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## PPG unveils new color palette to coincide with the economy's optimistic outlook

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By Joyce Gannon, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Shopping for a new cell phone or computer?

Shades of silver, chrome and black still dominate the shelves, but get ready for more gadgets in bright blue, orange, gold and yellow -- colors consumers are clamoring for as the economy begins to heat up.



At least that's the assessment of color design experts including some at **PPG Industries Inc.** who recently unveiled what they expect to be the hottest shades and textures for new products at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas.

"We're starting to see more color," said Kathy Willis, global color stylist, industrial coatings for the paint, glass and chemical giant. "People are starting to tire of silver as the economy picks up."

So don't be surprised if that portable DVD player or liquid-crystal display TV you're eyeing comes in a shade called "burnt orange," said Willis.

Consumers who feel more positive about spending are more willing to indulge in bolder colors -- especially for cutting-edge tech products such as handheld organizers, laptop computers and cell phones.

"We see a lot happening with yellows, blues and greens that are yellowed," said Allen Ferrell, a colors and trends

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John Beale, Post-Gazette

**George Heath, PPG director of marketing, Industrial Coatings, kneels with samples of new colors that are part of "TrendCast" for 2004. "Trendcast" is a guide for product designers looking for the hottest colors and textures for new consumer products.**  
**Click photo for larger image.**

everything being black and silver," said Ferrell.

PPG's Willis said product designers were turning to more orange, gold and yellow because they're "happy-go-lucky colors" that better reflect consumers' current mood.

She describes the shades featured inside new cars as "refreshing, buttery-type interiors."

Willis was on the team that developed PPG's 2004 TrendCast, a set of 200-plus colors and textures that it offers to product designers. To achieve special effects and textures -- such as a soft touch for a chrome-colored, hand-held organizer or a metallic feel for a cell phone -- PPG mixes additives into its coatings.

One of PPG's hottest textures right now is Velvetron, which gives chrome a warmer, liquid-like look.

PPG timed the unveiling of its new palette for the consumer show last month because, "Consumer electronics is more cutting edge and more trend-based than cars," said George Heath, director, marketing, industrial coatings.

Pittsburgh-based product and signage designer Bill Kolano concurred that color trends usually show up first in disposable consumer goods.

"You used to have one phone in the house for 20 years and it was black. So now you have a cell phone for maybe a year so you can change the color and the sky's the limit."

The same attitude toward color applies for computers, Kolano said, because technology changes so quickly that consumers replace them every couple of years. "People used to buy a computer as a long-term investment and it was a serious piece of the office furniture. Now it's looked at as a two-year investment so we can have more fun with it. We can have purple."

Yellow and related shades are popular now because designers see them as an antidote to the stress of war and the sagging economy of the last couple of years, Kolano said. Yellow also reflects "a trend toward nesting and traditional values." Color is one of the cheapest ways to make a product appear new and fresh to consumers, said Color Marketing Group's Ferrell.

Take the popular George Foreman grill and Pepperidge Farm's Goldfish crackers, a

manager for a Colorado-based outdoor furnishings and equipment company. Ferrell also is president of Color Marketing Group, a national association that makes annual color forecasts.

"I'm talking to you on a red, metallic phone that I bought in the last six months because I was tired of

snack that's been around for years. Simply by making the grill and the crackers available in a variety of bright colors, the manufacturers boosted sales and expanded their shelf space and visibility in stores, said Ferrell.

That's why PPG works so hard to develop an array of trendy shades for product designers to choose from, said Heath.

"With coatings, you don't have to change the whole manufacturing process. You add [the color] in." Coatings are PPG's biggest business, generating \$4.8 billion of its \$8.8 billion in sales last year. It's best known for automotive coatings and the consumer line that includes Olympic and Pittsburgh Paints.

But more than half its coatings are used to finish consumer products that range from Whirlpool washing machines to Dell computers and Harley motorcycles, said Heath.

"You think of PPG as making glass for buildings, but we're on everything people make."

Product designers pay more attention to consumers' response to colors these days, Willis said, because designer brand conscious discount stores such as Target have made stylish goods available to a wider audience. Average consumers who in the past weren't necessarily aware of high-end trends in fashion and design also have more exposure to style through the Internet and home improvement TV shows.

"Consumers are a lot more savvy about what they want," said Willis.

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