

Which product instructions are the most difficult to use and how can brand owners improve them?

Craig Thatcher, Director Userview®, reveals research results



...make perfect sense

Summary

Userview® regularly undertakes research into user attitudes to instructions. For this study we asked how important instructions were to their enjoyment and use of a product. What did they find most difficult and in which product groups did they have the worst experience? We also asked them whether they would return a product because of poor instructions and for their suggestions for making them easier to use.

Poor instructions were most frequently found with complex products where a relatively high degree of application and understanding was required by the user. Lighting, flat pack furniture and high tech items featured prominently and this was confirmed by the list of manufacturers and product groups that were mentioned by respondents as having poor instructions. The overwhelming majority (67%) recognised that good instructions were important to their enjoyment of a product.

Whilst nearly everyone said they recognised the importance of instructions, they were more reticent about whether they would return an item if it had poor instructions.

15% said that they would. 34% of people said they would not make a return, whilst 46% said they weren't sure.

Complaints about instructions revolve around the standard of diagrams and the associated written instruction. Individual respondents' comments indicate that the balance of words to pictures was also relevant to their use. There is also recognition that other factors get in the way of good instructions including layout, poor translations, too many languages, too much technical jargon and too many words.

When asked what would make product instructions easier to use there was a recurring theme that can be summed up with the words - clear, concise, straightforward, simple and step by step.

It seems obvious, but users felt that instructions and products should be designed from the user's perspective and not the manufacture.

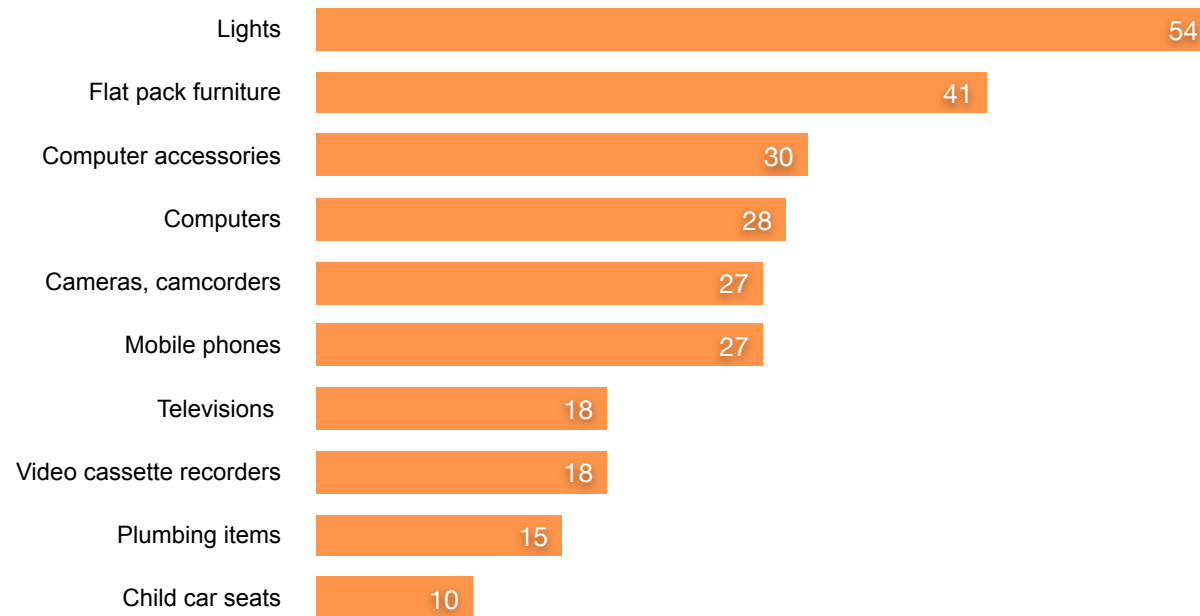
'Some instructions are just not thought through from the user's point of view'

All figures are percentages in this report.



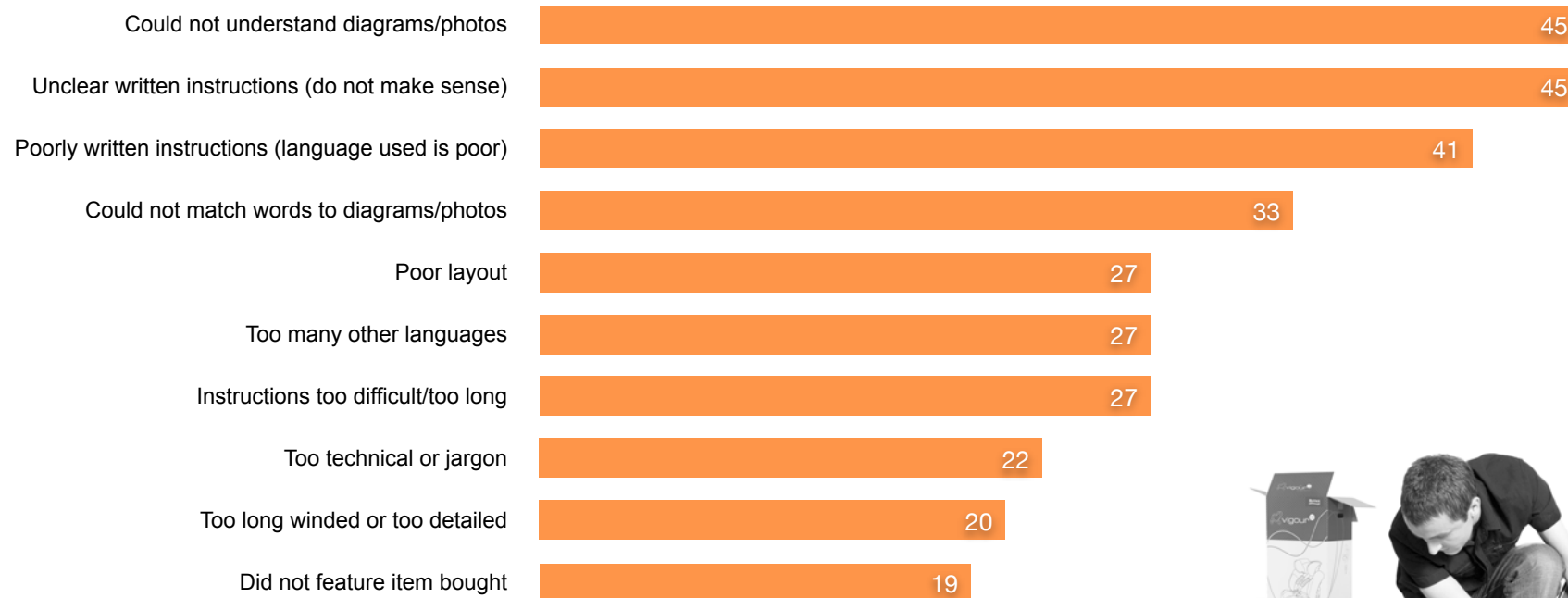
In what categories have you come across poor product instructions?

A significant percentage of people have experienced poor instructions in lighting and flat pack furniture.



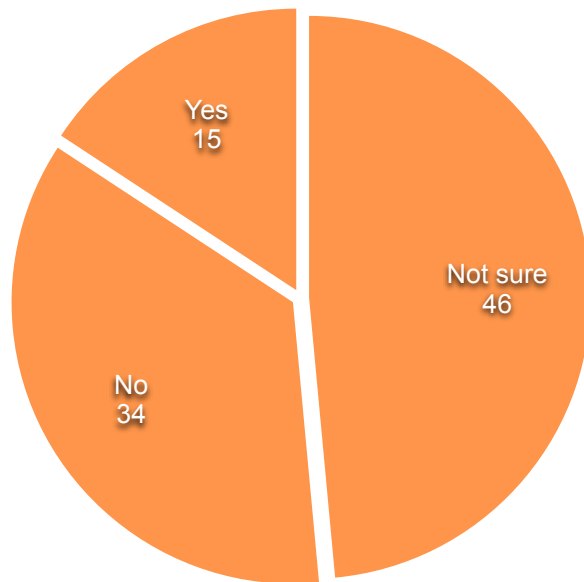
What did you find difficult about the instructions?

The most mentioned problems with instructions are around the diagrams and the written instructions and how they work with each other.



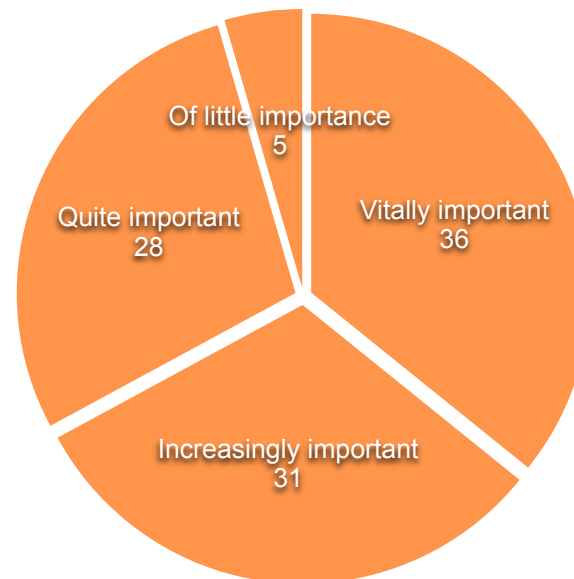
Would you return a product because of poor instructions?

15% of people would return a product. Many would not or are not sure whether to return an item. What effect is this having on their 'out-of-box' experience?



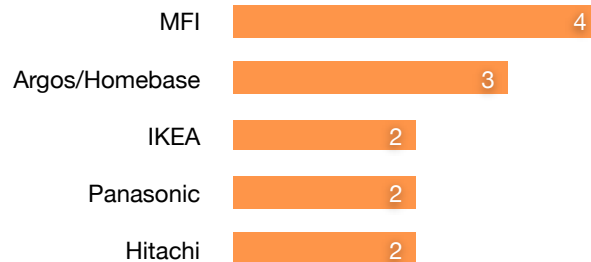
How important are good instructions to your enjoyment and use of a product?

No-one thought that good instructions were unimportant. Over 95% said that they were quite, increasingly or vitally important. People obviously value instructions as part of the product experience.



What are the worst instructions you have ever experienced?

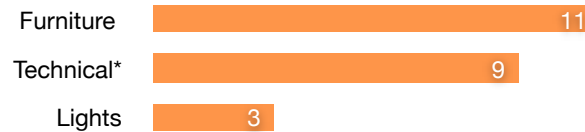
A spread of technical consumer brands were noticeable by their presence including; LG, Olympus, Panasonic, Samsung, Hitachi, Apple and Sony. Brands most frequently mentioned included the following:



Product groups that caused problems

Respondents were asked about product groups with which they had experienced problems with the instructions. The most notable sector was furniture, quickly followed by an array of technical household items such as televisions, VCRs, cameras, mobile phones, iPods and lighting.

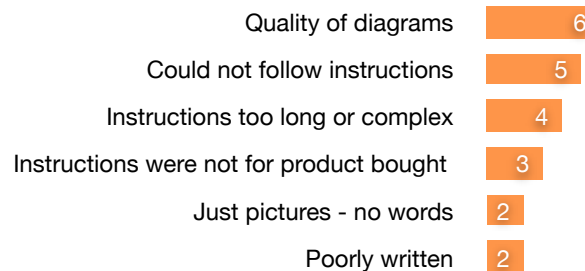
Product groups most frequently mentioned included the following:



* Includes TVs, VCRs, mobile phones & cameras

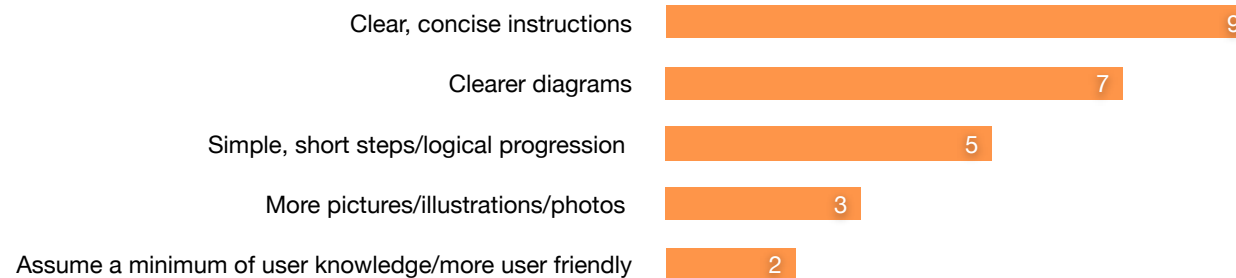
Specific issues with the worst instructions

Respondents were also asked to specify the problem they came across in these 'worst' instructions. They fell broadly into the following categories:



What can make product instructions easier to use?

Similar suggestions emerged from the respondents - clear, concise, straightforward and step by step. Respondents desire for clarity and ease of use is evident.



Some suggestions from respondents

'Simple, short steps. Not long winded instructions. Clear diagrams and photos'

'Generally, (instructions should be) more user friendly. Not everyone is fully experienced with the product'

'Clear diagrams and clear identification of parts with simple instructions'

'Too often badly translated to English. Printing ridiculously small for the eyes of anyone over 25! Often technical terms used when one approaches a job from a non-technical perspective'

'Sometimes the quality is so poor (cheap print etc) you don't trust them'

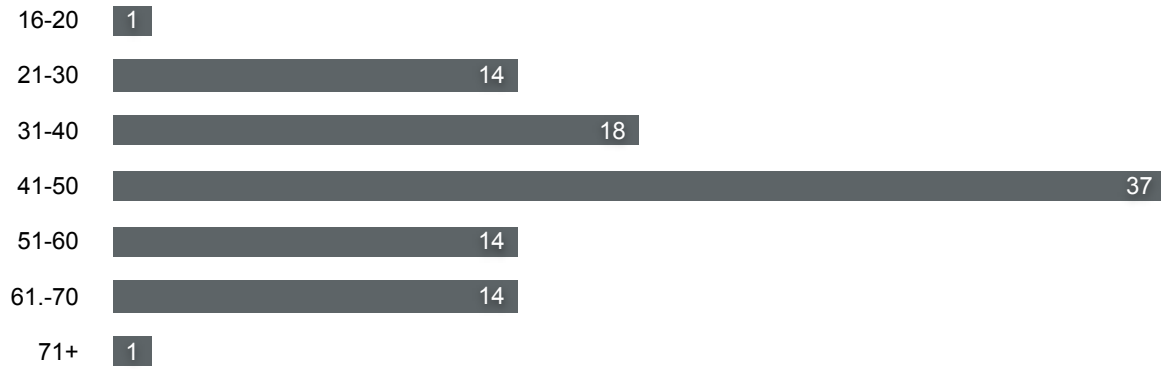
'Plain English would be nice!'



Appendix

Gender spilt 70% male, 30% female

Age range:



Userview® instructions make perfect sense

Userview® creates product instructions that are easy to use and comply with the International Standard, BS EN 62079:2001 for instructions. This improves the user experience and increases profits for brand owners and retailers by saving them time, reducing complaints, cutting 'No Fault Found' returns by up to 20% and saving litigation.

Established in 1994, Userview® has experience of all types of products from safety critical ones like car child seats through to flat pack furniture. It regularly undertakes research and tracks attitudes to instructions which results in valuable insights. Current clients include AkzoNobel, Britax, Bathstore, Crosswater and LG.

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