

Why Norwegians prefer **ELECTRONIC** forms

The ELMER Guidelines – right at hand and free of charge

ELMER

Easier and more efficient reporting

The **ELMER** concept

ELMER is a consistent set of rules defining a common look and feel and setting pedagogical requirements for public service web forms. The objective is to give users filling in forms a better experience, improving their **understanding of the task** and enabling them to enter the **correct information**. For the relevant authority, the increased quality of information leads to **better response quality** and **more efficient processing**.

The ELMER guidelines are presented in a tabular format with cross references, examples and a glossary of terms. Covering styles, page layout and interaction rules for on-line forms in detail, with a total of around 100 requirements. ELMER is a mandatory ICT-standard for public forms for the private sector in Norway ■

	Requirement Section		Mandatory Requirement	Link to other Rule
	2.3.8	The choices available for checkboxes, radio buttons and pull-down lists must use a wording that is meaningful for the user.		3.4.5
	2.3.9	Values used in lists must be sorted in an order that is meaningful for the form filler . If the alternatives are unfamiliar to relevant users, and the order cannot be predicted logically, long multiple choice lists should be divided, and single choice lists should be presented in two steps.		Clarification
Requirement Category		Recommendation	Link to Definition	Link to Clarification

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Click the menu to select a page.

Navigation Area

Input Area

Information Area

Licensed Premises

Information on relating to the Premises

Name of Establishment

Address/Postal Address

Postal Code/City

Telephone (without spaces)

Name of Establishment Owner(s)

Org. number	Name of Enterprise	Address/Postal Address	Postal Code	Ownership Interest
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

Add Row

Include all companies/self employed individuals with a minimum of 10% ownership interest. You will be asked to provide information on personal owners/shareholders elsewhere in the form.

← Previous Next →

Button Row

All ELMER based forms will have a common look and feel.

ELMER requires a navigation area to the left, with all the (relevant) pages listed, and an information area to the right for user-requested help and error messages. There are also specifications for presenting field groups, for dynamic tables and for placing help symbols and helps texts in relation to the relevant field.

ELMER-based forms will also contain uniform functionality assisting form fillers in avoiding questions of no relevance to their particular situation. ELMER describes two different techniques; “tracks” and “response-dependent questions”. There are several requirements dealing with when and how to use these techniques. And many other techniques to improve the total user experience are described in ELMER. Sometimes this will require a comprehensive restructuring of questions and pages from the old, paper based form to create different dialogues for diverging user groups ■

Giving the user a clear voice

ICT-oriented projects often suffer from unclear and divergent impulses from the user environments, making the system less used, and less suitable for its purpose. ELMER gives the user a clear voice, expressing a consistent and carefully considered message on behalf of the respondents, yet still harmonized with the needs that public administrations and government agencies have to collect sufficient information for complicated form based case administration.

Many agencies, developers, web designers and even the main business organizations have been involved in developing the ELMER guidelines. ELMER has devised a consistent, overall set of requirements, that have been developed by experts deliberately sacrificing their individual professional convictions for the benefit of common look and feel. This has been possible due to the special Norwegian tradition where government employees cooperate with usability and ICT experts from private sector, fully respecting each other’s needs and positions.

Today some two thousand different web forms satisfy the ELMER requirements in Norwegian agencies. For some of the most important business-related forms more than 90 percent are submitted through the web, even if a paper based alternative is available ■

Increasing benefits from eGovernment solutions

The success of eGovernment activities depend very much on the quality of user interfaces.

If the user does not understand the electronic form, he will **need support**. If mistakes are made, the answers must **be corrected**. If the user gives up, he will **submit the paper version** and the receiver has to register once more the information already given on the form.

But if the user understands and appreciate the web form, **the cost will be next to nothing**.

Needless to say, response quality is a critical factor for maintaining adequate public reactions and correct decisions for businesses and citizens. Decisions based on incorrect information might be a threat to legal protection and public security.

One important issue for the future: The more we succeed in integrating and re-using collected information to increase governmental efficiency, the more important it will be that form questions have been correctly understood and answered in the first place ■

Easily adopted by all eGovernment initiatives

ELMER can be easily adopted by any eGovernment initiative anywhere, for inspiration and motivation as a reminder of focus and approach, as a proposal for structuring user requirements and even as a comprehensive, transferable total set of requirements.

All countries face the same eGovernment challenges and communicate on the same Internet with fairly similar users in fairly similar situations. ELMER is available, explained and illustrated in English and ready to use, free of charge for everyone ■

You find the ELMER guidelines on www.brreg.no/english/elmer

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ELMER – easier and more efficient reporting – has been adopted as **the user interface guidelines for public forms on the internet**.

These guidelines have been drawn up on assignment from the Ministry of Trade and Industry and are managed by the Brønnøysund Register Centre. From the summer of 2009 ELMER is also **the Norwegian government IT standard for public forms** for the private sector.

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