Chapter 7

Reducing Response Burden for Enterprises Combining Methods for Data Collection on the Internet

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ABSTRACT

For many years enterprises have complained about their response burden in reporting to National Agencies, and it is necessary to find ways to reduce this burden. This is complicated, because in a modern society there is a need for even more reports and statistics. However, almost all data reporting from enterprises may be retrieved from existing data within the companies (Norwegian ELMER report 2001). For some areas it is easy to automate the reporting process. In other areas it is more complex because data exists in a variety of computer systems, and the systems are different in different enterprises. The Norwegian Government have financed a National system named Altinn for electronic reporting and communication between National Agencies and enterprises, and this system has functionality that makes it possible to combine traditional Web questionnaires with automated reporting. The Altinn system has been in production since 2003, and experiences from this are used in this chapter to demonstrate that enterprises prefer automatic reporting if this is an option. In this chapter the authors describe functionalities for combined reporting and how it reduces the response burden.

INTRODUCTION

For an enterprise it is time consuming to look up all necessary data for a report, and in some cases data may be stored in different systems. The workload of filling in a paper questionnaire or a Web questionnaire is almost the same, and the manual data entry introduces an extra source of error.

Statistics Norway has about 150 different business surveys, and about 30 person or household surveys, which for many years were produced as paper forms, prefilled with names and addresses, and prepared for OCR (Optical Character Reading). Anyhow, for more than 10 years Web questionnaires have been an alternative way of reporting, and in the last years only those who ask for it,
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gets a paper form. During this period automated reporting has been an alternative way of reporting on wages and on sickness leave, and when system vendors have implemented automated reporting, Statistics Norway have experienced that more and more enterprises use this facility in their systems. Automated reporting on wages has now a share of 94 percent. Other National Agencies have also been using automated reporting for large volume reporting.

Altinn functionality combines Web reporting and automated reporting of business reports, and is used in this chapter to describe how such systems can be designed. The different functionalities are described in more detail below. Enterprises may avoid investing in internal reporting systems because of functionalities in this centralized system, and National Agencies may develop services in the Altinn toolbox without installing special software because it is available in ‘the Cloud’.

The Altinn Toolbox

The agencies have access to a toolbox on Internet (SAAS Software as a Service). This toolbox is composed by a set of modules. Some of the modules are commercial products (Example: MS InfoPath, MS SharePoint), and whenever there is a new version, it is possible to do an upgrade. The modularisation makes the system less vulnerable for changes and future needs. It should even be possible to replace some of the products with others.

In this toolbox trained personnel (not necessarily IT people), can develop services for the agencies. One service may be composed by putting together different ‘sub services’ to form a process.

The Altinn End User Environment (PAAS Platform as a Service)

Altinn is a portal where private persons and companies can locate and do their reporting to National Agencies. National Agencies may also report back to private persons and companies using different ways of communication (message box, sms, Twitter, Facebook).

Altinn is a system where enterprises can choose to do their reporting automatically or manually using a Web-questionnaire. This gives flexibility for the respondents, but experience shows that in the areas where system providers have established automated reporting it is the preferred way of reporting (See Figure 1).

This chapter describes how automated reporting can be used in a combination with traditional Web-questionnaires to reduce the response burden. This combination can also be used to establish common automated reporting for several National Agencies thus saving the enterprises the burden of reporting identical data to several Na-