a repeatable, consistent result.

With this, Beck is able to deliver the client's brand beautifully, safely, and realized—every time and in every medium. The process is perfect from the start, issues are prevented before they even manifest themselves and the right people do the right things in the appropriate sequence. Finally, the approach uniquely provides relevant data to measure performance.

It's a process that does actually have a limit: It limits the rules that designers must subscribe to. By doing that, a package's beauty is able to shine through.

"Beauty enhances the pleasing qualities of products. When we do our job, our clients see their displays pull consumers in. Packaging jumps off the shelf," says Smith. "They are able to

create designs that intrigue and advertising that compels, helping business to thrive." ■

*About the Author: Mark Samworth, a member of FTA's Hall of Fame, frequent speaker at FTA Forums and perennial contributor to FLEXO, is a color specialist at Esko. He began his career at DuPont, where he held numerous positions in the areas of flexo plates and electronic imaging. Mark joined EskoArtwork in 1997 and has been actively consulting in screening, calibration, G7, color management and expanded gamut printing. He holds 10 patents in digital imaging, including: FlexoCal, Hybrid Screening, Plate Cell Patterning, Concentric Screening, Equinox expanded gamut technology and PressSync.*

*Mark received his Bachelor's in Printing Science from Rochester Institute of Technology and his Master's in Business Administration from the University of Delaware.*