Category: Products and Services

Project: RoCrow User Guide



What was the challenge?

Wingbeat were producing assembly and user instructions in-house for their 'RoCrow', a radio-controlled crow used to train birds used in falconry. Our task was to promote user understanding so they would determine why things might not be working when flying their self-assembled RoCrow.

The end users of the instructions were unlikely to have any experience of flying a radio-controlled plane, so clear guidance was paramount. However, the existing instructions were produced in MS Word as a text only list spread over two pages of loose A4, with accompanying instructions printed on the packaging box. They were difficult to follow and not particularly engaging to read, this resulted in users assembling the RoCrow incorrectly, struggling to fly them, and contacting Wingbeat for advice.

A challenge for us as designers was portraying the natural form of the product, and the mix of angles and detail required in the steps for quite a technical nonintuitive assembly. Couple that with three dimensional flying tips and a request for various user cases (potential arabic translation and different product models), you can see the challenges list grew considerably!

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What was the solution?

We needed to create a guide that could be printed in-house and used few words to keep down any potential translation costs. If converted to an Arabic version, we'd need to make the design modular to enable a right to left reading format.

Before starting any information design we went through a process of on-site 'task analysis'; assessing the product out of the box from a user's perspective, highlighting key tasks and rapid prototyping user guide layouts with the client.

Once the tasks had been agreed, we started work on clear, easy to understand illustrations and pictogram design; testing with the client and target audience via PDF mockups with annotations from the reviewers. We used methods such as 'ghosting' to see under hands, and refined the modular design. The final user manual was designed as an A3 to fold to A4.

The original brief also requested instructions on flying the RoCrow, but during development it soon became apparent that a user in the field would not be using a guide, so we directed them to the Wingbeat website for video tutorials.

What was the effect?

The design process for this project was just as important to the client as the final instructions. By applying information design principles throughout the process we highlighted user behaviour that changed their approach to the product design and marketing. The process also helped us as designers to gain an understanding of the limitations to the instructions, especially around explaining how to fly the product. It made us appreciate the different genres of instructional design and how some are best suited to learning, informing or applying different instructions.

Correct and incorrect assembly pullouts were very well received by the client, and similarly the zoom-in shots helped to pinpoint small details that were vital in the assembly and operation of the product.

Chunking the information into distinct sections helped to break up the original long instructions list, and gave us space to add a 'top tips' section on our recommendation. The pictograms within this section were supplied as separate elements which the client pushed across social media in an 'instructional marketing' campaign.

"The task analysis of our product carried out by TDL gave us a thorough insight into the real user experience and provided us with lots of valuable feedback, not just on the instructions but the way the product is designed and packaged"

Wingbeat Manager







Clear correct and incorrect illustration to highlight subtle challenges that would cause big problems for the user.

"TDL had a great influence on both our understanding of our customer experience, as well as how information is presented and absorbed. Customer feedback on the user guide has been really positive"

Wingbeat Manager

