

PRESS CUTTINGS

Publication: Professional Photographer

Subject: Color Munki

Date: August 2008

TECHNICAL | X-RITE COLORMUNKI

X-Rite ColorMunki

Friendly, good looking, easy to use. Can the X-Rite ColorMunki Photo make colour management sexy?

WORDS & PICTURES Ian Farrell

THE THORNY TOPIC OF COLOUR management is only thorny because it is perceived as being difficult. To be honest, though, it's not difficult; it's complicated. The two are not the same. Manufacturers of imaging software and hardware know this, of course, and spend a great deal of time and effort developing ways of making colour management easier for photographers. Yet despite all their efforts, many still ignore colour management, possibly out of fear if nothing else.

x-rite has been in the colour management game for ages now. Its calibration devices for screens and printers used to be marketed under the Pantone

moniker – and there aren't many people who know more about colour than Pantone. In an effort to make colour management easier and slightly cooler and more sexy, we saw products like the Huey emerge onto the scene a few years back, followed by Huey 2. Coupled with some very user friendly software, this made the business of calibrating your screen a doddle. Other companies followed suit and, to be honest, if you don't now calibrate your screen in this way, you want a good slap!

The ColorMunki, then, is x-rite's attempt to bring the simplicity of the Huey to printer calibration as well as screen calibration. Most paper manufacturers

supply ICC profiles for their media that help software like Photoshop output an image as close to the version you see on screen as possible, but it's argued that you can get better results by profiling the media you use yourself, specifically to the printer you are using.

The ColorMunki is an all-in-one unit that can calibrate both screens and printers. It can also calibrate projectors and so is a great accessory for those in social portraiture who rely on swanky presentations of images to make a sale. Installing the necessary software is easy and while users may be initially put off by the lack of detail in the printed quick-start instruction manual, they should be



↑ The x-rite ColourMunki in action, hanging off our office iMac in its protective neoprene bag while measuring colour values.

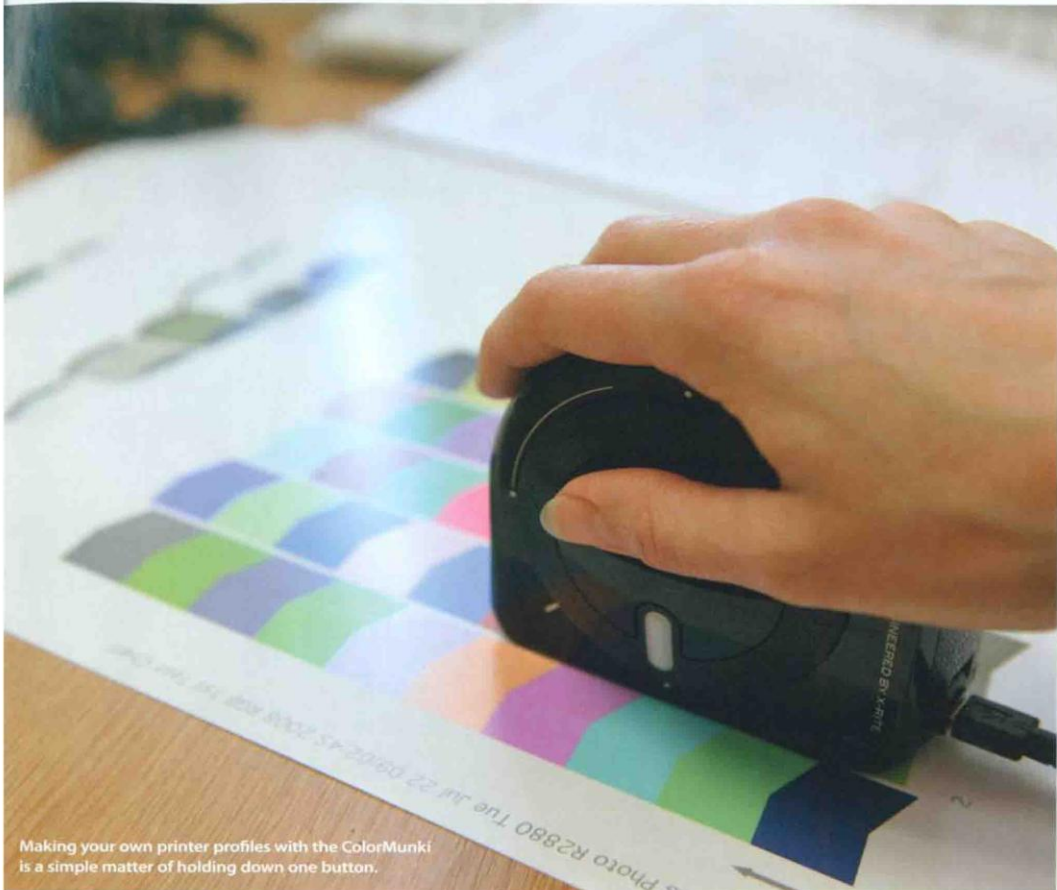
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Making your own printer profiles with the ColorMunki is a simple matter of holding down one button.

confident that the level of user-friendliness in the software itself is excellent. The interface guides you through exactly what needs to be done, and there are even video clips to explain things further if you don't get it first time. But you will.

We started out by calibrating the screen of our office test machine – a 20in Apple iMac. The software guides you through this process in an easy and logical way. Firstly, the ColorMunki itself must be calibrated, which is a case of turning the central control dial until the unit's sensor is pointing into a corner, where this is, no doubt, a colour standard which is looked at. Next it's time to measure the ambient light around you workstation. Do this by

turning the dial so the light sensor is on top of the ColourMunki and clicking the large, friendly Measure button.

To mount the unit on your screen it must be first put back into its neoprene carrying case, which protects your no-doubt expensive flat screen from scratches. The case's handle is weighted to stop the unit from sliding off the front of the screen. The first time you do this you'll think to yourself 'this is never going to work', but the reality is that it does – very well! The software measures contrast and brightness and asks you to adjust the screen's controls until these parameters fall into acceptable limits. Then it flashes up numerous colour patches and constructs a

monitor profile, giving you the chance to see what a difference this has made by switching the adjustment on and off.

One day my prints will come

Initially, and to the eye, the results of this calibration were good, with colours taking on a more natural appearance, especially skin tones. Using Epson's Stylus Pro 2880 [reviewed on page 100] with the supplied default profiles, we got great looking prints that were fairly accurate to the on-screen image. Certainly more so than before the calibration anyway. This is only half of what the ColorMunki can do, though. Making printer profiles of your own is what the next step is all about. ▶

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↑ Does this good-looking device have the potential to make colour management sexy?

Most printer profiling devices work in similar ways, although we have to say that the ColorMunki was easier than most we've used. First of all the software will print out a test chart of colours. It is recommended that this is left to dry for 10 minutes to make sure the hues are not changing subtly with time, and the software counts this down for you. Next the ColorMunki is dragged across each strip of colours with the Measure button held down. This is a much quicker way of doing things than individually measuring each colour patch for a few seconds, which is how some units work.

At the end of each strip the software tells you if it's measured OK or not, and you simply move onto the next column of colours. After this step the software prints a second chart to refine the responses it already has. Measure this in the same way and that's it – you have your printer profile which you can then select in the colour management options of your software, eg. Photoshop, Aperture, Lightroom. You'll need to repeat this process for each type of media you print on, and if you change any of the print settings.

At this point, we were quite pleased with the way everything was going with our ColorMunki, but sadly the good news was not to last.

Printing our sample images with the newly created profile yielded prints that were not as good as when we used Epson's standard profile. Muted colours often shifted so far as to become almost entirely different, while stronger colours became far too strong, sometimes burning out. We were convinced we had done something wrong, but after repeating the process with different papers and print settings we have to conclude the printer calibration side of the ColorMunki is definitely its weakest link.

It is possible to fine-tune a printer profile according to a specific image, which we also tried. This improved things a little, but the output still didn't measure up to that from Epson's own profile. Disappointing.

The less-than-stellar performance of the ColorMunki when creating print profiles leaves a slightly nasty taste in the mouth. After all it's a great-looking product, well designed and very easy to use. Its ability to calibrate screens is great, it's just the profiles for paper that are the problem, which means you might as well plump for a cheaper Huey 2 or i1 and use your manufacturer's own profiles. Opportunity missed. ■

Contact

www.xrite.com

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

Price: £375

Windows

Operating system: Vista SP 32 & 64 or Vista 32 & 64 with latest service pack

Processor: Intel Pentium 4, Intel Centrino, or Intel Core Duo, AMD Athlon XP or better

Minimum memory: 512MB RAM

Hard disk space: 300MB

Connections: Powered USB port, DVD-ROM, network card

Screen: 1024x768 or higher with 16-bit video card

Mac

Operating system: OSX 10.4, 10.5 with latest update

Processor: G4 or G5 with Intel processor

Minimum memory: 512MB RAM

Hard disk space: 300MB

Connections: DVD-ROM, network card

Hard disk space: 1024x768 or higher with 16-bit video card

SUMMARY

The ColorMunki doesn't quite bring complete colour management to the masses, largely thanks to its relatively weak performance generating print profiles. That's a real shame because this is a well-thought out and cleverly designed gadget that, in combination with its excellent software, makes colour calibration considerably less scary that it used to be.

The screen calibration side of the Munki's performance is spot on, though, and we hope x-rite can get things working better in the future.

Perhaps wait for ColorMunki version two – we'll get back to you then.

PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHER RATING

FEATURES	★★★★
HANDLING	★★★★★
PERFORMANCE	★★
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★
OVERALL	★★★★

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