



CNW GROUP

## **USING MEDIA INTELLIGENCE TOOLS TO DRIVE COMMUNICATIONS SUCCESS**

**The benefits of engaging  
traditional media and social media**

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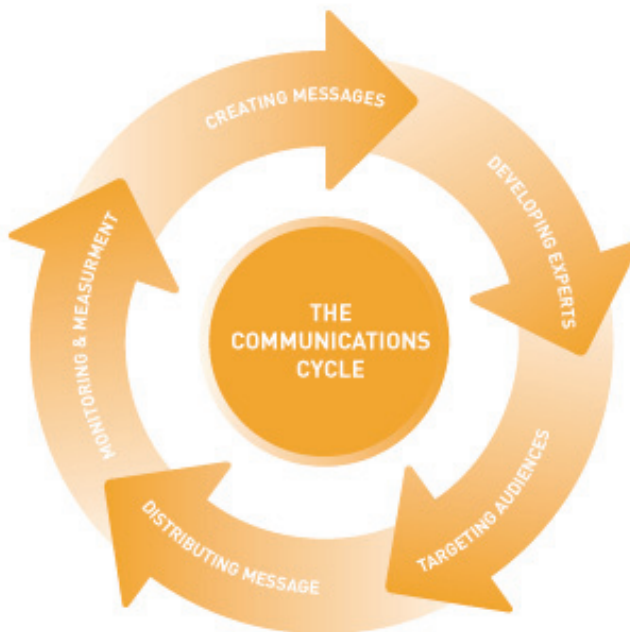
Corporate communications and public relations is vital to drive business success. Communicators must craft and execute a strategic public relations program that combines traditional PR tactics with today's more collaborative tools.

Traditionally, PR has focused on one-way communication carefully crafted from an organization to the media. Today, public relations is less about controlling messages and more about engaging in two-way dialogues with key audiences, including the media, consumers, bloggers, investors, business partners and more.

As a result of new Web 2.0 technologies, communicators' ability to engage their audience in dialogues or conversations is now easier than ever. By definition, Web 2.0 technologies are ones that "aim to facilitate collaboration and sharing between users." Chief among these technologies are social media networks, blogs, RSS and search engine optimization tools. This paper seeks to explore how the combination of traditional PR tactics and newer, more interactive and collaborative technologies can provide communicators with the most efficient and effective means to reach relevant audiences.

Let's start by looking at the **communications cycle**. At the heart of all communications are the messages that an organization wants to convey to their core audience. Determining what these messages are early on in the process will help define the rest of the program which should include:

- Developing and positioning experts
- Targeting and connecting with traditional media and citizen journalists
- Distributing messages
- Monitoring and measuring the effectiveness of your efforts



As communications professionals, the crux of your job is to influence the appropriate media and bloggers (and ultimately the public or other target audiences) about the importance of a particular story and, in so doing, position your organization's executives as preeminent experts on the topic(s) of importance to your organization.

It is equally important to measure the effectiveness of a communications strategy to understand how your messages are resonating with your intended audiences. Key to this is to determine how the outcome of a program will be measured for success before beginning. This will help to decide what messages will be effective, who the best spokespeople will be, what media (traditional and nontraditional) to target, and which method of distribution to use.

### **Creating messages that will resonate.**

At the onset of every communications program, the first step is to craft and define the messages your organization wants to convey. Many messages will be suggested; however, the key to effective communication is to focus on three to five core messages. Determine how each of these messages fits in with your communication strategy and aligns with your business objectives. These messages must be consistent with other messages throughout the organization, from marketing, to customer service, to internal communications, etc. They must be clear and concise to be effective. Going forward, the key messages will be the foundation of your communication. For example, the messages can be used:

- In news releases
- By experts and spokespeople
- As the basis of blog posts by executives
- To convey your plan to employees (who act as the face of the company)
- On your company's Web site

Remember to continually evaluate the messages you are conveying to determine how they are being perceived by your target audiences. It may be necessary to alter your messages during the campaign, but the only way to know this is by monitoring and measuring at key points throughout the campaign.

### **Developing and positioning experts.**

Developing executives into "industry experts" is integral to the success of any PR program. But, effectively playing the expert game requires a bit of imagination and creativity. Journalists, while happy to talk to communications professionals initially, will require access to experts in order to build their stories. Bloggers almost always prefer to hear directly from an expert.

**Perform an “expert audit”**

When working within an organization, or taking on a new client if you are a PR professional at an agency, it is necessary to perform an “expert audit.” Sit down with colleagues or clients and identify who can speak effectively about which topics. The most sought after experts are those who can provide a different angle on a topic, who are somewhat controversial, who are willing to speak candidly with a reporter or blogger, who are unflappable, and importantly, those who will be available when an interview is requested.

**Play reporter**

Forget for a moment the organization’s objectives and regard the world as a reporter or blogger would. Given their beat and the readers these reporters or bloggers must satisfy, identify the following: What topics are of interest? What angles are fresh and provocative? Which experts and what level of expertise would make an article a really interesting read? Genuinely reach out to journalists to gain an in-depth understanding of what they want so you can hone your message to suit their needs. Journalists need to actively participate—they don’t want canned stories. If you understand what a journalist is looking for, you stand a better chance of getting picked up.

**Become a matchmaker**

Having performed that analysis, now play the role of matchmaker. Ask yourself: which individuals within my organization or my client’s organization can satisfy the needs of the reporters? Whose presentation style will be most persuasive? Who can electrify the story?

**Identify ideas for the masses vs. tailored pitches**

A news release essentially packages ideas for reporters and others en masse. A pitch, however, is tailoring an idea for a single reporter or blogger. In a tailored pitch, a communications professional is saying, “I think you’ll be interested in this person because ...” By reading the target publication or blog, or watching the program on TV, a communications professional should have a clear idea of what will resonate with the reporter, blogger or producer, and what will not. Remember, your credibility is at stake, so make sure you do your homework. When writing a pitch, the tone should be friendly and familiar and not at all vague. Make sure to have ideas that can be used in news releases and others that can be saved or tailored for pitches.

**Develop platforms for spokespeople**

Profiling key spokespeople on the organization’s Web site and in widely available expert databases provides reporters with easy access to these experts. These networks are designed based on social network concepts—the collaboration of information. It is also a good idea to consider services that enable expert profiles to be linked directly from a news release. This capability provides more in-depth information on spokespersons to reporters reading your news which may increase the potential for pickup. If there is an expert who can speak on a “hot topic” that is currently in the news, consider sending

out a media advisory alerting reporters to the availability of such a spokesperson and his or her position on the topic. Whatever methods are ultimately used, developing experts within an organization and creating platforms from which they can provide their opinions is one of the most important tactics to securing lasting media coverage.

### **Targeting, connecting with and influencing the appropriate Media – the right mix.**

Knowing the target audience and where they go to get information that drives their business decisions is critical to the success of a public relations program. Is it the trade publications that cover their industry? Is it the business reporter at their local daily newspaper? Or is it where your competitors are advertising? Is it the leading industry bloggers and other citizen journalists? Talk to customers and industry experts to find answers to these questions. The reporters who write for these publications and the leading bloggers are the ones you want to target. More precise demographics may be considered as well—age, gender, ethnicity, politics, sexual orientation, socio-economic and more. To reach your target audiences directly you must target the information sources they rely on regularly. For most, this is a combination of print, broadcast and online sources (both traditional media and consumer generated media such as blogs and video sharing sites).

Another factor is today's media environment. The 24-hour news cycle brought about by the Internet and cable television has created news holes that need to be continuously supplied. Yet, despite this need for news, many outlets around the country and the world are operating with fewer reporters than they did five years ago. The resulting pressure to churn out more content with less staff can open doors to opportunities for coverage because of a need to fill these 'holes' with interesting, newsworthy information that might not have otherwise been available. And remember, your target audiences are now more accessible than ever...in fact, today you can communicate directly with them. With knowledge of where your audience goes for their information and an understanding of the current media and blog environment, you can now begin to build an effective media and blogger list.

### **Building a media and blogger list – and keeping it up to date**

After determining what sources your target audiences' rely on, it's time to build a targeted outreach list. It is equally important to add any publications or blogs that cover your competitors to the targeted lists to which you distribute your messages. If they write about your competitors, they are likely to want to write about you as well. There are many ways to do this research—some more timely and cost-effective than others. Whatever method you choose, review several back issues of the publication to learn what each reporter covers and what interests them and their audience.

>> **Subscribe to the publications read by your target audience.** Consider publications in your own backyard, as well as others around the country. Review the masthead or beat sheet of each to build a master list of reporters that cover your industry or news similar to your own. Some publications provide beat reporter lists upon request. Routinely check the mastheads for any changes in beat or reporters' assignments.

>> **Utilize search engines to find online editions of publications or relevant blogs.**

By plugging appropriate keywords into major search engines, links to appropriate industry publications will appear. Visit each site to find the masthead or beat sheet and determine the correct reporter for your news - this can usually be found in the About Us or Contact Us section of most online publications. Make sure to routinely return to these sites to keep your list up-to-date.

>> **Follow media-focused newsletters or publications.** There are quite a few newsletters that cover the media industry, reporting on staff changes at magazines, daily newspapers, wire services, trade publications and broadcast outlets. Subscribing to these newsletters may make it easier to stay on top of media movements.

>> **Use a media database.** Media databases are the most cost-effective means of building up-to-date media lists. Whether it is necessary to cast a wider net or keep the news more targeted, a media database allows you to research easily the appropriate media at outlets around the world. CNW Group offers a number of media database solutions, including MediaNetCentral, Canada's online media directory; and MEDIAAtlas, a global online media directory. Both offer:

- Online access from anywhere
- Ability to search by geography, subject, beat, title, and more
- Knowledgeable research team who regularly update the contacts
- Journalists' communication preferences (so you can communicate with them in the manner they prefer)

>> **Use a blog-specific search engine.** Tools such as [Technorati](#) which monitors and categorizes over 110 million blogs, [Google Blog Search](#) and [Blog Pulse](#) can help you identify the best blogs to target and observe. Blogs, a "Web site where entries are made in journal style and displayed in a reverse chronological order" and other Web-based sources are gaining significant followings.

A free subscription to Technorati provides a simple way to track blogs. By clicking on "advanced search" and typing your industry into "blog directory search," a list of relevant and popular blogs will be compiled. The list includes a description, link, the number of users that are fans and a measurement of authority for each blog. Also, you may add favorites by setting up a list. Click on the "favorite" button on certain blogs you want to monitor in the future. This adds the blog to your favorites tab on the top of the page. You may compile a Watchlist, where you can search for keywords and URLs that

Technorati will automatically monitor for you. This feature allows you to tag favorite topics. For example, if you tag your company's name as a favorite topic, when you click on "Watchlist" a list of blogs that mention your company name will appear.

Bloggers and online users frequently use Technorati's ranking system to analyze the importance of other blogs and websites. The site looks at the number of incoming links to a particular blog or website in the past 180 days, and uses that to determine the "Authority" of a site. Each additional site linking to a particular site adds another point of authority.

Virtually every profession is debated and discussed through blogs. It is therefore vitally important to extend your PR program to the writers and opinion makers who contribute to these online communities.

At this stage in the communications cycle, you have:

- ✓ A strong, clear message
- ✓ Prepared spokespeople and experts
- ✓ Defined target audiences
- ✓ Built an extensive traditional media and blogger list

The next step is getting your message or story out to the world.

### **Distributing your message.**

There are many ways to communicate messages to target audiences, but none have proven as effective as the news release. Whether promoting a new product, making an important company announcement or releasing financial/material information, the news release should contextualize your news, story or event in a manner that gives your target audiences an appreciation for the significance of the announcement without being overly promotional. All news releases should contain compelling messages that reflect the organization's mission and core set of values.

Traditionally, a simple text news release was the easiest way of communicating an organization's message to its many audiences. Through a newswire, a communicator could send one news release to tens of thousands of media points and, in the past ten years, to thousands of Web sites and online databases.

Today, that same news release has morphed into an interactive communication tool that combines text, multimedia, video, audio and photos on one platform. Whether it's the CEO discussing the organization's mission or an interview with a celebrity spokesperson linked to a specific cause, multimedia content woven into an announcement and distributed as a Social Media Release (SMR) substantially enhances the impact of the news.

CNW's Social Media Release has all of these features, and more, to help you reach your online audience. In addition to the multimedia elements listed above, the CNW Social Media Release also allows users to comment on the release or see what others have said about it on blogs.

### **Get the word out**

By incorporating Search Engine Optimization (SEO), RSS (Really Simple Syndication or Rich Site Summary), social media tagging and nontraditional broadcasting into its distribution methods, the newswire is most effective in delivering your text or multimedia news release to both traditional media and public audiences, as well as the new, more technologically savvy audiences who rely on the Internet to collect and share information and engage in dialogue.

Today, you must make sure that your message can be found where your audiences look for it. SEO, RSS, social media networks, video content sharing Web sites and more are important to incorporate into your program to maximize reach and effectiveness.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) of your message makes it that much easier for anyone using a search engine to find information on your organization. Whether it's Google, Yahoo!, MSN or Ask.com, the search engine has become the primary starting point for most Web users. SEO can broaden the exposure of news releases by ensuring that the announcement appears higher in natural search results on topics related to the news. This is an extremely effective way of reaching audiences specifically interested in your news. Here are some tips to get the most out of search engine optimization for your news release:

#### **>> Use keywords that are relevant to your target audience throughout the release**

- First define the theme of the release and determine a list of keywords (words and phrases) that will represent the central theme.
- In general, identify two or three of the most relevant search terms that your audience is likely to use when performing a search.

#### **>> Write a keyword rich, contextually thematic headline**

- Your release headline is the most important line within your release and it must be keyword rich and express the general theme of the release.
- The headline, along with your company name, becomes the page title for the release. The page title is the identifier that search engines use to identify your release as a Web page and match it against its database. Therefore the page title needs to be extremely relevant to the release message. If you need another line to further detail the theme of the release, use a sub-headline to do so, as this will also be optimized.

>> Utilize keywords in the first sentence of the initial paragraph and throughout the body of the release

- The first sentence of the first paragraph of your release becomes the release description and therefore should describe what the rest of the body of the release is about.
- Search engines will identify certain keywords that are used too often throughout any Web page as “spam”; so be careful not to repeat your keyword phrases more than three times each for a release of approximately 250 words in length.

>> Write naturally to get your message across in a conversational manner

- The goal is for your audiences to click-through to a Web page via a link at the end of the release. The more natural and conversational your writing style is, the more likely they are to follow the link.

There are also a number of free tools available online to help you ensure that your release is search engine optimized. For an example, try the [Press Release Grader](#). It's a tool that evaluates the readability and online visibility of your release quickly and freely.

CNW Group's website is optimized for search engines and both traditional releases and Social Media Releases hosted on our website rank highly in search results.



**RSS**, also known as Really Simple Syndication or Rich Site Summary and often referred to as 'the glue of the internet,' puts users in control of the content they receive by allowing them to sign up to receive information from Web sites and blogs of their choice, which is then delivered directly via feeds, streams or channels. RSS is one of the main ways in which bloggers aggregate content. By seeking out RSS feeds from information sources that are of personal interest, bloggers can self-select the news and information they want to receive on a regular basis. If your news release or sections of your Web site (which are regularly updated with new content) are RSS-enabled, bloggers can easily find your news and information as it becomes available. CNW Group offers hundreds of RSS feeds categorized for the convenience of journalists and bloggers. Since launching these feeds in 2007, thousands of users have signed up to receive and use these feeds. Like SEO, an RSS-enabled release has the ability to reach a wide net of individuals who have an express interest in your organization or its activities. CNW's new Social Media Release will include an RSS feed that online users will be able to subscribe to, updating them when a follow up release is issued.

**Online Media Rooms** An online media room is essential to getting your up-to-date, relevant messages to the right audiences. Online media rooms are separate sections of a Web site where the media, and others, can come to get up-to-the-minute

information, download images, watch videos, listen to podcasts and sign up for RSS feeds. Remember to always keep the information relevant and fresh, or you will lose your audience quickly.

**Social Media Networks** Social networks such as [del.icio.us](http://del.icio.us) and [Digg](http://Digg) have created a more collaborative, interactive and dynamic experience for consumers and others seeking news and information. These types of social networks allow users to create a personal list or profile of links to blogs, articles, Web sites, and other online destinations of personal interest. This list can be accessed by the individual, or by others who have similar interests. CNW Group includes buttons for a number of these social networks in the body each release, enabling users to more easily share content with their friends and other members of the social media community.

Social Network sites also allow users to find out how others are saving or tagging their news and information. As an example, one can go to [del.icio.us](http://del.icio.us) and enter an organization's URL, and the tags that appear will tell the user how people on that social network are characterizing that organization. This is important information that can be used in other areas of your communications program.

**Online Video Distribution** The proliferation of web access – with 72% of Canadians (more than anywhere else in the world) now using the Internet (according to recent findings by ComScore) – means that there is a powerful and direct way to reach audiences with video content.

In fact, the constraints of television news formats are all but eliminated online, affording organizations the opportunity to provide viewers with a greater level of detail and interactivity. If you have previously invested in video news releases or b-roll, you should consider repurposing this content for online distribution. Sites dedicated to sharing video content include YouTube, Metacafe, [blinkx.tv](http://blinkx.tv), and Yahoo! Video, while iTunes offers a medium for delivering video via podcasts. Broadband also gives you the ability to host live Web video events and create regular video programming, building a community with a direct and active interest in your organization.

If you do not have the time, technical tools, skills or inclination to research appropriate sites and upload the video yourself, CNW Group Broadcast Services can assist you in scripting, editing and distributing the video to the appropriate sites they have identified through research on your behalf.

Incorporating video into a Social Media Release will increase the value of the release to consumers.

#### **Pitching bloggers**

Pitching bloggers can be a daunting task for communications professionals. Bloggers aren't bound by the same rules as traditional journalists; similarly, anything you write

to them may appear on their blog within minutes. Here are several tips from Rohit Bhargava, Vice President, Interactive Marketing at Ogilvy Public Relations Worldwide, that you should keep in mind before you pitch bloggers:

- Before you pitch them, read their blog.
- Two words: **trackbacks and comments- follow them, use them, read them.**
- Bloggers are experts.
- It's not always about their readers.
- Giving them free stuff is ok.
- Know who else is talking about you.
- Don't throw away your traditional media relations playbook.

Other suggestions offered by top bloggers such as providing a permanent link to your story and links to the story elements are already built into CNW's Social Media Releases, enabling bloggers to easily write about your message and link back to you. Provide bloggers and online journalists with both high-resolution and low-resolution images so that they have the option to choose which one, or just use part of the larger image, in their story.

### **Monitoring and measuring the effectiveness of your efforts.**

Monitoring and measuring the effectiveness of a PR program is a crucial step and should be continuously done throughout the life of the program. Do not make the mistake of reserving evaluation for the end. Regular monitoring and measuring offers the ability to reinforce your communications strategy and make any necessary improvements to your ongoing communications program. If you have not been monitoring and measuring all along, you should consider initiating a program at least 30 days prior to launching any significant new communications initiative to establish a baseline that you can easily see and communicate the impact of your efforts.

### **Monitoring**

#### **What exactly is monitoring?**

**Monitoring:** The act of scanning Web sites and other information sources such as newspapers, magazines, wire services, and so on, for mentions of an organization, its executives, its competitors or the industry as a whole. This includes providing links to where these mentions appear in articles online or in print.

Monitoring for mentions of an organization's competitors is as important as monitoring for mentions of the organization itself or the industry in which it operates. There are tens of thousands of Web sites and other online information sources that could potentially post something of interest or importance. And there are millions more people who could potentially read that article or posting.

Further, according to a 2007 study conducted by Nielsen on behalf of the Newspaper Association of America, audience sizes for newspaper Web sites is growing at nearly twice the rate of the overall online audience. An average of more than 59 million people (37.6 percent of all active Internet users) visited newspaper Web sites each month during the first quarter, a record number that represents a 5.3 percent increase over the same period a year ago.

Today, Web 2.0 technologies not only provide a means to reach your audiences more effectively, but they also provide a way to track the response to your news. A PR practitioner is expected, at the very least, to be aware of what's being said and read.

Here's how you can begin:

#### **Identify keywords associated with your brand**

To begin, consider keywords that are associated with the organization: its name, key executives, spokespeople, products, services and competitors too. Also consider what keywords are associated with the industry and areas of interest that affect your business.

#### **Define what you want to monitor**

Some organizations are only interested in what's being said about them online. Others want to know what's in print and on television. Consider where your target audience gets their information to determine what types of media are important for you to monitor.

If you're interested in learning more about media monitoring, contact your CNW Group Account Executive. Our comprehensive communications management suite, MediaVantage Enterprise, is an indispensable tool for tracking, managing and organizing media coverage from print, radio, broadcast and online sources.

Once you've set up your profile for keywords you want to monitor, CNW Group's MediaVantage will deliver clips in near real-time and will allow you to easily produce clip books for sharing with colleagues and stakeholders.

### **Measurement**

Measuring the effectiveness of PR has been a major challenge facing the industry for decades. Today, it is one of the hottest topics among PR professionals. The savviest ones already understand measurement is key to the future of the PR industry.

**Measurement:** The act of evaluating, based on determined criteria such as tonality, volume, share of voice, and so on, the aggregate coverage an organization receives in the media. Proper measurement will provide a basis for which a PR practitioner can

evaluate a PR program and determine if it is meeting its intended objectives and the objectives of the organization.

Whether a company wants to understand the impact of certain messages, change messaging mid-program, or assess the quality of its coverage versus the competition, measurement is the way. Measuring the impact of coverage can be as important as counting the number of articles in print (monitoring clips). Competition for budget and headcount is fierce – effective measurement also provides the tangible evidence to strengthen your argument to win more of both. Specifically, conducting appropriate measurement should yield:

- Volume of coverage vs. competitors'
- Opportunities to view vs. competitors'
- Equivalent ad value vs. competitors'
- Coverage by publication type or media type vs. competition
- Evaluation of tonality (positive, negative, neutral) and quality (based on articles' length, placement, publication, and several other criteria)
- Share of voice in articles as compared to competitors'
- Tracking of messages, issues and spokesperson
- Overall score that takes into account all of the above

To get started, consider the following:

#### **Determine how much measurement you need**

Determine what you need to prove you've met the objective set out in your communications program. Is it volume of clips and tone (positive/neutral/negative)? Is it share of coverage versus your competitors'? Is it the potential size of the audience you have reached through all placements combined? Or is it how your audience has interpreted and changed their behavior as a result of what, how and where you've communicated? In the past, measuring volume, tone and how your message has resonated was an expensive business venture. Today there are cost effective options that will not drain your budget, such as CNW Group's MediaVantage.

You should also determine whether you want to measure conversations in the blogosphere. Blogs are a bit harder to measure than they are to monitor on your own. This is because although tools like Technorati and Google Alerts allow you to search by keywords and pull up a list of blogs that mention those keywords, they do not allow you to dig any deeper than this. CNW Group's MediaVantage monitors blog conversations in real time and can help provide quantitative and qualitative analysis of how messages are resonating in the blogosphere,

#### **Let an expert do your measuring**

Measurement is usually viewed by management as more objective and credible when conducted using an independent firm, system or tool. It also makes this tedious, time-

consuming task possible in the first place. Look for a partner who is equipped to perform and deliver. Automated systems typically cost less than ones that involve human intervention, but either way, expect to invest time to establish what you want to measure including key messages, spokespeople, competitors, third-party sources and so on.

### **The communications cycle comes full circle.**

The communications cycle provides an important framework for every communications campaign— from creating messages to developing experts, identifying key targets, distributing your messages and monitoring and measuring success—you have a full-circle approach to your public relations efforts. The benefit of following this framework is that it allows you to evaluate your program at any point during the cycle and tweak or overhaul as necessary.

Each of the elements outlined in this paper can be managed on your own, but you should consider your objectives and identify where your time is best spent. It's quite likely that you would be better served letting an outside expert handle most of these tactics. So like thousands of your peers, consider the services that will do it for you – it can free you up to spend your time creating strategy, pitching, talking to and cultivating relationships with journalists, reading as much as you can in your industry – all the things you can't outsource. Selecting the right partner will significantly benefit you and your organization in the long-term.

### **ABOUT THE UPDATES AND REVISIONS TO THIS PAPER**

The authors, Ted Skinner and Michael Pranicoff, have combined, revised and updated two previously published PR Newswire white papers: “Using Media Intelligence Tools to Drive Communications Success,” by Nancy Sells, and “Building Support for Your Cause Through Public Relations: The Benefits of Engaging Traditional Media and Web 2.0,” by Michael Pranicoff, to create this new version. This version was updated by Parker Mason, Web Content Specialist, CNW Group for a Canadian audience.

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