Professional manuals for interactive play devices

Public summary

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Introduction

Yalp Lappset B.V. (Yalp) has been designing and selling interactive play devices for 17 years. Now that the interactive play devices are sold all over the world, a lack of documentation on their installation process arises. This lack causes: the Yalp installation team to fly all over the world, wrongly installed products, and an overload of frequently asked questions by international clients.

The research question is stated as follows: *How can the manuals of Yalp's six interactives be upgraded systematically to improve the service provided to the customers before, during, and after the buying process?*

There are two design-inputs: First, a literature research clarifies the international regulations and will offer scientific guidelines for the visualization of information. Second, an information landscape will be created to define the (potential) function of the manuals within Yalp's sales process. These inputs will be used to create the design. At the end of the research the design and the process will be assessed.



Figure 1 - Graphic representation of the structure of the report.

Input

Literature research

The literature research exists of three parts. The first part shows that the IEC standard is the most recent standard that prescribes international *theoretical* guidelines for creating an installation manual. It covers rules for: preparations, authors, contents, and warnings. The second part gives guidelines towards *practically* designing a manual. It explains four design principles: scale, visual hierarchy, balance, and contrast. Which all help making a clear distinction between different elements in a visual. The third part is about user perception. This part gives guidelines for the correct design of manuals, based on the idea that humans are "machines" that follow certain "rules". It discusses: The Gestalt Principles, the aim and use of manuals, storytelling, and visual structuring. The literature research gives guidelines that do always work in design but also shows that designers may deviate based on context, aim, or audience.

Information landscape

The information landscape visualizes the information flow within the three phases of the Sales process: pre-sales, sales, and post-sales. The information flow is described between three stakeholders: Yalp, distributors, and clients. The goal of the landscape is to determine the *current* functions of the manuals within Yalp. Moreover, the aim is to discover the *potential* aims of the manuals. The general aim of the manuals based on the landscape: 1. Helpful for both clients and distributors in sales and after-sales phase; 2. Wide range of audiences; 3. Personal and involved communication.

Design

Based on the inputs described above, the template for the design of the manuals has been created. During the design there have been four main challenges, which have been solved in the following ways:

- 1. New languages should be easily added to the manual. Solved by separating texts and images.
- 2. Adaptability should be high. A structured and layered combination of documents and contents makes sure changes, minor or major, can be done efficiently.
- 3. Clear user guide. Structural elements are added to the manual at key-locations.
- 4. Friendly communication: An amicably approach (rounded, light, simple) combined with recognizable details (no heavy equipment only, also a hammer or broom). A round font and a personal way of writing makes the text friendly.

The main goal of the template is to create consistency. This has been done by creating a systematic way of working. A manual is set-up by creating the text in Word; using a style-library the right characteristics are applied to textual elements. Images are created in the Illustrator template. Images and texts are combined in InDesign, using a variety of tools: masterpages, objects styles, paragraph styles, libraries, etc. The way of working is explained in an information document for future manual-designers.



Figure 2 - Automated text lay-out from Word to InDesign.



Figure 3 - All elements are based on object styles.

Creating the content of the manuals is done by combining different types of input: on-site installations, already existing installation documentation, visits to Yalp, and meetings with designers of the interactives.

Reflection

The end of the research discusses the implementation of literature in practice. All design principles were of a certain use for the design of the manuals, however not all could be taken into account *always*. A survey has been conducted, it shows the relevance and pitfalls of certain Gestalt principles and is used as a guideline for the design of complex and ambiguous installation steps.

The biggest challenge in this process has been to merge all the inputs into relevant and correct manuals. This directly implies the scientific relevance of this research: the connection between theory and practice; the wide variety of examples and the practical reflection on literature makes the literature more understandable and useful for future research and designs.

Concludingly, the final design does update the current manuals in a systematic way. Even though the design is never fully done, the overall outcome is beneficial to Yalp's service towards clients in the sales process.