

31. Forms

The Internet is an interactive medium and the way you communicate with users is vital to their user experience. When users have to fill out a form on your site, correct instructions and appropriate feedback are very important.

177. Provide clear instructions.

Always provide users with instructions when they have to do something on your site. Complete instructions that are easy to understand limit the possibility of mistakes, saving users time and frustration. A simple but often overlooked example of instructions is indicating which fields of a form are compulsory.

178. Put the instructions above the form.

A lot of sites put the instructions for filling out the form underneath the form, at the bottom of the page. Users are supposed to read the instructions before filling out the form so put them at the top of the page, above the form.

179. Indicate which fields are required.

Make sure users can easily tell which fields are required so they get a good idea of how long it will approximately take them to fill out the form. Indicating which fields are required minimizes the risk of mistakes and increases the user's chances of correctly sending the form.

180. Make sure all fields containing vital information are compulsory.

Make sure all the fields that contain information you need to respond to the user's request (sending a brochure, calling to schedule an appointment, ...) are compulsory. If somebody asks to be sent a brochure but forgets to fill out his address, you should point that out. If you don't, you don't know where to send the brochure. Because the user is most likely unaware that he didn't fill out all the necessary fields, he will think your site doesn't work properly or worse, that you don't bother to send the brochure.

181. Put the name of the field in front of the field.

Make sure users know which field they're filling out. Put the name of the field in front of the field, not behind it.

182. Put the fields in a logical order.

Don't experiment with the order of the fields. First ask the user for his first name, then his last name, not the other way around. The fields street name, number, postal code and town are best grouped together.

183. Don't ask too much information.

A form with lots of fields to fill out tends to scare users because they think

it will take a lot of time to fill out. Always keep forms as short as possible and ask only strictly necessary data. If a user wants to subscribe to your newsletter, all you have to ask is an email address. If you have to send a user something via regular mail, you need a name, address and email address. If it's a company, ask for a company name and VAT-number as well. Think about what the minimal required information is for each form and restrict yourself to asking only that.

184. Limit the length of your forms.

Another way to limit a form's length is by grouping information, either in a single field or in fields that are placed next to each other instead of underneath each other.

Things that you can group in one field:

- First and last name
- Street name and number
- Postal code and town

Putting this information in one field gives users the impression they have only three fields to fill out instead of six. If you prefer using separate fields, put them on the same line instead of underneath each other. It makes the form look shorter.

185. Let the user choose his own email address.

Don't use the user's email programme to send a form. Chances are the person sending the form is not using his own PC. Or maybe the standard email address on the computer is that of another family member. Let the user decide which email address he wants to use.

186. Provide clear error messages.

If the user makes a mistake when filling out a form, tell him exactly what he did wrong. Don't resort to a string of error messages in pop-ups but put an error message above the form that lists everything the user has to do to successfully complete the form. Use the same order of the fields in the form and indicate the fields that need to be filled out correctly in red. That way, the user immediately sees what he did wrong and how he can correct his mistake(s).

187. Remember the user's language.

Make sure all instructions, error messages and feedback are in the right language. A lot of programmers mistakenly assume that everyone understands English and put these messages in English on all language versions of a site.

188. Avoid technical jargon.

Avoid technical jargon in error messages and on other feedback pages. Don't assume users know a lot about computers but use words that everybody understands. Not everyone who surfs the Internet is a computer freak.

189. Save the user's work.

When a user fills out a form, it is best to save his input until the action is successfully completed or until the user quits the page. When the user makes a mistake, don't empty the fields he already filled out but display the form and the error message on the same page so the user can see what he did wrong. That way, the user only has to correct his mistakes instead of having to fill out all the fields again.

190. Provide feedback if a user has sent a form successfully.

If a user has successfully sent a form, provide a feedback message on a new page. Tell him the form has been sent and what he can expect next. If the form was a request for a brochure, tell the user when he can expect to receive the brochure. This feedback page is also the ideal spot to encourage the user to keep surfing by highlighting certain sections or products.

Examples

Subscribe to the Financial Mailing List

Please fill in the fields below if you want to be notified automatically when information is put online.

Note :
This information is confidential and won't be used for commercial purposes.

- Name
 - E-mail address
 - Company
 - Position
 / - Phone / Fax
 - Street & number
 - Postal Code & City
 - Country

Notify me when **Press Releases** are published online
 Notify me when the **Annual Report** is available online

SUBSCRIBE

Please enter all requested information correctly

Mrs. ▾
 First and last name: *

Street & Nr: *

Zip code & Town: *

E-mail address: (check twice, please) *

Phone number: *

When can we reach you there? : *

Faxnumber: (if available):

Are you a returning client of CONNECTIONS??
Yes ▾

The name of a field should be in front of the field, not behind it (left screenshot). The same goes for the indication whether a field is required or not (right screenshot). Especially for visually impaired users who use screen readers, this kind of information after the facts isn't very handy.

contact contact

Please use the form below to contact the Webmaster if you have remarks about the site, the Sales Department if you're a prospect, Extended Services for recruitment, outsourcing and training solutions or the Customer Support Office if you're a client.

First name *

Last name *

Email address *

Function *

Company

Address

Telephone *

I want to contact

Comments *

* : required fields

If you want people to read the instructions before they start filling out the form logic dictates they should be above the form itself, not underneath.

groups

You can request the admission for groups (Groups: At least 20 to 25 persons for youth groups -16 years, retired people 60+, handicapped people and all other groups who made a reservation) or ask for more information by filling out the form below.

Important Information to make sure your groupvisit will be succesfull!
[Click here.](#)

Your first name:

Your name:

Your organisation*:

Your street: Your number.:

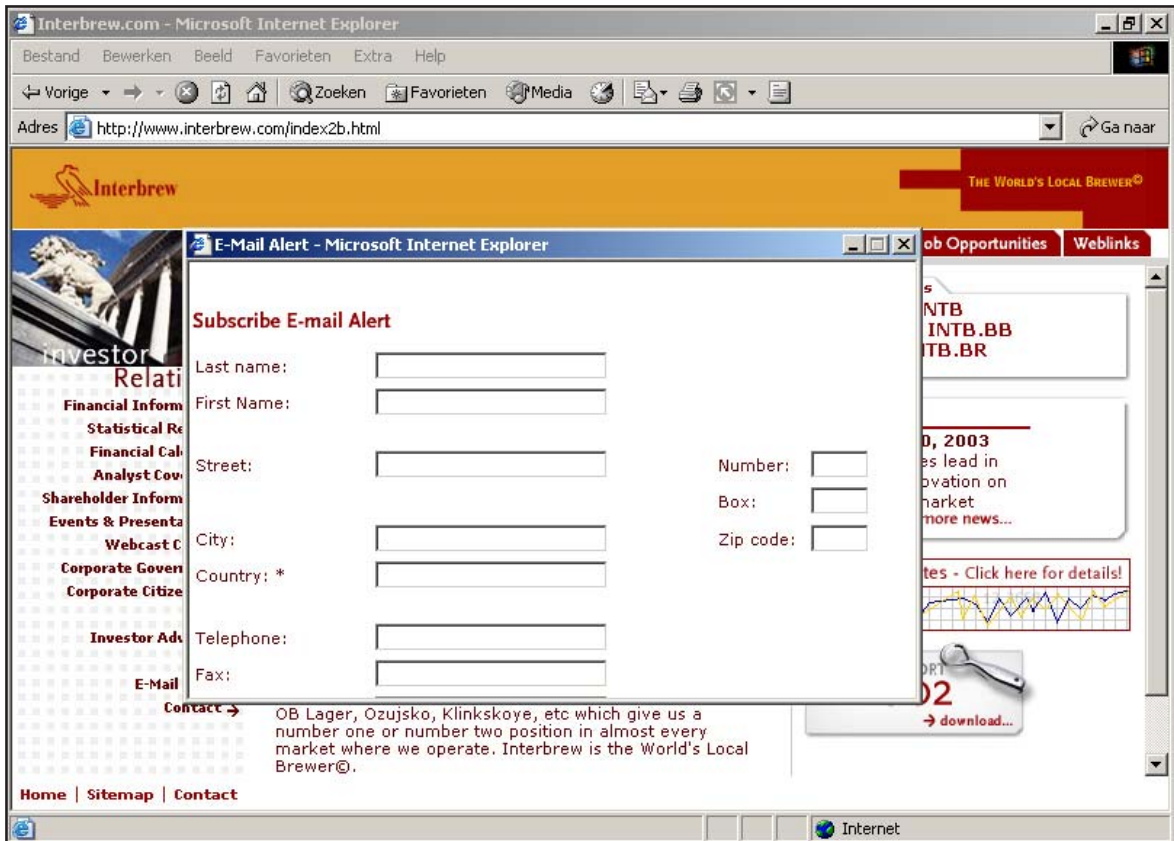
Your city: Your postal code:

Your country:

Your questions/ remarks:

* Optional

If it's the worldwide standard that fields marked with an * are required fields, don't do the exact opposite by using an * to indicate optional fields. That's very confusing.



Subscribing to Interbrew's 'E-mail alert' sounds easier than it is. The subscription form appears in a pop-up window that's too small to show the entire form. Because users can't scroll, it's impossible to find out if there are any fields below the page fold of the pop-up. The enterprising user who tries to send the form by clicking the 'Enter' button is told he needs to fill out the fields 'country', 'email' and 'profile'. Because the user can't see the fields 'email' and 'profile', he can't fill them out and can't send the form.



Brochure Request

Thank you for your interest in our company. To receive our brochure, please complete the form below and you will receive it shortly.

Title: * Mr Miss Mrs

Firstname: *

Lastname: *

Language * EN FR NL

Company: *

Activity Sector:

Function:

Address: *

Zip: *

City: *

Country: *

E-mail: *

Phone: *

Fax:

Privacy notice: * I accept that the data indicated in the form will be used by DAD for the sole purpose of its marketing activities.

I do not accept that the data indicated in the form will be used by DAD for the sole purpose of its marketing activities.

You have the right to consult and modify these data by contacting DAD at newsletter@dad.be Belgian law of December 8, 1992 on Privacy Protection in relation to the Processing of Personal Data as modified by the law of December 11, 1998 implementing Directive 95/46/EC.

* = is required

Unless your form is several pages long, you only really need one button at the end of the form: 'Submit'. Buttons like 'Clear', 'Cancel', 'Delete' or the weird 'Beginwaarden' ('Initial values') on the screenshot above only cause problems for users. Putting the 'Clear' button first and the 'Submit' button second, like ING does, is asking for trouble. Most users fill out the form and then click the first button they come across: if that's the 'Clear' button, it means they have to fill out the form all over again. Most users aren't too happy when that happens...

Do you want to subscribe to:

Phone/Bank services:

Yes No

Home/Bank services:

Yes No

Protection of privacy

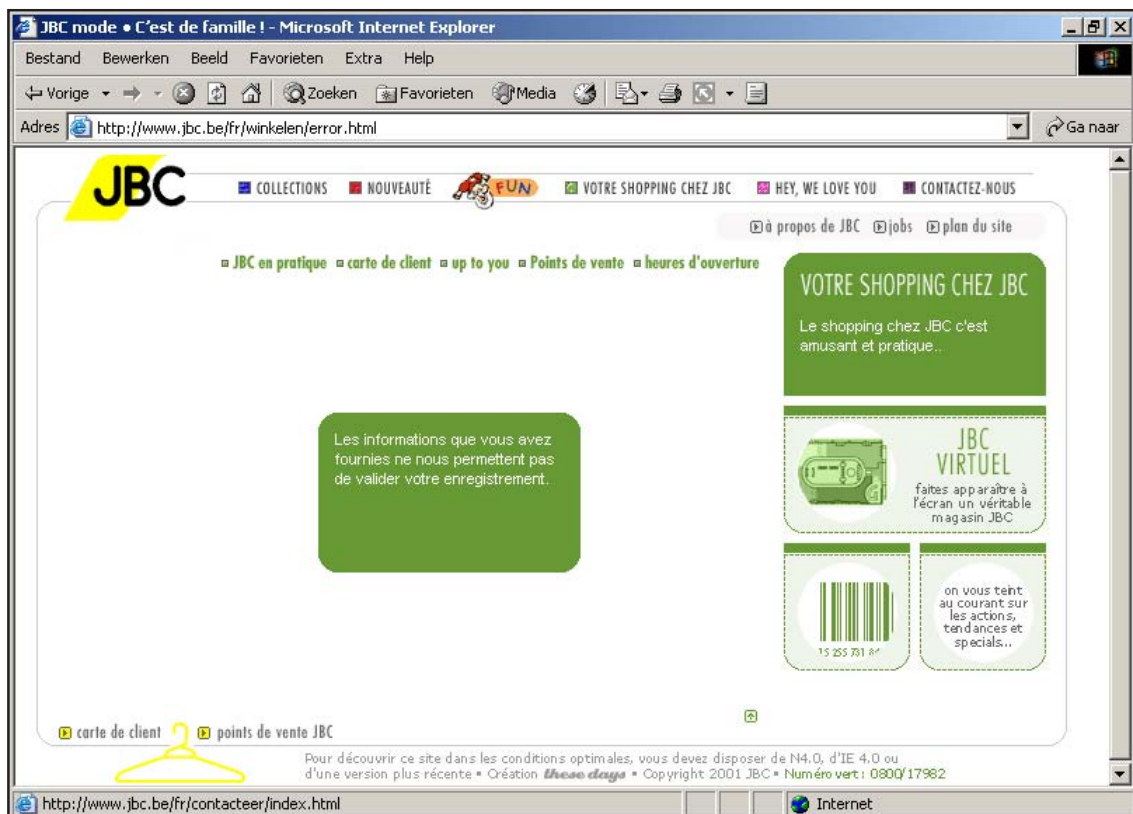
The data on this reply coupon are processed by ING Belgium SA/NV, Marnix Avenue 24, 1000 Brussels, for the following purposes : processing of your requests (in relation to accounts, payment transactions, loans, investments, brokerage (a.o. insurance), publicity objects and/or information about banking or insurance services), customers' relationship management, marketing of banking and insurance services, global overview of the customer, control of transactions and prevention of irregularities. These data are communicated to other **companies of the banking and insurance group ING in Belgium** for the purposes of customers' relationship management, marketing, global overview of the customer, provision of their services where appropriate and control of the regularity of transactions (including prevention of irregularities). You may access and rectify the data which relate to you. For further information, consult please our [Privacy Policy](#).

Tick off this box if you want to object, free of charges, to :

the processing of your data by ING Belgium for purposes of direct marketing;

the communication of your data to other companies of the **ING group in Belgium** for purposes of direct marketing.

By clicking on the « submit » button, you consent to the processing of your data in accordance with the above provisions.



If a user makes a mistake, don't just say he did something wrong but be as specific as possible in your error message.



contact contact

Please use the form below to contact the Webmaster if you have remarks about the site, the Sales Department if you're a prospect, Extended Services for recruitment, outsourcing and training solutions or the Customer Support Office if you're a client.

- Please enter a last name
- Please enter an email address
- Please enter a function
- Please enter a telephone number

First name *

Last name *

Email address *

Function *

Company

Address

Telephone *

Login information

Email address:

Verify email address:
email does not match

Password:

Confirm password:

Display language: ▼

Don't put error messages in a pop-up window (top screenshot) but on the page of the form. Either directly above the start of the form (middle screenshot) or in the form itself (bottom screenshot). Putting the error messages on the page of the form itself makes it a lot easier for users to see what they've done wrong and increases their chances of sending the form correctly on their second try.