
CHARLES CHRISTIAN'S

LEGAL TECHNOLOGY

INSIDER

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO WHAT'S HOT (AND WHAT'S NOT) IN LAW OFFICE SYSTEMS

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COMPATIBLE IT CLEARS WAY FOR MERGER

With effect from 1st October, Alsop Wilkinson and Dibb Lupton Broomhead will come together in the newly merged practice of Dibb Lupton Alsop. But with 770 lawyers, nearly 1500 staff and offices in ten locations, will the new firm's IT infrastructure be able to cope?

Last week **LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER** spoke to Dibb's IT director Guy Liddell, who revealed that although technology and communications were one of the key issues the two firms' joint integration committee had to consider, both sides IT teams were "bushy tailed and enthusiastic" about the link-up.

According to Liddell, a high degree of compatibility already exists between the two firms, not least because "Alsops are going where we have just been".

This is most noticeable over the choice of practice management system. Dibbs is an Axxia Arista user, while Alsop Wilkinson had been planning to upgrade its accounts system and was already planning to move to Axxia. The net result is Liddell is confident the two sides will be running a common accounts system by the end of November.

It is a similar story when it comes to office automation. Dibb's wordprocessing platform had been WordPerfect 5.1 for DOS but over the last few months the practice has been migrating to Windows 95, running Microsoft Office, Word 7 and the Saros document management system. Alsops is currently a WordPerfect 5.1 user, so not only is there an element of ➔

➔ file compatibility but moving the two firms to the same environment will largely be a matter of extending the existing Windows 95/Word/Saros product and training "roll out" to Alsop staff. Liddell envisages this being complete by mid '97.

Although it will be necessary to make some improvements to the firms' data networks and replace some parts of the voice network, "in essence," says Liddell, "there are no major IT issues to be resolved."

In fact even where the two sides have found themselves using different technologies, it has been possible to devise satisfactory interim solutions. For example Alsops use cc:Mail whereas Dibb's electronic mail system is based on Microsoft Exchange. But because both firms also use X.400, cross system email traffic is possible.

☞ **Comment...** Guy Liddell does however add that if Dibbs and Alsops had not got together for another couple of years, it might have been an entirely different story, as by then both firms could have been committed to major investments in incompatible systems, so that any merger would have resulted in the additional expense of substantial retraining and re-engineering, as well as writing off redundant technology. With rumours of more deals in the air, including a possible mega-merger between Cameron Markby Hewitt, Denton Hall and McKenna & Co, the risk of IT incompatibility becomes ever greater. In the past building society mergers have foundered on this very point and with many practices now pursuing sophisticated but often highly idiosyncratic IT strategies, we could soon see the problem echoed among law firms. ☐

SHOOSMITHS GET 15 YEARS

Shoosmiths & Harrison has awarded contracts described as being "valued in excess of £150,000" to Pericom Desktop Networks (☎ 01908 265533) for the installation of new voice and data networks. As part of the contract, which includes supplying on-going support, Pericom has also provided a 15 year guarantee on the entire installation.

INSURING WORKFLOW

Hall Clark, which has an insurance and private client practice in the West End of London, has ordered the Linetime (☎ 0113 250 0020) Practice II accounts system with a view to improving credit control, workflow management and time recording within the firm.

ELITE WINS FIRST SCOTTISH ORDER

Having rapidly taken a big slice out of the top end of the English legal market, Elite Information Systems has now turned its attention towards Scotland with Dundas & Wilson, the largest law firm in Scotland, confirming last week that it would be ordering Elite.

According to Dundas & Wilson director of information systems David Lanc, the move from the firm's old Norwel system to Elite running on Informix would be a long transition but he expects the system to be up and running by April of next year.

Meanwhile McGrigor Donald, the other major Scottish legal heavyweight, is also reviewing its IT operations and is understood to have short-listed Elite although their consultants Stoy Hayward are currently examining other options.

☞ **Related Developments...** Within the next six weeks Elite (☎ 0171 330 3504) will be launching an Oracle version of the system. This will be followed in 1997 by an SQL Server option, which Elite's UK manager David Thorpe believes will prove popular with smaller firms looking for a Windows NT solution.

Elite, in conjunction with Tremco Legal Solutions of Utah, has also just announced the availability of SQL Courier. This is a new data replication add-on to the Elite Billing system that allows users to automatically link client and matter information to document management systems, such as PC DOCS Open and SoftSolutions, as well as third-party products such as Equitrac and Carpe Diem.

Thorpe says the key benefit is users can set up new matters or amend existing files in Elite and have Courier open or update corresponding files in related applications without having to rekey data, thus both saving time and reducing the margin for error. ➡

➡ ☞ **Further Comment...** Although Elite is sweeping all before it in terms of winning new orders, there still remain: "the local support problems that Elite is tagged with" - to quote the words of one leading legal IT consultant.

Not only have Elite's own staff been in short supply in the UK until recently but there are also virtually no people with experience of Elite systems available for hire by law firms' inhouse IT departments.

Certainly "people problems" seem to have played a part in the difficulties Nabarro Nathanson encountered trying to implement Elite - and which Andersen Consulting is now trying to resolve. And, a combination of "operational difficulties" and "human error" have also been blamed for the recent crash of the Elite implementation at Charles Russell.

In the case of the latter incident, which occurred at the end of July, a problem with an Informix server revealed back-up files to be inadequate and so the firm has had to go back to its old Miles 33 system while it restarts implementing Elite, which is now scheduled to go "live" at the end of the year.

Interestingly, despite all the problems, Charles Russell finance director Stephen Akers has no doubts that Elite is a good system. "You cannot blame the crash on the Elite software, which is a fantastic product and far ahead of anything else on the market". Akers says that although the firm only managed to run Elite for a few weeks, it was already proving its worth, producing reports overnight that would have previously taken days.

☞ By way of a footnote, Nick Hughes, the new legal business manager for Informix (☎ 0181 818 1265) in the UK, reports that the company is starting a new consultancy service based around "technical account managers" who will be able to provide law firms with advice on how to plan Informix implementations, as well as optimising their installations' performance and resilience. □

PEAPOD CLAIMS FIRST IN HIGH STREET RACE

Peapod Solutions claims it has won the race to bring to market the first all-in-one low cost computer solution designed for solicitors regulated by the English Law Society. Called the High Street Kit (HSK), the system goes on sale in October and offers full hardware, software plus training and support from as little as £40 a week.

Peapod (☎ 01753 581600) describe HSK as a "pick up and go" solution in that the user gets a high spec Pentium PC (133MHZ + 32Mb RAM) fully loaded with accounts, practice management, office automation and legal electronic forms software. In addition, there is a laser printer, a tape backup facility and a high speed modem plus all associated software upgrades and technical support.

The novel element is the system is being supplied on the basis of a fixed fee – starting at £40 per week – subject to a three year contract period. (Although there is an option to cancel the deal within 30 days if the user is unhappy with the product.)

At the end of the three year period the user can continue using the system, taking out the extended hardware maintenance and software support option if they choose. Or, they can renew the contract for another three years, in which case they will receive new hardware and software plus further training.

According to Ian Wimbush of Peapod, as well as being cheap and overcoming some of the cash-flow problems smaller firms face when it comes to acquiring IT, one of the attractions of this scheme is: "it protects firms from the expensive merry-go-round of periodically having to replace obsolete hardware and software".

The system's software components comprise: accounts, time recording, legal aid franchise, practice management, client/matter database and financial ➔

➔ reporting applications developed by Pracctice plus Peapod's Printaform electronic forms production system and the Microsoft Office 95 suite, which includes Word wordprocessing, the Excel spreadsheet and Schedule+ diary.

The bundle includes two days training, which is based on a modular programme so users have some leeway to pick and choose the subjects where they need tuition. There is also a more expensive "Gold Plan" option (£55 per week) which provides additional training.

Peapod will be marketing the HSK system to solicitors from next month, when they will also be announcing details of the HSK User Group, which they envisage being independently chaired "so as to bridge the gap between solicitors and computer professionals". □

TWO MORE FATHOM WINS

Fathom Technologies has won two more orders for its Caseflow credit management and debt recovery system. The latest wins were Chelmsford Borough Council, which becomes Fathom's sixth local authority installation, and Putsmans, who are a Birmingham-based firm of solicitors.

☞ **Technical Note...** In common with a growing number of legal IT suppliers, Fathom Technologies (☎ 01734 750886) can now support the Windows NT platform. Fathom NT users include Gosport Borough Council, the Bradford & Bingley Building Society and Fennemores of Milton Keynes (see also story on p.5). □

ISLAND SITE

Collas Day & Rowland in Guernsey has ordered a 35-user Arista case and practice management system from Axxia Systems (☎ 01734 602602), as part of what senior partner Peter Atkinson describes as the firm's strategy to provide an improved service to offshore banking and financial sector clients through communications and increased productivity. □

NT VIRUS SCANNER

Data security specialists Sophos plc (☎ 01235 559933) has produced a new version of its SWEEP anti virus scanner for Windows NT. The software will run on both Intel and Alpha AXP systems. Evaluation copies can be downloaded from ftp.sophos.com/pub/evaluation/sweep

YOU READ IT HERE FIRST
In the 26th August edition LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER reported on the major omissions blighting the Law Society's new Information Technology Directory. It took weekly legal magazines three weeks to catch up with the story.

NEW LIBRARY SYSTEM

Electronic Online Systems International (☎ 0171 253 1177) has now begun installing its new Windows-based GLAS (Graphical Library Automation System) in the UK. The company describes GLAS as a "cutting edge solution for library professionals".

NAMES CHANGES

With a growing volume business now coming from outside its traditional market of lawyers in private practice, AIM Law Data has been renamed AIM Data Systems (☎ 0113 263 8500).

☞ To avoid confusion with legal systems supplier Professional Productivity Solutions (or PPS) Peapod Professional Solutions has now changed its name to plain Peapod Solutions.

COUNTY COURTS TO COMPUTERISE IN PFI DEAL

The Lord Chancellor's Department has just awarded the IT services company EDS a contract to supply computer and related services to all 235 county courts in England and Wales.

Known as the Local County Court System (LOCCS) agreement, the contract will run for seven years and see manual record cards replaced by computerised case management and tracking systems. The LOCCS project has already been running as a pilot scheme in six courts and EDS expect to have nearly all the rest up and running by the end of 1997.

LOCCS also embraces the CREST Crown Courts computerisation project and EDS will also take responsibility for running the Summons Production Centre and the County Court Bulk Centre in Northampton, which was hit by strike action earlier this year.

The new system is expected to transform case management in county courts by making it quicker and easier to locate records and progress cases through the use of its CaseMan software. This allows data relating to claims and parties to be input once and used many times.

☞ **Comment...** EDS is the company US presidential candidate Ross Perot founded and later sold to General Motors. EDS has subsequently been spun-off from GM and is now an independently quoted company on the New York Stock Exchange.

EDS won the LOCCS contract, which is the first the LCD has awarded under the Government's Private Finance Initiative (PFI), against competition from Siemens and Sema after submitting "the most economically advantageous bid". In accordance with the PFI, this "transfers the risk" to EDS, who earn a fee every time a summons is processed and so have a vested interest in ensuring the project runs to schedule and is a success. □

DIARY DATES

☎ **2 October - Excel Spreadsheets for Intermediate Users.** One day course organised by Institute of Legal Cashiers & Administrators. Fee £240 + VAT. Call ILCA on ☎ 0181 294 2887 for details.

☎ **28 October - Internet for Professional Services** One day conference on developing a competitive advantage through the Net. Speakers from Bird & Bird, Masons and Clifford Chance. The event is sponsored by **LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER** and takes place at the Scientific Societies Lecture Theatre, London W1. Fee £399 + VAT. Registration from 9.00am, closes 17.20pm. Call Amelia Tinsley of IBC UK Conferences on ☎ 0171 453 2709 for details.

☎ **Legal Admissibility of Electronic Documents** The IT division of the BSI (British Standards Institution) DISC is mounting a series of one day seminars to discuss issues surrounding the storage of documents on electronic systems and their admissibility as evidence in courts of law. Speakers include Graham Smith of Bird & Bird and McGrigor Donald partner John Newall. Fee £195 + VAT with discounts for members of sponsoring bodies. The venues are Birmingham **28 October**, London **8 November**, Edinburgh **29 November** and Manchester **4 December**. For details call BSI-DISC on ☎ 0181 996 7408.

☎ **27 November - LITigate '96** One day conference plus workshop sessions on legal IT, law firm re-engineering, case management and networks. Speakers include Richard Susskind, Neil Cameron, Gary Simon of Deloitte & Touche and Ken Olisa of Interregnum. The event is co-sponsored by **LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER** and chaired by **LTI** publisher Charles Christian. Venue: Café Royal, London WC2. Fee £380 +VAT, registration from 9.00am. Call Forum Conferences on ☎ 0181 445 8060 for details. *Plus see form enclosed with this edition.* □

FENNEMORES MOVE REFLECTS TREND

The news that Fennemores of Milton Keynes has completed the successful migration from its old proprietary CTOS systems to a new Windows NT environment with Microsoft Office running on Pentium PCs, is clearly good news for the firm - but it also reflects a growing trend in law office automation projects in the UK.

With over 250 fee earners and staff working out of the firm's Milton Keynes, Luton and Northampton offices, plus the wholesale replacement of hardware and software, and extensive staff retraining, it is hardly surprising that the total budget for the project was in the region of half a million pounds.

There is also no mystery as to why a firm such as Fennemores should feel the need to radically upgrade its IT infrastructure. As senior partner Christopher Hilton-Johnson explained: "Our clients are always looking for improved results and effective feedback, whilst also being extremely cost conscious about the services we provide.

"The improvement in efficiency and quality of service that today's IT systems can enable, are making wide scale adoption of the latest information management techniques something the profession needs to embrace immediately. The first email writ was a clear signpost to the future".

The Fennemores' move is however also important as it reflects the growing trend for "Microsoft/Everything" whereas even 18 months ago a Novell/WordPerfect solution would have been more usual.

Consultants and IT suppliers that **LTi** has interviewed cite several reasons for this change of allegiance, including: the delay before a satisfactory Windows version of WordPerfect was delivered, the 10 month wait for a Windows 95 product and administrative red tape that meant even firms who wanted WordPerfect were unable to get hold of the software. ➔

➔ This is in sharp contrast to Microsoft which over the same period has earned a reputation for delivering competitively priced state of the art software with close integration between front (Word, Excel) and back office (NT) products.

☞ **Comment...** The old WordPerfect versus Word debate seems to be over. Microsoft is winning hands down at the moment, not least because its rivals keep shooting themselves in the foot

In a new report, the US research group Forrester says Novell is "at the crossroads" with nearly 50% of current NetWare users expecting to move to the rival NT system within three years. ☐

DPS EXTENDS LINKS

Next week a newly installed accounts system from Technology for Business goes "live" at Pickworths in Hertfordshire. This will be followed at the beginning of November by the implementation of links between the TFB system and the DPS case management software from MCS that Pickworths use to help handle their criminal work.

According to Osman Ismail of MCS (☎ 0181 882 8811), although this is the first link to a TFB system, it is one of a growing number of third-party accounts products that can now accept billing and ledger data from TFB.

"The trend today is for firms to pick and chose different elements of their IT systems, such as accounts and case management, from different suppliers so they can be certain of having *best of breed* solutions. DPS is designed to meet that need," said Mr Ismail

Along with TFB, links exist between DPS and systems from Pracctice, Cognito Software and the new Paragon package from Legato Computer Services. Mr Ismail believes this "openness" is one of the reasons why, according to the 1996 *Robson Rhodes Survey*, DPS is now the UK's most widely used stand alone case management system. ☐

CURRENT LAW ON CD
Sweet & Maxwell's legal digest series *Current Law* is now available on CD-Rom as part of the new *Current Legal Information CD* published by S&M subsidiary **Legal Information Resources.**

☞ **The CD was developed using FolioVIEWS electronic publishing system supplied by Catalyst Publishing Solutions (☎ 01993 708700). Along with the equivalent of ten years' worth of *Current Law*, the disk also contains daily law report and European, legal and financial indexes. For sales information call ☎ 01264 342899.**

NEW JARGON CORNER: PRINT MILES

If you use a Windows based PC, you will know that with many applications as well as *clicking* on the print command or icon, you also have to press "enter" to clear the print dialogue box. But when do we remember this? Usually only after we are half the way across the room from our desk to the printer, the filing cabinet or the coffee machine.

Print miles are the distance travelled before you remember to clear the dialogue box. As in "I think I have covered enough print miles this month to qualify for the London Marathon." Still, it saves going to the gym.

ME AND MY PC

Jonathan Silverman, a partner in the London firm of Silverman Sherliker, which has a commercial and copyright practice, has always been a believer in keeping abreast of the latest developments in technology in case they can provide opportunities for improved productivity and efficiency. L*Ti* recently quizzed him about the systems he was currently using...

When did you and your firm first start using computers? Immediately after I set it up in 1981. We had Epson 8-bit computers, IBM magnetic card machines and I recall accessing the old Eurolex system through a teleprinter.

What systems does your firm use? Solace for accounts, WordPerfect for Windows wordprocessing, the Excel spreadsheet, LINK, Tel-Me, CompuServe, DragonDictate and the Marquesa trademarks research system.

What is your main PC hardware? A 120MHz Pentium processor, with 16Mb of RAM and a 1.2 Gigabyte hard disk, running Windows 3.1. I also have a Toshiba laptop and a Psion Series 3a pocket computer.

What are the main applications you run? WordPerfect, Excel, WinFax (for sending faxes direct from the desktop), CompuServe and the DragonDictate speech recognition system.

What is your favourite program? DragonDictate - anything rather than type for hours!

When is your PC turned on in the morning - and switched off again at night?

As soon as I get in and just before I leave the office. Say 8.30am to 7.30pm.

What was your worst moment with ➔

➔ **a computer?** Getting "out of memory" messages when I desperately need to do something.

How many times a day do you check your email? Twice a day on CompuServe and LINK.

What do you never leave home without? According to Jonathan Silverman it is "an embarrassingly long list" and includes: a radio-pager, a mobile phone, the car keys, a Psion, a "Yard-o-Led" pencil, a FiloFax, practice visiting cards and a Rolex!

Have you one piece of advice you would like to pass on to lawyers working with computers? "Just because your present IT systems work, you should not become complacent. Keep looking at new developments."

From your experiences would you describe IT as being a benefit or a liability? "I couldn't do without IT." ☐

IBM IN SPEECH INITIATIVE

IBM in the USA has reported what it claims is a major breakthrough in speech recognition technology with the launch of the first real-time continuous speech product in the IBM VoiceType family.

Called MedSpeak, it is a Windows NT application designed for radiologists working in US hospitals. IBM claim the system allows users to speak naturally - rather than resort to a more robotic discrete speech mode - and that most people should be able to use it without having to spend time on "enrolment" courses to allow the system to become familiar with their voice patterns,

☞ Here in the UK, Technology for Business (☎ 01932-781120) is working on a new speech recognition application for lawyers based on Kurzweil technology. Further announcements are expected later this autumn. ☐

COMMUNIC@TIONS FUTURES

Web site operators are welcome to create hyperlink jumps to the **LTi** site at <http://www.cloudnine.co.uk/cloudnine/>

MICROSOFT ISSUES BETA OF NET SECURITY SOFTWARE

Microsoft has announced a new cross-platform technology that should make it easier for software programmers to develop secure Internet applications.

Called CryptoAPI, version 2.0 is now available in a beta version and can be downloaded from the Internet at <http://www.microsoft.com/intdev/security>

Microsoft says that along with making it easier to add cryptographic capabilities to software, the new product creates the foundation for a public key infrastructure (PKI), so end users will be able to digitally sign documents or verify an individual's identity when exchanging legal information across the Internet.

☞ **Technical Note...** Public key encryption uses two keys – one public and one private. If lawyer A wants to send a confidential message to client B, then A encrypts it with B's a public key but it can only be decrypted by B using his own private key, so even if it does fall into the wrong hands, no-one else can read it.

But, while Microsoft may have resolved some of the technical problems associated with PKI, the proposed framework for regulating the use of PKI raises some thorny political and legal issues.

For example it is envisaged that keys will be issued by Trusted Third Parties (or TTPs) who will keep copies in escrow and so be able to certify the true identity of key holders in the event of disputes. However in the UK, the DTI proposes to license TTPs on condition that on production of a decryption warrant, a TTP must generate a copy of the user's private key and hand it to the DTI so they can access the files. □

HEXAR TO EXPAND RANGE AND GO INTERNATIONAL

At a recent seminar, fax management systems specialist Hexar (☎ 0181 563 9000) confirmed that it was now looking at expanding its activities into all areas of electronic messaging, including the development of universal in-boxes (see also story on p.5 of Issue No 22).

Hexar is already installing the first telex integration systems into firms using its FaxSwitch software and expects Group 4 fax transmission to be available in the first quarter of 1997.

Following the opening of a Paris office earlier this year, Hexar now plans to open an office in New York. As well as local sales, these offices will also provide local support for firms with overseas branches wanting to establish "least cost" routes for international fax traffic.

For example, rather than send a fax direct from Vietnam to a US client, which is very expensive, the least cost route for Freshfields' Ho Chi Minh City branch is to first send it to London over the firm's own internal datacoms network and only then on via fax to the USA. □

FASTER MODEM SPEEDS AGREED

The International Telecommunications Union has ratified two new modem speeds for the V.34 communications protocol, namely 31.2 Kbps and 33.6 Kbps. Currently the top "official" speed for V.34 modems is 28.8 Kbps.

☞ **Comment...** A number of modem manufacturers, including Supra, Hayes and US Robotics, have hinted that they will be offering upgrades from 28.8 to 33.6 for a minimal charge. However with latest figures suggesting that nearly 60% of Web surfers in the UK still access the Internet via modems with speeds of 14.4 Kbps or less, any firms considering investing in faster modems are probably best advised to wait until the first purpose-built 33.6 Kbps models are available. □

**OFFICE 97
ON ITS WAY**
Microsoft says that Office 97, the next version of its office automation suite, should be available in the UK at the beginning of January. The main changes are expected to be far greater integration with Internet services, with Microsoft's Web browser acting as the user's desktop.

☞ **Easynet**
(☎ 0171 681 4444) has become the latest UK Internet Service Provider (ISP) to sign up with Microsoft and offer Internet Explorer 3.0 as its browser software for new customers.

**BT CUTTING
CALL COSTS**
From 8th October British Telecom is cutting the cost of calls by up to 25%. National daytime calls fall from 9.9p to 8.8p per minute, which should be useful for firms with no local ISP or for accessing LINK from outside the London area.

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Don't miss the next edition No 24 out: 7th October

Alexis Byter's
COMPUTER LORE

At a seminar I attended last week, one of the audience raised a very good point, namely: if the commercial world is now in the throes of the so-called "digital communications revolution" (the Internet and all that) how come so many major law firms are currently spending large amounts of money on sophisticated fax management and fax switching systems?

Surely this is yesterday's technology and the firms should instead be investing in electronic mail!

Yesterday's technology? I think not. With an estimated 300 million fax machines worldwide, a user base that big is not going to disappear overnight. And certainly not in the legal market where something like 30% of all calls made by UK law firms are fax communications. For example last year Clifford Chance sent and received a total of six million pages by fax.

All of which helps explain why fax can account for up to half of a firm's phone bill. In the circumstances, it is hardly surprising that there is a boom in demand for systems to make the fax process more efficient and cost effective.

It is also highly unlikely that in the short to medium term fax will become a dead end technology. Indeed we are already seeing the emergence of the

➔ first generation of *universal in-boxes* that can handle all forms of messaging, including voice and email, as well as fax.

Fax also has advantages in terms of standards and reliability. For example, with email you can never be sure when or if a message has arrived, which is no way for a lawyer to conduct business-critical communications.

But, while such technical issues will no doubt soon be overcome, one completely grey area remains in relation to the potential legal problems arising from the use of email.

All litigators know of cases that have been won or lost through the discovery of carelessly worded documents that have effectively conceded liability. But while lawyers and their clients may now have procedures for safeguarding paper-based correspondence, including fax, email remains uncharted territory.

What makes this worrying is that the informal nature of email actually encourages a much less inhibited and frequently downright gossipy style far removed from the traditional constraints of business communications.

Yet all these flippant emails – which of course no-one ever bothers to monitor or purge from their PC's hard disks and their firms' back-up archives – are governed by exactly the same rules of *discovery* as conventional correspondence when it comes to the litigation. □

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