

PROFILE

Colour Masters



Richard Lawn, CEO of eWarna with his partner and co-founder, Shiew Man Hon, COO of eWarna.



A splash of colour on your plain dress makes heads turn. A rainbow makes you smile. Children are attracted to brightly coloured toys. Colour makes the world more fun, vibrant and interesting. But for many, particularly those in the garment industry, it's serious business. eWarna offers a solution that'll put back the fun in the colour industry.

How important is colour in your life? An average person is able to distinguish a myriad of colours. Our surroundings would certainly be dull if we could only make out black, white and several shades of grey in between. But how does one turn our God given gift into a unique business initiative that promises to revolutionise the way we deal with colour? Why is colour such a big deal?

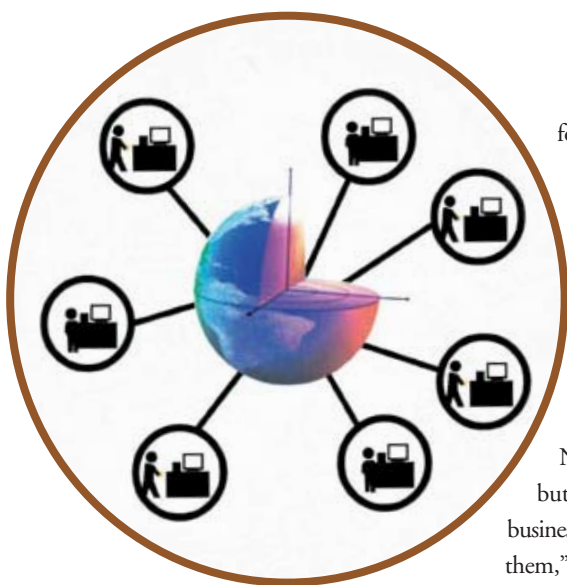
“First of all, you need to understand just how important colour is in the textile industry. Colour adds most of

the complexity to a garment but it also adds the most value to the textile. The garment industry is worth USD500 billion,” reveals Richard Lawn, chief executive officer and co-founder of eWarna. Now, that is a lot of money.

eWarna is the Malacca-based MSC-status company that recognises the importance of colour in just about all the things that we use on a daily basis, particularly the clothes that we wear. Its mission is to deliver world-class colour physics software as an application over the Internet to provide quick and accurate colour checking and matching,

particularly for retailers, apparel buyers and merchandisers, vendors of coloured material; apparel makers; contractors, agents and other parties involved with colours in the supply chain.

eWarna.com was founded in early 2000 with angel funding to commence prototype development and subsequently attracted its first round of strategic funding in September 2000 from techpacific.com Limited and Nan Fung Textiles Ltd. It has since attracted its second round of strategic funding from MSC Venture Corporation, Maybank and Intelligent Capital.



And, despite having only been on the market for a few months, eWarna has already been talking to major players in the garment industry such as Li & Fung, Next and Liz Claiborne, and several Asian manufacturers are already paying customers for the product. It's quite an achievement although there is still a long way to go.

"Getting people to adopt this new technology will take some time because deciding to change the way business has always been conducted is no easy decision to make," says Lawn.

The need for speed (and lower costs!)

In the traditional way of conducting colour matching, a garment manufacturer sends a physical swatch to their supplier who then works out a dye recipe based on historical experience. The supplier does a trial dyeing and courier the results back to the manufacturer for their approval.

If the colour matches, the process ends there, with an order sent to the supplier. But if the manufacturer is still not happy with the colour match (and you have to realise that under different lighting situations, we see different colours), the process is repeated until the right match is made. Pieces of samples flying around the world are very costly, and it's not just the money, it's time as well. Because fashion changes so quickly, the garment production process has to

follow suit or manufacturers will end up with a lot of out of fashion garments. And the thing is, a piece of garment is made up of several many different components.

"Let's take the example of one of women's most essential pieces of clothing, the brassiere. Not that I have a fetish or anything but I had a friend who was in the business of making them so I know about them," Lawn said quickly to my raised eyebrows. "You have cloth, lace (some of them), plastic, elastic bands, metal hooks and eyes, ribbons and all of these have to match. They don't all come from one supplier and they are of different materials but nonetheless, they all have to match. You don't want to be wearing a mismatched bra, now would you?"

Colourfast solution

eWarna's founders, Lawn and eWarna chief operating officer ManHon Shiew, have got years of experience working with textile colour worldwide - from selling and checking colour to even designing dye machines that produce colour. With technical advisors that include the world's leading textile colour physicists - Associate Professor Dr John Xin of the Institute of Textiles and Clothing in Hong Kong Polytechnic University, ASP architects, apparel buyers, retailers, supply chain experts and dyehouse managers, eWarna provides an objective solution to a matter most subjective.

"Colour determination depends greatly on the light, the object and observer. It's subjective, just like weight and mass. On the moon, you weigh less than on earth but your mass remains the same," explains Lawn who graduated from Cambridge University with a 1st in Natural Sciences. "Colour properties are like mass, it doesn't

change. eWarna provides a completely objective determination of colour."

eWarna compares colour by looking at its colour properties obtained by using a spectrophotometer. The colour properties provide a standard for all other samples to match to up to a variance degree pre-specified by the manufacturer. This process makes the colour matching easier and a lot more accurate and objective. eWarna's application also greatly reduces lead time in the supply chain by allowing all relevant parties access to the same colour data simultaneously wherever they are based in the world.

Unique offering

Despite the textile industry being an industry with a long history, eWarna is the first company to provide colour physics as an application service provider (ASP) and filed a patent on its software in May 2000. The eWarna software works on a neutral and open platform designed by eWarna chief software architect Niclas Hedhman. Hedhman leads a team of highly skilled local programmers at eWarna's Malacca headquarters.

"We probably have the best Java programmers in the country. At first we brought in programmers from overseas but we have found Malaysians to be as good if not better," said Lawn.

Lawn, who has been running his own company in Malacca making batch dye machines since 1994, believes that the MSC makes it easy for technopreneurs by providing the infrastructure to support their business.

eWarna is headquartered in Malacca, with additional offices in Kuala Lumpur, Hong Kong and the UK. The company also has representatives in the US, India and Australia. ●

*For further information, go to
www.ewarna.com*