Brands Can Recolor the Visual Language of Technology

The future is a promise to the human imagination, inspiring us to look beyond what the world is and envision what it could be. But if the future is so rife with possibilities, why have marketers' ideas of what it looks like—or rather, what they believe audiences think it will look like—converged on such a monolithic aesthetic?

When we examined search and download data from our platform, we found that in 2024, users were enamored with visuals of the future. Among our Creative library of hundreds of millions of pre-shot images, videos, and illustrations, the most popular images featured sleek hologram overlays, luminous lines of code, and a notable abundance of one color: blue.

Getty Images

Two of Getty Images’ top-selling images from 2024.*Getty Images*
Marketing visuals have long equated technology and the future with cool tones and electric dreamscapes, largely due to the influence of science fiction films. Through their cultural dominance, these films set the aesthetic for the future as a blue, clinical, and streamlined world.

Despite recent efforts to move away from the blues, the depiction of technology and the future has changed little over the last 30 years—and in 2024, we saw a renewed embrace of blue-dominant tech imagery in response to the rise of artificial intelligence. AI is changing how we work, live, and create, and marketers are defaulting to the familiar visual codes of science fiction to capture it.

But while this icy palette remains popular, it does not reflect people’s actual relationship with technology. According to Getty Images’ VisualGPS AI report, 98% of consumers say authentic visuals are pivotal to building trust, which means beating the “tech blues” may be the key to connecting with today’s audiences.

A brief history of the tech blues

One of the most iconic scenes in science fiction cinema, the finale of Blade Runner (1982), is almost monochromatically blue: The scene is awash in blue lighting; dystopian Los Angeles is blue neon and blue-black skyscrapers; Roy Batty’s eyes gleam an icy, unnatural blue, signaling his mechanical nature as a replicant. Blade Runner preluded the internet era of sci-fi film, but its visual legacy would endure, joining other canonical sci-fi titles like The Matrix to establish a visual language for technology.

Real-life technology also plays a role in shifting tech aesthetics. With the advent of the internet alongside advancements in CGI and special effects, the tech blues became more deeply associated with visualizations of the future.

At the same time, brands in the 1990s were focused on broad, generic appeal, and depictions of technology coalesced around the recognizable aesthetic from the movies. Blue tones cast the future as something cold and meticulously calculated. Environments were medicinal and minimalist; they evoked a kind of masculine angularity, following the lineaments of circuitry and hardware.

This would cement the aesthetics of tech for decades to come—not just in marketing, but in the development of technology itself. Our everyday devices became sleeker, thinner, more portable. User interfaces on smartphones and computers became more minimalist with each software update.

Not until the 2010s was there a shift to bring other tones

into the futuristic palette. The injection of pinks and purples into the blues, often called “bisexual lighting,” afforded a warming, more inclusive quality to technological imagery. In terms of composition, images featuring people using technology, rather than just the technology itself, became more popular.

Now, we’re facing another technological revolution. Artificial intelligence—specifically generative AI—is everywhere. What was once a trope of science fiction is now on course to be the defining technology of this century, and naturally, enthusiasm around AI has led to a strong reemergence of the tech blue aesthetic.

Getty Images



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The outputs of the technology itself could also be reinforcing the tech blues trend. The blue, masculine, medical visuals associated with the word “future” are encoded in these tools’ foundation models, so they create images in line with these trends. With 62% of marketers using AI to generate image assets for their projects, AI-generated images could continue to reinvigorate the tech blues as a dominant aesthetic.

To counteract this, brands should consider shifting their visual strategy from popular representations of the future to images and videos that feel accessible and relatable to audiences. Generative AI can play a role here, especially if the goal is to visualize something imaginative and create something eye-popping, but it must be balanced with authenticity. Center imagery around real people using technology in ways that matter to them, and watch the colors change.

In fact, despite blue being the dominant color in tech imagery, Getty Images’ two top-selling images of 2024 were

people in orange and yellow hues.



Getty Images

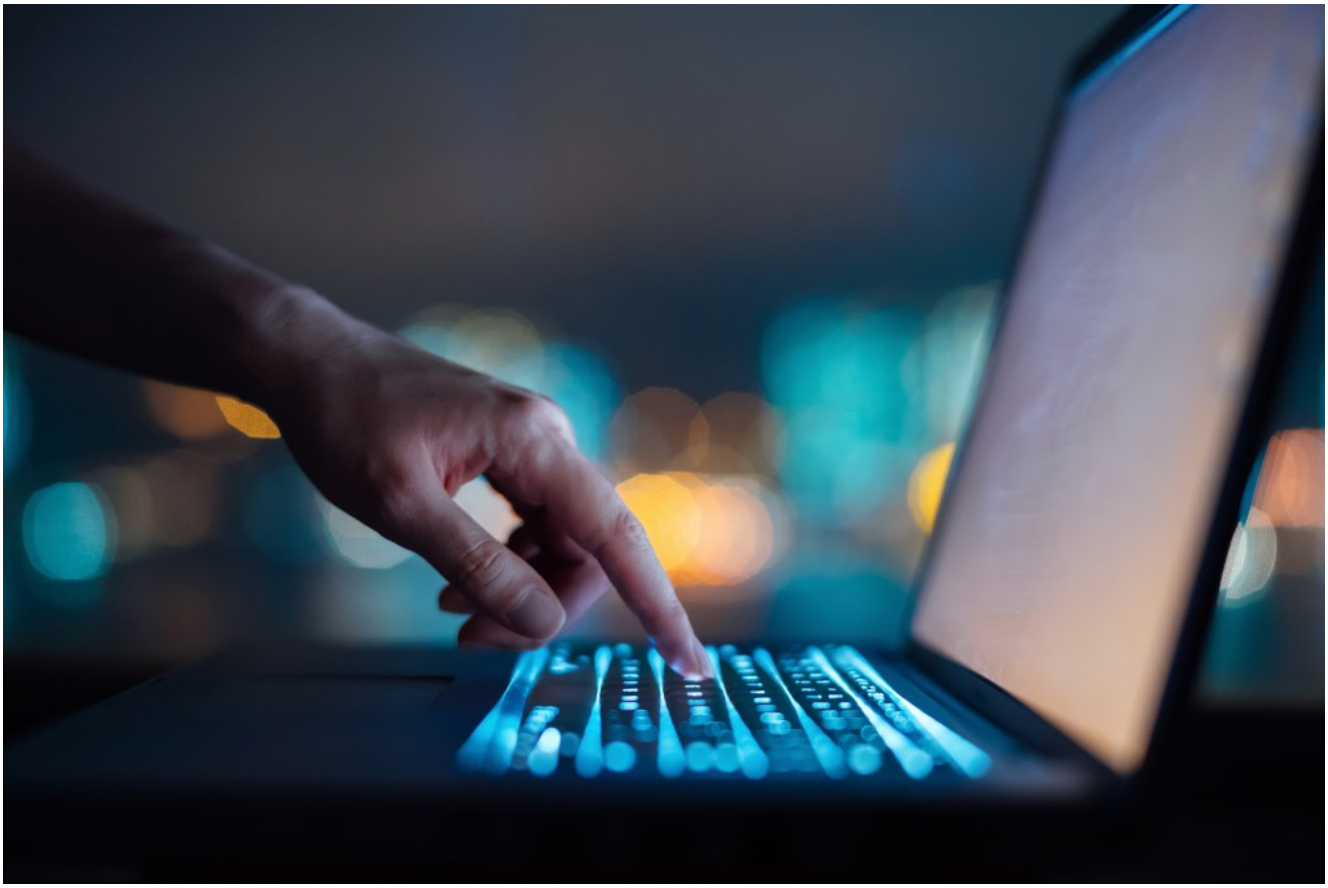


Getty Images

In an uncertain world, brands want to present as warming, positive presences in society, and their visual strategies should reflect this. That means looking beyond what the movies tell us the future will be and depicting the one we're actually shaping.

The visual code of hands

While showing people using computers, smartphones, and even speculative tech like holograms are common ways to humanize tech in visuals, Getty Images' search data shows that users are fixated on hands.



Getty Images

As seen in the image above, the focal point is not the futuristic glowing keyboard, but the extension of the user's finger to press a key. The visual signals human influence over technology, evoking a sense of autonomy and control.

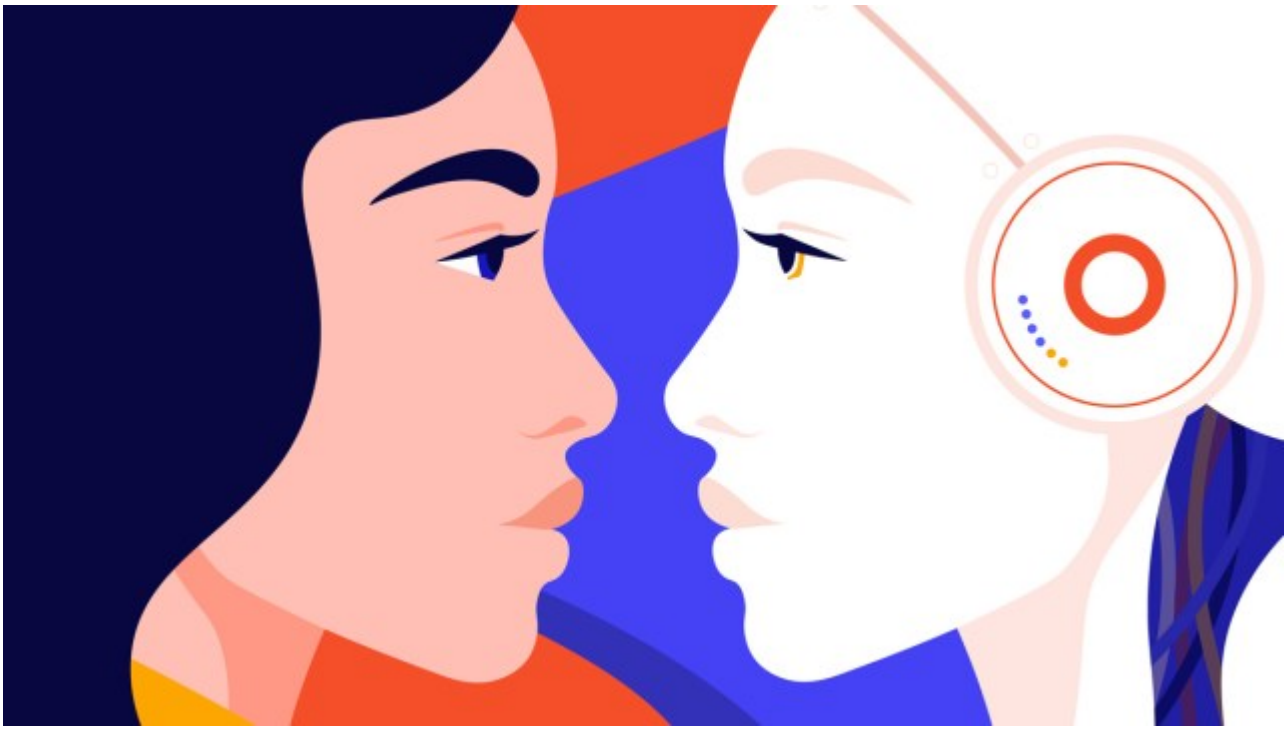
The emphasis on hands is also a response to the rapid proliferation of AI imagery. Hands are a popular litmus test of whether an image is AI-generated, since generative models struggle to capture them. In this sense, hands are becoming the AI era's symbol of trust and authenticity.

But as more brands incorporate AI into their creative workflows, a simple "hand test" is not enough where transparency is concerned. Labeling AI-generated and -modified content will prevent audiences from feeling duped or misled. To build further trust with audiences, brands should use AI tools that are responsibly trained off permissioned content, ideally ones that compensate the creators who offer their work. This reduces potential legal risk to the brand while reinforcing the unassailable value of human creativity.

Picturing a human future

Our relationships with technology are deeply personal. Most of us interface with software in some capacity every day, be it at work, school, or for leisure. 91% of Americans own a smartphone. However, depicting the personal utility of technology like smartphones and laptops is not where brands struggle—it's emerging technologies like AI that are driving them back toward the blues.

AI is difficult to visualize, and by leaning into clinical, scientific visuals ornamented with fiber-optic patterns and overlays, marketers are trying to capture the feeling of using advanced technology. But everyday people aren't using AI in a high-tech laboratory; if brands want to resonate with users, they need to bring the future home, embracing more vibrant, energetic visual styles.



Major technology companies are already embracing this trend. Google's "Dream Job" Super Bowl ad goes for warm neutrals and human-focused imagery. The AI assistant Gemini feels accessible, portrayed as a peer to the refrigerator and the

minivan instead of some ultra-high-tech gadget.

Beating the tech blues is more than a shift in color palette—and it doesn’t require forgoing the color blue at all. Rather, it’s about creating visuals that portray a warmer, more inclusive future, focused on the benefits of technology on human society, interpersonal relationships, and creativity.

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