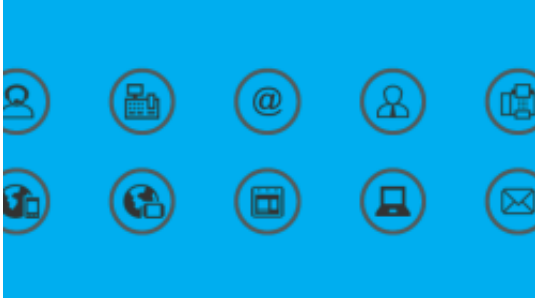


# Visual language will result in better services

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Service design can be invaluable during the ideas and concept phase, but does not have a systematic format for describing how to turn the objectives of a service into reality.

The number of digital services that we have to deal with has exploded. They are provided through a range of different marketing channels and across various technical platforms, and we order everything from cinema tickets and new summer clothes to travelcards and holidays. Even public services have gone digital, and this year a million Norwegians submitted their tax return online.

But across this plethora of services, steps are not always in a logical sequence, and our encounters with service providers can sometimes result in odd customer experiences.

## Fragmented contact

"One of the possible reasons behind a disjointed service might be when a company has an internet department, a customer service centre – and different staff writing any letters or texts that the company sends. Or a company might have purchased several new computer systems but has not meshed these together," says Ragnhild Halvorsrud of SINTEF ICT, head of the VISUAL research project.

"For example, when the coffee machine needs servicing, first of all you have to contact someone, then arrange for it to be collected, which involves shipping; you receive a confirmation, order status and tracking information by SMS and e-mail from the manufacturer and logistics department; then you have to log in to [internet banking](#) when you get an invoice, etc. Or you book a flight online, and everything from check-in to choosing a seat takes places in a fragmented dialogue by SMS and e-mail. The repeated interactions between customer and provider must be logical and provide a good experience," she says.

## **Streamlined dialogue**

The researchers at SINTEF will be working with the consultancy firm Halogen, Linköping University and Hafslund Strøm, FINN.no and DIPS to develop a new, [visual language](#) for service providers. Halogen is the project owner, since the agency's main focus is on service design.

Service design is a new speciality that focuses on a more coordinated, customer-oriented way of developing services. Service design can be invaluable during the ideas and concept phase, but does not have a systematic format for describing how to turn the objectives of a service into reality.

The visual language on which this project is focusing consists of diagrams and symbols. It starts by looking at the points of contact between customer and service provider, and produces a graphic

description of sequences and time flow. The aim is to simplify communication between designers, decision-makers, product owners, technologists and everyone involved in developing the service.

## **Scenarios and service models**

During the first phase of the project, the researchers have begun defining what words will be used to serve as a central terminology and define sequences and outcomes during interactions between customer and provider, when things should happen, parties that are involved, etc.

They are also developing the virtual 'service models' and scenarios that will be able to detect subtleties within the customer experience in situations such as online shopping and booking flights or a care service. The service models will be used for training, but also as an aid to developing and evaluating the language.

The visual language will be connected to the company's internal systems. Its most important utility value may be in its ability to visualise time-flow from the customer's angle – what is known as the customer journey. The aim is to make it easier to discover illogical transitions in services, and improve customer satisfaction and profitability.

## **Spectrum of services**

The corporate partners in the project cover a wide spectrum of services in different sectors: Hafslund Strøm (electricity supplier), FINN.no (digital marketplace) and DIPS (digital patient records and eHealth). The visual language will be tried out with these companies on annual cycles, and this will form the basis for assessing and developing the language.

"We will be working with Hafslund Strøm to chart the experience and

behaviour of the customer in terms of electricity supply over time. The corporate market is the focus with FINN.no, and here we are looking at options to make better use of self-service systems. With DIPS, we will consider improvements in the referral process in Norwegian hospitals", concludes Ragnhild Halvorsrud.

## **Facts about the project:**

- The aim of VISUAL is to develop a visual language for service design, including the methods and tools that go with it.
- [Service](#) design means a more coordinated, [customer](#)-oriented approach to analysing and developing the way a company provides its services.
- Involved in the project are Halogen, Hafslund Strøm, FINN.no, DIPS, SINTEF and Linköping University.
- The project is employing a Doctoral Research Fellow.
- VISUAL is an innovation project supported by the Research Council of Norway.
- The project time frame is 2012–2015.

**More information:** [www.visualproject.org/](http://www.visualproject.org/)

Provided by SINTEF

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