

# Creating a colour blind friendly retail experience

## What is colour blindness?

We see colour through three types of cone cells in our eyes which absorb red, green and blue light. With colour vision deficiency (CVD) one type doesn't operate normally, meaning many different colours can appear the same. The common myth that colour blind people only confuse red and green is exactly that – a myth!

For example, blue and purple are a very common colour confusion for most people with CVD, pastel colours often can't be seen (see images 2a & 2b) and many people can't tell the difference between red and black.

## Why is it an issue for retail?

Approximately 3 million people in the UK have some form of CVD and for people with no deficiency it can be hard to imagine the difficulties CVD can cause. Yet everyday shopping choices rely on colour when making decisions about potential purchases and this can be very challenging if differences between colours aren't obvious to the purchaser.

Often clothes and home furnishings either aren't labelled with their colour or confusing names are used such as 'coral', 'stone', 'volt' or 'fuchsia'. When shopping, people with CVD aren't looking for a certain shade to go with an existing item but instead a defined colour that they are assured will work.

They

- need to be confident of colours when making an initial purchase AND once they get items home
- want to know what colour their clothes are even if they don't see them in the same way as most people
- may need to match a new purchase to other clothes/home furnishings

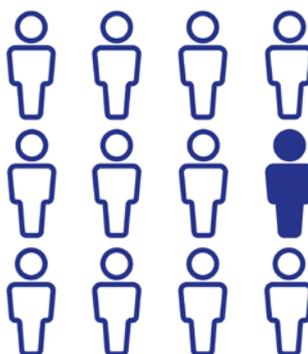
so knowing the actual colour of garments is essential.

If products don't provide clear colour information on (preferably an integral) label, people with CVD

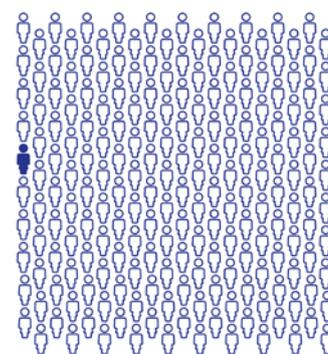
- are just guessing and probably won't buy, or they
- have to find a sales person, explain the problem (which many find embarrassing) and ask them the colour.

Colour blindness is one of the world's most common inherited conditions. Statistically, it affects:

1 IN 12 MEN



1 IN 200 WOMEN



Or, almost 5% of your potential customers!



1a: Normal colour vision



1b: Simulated CVD



2a: Normal colour vision



2b: Simulated CVD

Often there are no staff available or they may want to know the colour of many items which means constantly asking for help. These issues force colour blind people to shop online.

With around 3 million in the UK affected, a simple addition such as integrated colour labelling would make a substantial difference to up to 5% of your target market and potentially prevent you losing a sale to a competitor who does give this information on their website.

But it's not just about problems with colour labelling.

Food packaging is often badly designed e.g. nutritional information provided via a traffic light coding system, because people with CVD have to rely on text. If text is in black against a red background many can't read the text either. This can result in a lost sale or can even be dangerous in the case of allergen information.

Finding your way around a shopping centre or back to your car can also be problematic if maps and other wayfinding information is colour-coded. There may even be issues with emergency signage and equipment which could be 'invisible' to people with CVD – see Further Information below.

## What can you do to help?

### Retailers

As a first step consider if your colour blind customers can independently

- Read your fascia/see your logo/make sense of your merchandising layout
- Easily spot whether you have a sale on/easily see your sale item tickets (clue: red won't stand out but some other colours do)
- Distinguish between produce items e.g. red and green peppers or apples, or between ripe or unripe bananas
- Understand the simple colour hue of your products by looking at the label

Your own-label products can be easily 'fixed' and larger retailers can use their buying power to influence changes amongst external suppliers, even if they are large brands.



3a: Normal colour vision



3b: Simulated CVD



4a: Normal colour vision

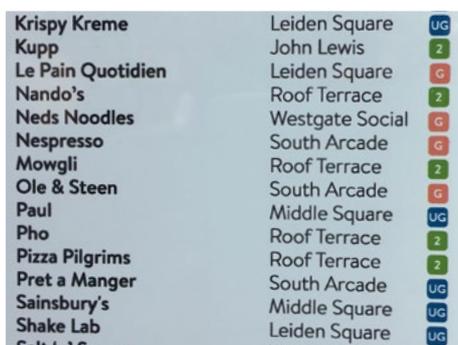


4b: Simulated CVD

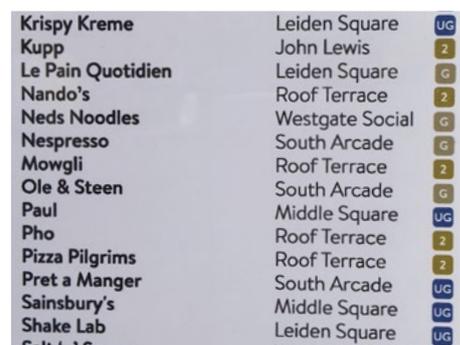
### Landlords

Landlords can make the shopping experience for those with colour blindness easier too.

- If your malls or car parks have colour names – red mall, green car park – do you also label all signage/wayfinding information with text/symbols?
- Coloured text on coloured backgrounds can be invisible to people with colour blindness - are your directory boards, whether physical or digital, accessible?
- Car parking – can people with colour blindness make sense of your ticket machines and signage, might they get confused by coloured lights indicating vacant or occupied spaces?
- Do you know whether your emergency signage is actually visible to people with colour blindness? Just meeting fire regulations does not mean that it is! See Further Information below.



5a: Normal colour vision



5b: Simulated CVD

A courtesy which would be greatly appreciated is to make sure your toilet door locks don't use red and green to denote occupied or vacant – a massive frustration to people with CVD!

## Further information

For further information visit <http://www.colourblindawareness.org/> and see Annex C of The Guide to Safety at Sports Grounds (<https://sgsa.org.uk/worked-examples-and-annexes/>) for information on how to make buildings and information accessible to people with CVD.