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Country Report - Portals in Norway
Government On-Line International Network
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1. Introduction

This report is the Norwegian response to the portal sub-project within the Government On-Line International Network.

1.1. Portals – role and functions

In the discussion regarding topography for the future public administration, emphasis is placed on flexibility and accessibility for the users[1]. Public information and services must therefore be available via a number of contact points or channels. Establishing a general infrastructure for two-way communication between the administration and citizens where human and technological networks interact and complement each other is the principal challenge.

In line with the definition given in the covering letter, portals can be viewed as dedicated services whose aim is to make it easier to find and to access information and services from public agencies. These kind of portals functions as a guide to other web services, using search engines and indexes.
The added value of the portals lies in the fact that information from a number of independent suppliers can be presented in one point in a manner which is systematic, uniform and easy to follow. Users can be guided via the portal to the right public agency without having to be familiar with organising of the government.

In addition, the portal is instrumental in verifying the quality of information and services by means of its selection criteria. Users can feel confident that the information and services available via the portal are correct and credible, and that the sender is an authoritative source. The portals can also offer value-enhancing functionality. This is made possible by means of the synergy of horizontal integration, that is to say; services that one agency is unable to offer alone, which are made possible by means of cross-sector co-operation.

As for the government itself, portal co-operation may represent a better use of resources. Public agencies often share target groups, challenges, and demands for provision. Such services can be starting point for organisational development and improvement of agencies communication and value-creating processes.

Portals bring information and services closer to the user than any single websites can manage. This means greater security, both democratic and legal, and greater opportunities for effective task management by the administration.

Discussions on public portals have to take as its starting point the fact that a portal will enhance co-ordination and efficiency. In our opinion it is therefore considered less fruitful to dwell on scope, functionality and content of the services, as these things tends to vary

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[1] The users are defined as individuals, trade and industry sector, unions and interest group.

relation to individual requirements. Portals do not <u>have</u> to have a search engine in order to be portals, and they can also be comparatively thin on content.

Some suggests that portals as *websites* are becoming less and less important, while the *co-ordination* which they represent will become ever more important. In the future, we might see examples of personal portal services in which information and services from various suppliers are selected and presented in accordance with *individual* criteria. The organisation of information and services, and the establishment of structures for this kind of scenario (such as information structures and metainformation) will take greater importance. The development of a universal encoding language (XML) and intelligent search technology implies that it will become easier to create simple, individually prepared services on the Internet.

However, this presupposes that the whole of the government is represented on the Internet by good, user-oriented web services. These kind of web services should be linked together and made available by means of joint information structures, standardised metatagging and a shared understanding of quality. Therefore a national strategy for the development of web portals has to focus on methods for co-ordination and not on the services *per se*.

In our opinion, the definition given in the covering letter focuses to the requisite extent on the *co-ordination* function of the portals.

1.2. Status – eGovernment in Norway

The co-ordinating function of portals will make them an important supplement to other public web services, such as websites for agencies and municipalities and therefore represent:
- an alternative entrance
- a "search and help service"
- access to horizontally co-ordinated services.

Strategies for establishing portals therefore must be viewed in close connection with the national strategies for eGovernment in Norway.

Norway puts a high priority on reaching the goal of developing a 24/7 Government. In order to reach presupposes that the public administration will be reconditioned and modernised in such a way as to become more user-oriented and effective. 24/7 Government focuses on the interaction between citizens and the administration, and that the administration shall meet the needs of its users by developing user-friendly and tailored services.

It is also all about reinforcing the democracy perspective by offering better access to public information and services. This objective involves improving access for citizens and users to public information and services, including via electronic services and self-service solutions on the Internet. Information technology makes it possible for the public administration to meet the users and partners in a completely new way, and the aim for such services is to act as the primary channel to its users before the end of 2003.

24/7 is based on the assumption that everyone must have equal opportunities to communicate with the public administration, irrespective of human factors, resources or demands. Therefore, one important challenge will be to establish an infrastructure where the various channels interact and complement one another.

Another challenge is to offer users uniform, co-ordinated services. Measures to increase co-ordination within the public administration have to be taken and cross-sector solutions will have to be developed. Here, both municipal and governmental services must be available in one location in the form of information, guidance and simple executive processing. This also applies to the physical offices as well as the electronic services. Users must get what they need from a single location, such as the so-called public one stop shops in their local community. This will result in shorter processing times and improved monitoring for the public. This will demand not only co-ordination between agencies but also across various sectors of government.

Supplementary telephone services and call centres will allow users to come into direct contact with public service personnel 14–16 hours a day for information, guidance, simple registrations and the further handling of matters.

A 24/7 Government should be open and discussion-oriented. Therefore, an objective should ensure that users get both better access to official records and also better opportunities to participate in the democratic processes. All records (where access is not restricted) must be made available electronically, and they must be prepared for ongoing democratic discussions. Examples of relevant measures include electronic documentation of public reports and plans, electronic suggestion boxes, discussion aspects and electronic user assessments of public services.

Another aim for electronic services and IT-based solutions is to make the public sector more efficient. Freeing resources and utilising these more effectively, such as by moving administrative resources to service functions, is a further aim.

In summary, the following figures show the status of the work with 24/7 Government:
9 out of 10 public agencies and 7 out of 10 municipalities have set up websites.
Approx. 170 (out of 435) municipalities have set up one-stop shops offering municipal services. There are about 20 one-stop shop also offering information and services from other sectors and public agencies.

2.   Drivers of change – driving forces, incentives and means

2.1. User orientation

An essential prerequisite for the development of a 24/7 Government is to be familiar with the needs and requirements of the target groups, and for the services to meet the needs of the users. Therefore, the Norwegian public information policy takes as its basis the fact that the administration must make provision for mutual, two-way communication on duties and rights with various user groups. Surveys show that the public administration, and the agencies in particular, are systematically working to an ever greater extent on preparing their information and communication on recipients' terms as much as possible.

During the last year, the Norwegian government carried out several surveys of users' attitudes towards public information and services via various contact channels. The surveys show that users very much prefer electronic channels, such as telephone and the Internet, as their main channels of contact with the public sector. The survey also indicates that the younger members of society are among the most eager users of the Internet, but that more and

more new groups of people are starting to use the Internet. People are expecting more from public services. Users are becoming progressively more demanding and want more services with increased interactivity, better accessibility, higher quality and greater flexibility.

Therefore, the work on 24/7 Government must illustrate the connection between the needs and satisfaction of users and the public supply of electronic services. It will be particularly important to find out how a public administration can meet the requirements and needs for efficient task management and access to public authorities and decision-making processes. Another primary issue is to look at how it is possible to ensure that technological and human networks are able to complement one another and in this way guarantee all access, regardless of criteria.

2.2. Other incentives

2.2.1. Distribution of responsibilities and roles

Norwegian public administration has traditionally been decentralised in the sense that both the specialist responsibility and the responsibility for the use of policy instruments for the solution of tasks have to a great extent been assigned to the individual sectors and entities. Thus it is primarily the individual sectors and entities that are responsible for the development of 24/7 Government.

The purpose of the line responsibility is to ensure better integration with the agency's services and instrument system, making task management more efficient and readjusting it in terms of organisation and ensure that the services is based on the line organisations' specialist knowledge and understanding of the target groups. Therefore, it is important to utilise the driving forces, the motivation and the skills of each individual body and in this way develop the 24/7 Government by means of long-term evolution.

One main strategy is to encourage public entities to link up in major and minor Internet co-operations so that smaller municipalities and units can set up services on the Internet. These may be geographical portals, topic portals or shared services. Regional portals have been set up at various locations in the country, offering services that would not have been implemented otherwise.

The objectives of the 24/7 Government will presuppose a more active co-ordination role. It is important to deal with shared needs for development and to promote adequate standardisation and joint solutions both at a technical level and a service level.
The Ministry of Labour and Government Administration (AAD), holds the overall responsibility for Government policy and is responsible for initiating principal measures for standardisation and co-ordination, provide political establishment, and co-ordination among agencies and the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities.

The Directorate of Public Management (Statskonsult) is the Government's specialist directorate for communication and the development of technology and organisation, and assists with terms and strategy development, as well as implementation of pilot projects and new services in line. A number of other agencies have also been assigned responsibility for the operation and development of national joint services, including the Chief Administrative Officer of Sogn og Fjordane (www.norge.no)

In the case of the municipal sector (municipalities and local councils), overall responsibility for driving change lies with Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities. A separate plan of action is being prepared for the municipal sector where principal frameworks and strategies for the further development are mapped out.

2.2.2. Funding

At present there are no funding arrangements earmarked for agencies to set up web services. The development costs have to be covered by the individual agencies or in co-operation with others in line with the distribution of responsibilities and roles. There are opportunities for finance via other national ventures (including the high-speed communications programme, HØYKOM) and other research programmes, but these opportunities are utilised only to a small extent.

2.2.3. Framework on Government policy

The principal framework for the development work is made up by the Government policy and public information policy. Particular emphasis is placed on legal protection, the protection of privacy, rights for parties, insight, openness and dealing with democratic rights. The information policy adopts five main principles for public information and communication, and places particular emphasis on the fact that information must be proactive, dialogical and prepared on the basis of the needs and requirements of recipients.
A number of legal framework factors, on elements such as rights for parties (the Public Government Act), insight and openness (the Freedom of Information Act) and legal protection and the protection of privacy (the Data Protection Act) are provided via special legislation.

2.3.   Potential obstacles to the development

2.3.1. Costs and the contribution of resources

The development of 24/7 Government is extremely costly. In terms of both funding and skills, this kind of work will demand comparatively great investment from individual agencies, and this is probably the reason why development is going relatively slowly.

2.3.2. The quality of public web services

Enhancing the user-oriented quality of public web services constitutes a challenge. The results from a survey show that electronic service delivery is comparatively incomplete, with simple functionality and primary emphasis on the one-way provision of information. The results also show that electronic services in the public sector are undergoing development, including features such as more interactivity and closer integration with expert and specialist systems.

Government bodies have progressed slightly further than municipal services, with features such as more interactivity and greater levels of user orientation. This may have something to do with the fact that these web services are generally older and therefore have more experience of development work.

Therefore, motivating the administration to work systematically in order to enhance the quality of its web services poses a great challenge. One primary strategy for this will involve establishing a directional framework in the form of quality criteria that individual bodies can opt to use as their starting points, and which will encourage the bodies to maintain quality awareness when establishing and developing web services, such as by rewarding good quality. Agencies that choose to base the development of their electronic services on the quality criteria will therefore ensure good specialist establishment of these.

2.3.3. Organisation and traditional task management

Traditional organisation and the distribution of tasks are a challenge. Previous attempts with public service offices have shown that joint solutions have been made difficult by the line organisations' decision-making authority and by restricted opportunities for delegation, particularly in respect of cross-section action. There are also a number of legal restrictions in respect of rights for parties, complaint and appeal arrangements and the protection of privacy/data security. The task of examining the regulations for simplifying regulations and legislation has been given priority by the eNorway action plan.

There are also challenges linked with the better utilisation of IT in the Government's internal task management and streamlining, as well as the co-ordination of value-creating processes. The bodies' internal organisations of work and procedures for administrative procedures have to be adjusted for electronic communication and service, as well as for horizontal co-operation with other bodies.

3. Portals – future development and challenges

3.1. Status and development

There are a number of main development features, which will be of significance to the development of portals and other web services.

3.1.1. Development features

There is much to indicate major changes to the organisation and work forms in the public administration. This applies both to changes as a consequence of conscious control, such as reconditioning of the Government structure or changes to the distribution of tasks and resources, but also to changes as a consequence of "uncontrollable" development features. These include increased competition, more demanding users and greater complexity. It is evident that progress is being made towards "the network Government", where the focus will be on high quality for core tasks and extensive interaction with other players (both private and other public service providers).

3.1.2. Technological development

Internet technology is undergoing constant development in terms of both hardware and software. The next generation of the web will probably be based on global exchange formats, which will also make distribution possible via various channels, such as to mobile units. Intelligent agents and search engines will be able to find and compile information and services from various sources, depending on individual preferences. Estimates also show that

the greatest growth in the use of the Internet will be seen in the wireless/mobile units' field. This will place other demands on how information and services are organised and made available.

3.1.3. Changes to the pattern of usage

Great changes are taking place as far as users are concerned. Internet access is now practically free, and more and more new groups such as the elderly are gaining access to the Internet, a fact that will result in other demands for preparation and access provision. At the same time, the pattern of usage is becoming ever more advanced, and users are expecting to a greater extent that information and services will be available on the Internet, and organised with interactivity and options for adaptation to suit individual needs.

At the same time, the pattern of navigation is more difficult to control. Users do not necessarily follow logical, linear patterns, but jump backwards and forwards using hyperlinks. Search engines and metaindexes also help users to find items of information independently of their context.

3.1.4. Changes to the network topography

The topography of the Internet is also changing, in part due to changes to the pattern of usage. Diversification is on the increase; that is to say, additional, "simpler" offers are being made. The services are less general and better prepared in relation to the target groups and/or topics.
The relevance of the content ("What is the information about?" and "What does this mean to me?") is gaining in value at the expense of elements such as the audience for the content ("Who will see this?") and in this way the network has a less hierarchical structure.
As a consequence of this, there is considerable growth in the number of metaservices; that is to say, "thin" services which aim to refer customers to other services (portals, price comparison services, product testing services, e-commerce sites, etc.).

3.2. Strategy for co-ordination

While the administrations establish additional and improved services, demands for uniform co-ordination are growing. The co-ordination solutions have to complement the line organisations' own services and solutions but must not restrict their development. The aim of the co-ordination solutions must be to support and supplement the structure of existing resources on the Internet by means of rewards and "soft" co-ordination.

Important methods for ensuring "soft" co-ordination includes shared information structures, standardised meta-information and quality criteria. By taking these as the foundation for the development of their services, the agencies will make their resources better and more readily accessible at the same time. In this way, it will also be possible to reuse electronic information and services in a number of contexts, such as in portals.

Emphasis must be placed on the development of metaservices in order to ensure uniform co-ordination of information and services. These may include portals of varying "thickness" and focus (general, geographical or topic-based), electronic services (local electronic service "offices") or search engines, which search within defined areas.
These are services, which primarily have to be developed by or working closely with

individual agencies or bodies. Therefore, one important secondary strategy will involve providing encouragement for regional or topic-oriented Internet co-operation on joint solutions. This will also mean that smaller public entities (such as municipalities) will have the opportunity to take part in development work for which they would ordinarily not have the resources.

3.3. Future challenges

The objective of the reform and the said forces of influence create a number of specific challenges, which have to be addressed in the development work.

3.3.1. Internet presence

The basic criterion is that public agencies will set up websites on the Internet, based on information and services. This, among other things, was one of the objectives of norge.no, and findings here show that more and more public bodies are "getting on the Net" and setting up websites. In this instance, one secondary challenge is to stimulate increased diversification of the services, and in this way to give users services that have more target-oriented aims and are better prepared.

In a subsequent round, this will raise challenges as regards finding and verifying information and services. A greater selection of services makes it more difficult to find correct, valid information. Therefore, the strategy has to say something about which standardisation elements have to form the basis of information structures and metainformation.

The aim of the norge.no portal is to point the way towards public information and services on the Internet. One important question is how this service and other equivalent public portals can be further developed as guides and supplementary channels into the 24/7 Government.

For many small bodies, such as small municipalities, getting a website of their own set up and, even more, having interactive electronic services developed for them constitute in themselves a considerable boost in terms of both skills and resources. Therefore, an important strategy for the small municipalities may involve seeking to co-operate with other municipalities and making their services accessible via a shared portal/website.

3.3.2. Problems of openness and access

Initially, greater emphasis on the provision of information and services is a positive benefit with a democratic foundation. At the same time, greater opportunities for insight will help to create "closed rooms" to which the public do not have access. There is also the potential risk that public agencies will be content to make things available and not use resources to actively inform people of obligations and rights.

In addition, the transition to electronic channels for provision and distribution represent obvious challenges with respect of user access and information-gathering skills. There may be a risk that large groups of users will not gain access to legalised rights and opportunities because they are unable, for various reasons, to use the technical tools required. Therefore, the strategy has to indicate a choice of path in respect of 1) the development of supplementary channels, 2) the development of physical "support systems", and 3) improving users' information gathering skills.

3.3.3. Overall problems

Greater diversification and complexity also mean that there is a greater need to link together information and services together to form logical, uniform value chains. This has to take place both vertically (internally within the individual agencies and bodies) and horizontally (across agency boundaries and Government levels). Other challenges are raised as regards to creating integrity by means of a number of supplementary channels, such as physical services offices and electronic services.
This presupposes that main strategies are defined for co-ordination; both internally within individual bodies and in the administration as a whole.

3.3.4. "Convergence of information and services"

The more advanced the web services offered, the more difficult it is to distinguish between what is a basic service and what is an additional service. Information in itself will often be a basic service. Electronic forms and questionnaires will become a more important interface for the interaction between the Government and citizens. Users will be able to use the forms to both retrieve data from and submit data to the expert systems. This can be integrated with interactive guidance and prepared information. These kind of services presupposes that the web solution is integrated with various expert systems within the organisation, and that these expert systems are set up to be able to implement automated case management and services.

3.3.5. New tools

Administrative systems, which permit direct publication to the Internet, will be commissioned to a greater extent internally within the Government. Online databases, electronic administrative procedures and intranet solutions are examples of tools of this kind. While the one-way provision of information is a comparatively simple thing to manage, integrated electronic services presuppose that an overall perspective for the development work is used as the basis. Production systems, support systems, management and control systems and infrastructure have to be prepared for the future.

3.4. Strategic areas of action – Norway

3.4.1. Digital signatures

One important prerequisite for the further development of 24/7 Government will involve establishing a national standard for electronic forms and digital signatures.
There are a number of initiatives and projects in this area in the public sector. As integrated electronic services develop, large numbers of current paper-based forms will disappear or be integrated in a simplified form into the electronic service. However, during a transition period, having the opportunity to download a form from the Internet, which is then filled in and submitted manually, will offer clear benefits to users and the public bodies themselves. A need for joint measures for improved accessibility and formulation for such forms is signalled. The transaction-based interaction between users/citizens and Government will also take place in the form of the exchange of structured data in electronic forms.

The AAD holds overall responsibility for monitoring a committee, which has considered the use of digital signatures in electronic interaction with and within the Government. The challenge is to establish Public Key Infrastructure (PKI) and to develop a sufficiently critical mass for the use of digital signatures so that public services can be executed and developed electronically with sufficient security and confidence. Work is in progress on, among other

things, establishing a new permanent co-ordination committee, which will cover the public Government in its entirely, including local and regional Government.

3.4.2. Improved user-oriented quality

In the work on establishing the 24/7 Government, emphasis is placed on ensuring that electronic services are of a high quality. Therefore, 24/7 Government presupposes that public agencies and bodies are working systematically on enhancing the quality of their electronic services.

A set of general quality criteria has been developed for public web services so as to be able to measure and compare quality. These criteria form the basis of a tagging arrangement via the portal www.norge.no, and an assessment of all public web services was carried out according to these in the spring of 2001. The quality system consists of 21 different indicators within the fields of current interest, user-friendliness, openness and technical availability[2]. The quality system will undergo further development so as to cover a broader selection of user-oriented quality criteria.

3.4.3. Better utilisation of public data

Common formatting languages for electronic data flow and publication, seem to become dominant standards in connection with the exchange of structured and unstructured information on the Internet. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate in more details on how the metatagging of information can ensure better utilisation and reuse of public data.

3.4.4. Common search functionality for public Internet services

Good search engine services are an important tool for improving access for users to public electronic services. Search engines are costly, and acquiring a lot of publicly owned search engines would be a waste of resources. It will probably be possible to manage with one public search engine, if clear demands are made in respect of how a search engine of this type can be used by a number of parts of the Government. The portal norge.no currently has a search engine that can be developed in such a manner that a public agency or portal could use this search engine service flexibly and with satisfactory functionality for such use.

3.4.5. Protection of the line responsibility principle

The line organisations themselves will hold overall responsibility for the development of portals and web services. Therefore, work on 24/7 Government presupposes that line responsibility for task management is not undermined, but supported and reinforced by means of various measures for stimulating individual bodies and by picking up on and dealing with joint development requirements.

To strengthen the work with 24/7 Government, the Government has agreed that all bodies are to prepare strategies for the development of 24/7 Government within their own fields. These strategies will be included in the letters of assignment and in the control talks in general between the individual bodies and the superior authority.

The municipalities and local councils will also have to develop strategies and enterprise plans for their own implementations of 24/7 Government, and these have to be integrated into the

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[2] The quality indicators are described at http://www.kvalitetpaanett.net

plans for the individual bodies and be included in the control talks with the political bodies. Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities is working on the development of strategies for 24/7 Government in the municipal sector (eKommune).

3.5. Examples of portals

- **www.norge.no**

Official portal for public information and services on the Internet. This service went on line in January 2000 and will be assessed in the autumn of 2001 as a basis for a decision on possible permanent operation. This project is a co-operation between *Arbeids- og administrasjonsdepartementet* and *Kommunenes Sentralforbund*.

- **www.fjordinfo.no**

Regional portal for the county of Sogn og Fjordane. Both public and private participants.

- **www.smaalensveven.no**

Local portal for 10 small municipalities in Indre Østfold. Public information only.

- **www.odin.dep.no**

Portal for the Norwegian Government and ministries.

- **www.bedin.no**

Portal for information for trade and industry. Run by a foundation on behalf of the *Nærings- og handelsdepartementet* [Ministry of Trade and Industry].

- **www.plantevernmiddel.net**

Topic portal on plant protection means and other farming-related information.
Co-operation between nine players in the agricultural sector.