THE SUM OF ITS PARTS.

How connecting experiences makes them great.

2016
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Your customers expect experiences.

This shouldn’t be a surprise. Everywhere you turn, people are talking about it. In fact, in 2015, 89 percent of companies expected to compete mostly on the basis of customer experience, versus only 36 percent four years previous. The theme of Adobe Summit 2016 was “Becoming an Experience Brand.” Experience is everywhere.

Really, people have always wanted experiences. When athlete Anya Major ran through a room of brainwashed workers and hurled a sledgehammer at Big Brother in Apple’s 1984 Super Bowl commercial, people were waiting for an experience, and as a result, Apple almost immediately sold almost $3.5 million worth of computers.

And when copywriter Frances Gerety penned the words “a diamond is forever” for De Beers in 1947, he was proposing an experience that people were apparently ready to embrace. So much so that De Beers overran the diamond industry, and Advertising Age named the recognizable phrase the best advertising slogan of the 20th century.

Clearly, experiences are nothing new, but today something’s different. The experience is at the top of the marketer’s—in fact the entire business’s—priority list. And to understand why, we need to better understand what an experience is.

When it comes to business, an experience is essentially an opportunity for your customer to build a relationship with you. If the experience is successful, your customer feels connected. They might purchase something from you, and so on. If you’re really successful, they might become an advocate for you. On the other hand, if your experience fails, you can cause irreparable damage.

This definition is broad, so in order to see how it could play out today, let’s look at how it’s been applied throughout history. We’ll start in the distant past.

Noted marketing consultant Mark W. Schaefer suggests that, “the foundations of the ultimate customer experience were created in…medieval marketplaces.” As Schaefer describes the interactions between villagers and merchants, he calls out four distinct features of these experiences:

- They were highly personal and interactive. “You stood face to face with your seller, looked them in the eye, and bought with a firm handshake. You purchased goods from people you knew and trusted.”
- There was immediacy. “If somebody felt wronged or cheated, you knew it right away.”
- Success depended on word-of-mouth recommendations. “The most successful shopkeepers knew that word-of-mouth reputation was essential to sustaining your business and that partnering with influencers could help spread the word about their business.”
- There was a primal need to connect. “People…love the social aspects of the marketplace, and most of all, talking about their new finds.”

Schaefer of course draws parallels between this old mercantilism and modern marketing, but this older model had some serious drawbacks. Most significant of these was its lack of scale. A medieval merchant was only accessible to so many customers every day and in most cases, word of mouth only took things so far.

The answer, of course, was mass media. These experiences, like those of Apple and De Beers, were able to reach huge audiences. Super Bowl XVIII, in which the 1984 ad was run, was seen by an estimated 7762 million viewers, which is a far cry from the village square. But to accomplish this, the experience had to become impersonal—a shotgun approach aimed at the majority. Although Apple’s “1984” depicts the downfall of an oppressive regime, the ad itself, like all TV ads of its era, ironically represents a similarly heavy-handed attitude toward customer experience. If audiences wanted to connect with a brand like this, they had to do so on the brand’s terms. The relationship was one-sided.
CREATING connections.

Today, however, we’re at the dawning of a new kind of experience, one that capitalizes on the best of the mass media and merchant marketplace models, one that consciously puts the experience first. Today, we have the ability to create truly engaging and personal experiences for all our clients, whether we have a hundred or a million.

And if the purpose of these experiences is to build relationships—real, lasting relationships—then modern marketers leave their forebears in the dust with the ability to connect experiences across every touchpoint. In the past, experiences were essentially limited to one event, one handshake, one moment. Today, technology, according to an Econsultancy report on real-time marketing, allows us to craft a larger ongoing experience, one that “communicates dynamically and systematically with a consumer using timely data as input and a personalized message as an output.”

These kinds of connected experiences give your customers those opportunities to build a relationship with you in “dynamic” and “systematic” ways across their entire journey. If they’re on their laptop, their phone, in their car, or at the store, their experience is seamless and consistent. By all accounts, it’s an experience utopia.

TOUCHPOINT trouble.

Except it isn’t really happening. At least not yet. Certainly some innovative businesses are knocking it out of the park, but according to Econsultancy, only seven percent of businesses claim a level of maturity necessary to pull off the kind of customer experiences we’re talking about. The same report suggests that at least 50 percent of businesses are just starting to put together any kind of experience-based strategy.

40% of Fortune 500 companies on the S&P won’t be able to evolve to meet the expectations that technology brings and will shutter their doors over the next 10 years.

This wouldn’t be a problem except that the seven percent that are pushing the boundaries are drastically affecting public opinion. These days, news travels like lightning, and when someone introduces an exciting new experience, everyone knows about it and everyone wants it.

“The bar in the customer’s mind is extremely high,” says Wade Forst, senior director of emerging experiences at Razorfish. “Their expectation of seamlessness and transparency and personalization is very high. They don’t care about the silos and your organization, and they don’t want to be treated like a new guest whenever they step outside of one technology and into another or into the real world. That’s why I think omnichannel has been such a huge push over the last few years.”

Of course, hitting all the channels is crucial to creating dynamic and systematically consistent experiences, but those channels are increasingly becoming as much a part of the problem as customer expectations. Perhaps even more so.

For example, when asked the greatest barrier to their customer experience success, more respondents to an Econsultancy survey cited complexity and the vast number of touchpoints than anything else.

And this isn’t surprising. It seems like these channels are turning out to be a little like rabbits. According to one 2015 Adobe study, 46 percent of respondents claim to have encountered a "new channel or term" in the last month alone. And in general, the respondents push content through 2.5 times as many channels today as they did just three years ago.
Even worse are the incredible and unpredictable forms these new channels are taking. In this brave new world, literally anything could become a channel. This is a good thing because it means that literally anything can become a part of your connected experience. But it's also a challenge, because planning for everything is no mean feat.

Maybe the most obvious example of this explosion of channel diversity is the so-called Internet of Things. This proliferation of touchpoints is generally defined as a web of physical objects connected to the Internet, and therefore connected to each other and the world around them. Again, with the technology that drives the Internet of Things, literally anything can be a channel or a connection.

You probably already own one of these "smart" objects, and if you don't, you likely soon will. One estimate projects that over the next five years, 35 billion devices will be connected around the world to this physical web—that's four devices for every man, woman, and child on the planet.

And according to ABI Research, by 2020, the Internet of Things will be the world's largest device market—bigger than the PC, tablet, and smartphone markets combined. Because Internet of Things devices give consumers a most precious commodity—time—they will enjoy high adoption at a rapid rate.

And we're not just talking about consumer devices. By one estimate, by 2018, nearly half of all Internet of Things installed devices will be used by businesses to improve efficiency, launch new products, enhance customer service, improve the use of assets, and gain more information from field analytics.

All this means that the purchasing journey, the customer experience, and the brand will be directly impacted by the adoption of Internet of Things devices and technology. And other emerging technologies—like location-based marketing—will continue to push the limits of that customer experience as well. The bar, as Forst describes it, will just get higher and higher.

You want to deliver connected experiences. You want to deliver "seamlessness and transparency and personalization." You want to build relationships with your customers. The opportunity is there, but as we've seen, the challenge is great. You essentially need to be prepared to deliver coherent and integrated experiences through any and all channels that impact your audience, whether or not those channels currently exist. You need to become disruption proof. Future proof.

But remember that while many businesses are struggling to figure this out, some businesses are already prepared. The sooner you can join them, the further ahead of your competition you'll be.

For the remainder of this guide, we explore four ways you can prepare for the world that's coming and succeed in the world today.
FUNCTIONALLY future proof.

Know your connected experience capabilities.

The digital age rolled over marketers like a tidal wave, leaving those who were unsuspecting lost or treading water. But some, like Amazon, Netflix, and Zappos, rose to the occasion with smart digital engagement strategies to deliver personalized and online experiences—experiences that customers have now come to expect from every brand they interact with.

But as we’ve discussed, that expectation is constantly evolving in response to an ever-growing network of touchpoints, including some in the physical world. Today, it’s not so much that customers expect brands to give them personalized experiences whether they’re browsing a brand’s mobile website or strolling an aisle in that brand’s brick-and-mortar store. It’s that they expect brands to deliver continuous personal experiences that connect their mobile web interactions with the brick-and-mortar ones and improve both. It’s a tall order.

Connecting experiences across channels isn’t easy and Stephen Bernstein, the senior vice president of digital experience at Epsilon, has seen the struggle before.¹⁹

“What businesses are not doing very well,” he says, “is the personalized experience, creating that one-to-one experience across the different channels. So, some organizations will say, ‘Hey, we’re really good at creating that experience on the web, but then connecting it on mobile and crossing it over is disconnected.’

Part of the problem, Bernstein explains, is that people underestimate the effort—especially when it comes to content—that goes into a successful cross-channel campaign.

‘I find that the biggest challenge is how we rethink the repurposing and reusing content across channels effectively. And we inevitably find that we’ll create these strategies and create the data and segment things and be able to identify all of the different places that they need to be focusing on, but then underestimate the effort of what it’s going to take to actually create that personalized message and to leverage it across the different channels.’

The place to begin is by understanding how you can currently create connected experiences and then go from there. This process includes a detailed audit of the channels you’re already using, an assessment of new channels you could be using, and a realistic evaluation of how much effort it will take to create or repurpose content across those channels.

Because part of the goal is to future-proof your marketing strategy, it’s important to educate yourself on how things work and which parts of your structure can multitask easily across channels.

For example, most devices on the Internet of Things operate using apps (or something similar), so investing in your ability to create diverse and versatile apps will give you a leg up on emerging channels from that direction.

In many cases, as you begin to explore your potential for creating connected experiences, you’ll find that you’re closer than you think. In Bernstein’s experience, businesses often have the maturity, but simply haven’t realized it.²⁰ Take the time to really explore your ability and you’ll begin to see the possibilities for connections everywhere.

The mature experience.

If you’re not sure how your connected experiences stack up right now, Forrester’s Customer Experience Index can help you evaluate your current offerings. With over 25 key drivers for each industry, the index shows where your efforts stand out and provides actionable steps to improve, giving you the competitive edge you need in the market.²¹
The experience connection.

As you consider your ability to create connected experiences, take a look at these possibilities that have been successful with other businesses.

- **Change the way people use devices to interact with the world.**
  - Nest

- **Connect people with valuable goods and services.**
  - Uber

- **Connect people with valuable lifestyle metrics.**
  - Fitbit

- **Change how and where people engage with complex services and products.**
  - Chamberlin Edwards

- **Connect people with brands in physical spaces.**
  - Home Depot
Discover the journeys of your key personas.

A typical customer’s journey today could start by researching a brand on a mobile website and then continue later on a laptop. In between digital inquiries, the customer might dial into that company’s call center. Maybe the conversion takes place online via chat instead or inside the brand’s brick-and-mortar location. Or, if things are going really badly, maybe the customer leverages all three options.  

In one survey report, Econsultancy found that at least 50 percent of respondents were using 13 different touchpoints throughout their customer experience efforts. Certainly, some of these—such as desktop and mobile websites or email—are more common than others, but part of the challenge of the connected experience is to think like your customer and create connections where they need them. As Forst suggested, your customer doesn’t care which channels you’ve prioritized. They care how you’re using the channel they’re on now. If they’re navigating through 13 touchpoints on their journey toward you, it’s because they expect those touchpoints to deliver value.  

This means you need to learn to connect touchpoints based on how customers want to interact. But to do this, you need to really understand who your customers are and what drives them to you. And because things change so rapidly, you’ll need to constantly re-evaluate your understanding. If you’re constantly immersing yourself in what your customer needs, you’ll always be prepared when new channels or opportunities arise.  

In light of this, consider the following five steps when designing connected customer experiences.

1. **Develop customer journey maps.** Journey maps show you where your customers’ experiences with your brand begin and end. But to be effective, they must take into consideration all the contexts and environments in which customers might use your products and services. For example, do your customers interact with your brand at home or on the go? Both? Do they depend on you daily or intermittently?  

   *The best organizations invest aggressively in the digital touchpoints and interactions that their customers need most. To align interests and drive funding and commitments for a three- to five-year program, start by creating a wall-sized map of your customers’ journeys, with a particular focus on digital interactions.*

   Start by collecting all your customer data from throughout your organization, then plug it into a data platform that can help you identify key personas. Learn how those personas interact and respond at different touchpoints to discover what they need.  

   *Some companies have had success using a multi-touch attribution model, which uses advanced statistics and machine learning to pinpoint the impact of each touchpoint along the customer journey, online and offline. Seeing how customers interact across social, display, search, and email as well as direct mail, radio, and television helps you to more easily see how you can bridge the gap between their digital and physical experiences.*  

   Keep in mind as well that as your technology evolves and new channels emerge, so will your sources of data. According to Bernstein, “The Internet of Things is not necessarily about interacting with customers. Sometimes the Internet of Things is more about how I get information about customer behavior and then use that information in a timely way.”

   So constantly revisit your data sources and make sure you’re using everything you’ve got.

   And because quantitative data tells only one side of the customer story, you need to round out your learnings with more hands-on research. Enlisting ethnographers or cultural anthropologists to observe and listen through interviews, “follow me home” research, or shopper shadowing helps you understand how people use your products and services and learn where you can improve their experiences.  

   “What you’re doing with the device is mining a huge amount of data associated to people. And to get a 360-degree view, you have to use the data to build that picture. For the customer, it’s a cool new device that serves a purpose in their lives. But the companies providing that device are determining a huge amount of customer behavior.”
2 **Prototype the experience.** With your new customer journey maps, build out experiences for your key personas. But understand that you don’t have to engineer every interaction all at once. You’ve spent the time to understand these journeys, so you can start to prioritize the touchpoints that will make the most emotional impact on each persona as they move from channel to channel. You certainly shouldn’t ignore the other touchpoints, but with your journey maps, you can see where each touchpoint will have the greatest effect and plan accordingly.

3 **Analyze and revise your prototype.** Use data to learn how customers respond to your experience prototypes. Identifying data anomalies quickly shows you areas within the customer journey where customers are experiencing extreme friction or enjoyment. As you uncover the reasons for these anomalies, you’ll know whether to repeat your previous efforts or redesign them to improve the experience.

Again, use key informant interviews or focus groups to get qualitative feedback. Ask customer services, sales, and support teams for input provided by customers about their experiences. Find all areas that need adjustment, and make the appropriate changes.

4 **Roll out and perform ongoing optimization.** Deliver the revised experience, modified to meet your customers’ needs and expectations. Continue to monitor how customers are responding to your experience design through direct feedback, social comments, and reviews.

Also use analytics to identify metrics like low conversion rates, abandoned cart statistics, video completions, repeat visits, and others that identify opportunities for improvement.

5 **Automate engagement.** Reaching each and every one of your customers with personalized content and experiences across channels and devices is impossible without automation.

To scale to meet the demands of your customer base, use technology to automate the delivery of one-on-one experiences that are relevant to each customer segment.

At the same time, continue to evaluate the experience, both by customer satisfaction and the evolving needs and capabilities of your business. Just because an experience is working well doesn't mean it couldn't work better if you augmented it with a connection from a new channel.
Physical and digital connections.

More and more, channels are intertwining the physical and digital worlds, and the ability to create experiences that embrace both is becoming increasingly essential. Here are five brands that are ahead of the curve.

Walt Disney World
Walt Disney World takes guest satisfaction to a whole new level with wearables. Today, vacationers can purchase the Disney MagicBand, an illustrated, sensor-laden wristband to use at every turn—checking into the hotel, buying lunch, going through turnstiles, reserving seats at attractions, and more. Not only does this provide guests with a simple way to enjoy the park, it shows Disney how they can improve the experience even more. Because guests “check in” to areas of the park with their wristbands, park managers can see how to better staff rides, accommodate more guests, and more efficiently regulate inventory at shops and restaurants.

Casino
Casino, a French supermarket, uses near field communication (NFC), which allows customers to use their smartphones to access information on products and pricing via NFC-enabled shelf labels and then scan items as they place them in their basket. When they’re done shopping, they can quickly pay for the already scanned items by tapping their phone on a reader attached to the cash register.

Alex and Ani
This accessory retailer uses digital capabilities to extend their mission of conscious design into their in-store layouts. Bluetooth sensors drive personalized offers to customers’ devices if they’ve opted in to the brand’s push notifications. The sensors in turn track customers’ movement throughout stores, so managers are sure that their product displays make it easy for customers to discover and purchase pieces that accentuate their personal style.

Starwood
The Starwood Premier Guest loyalty program gives home away from home a whole new meaning. When registered members arrive, the hotel’s reservation system connects with their personal mobile devices, allowing them to easily check in without visiting the front desk. A code pushed to the device replaces physical keys and cards, while the room sets itself to guests’ preselected lighting, temperature, and entertainment preferences.

Sport Chek
Canadian retailer Sport Chek recently outfitted their 12,000-square-foot flagship store in Toronto with 140 digital touchscreens and a bevy of digital devices to enhance their customers’ in-store experiences with technology. These interactive touchscreens allow customers to design their own sunglasses, shoes, and jerseys, as well as analyze their golf swings and recommend clubs. The screens also display features when customers scan products with RFID tags at kiosks throughout the store. And if a customer who scans an RFID tag has previously downloaded the retailer’s app and opted into location sharing, the customer gets a personalized offer based on the product scanned and the customer’s purchase history. Content delivered on 226 digital signs placed throughout the store can be changed in a matter of minutes to respond to real-time events. For example, if snow begins to fall outside, managers can quickly change the signage to display cold weather gear.

“The channels that are important to marketers are obviously expanding, including mobile browsers and apps, to some extent watches, interactive signage, as well as smart television. When we work with clients like MGM, they are working on expanding to even more. Mobile web and regular web are table stakes. Our clients are also going big into apps. This requires a whole new level of capabilities and processes for marketers as the experience people expect to have in every channel is a highly immersive and very personalized one.”

VIKALP TANDON
Emerging technology will always disrupt the current market. Brands that understand what’s coming will have the advantage. Again, the Internet of Things—because it’s such a big player in the future of connected experiences—can offer an example of how this might work.

Industries like financial services, healthcare, and manufacturing can look ahead and see the benefits of the Internet of Things because they understand how it will enable them to provide convenient experiences that lead to better engagement. Today, doing business with these industries often requires face-to-face interactions and a lot of physical paperwork. But the new digital expectations inspired by the Internet of Things will change this.

To respond to the opportunities, brands in these industries need to react today. For example, if businesses in these industries truly want to take advantage of Internet of Things-type functionality, they need to become more nimble and digital. There’s a great need to transform complex physical enrollment processes into digital transactions, which not only sets things up for the future, but improves the experience today. Customers who have difficulties traveling due to time or health restraints are better served with digital processes, which in turn creates competitive differentiation.

Not to mention the huge potential cost savings from reducing paper in favor of digital documentation.

Some organizations are already prepared to react. Select government agencies, healthcare organizations, and other companies with complex transaction processes and heavy regulations have started to implement mobile solutions to simplify experiences for their customers.

For example, healthcare enrollment and eligibility company Chamberlin Edmonds simplified their sign-up and signature processes for patients, which can be up to 50 pages in some cases. It recognized that helping ill patients fill out these lengthy documents and then track them was taking valuable time away from hospital administrators. With its digital integrations, patients now sign on tablets, which has reduced the time previously necessary for filling out applications by 50 percent.

As you’re looking ahead, it’s important to focus on the experiences you’re delivering instead of the products you’re offering. Certainly, products are still important, but competitive advantage simply can’t give you the same head start it used to. Emerging technology is eroding the barriers that used to keep people from entering the marketplace, and it takes much less time for copycats to replicate innovators and take their market share.

You can see this in giants like Amazon. Deliv is a new startup company offering same day, crowd-sourced delivery to online customers of major brands like Best Buy, Macy’s, and T-Mobile, to name just a few. As more and more brick-and-mortar stores start using the service to quickly connect customers with their purchases, Deliv becomes more of a threat to the Amazon model.

In this uncertain environment, having the best product is not enough to become—or remain—a market leader. And the promise of a customer’s loyalty is much harder to earn. If you do earn it, it’s because of the experience you offer, so look forward with a specific experience-focused lens.

“The first thing is to understand the customer, and understanding how can you influence them five years out, which in today’s terms is a lifetime. So if you were to think about, from a technology perspective, what’s available a few years out, you have to constantly re-evaluate that. But if you were to look out a few years out and say, okay, here’s where my customer is and here’s their journey today. How could that journey be changing over the next couple of years? How do you prepare for that?”

STEPHEN BERNSTEIN  
SVP Digital Experience  
Epsilon
Secure connection.

According to an Accenture survey, almost 50 percent of respondents say they’re concerned about how brands will handle privacy and security in the Internet of Things.44 And in fact, many companies that claim to be customer-obsessed have made only scattered and underwhelming investments in security and privacy. As the number of devices and channels grow, companies will have the need to create greater requirements for managing authentication.

In the age of customer experience, security is becoming less about risk reduction, cost reduction, and regulation compliance and more about competitive differentiation. Companies who monitor everything, trust nothing, and can intercept problems in real time are proving to customers that they can protect their data and information from breaches.45

Fortunately, to manage the complexity, technologies are emerging that allow applications to self-test, self-diagnose, and self-protect. These technologies detect anomalous behavior using statistical models and advanced machine learning to compare a user’s current activity to their baseline activity and profile, triggering alarms when the behavior is unusual.46
Build your connected infrastructure.

As Bernstein pointed out, one of the biggest challenges to truly connect experience is underestimating how hard it is. By now, you have a pretty good idea of what you can do, so the last step is to reorganize your company and build the infrastructure to make the creation of these connected experiences possible.

This is not going to happen overnight, but the effort will be worth it. For example, in one survey reported by Emarketer, 94 percent of surveyed marketers found that improving their customer experience led to higher conversion rates and engagement.

Start with your organization. As you’re looking for the right changes to make, consider that, according to Econsultancy, businesses that claim to be “very advanced” at customer experience are twice as likely to have an organization where everyone is responsible for customer experience. This suggests that silos might not be the best approach.

Next, look at ways to streamline the processes that actually create the experiences.

For example, because delivering experiences through connected devices most often requires an app—to personalize, control, or give performance and operational feedback—consider investing in the mastery of mobile app management and deployment. After marketers identify where in the journey they can add more value through new devices or connected experiences, they need to move quickly to build, test, and deliver apps that support the customer experience.

If you’re working with the Internet of Things or some other physical channel, look at the devices themselves. If they’re not based on standardized platforms, as with smart watches or smartphones, you probably have to build and manage an infrastructure layer to authenticate, communicate with, control, and gather reports from the device.

Perhaps most broadly, think about content. Connected experiences require a lot of content, but that doesn’t mean you need to build something new every time. If you invest in your content creation process and then back it up with the right digital asset and web content management tools, you can drastically streamline the content production pipeline, making it possible for you to craft elegant experiences, knowing that you have the content to back it up.

“Whether a customer opens a direct mail piece, receives a follow-up email, visits a branch, or applies for a loan on a mobile device, the entire customer experience should mirror customer needs perfectly. We must be everywhere customers are and personally cater to their needs at every turn.”

GILES RICHARDSON
Head of Analytics
Royal Bank of Scotland
We may not be in the medieval market, where you could look into someone’s eyes and seal the deal with a handshake. Nor are we in the world of mass media with its wide reach and its one-way relationship. We’ve got something better. A world where brands can truly deliver what customers want: real, engaging, connected experiences.

Today, cars help us navigate, drive, and even park to make our time on the road more enjoyable. Wearable fitness trackers help us stay more active, leading to greater health and happiness. And self-serve options—like check-in at the airport and checkout at the grocery store—save us the aggravation of waiting in long lines along with other frustrated customers.

All these innovations give you opportunities to build relationships with your customers if you’re ready to take advantage of them. To do this, you need to start now. These opportunities will continue to grow, and consumer expectations will grow with them. The brands that are prepared will succeed. The others will likely fall to the wayside.

“If you haven’t started moving,” says Forst, “then you’ve already fallen behind.”

Luckily, while the process of becoming an experience business that delivers truly connected experiences requires work, it’s worth it. Huge opportunities are coming and if you start moving now, you’ll be ready to take advantage of them, whatever form they take.

Adobe can help.

With web experience management solutions like Adobe Experience Manager, combined with analytics and targeting solutions like Adobe Analytics and Adobe Target, it’s easier than ever to develop and deliver connected experiences. You’ll be empowered to streamline experience creation, eliminate technology silos, and continuously deliver personalized and relevant content. You’ll also be able to use big data to effectively understand your customers’ behaviors, and then target and engage them with highly personalized experiences across all devices and digital and physical touchpoints—engaging them with a cohesive brand experience on whichever device or location they find you.

Go: https://www.adobe.com/marketing-cloud/customer-experience.html
The sum of its parts.

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