



At the beginning of October 1991, Alan Murray contacted Morphy Richards (British Electrical Manufacturers based in Mexborough, South Yorkshire) and asked whether he could exhibit his display board (a criticism of the instruction manual for their Turbo Steam 1000 steam iron) in the design offices where the original instruction manual was made.

Morphy Richards agreed to meet him on the 16th of October. The following text documents the talk between Alan Murray, Peter Keagh (Chief Product Engineer) and Chris Thompson (Marketing Director). Both Peter Keagh and Chris Thompson were unaware that the conversation was being recorded.



P.K. Hello.

A.M. Alan Murray, Hi.

P.K. How are you?

A.M. Fine, how are you?... *Putting work onto desk....* This is what I have been doing. I am an artist and I have been working in Holland on a project with instruction manuals. I have been working with products like yours and with companies such as Calor, Philips, Rowenta and Black & Decker...

P.K. An information service?

A.M. Well yes, in a way. I have been looking at various steam iron instruction manuals, examining them, finding the faults and problems I have with them and then suggesting through display boards like this, the changes I would make to the manual.

P.K. There are two people who are involved with the instruction manual, Chris Thompson, the Marketing Director, and me. Could you hang on for a minute, I think Chris would be interested in this. Could you give me a minute to go and find him?

A.M. Of course.

P.K. goes off to find C.T. Returns without C.T. who will join us later.

OK. I am specifically interested in steam iron instruction manuals. This display board shows the problems that I have with your instruction manual. On one level I have problems with bad grammar such as this section here... *points to part of display board which suggests there are three grammar mistakes in one section...* On another level, I suggest that the instruction manual should be totally specific to the model of steam iron in the box. If I buy the most basic steam iron in the range, I do not have to be confronted with the luxury model when I read the text or look at the diagrams on the instruction manual.

P.K. Well I can say now that that's not feasible... laughs.

A.M. With this work, one part of my statement is, that I want to make you aware that your approach to your instruction manual is being observed. I have examined the instruction manual, (the fundamental link between manufacturer, object and consumer) and I suggest that you do not take full responsibility for the document which explains how to use the object that you produce. I would like to exhibit this notice board... *points to the notice board on the table...* in the design rooms where the original manual was designed. Then in a few weeks, I would like to return and talk with the designers and discuss my aims, the problems I have with their work and any problems they may have with my work.

P.K. I still can't get to the bottom of this, why are you doing this? I can't understand what you get from this. It seems like you are doing it for nothing, that you don't get anything from it.

A.M. Well, I do get something from it. As an artist you can do a lot of things, paint paintings, make sculptures, take photographs - all kinds of things. I think it is important that an artist investigates the visual symbols and information around us. I think art is about communication. The fact that I use an instruction manual to make a piece of art shows the importance that I attach to instruction manuals. In fact, I think I take them more seriously than you do.

P.K. Well, I have only been with this company for a few weeks, and I think that this instruction manual is awful. I thought that you would have been coming here today and saying, 'that's an awful instruction manual and I have a better design, do you want to buy it?'

A.M. At the moment, I think that it is more important to point out the faults that you are producing and selling. Rather than for me to come along with a new design; which might again be infected with your flawed attitude somewhere along the line. My investigation of your instruction manual is supposed to highlight this deep rooted flaw.

P.K. This was designed by a Product Manager - so we have a format. The Product Manager can change what things should go into it, not a designer. Then, it goes to a print house. In the print house they simply block it out. They don't design it, they just simply block it out and block it in, in sections. They don't have such an overall design, they just try to fit all the bits of information on the paper. Then, they change the mistakes on the proof if there are any. Then it's printed. As you know, or you won't know, with industries and companies the instruction manual is the last

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thing that gets done. The job is finished and you still haven't printed the manual. Nobody takes any real interest in the manual. People don't take any interest in the opportunity. Even I have a great problem with manuals.

A.M. My point is, even if the consumer never looks at the manual or even throws it away as soon as he buys the product, the manual should be correct and safe, even if it is never read. Some of the manuals are quite good. The Philips manual is very comprehensive, two colours and well thought out. But even that has a couple of spelling mistakes. I cannot imagine the same thing happening in an advertisement for the product. In fact, the box that each steam iron is sold in has a full colour picture of the exact model that is in the box. I think that the box is part of the pre-sales information (advertising) and the manual is post-sales (obligation). You are the only company which uses a general format. This covers the whole range and has a specific colour sticker of the model inside the box, pasted onto the outside. All the other manufacturers print a totally specific box for each different model they produce.

P.K. We have three different models in this range. We sell approximately three hundred and fifty thousand irons. That means that each model breaks into that figure. Certain models are more popular than other models. This means that one of those manuals, if they were different for each model, may have a run as little as fifty thousand per year. The Philips manual is printed in Singapore and printing out there is much cheaper than here. If we were printing our manuals in Hong Kong, (we do have some products that come from Hong Kong) we would have a different manual for each different model. It would cost us nothing. It would only cost us for the different layout, I suppose. We try and make one manual for all the irons, for cost purposes. If the manual costs more, then the price of the iron increases.

A.M. But surely, the price of the iron would not increase at all by taking more care to produce a better manual. I do not believe that if the printing costs were negligible, you would produce a specific manual, for each different model. You probably send internal information within the company which costs as much to produce, as a specific manual would cost to make. Surely a specific manual should take priority. Couldn't the small increase in cost come from the advertising budget?

P.K. The manuals are formulated from the Marketing Department, so they are the responsibility of the Marketing Department. I have a responsibility to make sure that they are technically and legally correct, so that, there is nothing on there that the company can be sued for. All the wiring information should be in accordance with the relevant regulations. Between the Marketing Director and myself we are not particularly happy with the way the instructions are. We actually have a coffee machine, where the instruction manual is so bad, that we have had to put a letter into every box explaining to people, 'Thank you for buying this wonderful coffee maker, it needs a bit of technique to use it.' We do this so people don't throw it away because the manual is bad. We are trying to develop a formula for the instruction manual that makes the manual 'user friendly'. That makes it more easy to understand and will make the customer more likely to want to read it. I read instruction manuals at home, but I think it depends on the person who is going to read them. But if you are going to give someone something to read, you've got to make it as simple as possible for them. I mean, this one is not too bad, but some of the writing on some of them is unbelievable.

P.K. points to diagram on display board and asks why I have suggested changing the position of the steam iron from resting on its sole plate to standing on its heel.

A.M. Your instruction manual tells you to never rest the iron on its sole plate, yet your diagram shows the iron doing just that. I rotated the diagram so that the iron is resting on its heel.

This is the first contact that I have had with you to exhibit this display board, criticising your original design. I am not looking for any money, I am not looking for a job. I want to suggest that, I, as an artist, can approach you, explain my position and exhibit an object which is the evidence for this statement. All I ask you to do, is to listen and if you agree with any points I make, change your manual accordingly.

P.K. Sounds Wonderful. I always wanted something for nothing... *Laughs...* Well, you can certainly leave your work here.

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A.M. Is it possible to install the display board in the design office where the original manual was designed?

P.K. Just give me a few minutes and I will see what I can do.

Leaves the room. Returns with Chris Thompson the Marketing Director.

Could you explain to Chris what you have been explaining to me?

A.M. For the last two years, I have been working on a project using steam iron instruction manuals as my object. Each manual has been examined and a display board has been made for each one of the different manuals. The corrections have been made in the national language of each company. The French part of the Calor manual has been corrected, the German part of the Rowenta, the English part of the Morphy Richards. The steam iron has been bought in the country of the company's origin. The Black and Decker was bought in New York, the Philips steam iron was bought in Amsterdam, the Morphy Richards in London. The suggested changes are firstly to make the instruction manual specific to the steam iron in the box, and secondly to make the steam iron consistent and safe. I would like to exhibit each one of the respective display boards, in each of the different company design offices where the original manual was made. Hence this display board... *points to display board on the table...* for your Turbo 1000 steam iron which I would like to exhibit in your design office.

C.T. Why are you doing this then?

A.M. I am an artist and I feel that this is an important field for me to investigate. I have a platform - the platform of art. I feel very positive about what can be achieved, using this platform. I approach you as an independent. I am not looking for work or money. You cannot buy me off and I cannot be controlled by you. I bring you a display board and ask you to exhibit it. If you choose not to, then I will record that as your response to my work. If you display my work and change the manual as a result of my intervention then I will record that as a result. As far as the instruction manual goes, I think that it's one of the most interesting and important objects in the 1990's. It symbolises the fundamental link between object, consumer and industry.

Advertising is something different. The instruction manual is almost the company's obligation. I think that the company's attitude to this obligation can also gauge the attitude they will have when they are faced with important decisions that industry has to make. My control of the manual is an analogy to the way I would like to check the intentions of industry.

C.T. So you don't want any money for this then?

A.M. No, nothing.

C.T. You want to put it on the wall in our offices?

A.M. Yes.

C.T. Having done that, where do you go from there?

A.M. I would hope that your designers would look at the work and then, in a couple of weeks time, I would like to return and have another talk with you about your attitude to my work. The actual display board and your response to my work may be exhibited and published in the future.

C.T. So how do you make your money then, how do you support yourself?

A.M. I teach every now and then in various art schools...

C.T. And what do you teach?

A.M. Fine Art. Also, for the last year I was sponsored by the Dutch Government.

C.T. What did the Dutch Government want from you in return?

A.M. Nothing in particular. The money was given after I had explained this project. They were interested in the project so they gave me the money to complete the project.

P.K. *Talking to C.T...* I think it is quite difficult for us to comprehend. He is not trying to get anything from us. At first, I thought he was some kind of spy. In fact, I think we should check that there are no microphones in the screws... *points at screws on display board and laughs.* *Talking to A.M...* We could put it... *points at display board...* in the office upstairs. Could you prepare it so we can put it up there ourselves?

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A.M. Yes, I suppose so.

P.K. It's just that we can't let you up there because there are a lot of projects that are on the go which we can't let anyone see.

A.M. So what kind of room is it, will it be possible to screw it to the wall?

C.T. excuses himself as there is a phone call.

P.K. Yes, it's a kind of creative studio with all kinds of things pinned to the wall that the designers work from. We will just move a few of these things around and screw your thing to the wall. Things are moving around on those walls all the time. If you can find some way of attaching those things to the back... *points at the original manuals behind the display board...* and then I can take the whole thing up and just screw it to the wall with four screws.

A.M. Is it possible to pin this information sheet up, which gives my name and address and the date I will return in case anyone from the office would like to contact me before then?

P.K. No problem.

A.M. I must just fill in the day that I can see you again on this form... what date would suit you?

P.K. Let's see... well how about a week today?

A.M. Wednesday the 23rd of October?

P.K. Fine. Getting back to the manual. I feel that the manual should be part of a product education to the customer and that's why I feel that the organisation belongs to the Marketing Department. They are the people who provide the information, so really, all the information for the manual could be gathered as the product is being designed. But they still tend to be the last thing that people do. We make our own instruction manuals to keep the costs down. You can spend a fortune on an instruction manual, I mean, there are people who are experts on instruction manuals and you can give your instruction manuals out to these people, for them to make a product that people can use. We tend to sit down here, with me and the Marketing Department and an engineer comes and has a look at it.

A.M. Is it the same people who deal with the instruction manual; who also deal with the advertising within the company?

P.K. Yes, exactly the same people. I mean Chris the Marketing Director, he's got three product managers working for him and his assistant. One of those product managers is totally responsible for everything associated with irons. He is responsible for determining what irons we should be selling, what irons we should be developing, to the graphic presentation of them, the colour, the boxes that they are put in and the marketing information that we put out; everything. Obviously, he has to be aware of what our competitors are doing. The instruction manual would be one of the things we would like to improve on, in comparison to our rivals...

C.T. returns. A.M. speaks to C.T.

A.M. I wondered whether I could supervise where the display board went in the design office?

P.K. If you can find some way of fixing the original manual to the back of the display board so that I can take it all up in one piece I will find somewhere in the office for it to go... *talking to C.T...* though I don't particularly want to organise it if it is your department.

C.T. Is it?

P.K. Yes, traditionally instruction manuals are your responsibility!

C.T. Oh, I thought they were yours!

C.T. and P.K. laugh.

A.M. OK... *explaining to C.T...* I have said that I will come back in a weeks time and if anyone wants to contact me before then, I have put my name and address on this sheet.

C.T. Can I just ask one question concerning copyright? If you leave this with us we don't want to find ourselves in a position where our copyright is compromised. I mean, we are in the process of developing instruction manuals which are our property and we have a copyright. It is fine to advise and improve and rationalise, in fact we have a project on, to do just that. We ourselves, believe that our instruction manuals could be improved. Now I don't want to get into

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the argument of you saying that we have stolen your ideas. If you would rather walk away from this now...

A.M. It's my hope that you will change the mistakes in your instruction manual because of my intervention.

C.T. So you're not looking for any payment for that?

A.M. No.

C.T. No financial arrangement or anything like that?

A.M. No nothing. If my intervention, makes you reconsider your attitude towards the way you have produced your instruction manual, then my work has been successful.

Both C.T. and P.K. laugh.

C.T. Have you had any problems with people understanding what you are doing at other companies?

A.M. You are the first company that I have approached with one of my display boards. I have display boards for Philips, Calor, Black & Decker, and Rowenta. So next year I will try to visit each one of those companies just as I have visited you. I even have problems convincing people in the art world, that what I do, is art.

P.K. So, will you then take these instruction manuals and make an exhibition of them?

A.M. Yes.

P.K. Is this conversation we are having now part of the art process?

A.M. My whole contact with you is part of the art process. The first part of the process was to make the display boards. The second part is to document your reaction to them. The third part will be to exhibit the display boards along with a documentation of your reaction to them.

P.K. OK. Good... *C.T. and P.K. laugh...* Like I said if you prepare the work...

C.T. Yes, I mean we can't let you up there.

A.M. No.

P.K. So you basically want an interface, you want us to react to what you have done?

A.M. But if you don't want to react, then that will be your reaction. When I contacted you I didn't really know whether you would even see me, so it's up to you.

P.K. I don't know about a reaction, they might not notice it up there... *laughs...* and what you are basically saying is, that the instruction manual should be specific to the steam iron you are buying. Therefore most of the changes on this board are making that point... *points to an example on the display board.*

C.T. We would say frankly, that, that was not economic for us to do. We do realise that there has to be a better way than we have used here, of making a manual for several models.

P.K. Maybe the instruction manual should say; Turbo 1000 specific, Turbo 2000 specific and Turbo 3000 specific and the figures for 1000 and 2000 have to be in a league table or something, rather than this statement on our manual which just says somewhere, 'all the features may not be included on your iron.' So I don't think that we will gain a great deal by exhibiting your board, but I am quite happy to put it upstairs on the wall. If you would have said that, 'the writing is too small,' then, I think that would have had a greater priority than some of the things you have suggested.

A.M. I could not justify changing the size of letters at this stage, as that would have made the manual larger, which could mean that it is not as easy to use when balancing it on an ironing board, whilst trying to iron. There will be a comparison made, though, when all the manuals are shown together in an exhibition. You use letters between the sizes 5 and 8 points, Philips don't go below 9. Calor try to use one manual for twelve different models on one A4 black and white sheet of paper. I'm sure people will compare the different manuals when they are on the wall.

P.K. Right, have you got all you need to get it ready to go on the wall? I will go upstairs and clear a space for it. I'll be back in a few minutes.

P.K. leaves the room and A.M. prepares the display board. Later P.K. returns, they check the time A.M. will return the following week and P.K. takes the work away.

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Alan Murray returned to Morphy Richards on the 23rd of October, but Peter Keagh asked whether he could keep the display board for another week, as he was busy with an open day for potential buyers. Murray returned two weeks later.

P.K. Hello again.

A.M. Hi. How was your open day?

P.K. Terrific. We had some smaller conference rooms upstairs that we knocked into one big conference room and we've built all new displays with themes for the products displayed. For instance, we have a new range that we are trying out that have farm animals on them. Pigs and sheep and hens. So their display was a farmyard scene with bales of hay and all kinds of farmyard objects.

A.M. The pictures on the products are a strange phenomenon aren't they? I remember reading that the bramble scenes on the sides of Russel Hobbs' toasters and kettles used to increase the sales by fifty percent.

P.K. Well, I used to work for Russel Hobbs and we used to complain that we had to continue producing these things. But it seems that a lot of people don't want the 'clean line' modern kitchens that the designers would like them to have, they want flowers and things. You only have to go into Marks and Spencers, I mean look at Marks and Spencer's Harvest range, people seem to want this. Anyway, your 'thing'...

A.M. 'Thing'... Laughs.

P.K. I don't think it has been a great success. I don't think many people have looked at it. I think our instruction manuals are particularly 'not good'. But I think that to make them specific for each model, would push the prices sky-high. I mean, the cost of that paper... *points at instruction manual*... is approximately 4p, somewhere between 2 and 4p to produce, and we have about three hundred thousand a year to make. Within that range, there are three models, so if you start to make one hundred thousand of each, instead of three hundred thousand of one, the prices go up. The perfect situation is that we can find an instruction manual which combines a user friendly layout and enables the consumer to distinguish one product from another.

A.M. Would the person who worked on that manual have got a chance to see my work?

P.K. Yes, he would have done. I mean, we have made a note of all the changes you suggest.

A.M. Is it worth your while to change the other mistakes like grammar mistakes and misleading diagrams?

P.K. It is worth our while and we will change the grammar mistakes. They should have been changed at the pre-printing stage.

A.M. Is it too late for that now?

P.K. No, the grammar mistakes will now be changed.

A.M. As a result of this?

P.K. Yes, as a result of this. They haven't been picked up. Sometimes people write to us, or sometimes we do checks ourselves and the mistakes are corrected. What this company doesn't have, but it is going to have from now on, is one man, a man from Glen Industries, who works on all the instruction manuals for all the products. The instruction manual tends to be the last thing that gets done. A lot of our manuals are written by people who don't know how to write instructions. Now, we are going to have someone who knows the field and will produce a suitable format which will serve all our products.

A.M. Do you think, that this man from Glen Industries is going to come up with a better product? Or, if his field is already instruction manuals, will he just make another manual as difficult to read as the rest?

P.K. We will initially use him and see what he comes up with.

A.M. Do you think he knows about the 'zap factor', about attracting people with the appearance of the manual, to help them digest the information?

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What does he think about the narrator being re-introduced to manuals, to counter the dry technical quality that usually puts people off when they pick up the manual? Do you think that he will consider the research, which says that, when you introduce one extra colour to an area within the manual, then that area, attracts 32% more interest than if it only had one colour?

P.K. Well, I would hope that he will have an attractive formula which will answer a lot of these criteria.

A.M. I would be interested to see what he produces. Maybe when he has produced his first manual, I can come and see you again. We can then discuss the details of that manual, comparing it to the time and cost spent on the design of the box that the steam iron goes in?

P.K. We are going to re-do the boxes. At the moment, we make a box that all three steam irons fit into, which has a picture of each different steam iron stuck onto the box. Whether this will be the method in the future, or we will have a different box for each iron is a question we have to ask.

Conversation tails off and A.M. leaves with display board.

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