THE 2020 GUIDE TO CANDIDATE EXPERIENCE

How to Provide Value-Driven Experiences for Every Candidate

presented by

plum

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INTRODUCTION

As an HR or talent professional, you've no doubt heard the term "candidate experience;" in fact, you may be a bit fatigued by the phrase since it's become such a buzzword in recent years.

Candidate experience results from employers optimizing every stage of the hiring process—from application to onboarding—with the intention of putting the candidate's time, energy, thoughts, and emotions first. Companies that prioritize a candidate-centric experience understand that the consequences of a poor candidate experience include the loss of customers, referral networks, and severed relationships from "silver-medalist" or future-fit candidates who would have otherwise been open to applying again.

So what makes a great candidate experience? Look to any research report or thought leadership piece and you'll get a similar answer—respond to candidates quickly. Be honest and empathetic towards your candidates. Share information and be available.

But in this age of readily-available information (thank you, Google), if factors like communication, speed, and transparency are how we define a "positive" candidate experience, then we are simply playing catch-up to meet candidate expectations.

To truly reap the benefits of candidate experience and stand out as a people-centric employer, it's time to go beyond simply meeting expectations, and add value to every candidate's experience. Instead of walking away feeling like their minimum expectations were met, candidates can instead walk away understanding more about themselves, and how they can even better market themselves for the next opportunity.

The challenge, of course, comes with the prospect of providing a personalized experience at scale without creating more manual work for recruiters and HR professionals.

In this e-book, we'll tackle that challenge as we dive deeper into why a candidate experience that adds value will be business critical in 2020 and beyond, and how you can start adding value to every single candidate's experience. We even cover some case studies of companies who are adding value to their candidate experience plans in new and unique ways to give you some ideas that you can bring back to your own organization.

PART ONE

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL
ABOUT CANDIDATE EXPERIENCE?

Building a positive candidate experience is no longer a "nice to have" in 2020—it's business critical.

For years now, HR and talent professionals have understood that candidate experience is important. After all, for many companies, job candidates are also their customers. Candidates who are satisfied with their hiring experience, regardless of whether or not they get hired, are twice as likely to become a customer of the hiring organization compared to unsatisfied candidates.[1]

Candidates who have a negative recruitment experience, on the other hand, are more likely to take their alliance, product purchases, and business relationship somewhere else—and may negatively impact the purchasing decisions of those in their social circles along the way. After a negative candidate experience, 65% of candidates share their displeasure with their inner circle of friends and family, while 35% share their dissatisfaction online through social media and review sites like Glassdoor and Indeed.[2]

Not only is a positive candidate experience linked to greater advocacy, but it's also linked to greater job acceptance. People who are satisfied with their candidate experience are 38% more likely to accept a job offer.[1] Job applicants who do not receive a job offer are 80% more likely to apply again if they already had a positive impression of the hiring organization.[1] On the other hand, a poor candidate experience may negatively impact whether "silver-medalist" or future-fit candidates apply to the company again. Candidates who rate their experience as 1 star out of 5 state that they are willing to sever their relationship with the employer altogether.[2]

Candidates with Negative Experiences

65%
tell friends and family

35%
Tell social media

Candidates who rate their experiences as

1 out of 5 stars
Sever their relationship with the employer

Candidates with Positive Experiences

Positive Candidate Experience

Offer Job

YES   NO

38%
more likely to accept

80%
more likely to apply again

THE ROI OF CANDIDATE EXPERIENCE

Losing customers *and* top-tier talent due to a poor candidate experience can have real financial impact on any organization. When addressing the topic of the ROI of candidate experience, one of the most famous case studies is Virgin Media, who was losing more than $6 million annually due to poor candidate experiences.[3] Virgin Media receives about 150,000 applications per year, which translates into hiring around 3,500 people. In 2015, over 7,500 customer applicants felt so negative about their candidate experience that they cancelled their contracts with Virgin Media and signed up with competitors instead.

With some intentional effort put into their candidate experience (centralizing their decisions around the question, "What if your candidate experience was so positive that it created new customer acquisition opportunities from the people we engaged with?"), Virgin Media was able to turn their hiring process into a $7 million revenue stream.

To calculate how much a potentially poor candidate experience is costing your company's bottom line, try out this candidate resentment calculator developed by the Talent Board.[2]

Figure 9. Candidate Resentment Calculator

Assumption: 100% of the people that apply are potential customers and/or influencers affecting revenue and referrals.

Example:
- A. Annual Hires = 1,000
- B. Applicants per hire = 100
- C. Rejected applicants per hire = (B - 1) = 99
- D. Annual rejected applicants = (A x C) = 99,000

Negative resonance factor = candidate tells 1 person (at a minimum)
- E. Total rejected candidate audience = (D x 2) = 198,000
- F. Average value of a customer = $100

@12% candidate resentment rate (based on North American candidates willing to sever the business relationship)
- G. Potential lost customers = (12% x E) = 23,760
- H. Potential lost revenue @12% = (G x F) = $2,376,000

Talent Board's Candidate Resentment Calculator

The Virgin Media case study is a famous one, and like we mentioned earlier in this chapter, the concept of candidate experience and its impact on advocacy and job acceptances isn't new; it's something that's been on the radar of most HR and talent professionals for a few years now. So why is 2020 the year that candidate experience will be more important than ever?

CANDIDATE EXPERIENCE IS MISSION-CRITICAL IN 2020 AND BEYOND

At the beginning of 2020, we were continuing a ten-year trend of low unemployment and record numbers of unfilled jobs across many markets, including Canada, the US, and the UK. Candidates had their pick of employers and roles. But as the COVID-19 pandemic and efforts to contain it took hold, a dramatic shift took place. Record numbers of employees began to work from home, layoffs and furloughs increased dramatically, and what had been a candidate-driven job market was upended.

While the long-term effects of the pandemic are still unknown, a clear shift has taken place in the world of work. Companies now need to consider how they can provide an exceptional candidate experience throughout the hiring process without meeting candidates face-to-face. Similarly, employers face an increased responsibility to demonstrate to candidates how they'll support their onboarding and employee development in a remote work environment where employees may not be able to meet their manager or teammates in person for an indefinite period.

Workplace culture and support of employees' professional development goals were already critical decision-making factors for candidates before the pandemic. For example, research from Glassdoor found that 77% of candidates (from the US, UK, France, and Germany) would consider a company's culture before applying there, and 56% of respondents say culture is more important than salary when it comes to job satisfaction. And while these priorities may shift temporarily, ultimately candidates will continue to seek out work environments where they can grow and flourish.
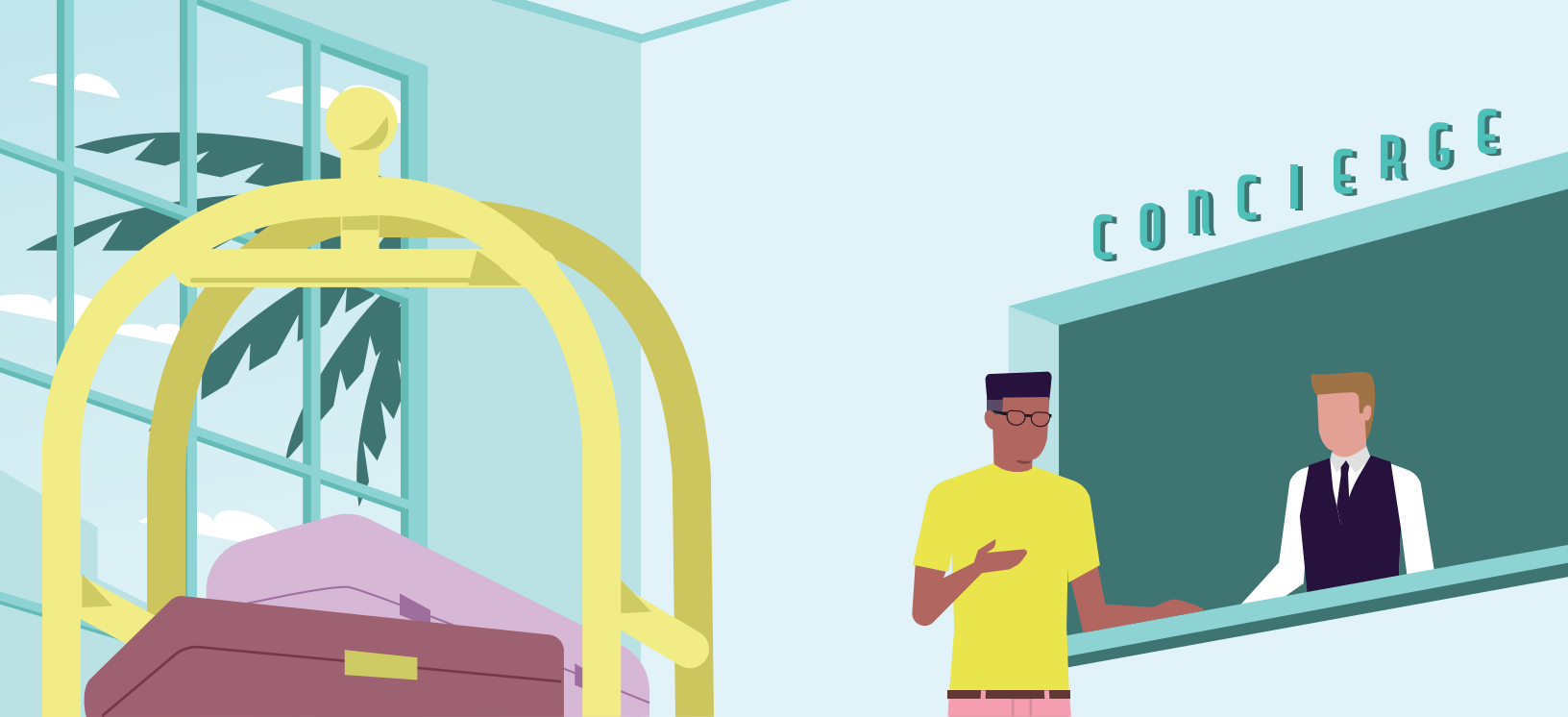
95%
of employed American adults agree that the way a potential employer treats them as a candidate is a reflection of how they would treat them as an employee

PART TWO

2020:
THE CANDIDATE EXPERIENCE
MATTERS NOW MORE
THAN EVER

Candidate experience has always been important—but the rules of what constitutes a positive candidate experience are always changing. Providing candidates with experiences that add value to their job seeker journey is essential.

In their report, "The far-reaching impact of candidate experience," the IBM Smarter Workforce Institute concluded that there are 3 things that organizations can do to improve their candidate experience: enhance employer branding, improve communication, and treat all candidates well.[1]

Here's the thing—when searching and applying for a job, candidates expect the same ease of use and convenience that they see in the apps and websites they use every day. Things like enhancing employer branding, improving communication, and treating all candidates well…in 2020, these aren't creating an exceptional experience; they're simply meeting candidates' expectations. They're table stakes. Factors like speed, communication, and transparency should already be at the foundation of your candidate experience. You will need to shift your focus to providing *value* for every job candidate.

Shift your focus to providing **value** *for every job candidate.*

CANDIDATE EXPERIENCE AND HOSPITALITY: ARE YOU FOR YOUR CANDIDATES?

The hospitality industry can teach us a lot about what it looks like to create a value-adding experience.

When asked about his definition of hospitality, Shake Shack founder Danny Meyer said:

> *Hospitality, as I define it, is very simple. It all comes down to one preposition: "for." If you feel like the other guy did something for you, that's hospitality. If you think about every single transaction you go through in life, you don't necessarily feel like they did something for you. In fact, sometimes you feel like they did something to you. And by the way, if you ask for your salmon rare and I bring it to you rare, that's not hospitality. That's what you expected. Hospitality might be that I remember, and I don't even have to ask you.[6]*

Are you *for* your candidates? Or are you simply meeting expectations?

Think of it this way—imagine you stay at two different hotels. At the first, the hotel staff greets you with a smile, the rooms are clean, you check-in and check-out quickly and without any hassle. About what you'd expect when staying at a hotel, right? Now at the second hotel, the concierge at check-in proactively tells you what's going on in town that weekend, and roads to avoid because of construction. You briefly mention that it's your anniversary, and moments after entering your room, you're greeted with a bottle of champagne and a card signed by the hotel staff. Upon check-out, they remember your name and where you're travelling from.

Neither of these hotels necessarily presented a bad experience, but which hotel are you most likely to return to? The second one, right?

When you see candidates as potential customers, understanding the importance of being *for* candidates becomes increasingly clear. Even if you're not a business-to-consumer company, being able to keep a solid talent pipeline of "silver medalist" and future-fit candidates is invaluable for any business.

Building a candidate experience that provides value for every single applicant means being *for* your candidates. And part of being for your candidates is understanding that there is a lot of time, energy, and resources that go into applying for a job. You need to communicate to job candidates that you honor that sacrifice.

People who are employed while interviewing take an average of two days off work to interview for a new position.[5] Not to mention, applicants in general give up a lot when they apply for a job. They willingly hand off so much personal data—detailed resumes, answers to applicant tracking system (ATS) knockout questions, cover letters written with time and care... and when they get nothing in return, any job candidate would be disheartened. When they aren't provided with some element of value, candidates feel like they are on the losing side of an exchange of information.

So how do you make sure your candidate experience is *valuable* for job candidates? And, more importantly, how do you ensure you are providing that equitable exchange at scale so that it touches every candidate?

SCALING A VALUE-DRIVEN CANDIDATE EXPERIENCE

For many talent acquisition teams, a "good" candidate experience means creating as many touches with the candidate as possible. Senior talent acquisition consultants at Booz Allen Hamilton, for instance, have said, "We believe in a 'high-touch' recruiting experience, where recruiters communicate consistently by phone, text or email the status of an individual's candidacy at each stage of the process."[7] Stacy Zapar, founder of Tenfold and The Talent Agency, advocates blocking off a set period of time to do this every week.[8]

But when you're a company like Southwest Airlines, which receives a job application every two seconds,[9] texting every candidate is not so feasible. And how much *value* is a text really providing a candidate?

Recruiter time and resources don't need to be in opposition with candidate experience. There are organizations that have set the

example that talent acquisition processes can be designed for efficiency *and* candidate experience.

At Greenhouse OPEN's 2018 conference, Employer Brand Strategist Lane Sutton (who consults for companies like Disney) shared his experience of creating a great employer brand for job seekers.

For one company he consulted with, his team created an email list of every person who applied for a job at the organization, and nurtured them with a monthly newsletter that highlighted the company's culture, team outings, and quotes from employees on what they loved about working for the business. The emails saw a 54% open rate (for context, the average email open rate is 24.88%).[10]

The organization learned that job seeker interest was not one-and-done. As a result, they built into their hiring process a step that automatically added every job applicant to an email newsletter specifically designed to advertise employer brand, even when a candidate was rejected for a job. The process was automatic, meaning there was no manual work required from recruiters and HR professionals, but the campaign was driven by a value-adding candidate experience. Now interested job seekers got an exclusive sneak-peek into the company culture—something they didn't have before.

Creating an experience that provides value for candidates at scale doesn't have to just look like consistent communication between the employer and applicant, either. Manuel Heichlinger, LinkedIn's Senior Manager for Talent Acquisition, has said, "The best companies want to help their candidates to succeed and are making the most of emerging interview techniques. These include using online assessments to give a more holistic picture of the candidate."[11]

Online talent assessments, when used correctly, can provide you as an employer the best of both worlds—efficiency *and* value for every candidate. Assessments are convenient for HR teams—the results of a valid assessment can give talent decision-makers a rich understanding of applicants' innate talents and behavioral competencies, which can become a more predictive replacement to resumes as a top-of-funnel shortlisting tool. Talent assessments also have the potential to reduce time-to-hire by shortlisting candidates more quickly and predictively.

But be warned—assessment providers don't always get the candidate experience part right. Applicants may be asked to take a long and

"The best companies want to help their candidates to succeed and are making the most of emerging interview techniques. These include using online assessments to give a more holistic picture of the candidate."[11]

- Manuel Heichlinger, LinkedIn's Senior Manager for Talent Acquisition

arduous assessment, but when finished are met with nothing but a "we'll be in touch" landing page or email—a black hole. The result is a pretty frustrating experience for job seekers, who have spent time and energy applying to your company without so much as a note that they'll hear from you. Candidates receive no value.

To contribute to an excellent and value-adding experience, online assessments need to provide some sort of applicant-facing output. This doesn't mean they have to inform a candidate whether their assessment results were or were not a match to the role's requirements (which could quickly backfire into a negative candidate experience), but there are other ways to leave candidates feeling good about themselves and your company.

Assessments can provide a value-adding candidate experience by providing job applicants with content that helps candidates as they continue on their job search, or an output that helps applicants uncover something new about themselves. Here at Plum, for instance, we automatically provide every single person who takes our talent assessment with a unique and personalized profile that outlines their top talents, tailored career advice, and questions to ask in their next interview to ensure they're finding a workplace where their innate strengths can shine. Candidates receive valuable feedback that they can take with them whether or not they reach the next stage of the hiring pipeline, all while requiring no extra bandwidth from recruiters and HR professionals.

These are just a few examples of methods organizations can leverage to go from an expectation-meeting candidate experience to an expectation-exceeding candidate experience. But what companies are using a value-driven candidate experience now, and how is it resulting in attracting better talent and acquiring more customers? Let's dive into some examples of companies setting the value-driven candidate experience bar high.

PART THREE

CASE STUDIES

Not sure how to start integrating a value-driven candidate experience into your own hiring process? Here are some real-world examples to get you started.

CASE STUDY 1: BOOKING.COM

Booking.com

Creating value-generating content for every kind of job seeker

Booking's career site is a treasure trove of content just for job seekers. Here are a couple pieces of content you'll stumble upon on your journey through the Booking career site:

- Videos demonstrating Booking's culture, highlights of employees who relocated to their Amsterdam headquarters and their experience, and stories of employees' favorite places to travel

- A blog full of job seeker pro tips, Booking employee profiles, and reasons to love the cities where various Booking offices are located

- A podcast, guest-starring various Booking employees

- Functionality to save jobs and sign up for job alerts

Browsing jobs on Booking.com's career site

Just as all businesses understand the importance of prospective customers' journeys to becoming customers, Booking knows that the same rings true for job candidates. Through video content, blogs, and podcasts, Booking paves a value-driven journey for job seekers in a variety of ways. Whether someone is looking for general interview tips, or a behind-the-scenes look into life at Booking, they'll find the answers they're looking for on the Booking career site.

In response to COVID-19, Booking created a special FAQ page for candidates addressing questions about topics like virtual interviews, working from home, and the impact of the situation on open roles.

Booking.com's Coronavirus (COVID-19) FAQs

CASE STUDY 2: DOCUSIGN

DocuSign®

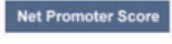## *Ensuring candidates' voices are heard with standardized surveys*

DocuSign—which makes it easy and fast for documents to get signed—understands that part of providing value to every job candidate is to give them an opportunity to contribute feedback on their experience. That's why DocuSign created standardized surveys for every job candidate.

These surveys seek responses from all candidates (not only those who received offers), asking how well the recruiter explained things (the company, the role, and the process), along with evaluating courtesies like follow-ups and respectfulness. The survey asked how likely the candidate would be to recommend DocuSign to others based on their experience (a Net Promoter Score).[12]

Candidate Experience: What we ask

Survey

Factor	Question	Rating
Company Overview	My recruiter gave me a good overview of DocuSign and the value proposition	Strongly agree
Job Explanation	My recruiter had a good understanding of the role and could clearly describe the responsibilities of the position	Strongly disagree
Interview Process Explanation	My recruiter explained what the interview process would look like	Agree
Follow Up	My recruiter provided me with timely updates on the status of my application	Neither agree nor disagree
Respect	My recruiter treated me with respect throughout the process	Strongly agree
Employment Brand	Based on your experience as a candidate, how likely would you recommend DocuSign to others?	Net Promoter Score

DocuSign's candidate experience survey

DocuSign's Doculove Score

And these surveys aren't just in place to make candidates feel good, with the results ignored or locked away, never to be viewed again. The results actually go towards rewarding recruiters. Recruiters who provided a positive candidate experience were acknowledged with a high "DocuLove" score—DocuSign's innovative method of providing feedback, recognition, and development for their recruiters.

As a result, DocuSign saw their candidate Net Promoter Scores jump by 55%.[12]

PART FOUR

PROVIDING THAT PERSONAL TOUCH: CREATING A CONSUMER-GRADE CANDIDATE EXPERIENCE WITH PERSONALIZATION

The previous case studies provide a fantastic framework on what it looks like to provide an above-and-beyond candidate experience for every single applicant. What they're missing, however, is that next step in building a value-adding experience—personalization.

As consumers, people are accustomed to receiving personalized experiences in exchange for their data; think loyalty programs that offer a free gift on your birthday or tailored ads on social media. It shouldn't come as a surprise that candidates expect that same level of personalization in their job search. But the task of personalizing the candidate experience for every single job applicant—especially when job postings may receive hundreds, maybe even thousands, of applications—sounds like so daunting of a task that you may not even know where to start.

Plum, however, has cracked the code on providing a personalized candidate experience to every applicant, beyond gimmicks like "Hi [first.name]" personalization tokens in recruitment status emails.

Plum's talent assessment sits at the beginning of your talent acquisition process. Not only does that allow your hiring teams to access insights on every applicant's job performance potential at the beginning of your recruitment pipeline, but every single job applicant also receives a detailed and personalized Plum Profile. The Profile outlines what makes them exceptional, including their top talents, career advice, and

Anita Whiteley

Talents Advice Development

Communication
Conveying ideas effectively and identifying messages others are attempting to convey.

Managing Others
Taking charge of a group and motivating group members toward common goals.

Decision Making
Making high-quality decisions based on limited information.

Candidates can view their Top Talents in their Plum Profile

Anita Whiteley

Talents   **Advice**   Development

You'll be happiest in positions where you'll...

- Routinely encounter and solve exceptionally complicated problems.

- Be able to accomplish objectives without having to worry about managing the underlying motivations or feelings of others.

- Be asked to accomplish difficult goals in a short time frame, because you'll enjoy the challenge and often succeed.

- Have the time to complete detailed projects well.

Candidates can also view career and developement advice within their Profile

questions they can ask in their next interview, providing applicants with the self-discovery they need to promote themselves effectively throughout their job seeker journey.

Every Plum Profile is unique to the candidate, providing a personalized and consumer-grade candidate experience that provides value for every single applicant. 71% of candidates who completed their Plum Profile as part of a job application process rated the usefulness of the Plum Profile results as very useful or extremely useful. When asked how they would describe their experience completing their Plum Profile, 86% of respondents described it as positive or very positive.

CONCLUSION

In 2020, if you want to win the race for top talent, it will no longer suffice to simply meet job candidate expectations in the hiring process. Candidate experience will no longer be a "nice to have"—it will be a business necessity.

Candidates also understand that the way they are treated in the interview process is indicative of how they'll be treated as an employee. Job seekers therefore desire personalized experiences... but can also smell a personalization token in an automated email from a mile away. The challenge for any talent acquisition leader soon becomes, "How can I provide a positive candidate experience for every job candidate, without adding more to the load of our recruiters and hiring managers?"

To remain competitive in 2020, organizations must move from simply meeting candidate expectations to providing an experience that exchanges a candidate's time and energy with something of value that they can take away from the hiring process. The hospitality industry offers a glimpse into what a value-adding candidate experience looks like, and it relies on the preposition "for." What are you doing *for* your candidates?

One way that employers can provide a value-adding candidate experience at scale in 2020 is by leveraging a pre-employment assessment like Plum. Plum facilitates an engaging and positive candidate experience by providing every single job applicant with a detailed and personalized Plum Profile on what makes them exceptional. The Plum Profile includes their top talents, career advice, and questions they can ask in their next interview, providing applicants with the insights they need to promote themselves effectively during their job seeker journey.

At the end of the day, providing a positive candidate experience in 2020 will require talent acquisition leaders and specialists to understand that job candidates commit a lot of time, resources, and personal data into the hiring process—how are you providing an equitable exchange of value and personalization in return?

ABOUT PLUM

Plum future-proofs organizations by unlocking the potential of their people. By measuring talents such as adaptability, innovation, and communication, Plum matches people to jobs where they thrive. To learn more about how Plum equips businesses to provide value-adding candidate experiences at scale, visit www.plum.io/candidateexperience.

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