

PRESS CUTTINGS

Publication: Think Camera reviews

Subject: Color Munki

Date: July 2008

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REVIEW

X-Rite ColorMunki Review

By Alan Sircom



Product Details

We clicked with:

- Useful profiler for printers, screens and projectors
- Can sample the outside world, too
- Elegant design

Shots in the dark:

- Price puts it between pro and amateur buyers
- Sampling button can get stuck
- Tweak-free profiles too basic for some

When it comes to colour management, photographers fall into three categories; here are those who couldn't care less, those who know profiling is beneficial but really can't be bothered and those who religiously tend to their equipment. In fairness, most of us fall into the first and second camps... it's often just the hardcore pros who take colour management seriously.

Part of the reason why people rarely apply colour management techniques in the home is the time and trouble spent getting the equipment profiled, and re-profiled every month or so. Traditionally, you needed different devices to profile a monitor and a printer, with the latter requiring a specialist colour patch chart that made the profiling process extremely time consuming. The ColorMunki changes all that; the same device - about the size of a really big tape measure used by builders - can be used to calibrate your monitor, printer, even a projector. And more besides.

ColorMunki allows you to accurately capture and input colours and even palettes of from the outside world and work them into Photoshop (be warned though, the centre click button on the sensor can easily get stuck, but can just as easily be dislodged). Think of this like paint matching at your local Homebase; you run the sensor over the colour you want to capture and it's done. All you have to do is turn a dial on the side of the ColorMunki to the relevant section. Unfortunately though, the device has no built in storage, so it needs to be tethered to a computer while capturing this colour. However, since X-Rite (the ColorMunki people) also own Pantone (the pro colour people), anything you scan in can be matched to the nearest commercial shade. You can also use this to draw out colours from your existing images in Adobe Lightroom, which is either surprisingly useful or absolutely pointless depending on your photographic needs (if you are building wedding albums for example, it allows you to colour co-ordinate your pages with more confidence).

In addition to making it possible to run round with the ColorMunki and a laptop, to find the perfect colour scheme for your living room, it allows you to get uber-accurate colour correction on your digital images, effectively profiling your camera in the process. Here's how... photograph a grey card, having taken a custom white balance reading. Now run the ColorMunki over the same grey card, import this into Photoshop and use it as a reference colour against that made by your camera. Applying those changes (made to bring the camera image into line with the ColorMunki image) to your regular photographs is a bit like profiling your camera.

You need to have an internet connection running when you first strike up the calibrator; it downloads the latest version of the software and that's a large (167MB for Macs) file. You then hook the ColorMunki to your computer via USB. There are some neat touches, though; the strap of the (curiously sandalwood-scented) stretchy carrying case is weighted, to counterbalance the device when hanging off a LCD screen, and the centre wheel of the ColorMunki itself is the one control - point it to one of the settings to go (a pity these have dots instead of logos, but style counts and the program tells you which setting to select).

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To calibrate a screen, you point the thing at a target on the computer screen, or run it along a printed target - simple! It will produce both colour and black and white palettes for calibration and the only issue is they do chew through a lot of ink. Naturally, a profile only works with one printer, one type of ink and one kind of paper; if you regularly swap paper stocks or switch from colour inks to dedicated blacks and whites, you need a profile for each change.

The calibration process itself is quick and almost wholly automated - the colour geeks who like to hack into their own profiles may find this a little too simplistic and, in fairness if you want to tweak your black & white profile to taste, the ColorMunki won't let you.

You should give a screen upwards of half an hour to settle down before calibration, but the profiling should be finished in about 15 minutes. If the screen is new, you should calibrate it every few weeks, but as it ages, it needs regular feeding to keep colour correct. Generally, compared to a by-eye calibration, the images will seem slightly dark and almost olive coloured. Calibrating a printer takes slightly longer than just the monitor and matching the two takes longer still. But it's worth the effort. Why? If you simply take the images straight out of the camera and print them, then no... the necessity to have a colour-managed screen and printer is not that vital at all. Most of us don't do that. Many of us shoot RAW and finish the photo on the computer. At this point suddenly that colour management becomes vitally important. ColorMunki shows a before and after image, by switching the profile on and off, while viewing an image:



If your screen is set too dark or too light, the temptation to 'fix' this image by tweaking the levels in Photoshop would be hard to resist. And it would be wrong. Also, if the colour of your monitor is off, you might tweak the colour balance to correct errors that may not be there in the first place. Worse, if the printer has no reference point to work with, the end result could be similarly out of true. If you are lucky, the alignment of the screen and printer happen to work together well... but do you really want to put your prints in the hands of lady luck so readily? ColorMunki takes the luck element out of the equation.

Colour management systems are not particularly new and there are cheaper calibrators than the ColorMunki. Few of those support as wide a range of products, though; you will not find a device that supports screens, printers, projectors and can scan colours in the real world at anything like this price. And that - plus the peace of mind colour correction offers - makes this a clever little Munki.

Our Verdict

Design	★★★★★★★★	8	Picture Quality	★★★★★★★★	8
Ease of Use	★★★★★★★	7	Value	★★★★★★	6

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Overall ★★★★★★★ 7

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