

1) Title of the case

Altinn – trade and industry's gateway to public services: Making the businesses' interaction with the authorities easier through a simplified electronic dialogue

2) General description of the project

Trade and industry shall get a joint portal for electronic services – electronic dialogue with the public sector. This shall be developed on the basis of the current Internet portal Altinn (www.altinn.no) (for public reporting). Altinn shall be developed further as a tool for realising the objectives of electronic communication between the public sector and users, and obtain/achieve efficiency and coordination benefits on the part of both the public and the private sector.

The Norwegian Government's vision is to be at the forefront internationally when it comes to offering electronic services from the public sector. User-friendly electronic services directed at trade and industry contribute to simplifying the everyday existence of businesses in a number of areas. They improve the interaction between the private and public sectors, and free up time for value creation on the part of businesses. Users can initiate the required interaction with the public administration *when* and *where* it suits them.

The current use of Altinn

Today Altinn is primarily a channel for electronic reposting pursuant to statutory reporting requirement, such as income tax, VAT etc. The users of Altinn can either fill in the forms directly in the Internet portal or they can use their own IT systems to transfer data, for example salary and accounting systems or a year-end accounting package. The companies' own IT systems transfer pre-filled forms to the portal through a simple interface where subsequently the forms can be completed and signed in the portal.

Efforts have been made to make the forms as easily accessible as possible. The users will automatically get a list of forms on screen when deadlines are imminent and, at the same time, get necessary online guidance on what forms to send (and which public agency is responsible for the form). Altinn automatically enters all relevant information into the forms based on the information contained in existing public IT systems and registers (pre-filling). The forms are dynamic so there is no need to answer questions that are not specifically related to you. There is an electronic PO box for registered post and messages from different governmental agencies to individual businesses.

An open, accessible and secure solution

Altinn is a 24/7 solution, which gives high flexibility for the users. It allows users the opportunity to use the solution anywhere, at any time. Altinn is built on a .NET platform, but there is no demand in most cases for the users to change their hardware or software. Regular access to the Internet is usually sufficient.

The solution builds on a standard interface based on an open standard (XML, SOAP), and integration towards the IT systems for the businesses is implemented through the help of web services.

Altinn is designed for any security level and the software ensures that access to and treatment of data is restricted to people and software with proper access rights. Security mechanisms are incorporated for secure storage and tracking of data.

A pin-code is at the present stage used to authenticate the person in the Altinn-system. The system is connected to the Register of Business Enterprises, affirming that person's authorisation to act on behalf of the company. Work is now being done to change the system and start using digital signatures (PKI) instead, for authentication and also for signature (non-repudiation). This will probably be in full production at the beginning of 2007.

The overarching strategy

The goals of an overarching *strategy* for the development of electronic services directed at trade and industry are to ensure coordinated services, to keep up the pace of development, and to ensure that developments are in line with the wishes and needs of businesses. In order to get users to prefer electronic services to paper based communication, these have to be user-friendly and adapted to the needs of the users. Only then will the effort bring pay-off in the form of efficiency gains on the part of the public sector and simplification on the part of trade and industry.

3) The main content of the case

Several surveys conclude that trade and industry sees the changeover to electronic reporting as an important simplification. We will build further on the success achieved by the Internet portal Altinn as a tool for reporting from trade and industry to the public sector. Altinn shall by the end of 2008 be the portal where trade and industry can find all services from the public sector - electronically.

The strategy encompasses a wide range of different electronic services. A coordinated and user-friendly range of services for trade and industry calls for different forms of electronic services to be seen in its context and to be coordinated, and made available through Altinn. The Altinn portal shall give access to services as

- electronic reporting pursuant to statutory reporting requirements, such as filing reports on tax return, VAT return, etc.
- other types of electronic services, such as electronic application forms, replies to applications, decisions, overview of the information registered about the business in public sector registers, etc.
- electronic information services, hereunder, but not limited to, information concerning various subsidy schemes, general information regarding the public administration and regulatory framework information.

The current goals are:

- In 2008, 75 pct. of all reporting on the 15 most used forms shall take place electronically to the public sector
- In 2008, at least 30 pct. of the target group for other available electronic services shall make use of the electronic form of communication
- In 2008, 70 pct. of businesses shall be very satisfied or satisfied with governmental electronic services. User satisfaction surveys shall be carried out regularly

Measures:

- By the end of 2008, it shall be possible to complete all filing pursuant to statutory reporting requirements electronically via the Altinn solution
Milestones: By the end of 2006, 50 pct. of all forms shall be available via Altinn
 By the end of 2007, 75 pct. of all forms shall be available via Altinn
- By the end of 2008, all electronic services which require written communication between the public sector and trade and industry (such as application forms, etc.) shall be available via Altinn
- By the end of 2008, all businesses shall be offered the option to receive replies to applications, decisions, etc., sent to an electronic mailbox at Altinn
- By the end of 2008, all information serving the needs of trade and industry for knowledge of public sector schemes, regulatory frameworks, etc. The information shall be adapted in a user-friendly manner for easy web-based search/retrieval. The information shall be presented in a uniform layout and coordinated to enable trade and industry to easily locate updated and quality-assured in-

formation. General information shall be available at Altinn. Other information shall be accessible via good references/links from Altinn

- Electronic signature/e-ID shall be adopted in respect of all relevant electronic services
- Governmental electronic services shall, to the extent possible, be adapted and adjusted to the individual needs of each user, and hereunder be integrated with the internal specialised systems of the user
- By the end of 2008, all forms from the public sector shall be based on a joint user interface. (Guidelines for such a joint user interface (the Elmer principles) were drafted in 2005)
- Public authorities providing electronic services shall regularly consider measures to stimulate increased use of the services, such as, for example, extended time-limits for electronic filing, swifter processing, lower fees, feedback in the form of statistics, etc. Such measures shall always be considered upon the introduction of new electronic services
- All electronic services shall, where possible, be pre-filled with basic data from the Central Coordinating Register for Legal Entities and utilise joint metadata from the Register of Reporting Obligations of Enterprises
- Information services shall to the maximum extent possible feature provide direct links to reporting services, application forms and other relevant electronic services
- Relevant regulatory frameworks shall be reviewed to facilitate efficient electronic interaction

4) The reasons behind the case

Each year Norwegian businesses complete a series of public reporting forms in order to satisfy the public need for information. Surveys indicate that Norwegian businesses today spend app. 5 000 person-year on statutory reporting to Central Government agencies. Simplification of businesses' reporting obligation has therefore been a major task for the Norwegian government for many years. The main reason to reduce this burden on businesses is the same: to ensure and to strengthen our competitiveness.

Industrial policy needs to be comprehensive and adopt a long-term perspective. One aspect of this comprehensive approach is the Government's effort to streamline and facilitate reporting to public authorities, and thus give businesses the possibility to devote more time and resources on developing and creating value in the company. Regulatory frameworks and reporting requirements shall not be perceived as barriers to starting up or developing business ventures. In reducing businesses time spent on filing reports to the public, enables us to protect and continue to develop our current welfare society.

The Government's over all objectives are: Norwegian regulatory frameworks shall require the minimum possible compliance resources, and shall represent a competitive advantage to businesses based in Norway. Favourable and predictable conditions for business provide a good basis for innovation and value creation. Information technology, applied in the right way, makes an important contribution to the achievement of these goals.

The Government has laid down some principles governing the simplification efforts:

Principles governing the reduction of the reporting burdens on trade and industry

§ The Government shall never request more information than what actually is used

- § Businesses shall never have to report the same information more than once
- § The Government shall offer the simplest possible method of reporting
- § There shall be a reasonable balance between government's benefit from such reporting and the burden placed on the business in question

The aim of the public sector is to achieve

- § that trade and industry experience public administration as well-organised and non-bureaucratic, and that Norwegian provision of public services provides a competitive advantage internationally
- § the best possible cooperation in the interaction between the public sector and trade and industry

The Altinn portal is an important tool to fulfil these principles.

5) The actors behind the case

6) The process leading to success

In 2002 the Norwegian Tax Administration, Statistics Norway, and the Brønnøysund Register Centre joined forces in order to create a common Internet portal for public reporting. The portal has been in full operation since 2004. In the beginning it covered mainly financial data.

The project soon showed that the portal had the ability to be a useful tool for other agencies as well, that the solution could be used to develop new services, and last but not least be developed from a one-way reporting channel to a channel for dialogue between the businesses and the public sector.

Altinn has become a very important tool in the government's effort to reduce the administrative burdens for the businesses. There are many good reasons for expanding the use of this investment to other parts of the public sector. The Ministry of Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Finance have, on state level, in charge of the development of Altinn. been the most important actors in this work. The three original partners in the project have also played vital roles in the developing work, as well as in the marketing of the portal.

The trade associations have also been important contributors. They have strongly supported the initial development of Altinn and now support its expansion. User participation is a very important focus for this initiative. Up to this point accountants have been the main direct user group, reporting financial data on behalf of their clients. The Norwegian Association of Authorised Accountants (NARF) has made great efforts in order to get their members to take Altinn in use.

The Brønnøysund Register Centre (BRC) is responsible to administer and develop the Altinn portal. The BRC is an administrative agency responsible for a number of national control and registration schemes for business and industry. The BRC performs an important task by coordinating the reporting obligations of businesses and works in close cooperation with the agencies that use Altinn for their services. Altinn is presently financed by the Ministry of Trade and Industry.

The portal will be continuously developed in order to improve user interface (based on user feedback) and to enhance its functionality.

Registration tools

Certain registration tools already established in the public sector of Norway are essential in the Altinn solution:

The Central Coordinating Register for Legal Entities: The register contains basic data about entities that are under reporting obligations to the Register of Employers, the Value Added Tax Registration

List, the Register of Business Enterprises, the Business Register of Statistics Norway, the Corporate Taxation Data Register or the Register of Foundations. All legal entities are allotted a unique organisation number. In addition, the Register holds information on all persons with key roles in the entity. The primary task of this register is to coordinate information on business and industry in various public registers, and which public authorities also frequently request. To prevent that public authorities ask companies the same questions, the Register ensures that all the information is collected in one place and that the information can be reused by the public authorities.

The Central Coordinating Register for Legal Entities plays two important roles in Altinn.

- The administration of admission rights in Altinn is determined by the roles that are registered with the legal entity in the register
- All forms is pre-filled with relevant basic information about the legal entity from the register

The Register of Reporting Obligations of Enterprises: The main task of the register is to maintain a constantly updated overview of the reporting obligations of enterprises, and to find ways to coordinate and simplify these obligations. The aim is to prevent unnecessary compilation and registration of information, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises, and to ensure the reuse of data. The register maintains an overview of the information the various registers and agencies require from enterprises and of the permits required for business activities, and estimates burdens related to submission of information in terms of time. The register has lately developed a metaregister that are supplying metadata (covering semantic interoperability) for electronic reporting solutions like Altinn.

Altinn also is connected to the National Registry, a population registry of every physical person with its domicile in Norway. Each person is given a national identity number that is used by all agencies in the public sector (and also in private sector). Forms is pre-filled and controlled against data in this Registry.

The Elmer guidelines for joint user interface of public forms on the Internet are also an important tool to create user-friendly solutions. The guidelines contain some general principles and in addition several detailed directions on designing good electronic dialogue. Common look and feel is one of the main principles, and guidelines recommends that the computer screen be divided in three:

- The navigation area on the left hand side
- The actual form in the middle
- The information area to the right

The guidelines also recommend the “listening form”: Questions is depending on earlier answers. It’s a well-known problem in most forms that the relevance of different questions will vary for different user categories. Therefore – choosing different tracks in a form - which means that the next questions is based on the previous answers - is one of the most important opportunities for simplification in electronic forms versus paper forms.

7) Results indicating the success

The Altinn success is based on one simple, but important, factor: the solution works in practice. The marked penetration became high very rapidly. An increasing number of public authorities are delivering services via Altinn and the take-up of the services offered is high. The most complex forms are already available in Altinn (the tax return for businesses).

The number of public agencies who is taking part in Altinn is growing, at the moment app. 20 agencies have signed an agreement with Altinn, out of these 11 have services available at the moment. 27 services are now available (app. 90 forms). All these numbers are expected to increase soon.

Market penetration:

- App. 12 mill electronic forms has passed through Altinn
- The stockholder reports January 2006: 91 pct.
- VAT Return: Increasing every term, now 63 pct.
- Tax return for businesses: 2005: 65 pct.

Results from a survey among 2000 general managers in June 2005:

- 70 percent agreed with the statement that «Altinn is a time saver for their business»
- 94 percent want all public forms to be available through Altinn.
- 60 pct. are aware of Altinn
- 90 pct. want to use Altinn more in the future

The solution gives cost effective development of electronic services from different public agencies. The solution is also used for services for private persons. The Norwegian Tax Administration has in their strategy for electronic services decided to use the Altinn-solution for the production of all their electronic services.

Altinn is unique also on an international scale, and many countries have shown interest in Altinn. (Updated statistics will be presented at the workshop.)

8) The main obstacles of the case – and future challenges

The main obstacles of the case are and have been more or less the same as what we see as the future challenges.

- We have a long way to go to reach the ambitious political goals – within a short period of time
- How to get all forms and all services available via Altinn? How to convince all governmental bodies to offer their services through Altinn? Today each authority is to a large extent free to decide which access points it will use, and voluntary participation is important to create a good environment for cooperation
- The financing of (the?) initiative as such, where the savings/expenditure cut often comes to others than those who are carrying the (initial) costs
- Common infrastructure for use of eID and e-signatures is needed, but the market is developing very slowly
- Ensuring adequate capacity in the Altinn organization in general. A new procurement procedure is starting now, which is very time consuming.
- Ensuring efficiency in the governing of Altinn and at the same time ensure that all participating agencies are involved – especially when the number of participating agencies is increasing
- The possible clash of interest between the focus on efficiency in public sector and the focus on user-friendly/-oriented services
- Better quality services: how to establish services between different government bodies/agencies. Such services are more demanding to develop, but will also give rise to the greatest savings both for users and the public sector
- The need of more standardisation in the public sector's ICT systems to ensure better interaction. A prerequisite for such useful and cost-efficient cross-sectoral measures is that the public sector's ICT systems are able to interact with each other and with the internal IT systems of businesses.

To be able to provide user-friendly electronic services, the public sector needs to maintain a close dialogue with users throughout all phases of the development of electronic services. User participation is ensured through various existing user fora and designated workshops, and will continue to be emphasised when moving forward. The user representatives need to feel that they are involved.

Another challenge is that we want to focus on cost-benefit analyses of potential savings from electronic dialogue between trade and industry and the public sector. These would have to demonstrate the consequences on the part of both trade and industry and the public sector. The main responsibility for carrying out such analyses lies with each government body. Joint solutions like Altinn have a special responsibility for always offering services that are useful to both the public sector and to trade and industry, and for rendering these visible.

Certain public services require PKI-technology. The Government establishes a common security gateway for public sector. The gateway shall offer a joint cost-efficient service for PKI-based log-on/authentication, electronic signature, etc., and ensure a coordinated rollout of e-ID/e-signature within the public sector. The security gateway will be a portal for PKI-based log-on/authentication and, if applicable, signing for services offered through service portals, the websites of government bodies/municipal administrations, etc.

The strategy encompasses electronic services from the public sector to trade and industry, from both the central and local government sectors. The Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS) is actively pursuing a coordinated and swift development of local government electronic services. Moreover, it is a joint objective of the Government and KS for local government services directed at trade and industry to be available via Altinn as soon as possible, in addition to being available via the website of the relevant municipal administration.

9) Main sources of inspiration behind the case

The development of Altinn has its base in three very dedicated agencies: The Norwegian Tax Administration, Statistics Norway, and the Brønnøysund Register Centre. They had a very pro-active and strategic management, and needed ability to implement the project.

The Brønnøysund Register Centre is an advanced user of ICT, and is internationally in the forefront in many areas.

The development of the strategy and the further development of Altinn have two main objective: The political focus on the problems related to red tape and the government's strong commitment to reduce the administrative burdens of the businesses.

The development of MinSide (My Page), a portal for e-services for physical persons domiciled in Norway, is also a source of inspiration. The two initiatives, even though they are quite different, have a similar overall goal and can inspire each other and exchange knowledge and experiences.

10) The most important lesson learned

Lessons learned *so far* (we are only in the beginning of the implementation and development phase):

- Development of new ICT-solutions are time consuming
- It is a great challenge to get different agencies to cooperate
- Advanced services demands advanced underlying ICT-systems (registers etc.)
- User satisfaction is very important, and must never be underestimated
- The businesses do want electronic services from the public service
- User participation is vital to get user-friendliness/satisfaction – which is vital to get a high market penetration
- The demand for user services/help functions concerning electronic services is very high