

## Guilty by Association: The Colors of Christmas (and Other Holidays)

By Ken Carbone Wed Dec 23, 2009 at 2:12 PM

Banished to the fringes of the spectrum are innocent color combinations that are doomed forever to be associated with holidays. This time of year the world is awash in red and green signaling the spirit of Christmas, good will toward men and mass hysteria at the mall.



When it comes to design and branding, red and green are categorically rejected by clients unless the company is a global pizza conglomerate.

Present these colors with deep strategic rationale and conviction and a CEO's reaction remains swift and direct: "Too Christmasy." At times I've tried some presentation sleight-of-hand by introducing these colors as "wine and pine." No good.

The association with a poinsettia plant and industrious elves is so strong that red and green get their due for only weeks a year.

Red and green are not alone in their plight. With the help of Autodesk's Sketchbook Mobile on my iPhone, I've created the following digital paintings in Abstract Expressionistic style to present a line up of usual suspects that share a similar fate. Which holidays do you associate with these colors?





Can you see now why the choice of a distinctive brand color takes great corporate courage and vision? Brown and gold for UPS, robin's egg blue and white for Tiffany and yellow and black for Livestrong stand apart.

Navy blue, the flag of conservatism, is the safe bet for thousand of corporations.

Red? Sorry Coke, Target and Virgin, no one in this brand-saturated world owns red.

Except maybe Christmas.

Happy Holidays!

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*Ken Carbone is among America's most respected graphic designers, whose work is renowned for its clarity and intelligence. He has built an international reputation creating outstanding programs for world-class clients, including Tiffany & Co., WL Gore, Herman Miller, PBS, Christie's, Nonesuch Records, the W Hotel Group, and The Taubman Company. His clients also include celebrated cultural institutions such as the Musée du Louvre, The Museum of Modern Art, The Pierpont Morgan Library, The Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and the High Museum of Art.*

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