
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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WOOLF - OK BUT NO CIGAR

The good news is Lord Woolf's final report - *Access to Justice* - on the restructuring of civil litigation in England & Wales envisages a faster process and considerable logistical savings being made through the use of IT, particularly case management and communications systems. The bad news is the report seems to ignore some fundamental practical problems. LTI deconstructs the issues...

It is clear a comprehensive courts computerisation scheme will cost a lot of money but where will it come from? Lord Woolf makes no estimate although he has helpfully stated that while it would "not be peanuts" it also "should not be exaggerated" and hinted that the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) could assist.

Unfortunately the PFI is not the success that was originally hoped - in fact earlier this month even the right-wing think tank Adam Smith Institute published a report criticising the PFI concept. We can also be certain that raising taxes to buy judges computers is not going to feature very highly on any political parties' agenda, no matter who wins the next General Election.

Even assuming the money can be found, is the Lord Chancellor's Department capable of implementing such a project? Its track record is not good. For example attempts to streamline the Courts Agency Computer service earlier this year prompted a six week strike at the Northampton County Court bulk centre. Project Judith may have been enthusiastically greeted by judges but the technology is already obsolete. And the ➡

➡ Courts Listing service is six months behind schedule. continued on page 4 ➡

RED FACES OVER IT GUIDE

There are red faces at Chancery Lane following the publication earlier this month of the first edition of the English Law Society's new *Information Technology Directory*.

Described in pre-publicity as "well researched... by the Society's IT experts," the *Directory* manages to omit some of the best known names in legal technology including: Avenue Legal Systems, MSS, Linetime, MCS, Admiral, Solicitec, Miles 33, Technology for Business and Elite as well as smaller or specialist suppliers such as Hatton Blue, Fathom, Ymijis and Jackson Computer Solutions.

If the 1996 *Robson Rhodes Report* is used as a benchmark, the omissions account for 36% of the accounts and 22% of the case management software markets. TFB users, incidentally, include Girlings of Canterbury whose senior partner Tony Girling is the current president of the Law Society.

Publisher Carl Upsall says the editorial side of the *Directory* was handled by the Law Society's IT adviser and he is "not sure how such big names managed to disappear from Christina Archbold's database". An announcement is expected shortly on plans for an addendum or supplement to the *Directory*.

☞ **Note...** The Publications Division's next project is a CD-Rom version of the Law Society's *Annual Directory of Solicitors & Barristers*. A solicitors-only version is scheduled for October, with a full version due in January 1997. □

SHOOSMITHS REVIEWING IT STRATEGY

The multi-office major regional practice of Shoosmiths & Harrison (which recently broke with law firm tradition by announcing its gross fee income - up by nearly 20% to £29.5million for the year 1995/96) is currently reviewing its IT strategy. The external consultant is Richard Blasdale of Robson Rhodes.

EVERSHEDS ORDER DART Eversheds' Cardiff office has ordered an 8 user licence version of Dart Legal Systems' PPL integrated case and practice management system. The new system will run on an Oracle database and be linked to a Cognos executive information (EIS) system. Dart is on ☎ 01480 470307.

AXXIA TO BE PART OF IRWIN MITCHELL £2MILLION PROJECT

As part of an overall £2million project to streamline the firm's front and back office systems, Sheffield-based Irwin Mitchell has ordered Arista case and practice management software from Axxia Systems.

The firm's long term IT strategy is to provide the infrastructure for achieving "improved client service quality through electronic communications" and "greater profitability via increased productivity".

To this end 700 of Irwin Mitchell's fee earners and staff in seven offices will be equipped with PCs running Microsoft Windows 95. And, along with the Arista practice management system running on an Informix database, Axxia will also deliver 350 case management, fee earner desktop and marketing modules.

Axxia Systems (☎ 01734 602602) says its slice of the project is worth £600,000. The Arista system replaces Irwin Mitchell's incumbent accountancy system from AIM Professional. □

ELBORNE GO NORWEL

City of London insurance and shipping law specialists Elborne Mitchell has signed a £100,000 deal with Norwel Computer Services (☎ 0161 945 3511) which will see the installation of Norwel's practice management, EIS, marketing and fee earner desktop software running on Data General's latest Intel-based AViiON 3000 server hardware. □

TWO NEW EQUITRAC DEALS

Two more firms - Forbes & Partners in Blackburn and Birmingham's Wragge & Co - have installed the Equitrac (☎ 0171 831 7818) photocopier costs recovery system. Wragge's system will be linked directly to the firm's accounts system (from TMA) for automatic posting of billable charges. □

PULLEN JOINS LINETIME

Tim Pullen, one of the original management team at Solicitec and more recently an independent consultant specialising in legal practice quality management, has joined Linetime (☎ 0113 250 0020) as the company's new sales consultant for the South of England. Hampshire-based Pullen will have the dual role of servicing existing Linetime customers and building up the company's presence in the South.

Field Overell, a 5-partner firm based in Leamington Spa, is using Linetime's Context conveyancing software to help create a dedicated conveyancing unit within the practice. Previously domestic conveyancing was handled by a number of fee earners in separate offices. □

SUPPLIER OFFERS

This new service for **LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER** subscribers lists current special offers and promotions being run by IT suppliers.

☞ Any company with a genuine special promotion should contact the **LTI** office. There is no charge for inclusion.

☎ **Admiral Legal Systems** (☎ 01276 682268) From now until the end of 1996 Admiral is running a special offer on its LegalMind (previously Amicus) Windows NT-based practice management system. Savings of up to £5000 can be made on copies of LegalMind software ordered and installed by the end of the year.

☎ **Pracctice Ltd** (☎ 01432 351041) is running a special discount offer for sole practitioners. This comprises: a single user licence version of the company's integrated accounts and practice management software, three days' training, one year's support/upgrades, and the entry onto the system of opening balances - all for £2100 + VAT. This represents a 40% saving on the normal retail price of £3540 + VAT for the bundle of software and services. □

FAX BILLING - £1 A PAGE IS AVERAGE

The results of a recent survey carried out by disbursements cost recovery specialists Equitrac show that the most common way of recharging faxes was per page and that on average firms were charging £1 per page regardless of destination.

As Equitrac systems have the option of recording and recharging faxes by one of four ways (*i* true call duration costing linked to BT/Mercury tables, *ii* per page billing, *iii* zone/destination billing, and *iv* a combination of the above) the company recently surveyed users to find out which methods they actually used.

Of the sample, 60% of firms said they were charging clients for sending faxes - the lowest number was in the South East excluding London, the highest in the Midlands and North West. As to the percentage of faxes recharged to clients, the national average was 70% - again the South East was lowest, the highest proportion was in the North East.

In terms of the methods used although some firms were employing a combination of charging formulae, no one was charging only for the duration of the call and by far the most popular method was per page, regardless of the zone or destination. Charges varied dramatically from a low of 20p per page to a high of £1.50 - both incidentally recorded in London - with a national average of £1 per page.

☞ **Note...** Equitrac also asked about the recharging of copier costs. Although some firms reckoned to recharge 100% of all photocopying to clients, other admitted figures as low as 15% producing an average of 65%. Nearly all firms thought they could improve their recharge rate.

The price for a single B&W A4 photocopy varied from 5p to 26p, with the average being 19p. Charges for colour copying ranged from £1.50 to a barely economic 18p per page. □

WIGGIN & CO MAKE AWARD TO ADMIRAL

Commercial lawyers Wiggin & Co which, despite being based in Cheltenham, has an established international reputation with branch offices in London and Los Angeles, has awarded the contact for its new practice management system to Admiral Legal Systems (☎ 01276 682268).

Admiral will be supplying the LegalMind software running across a Windows NT network with a Microsoft SQL Server database. Wiggin & Co say the ability of the Admiral system to integrate with the firm's Windows 95 PCs, NT network and Word 7.0 wordprocessing was extremely important. □

FAX SYSTEM COMPETITION HEATING UP

Competition between the two leading suppliers of fax management software is heating up.

After Kommunicate (previously Fontware - see story on page 5) reported six new orders for its RightFax network fax system, its main rival in the legal market Hexar (☎ 0181 563 9000) has just announced three new orders for its FaxSwitch software.

Hexar's latest wins were at Herbert Smith, Nabarro Nathanson and Simmons & Simmons. All three chose FaxSwitch in head-to-head competition with RightFax. □

NEW WORDPERFECT PLUS HARDWARE BUNDLE

Corel Corporation, the new owner of WordPerfect software, has signed an agreement with Packard Bell NEC Inc that means Corel WordPerfect Suite 7 (which includes the latest Windows 95 version of the WordPerfect wordprocessor) will now be bundled with all new Packard Bell PCs.

Corel estimate worldwide this will total 5 million units this year and so help restore confidence in WordPerfect as a major business software application. □

SHARP CLAIM SMALLEST SCANNER

Sharp Electronics (☎ 0800 262958) has launched the JX-250 - what it claims to be the world's smallest A4 flatbed scanner. Designed for use where space is at a premium - such as offices at home and one-per-desk applications - the unit can scan a black & white page in 4 seconds and handle text for subsequent OCR processing. The PC version costs £549 + VAT and there is also a cheaper Mac version.

NEW DOCS OPEN NEXT MONTH

UK distributor Quintec (☎ 01268 270601) launches a new version of the Docs Open document management system at the Document '96 show at the NEC in Birmingham on 24th September. The new Version 3.0 includes groupware, Internet and mobile computing enhancements.

ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Lord Woolf's report *Access to Justice - the final report by the Master of the Rolls to the Lord Chancellor on the civil justice system in England and Wales* is available from HMSO, price £19.95

ACCESS TO COURT LISTS

Although the Lord Chancellor's Department has still to award any contracts for the proposed Court Listing service, at least three suppliers now offer services. The latest to go "live" is the WWW based service from Sweet & Maxwell (☎ 0171 393 7141). This is free, updated daily and currently contains Crown Court and some High Court lists. Sweets say the service at <http://www.smlawpub.co.uk/courtindex.html> is attracting interest from both barristers and solicitors.

WOOLF DECONSTRUCTED

➡ continued from front page... The Report talks about the need for barristers and solicitors, as well as judges and court administrators, to be brought into the IT equation to help manage the document loads now encountered. But where do litigants-in-person fit into the picture?

Lord Woolf talks about *fast* and *multi* track options but will there also have to be high and low tech options – for the decline in the availability of legal aid certainly means the future will see many more litigants-in-person.

Possibly the biggest problem relates to the suggestion that there has to be a cultural change, with a move away from adversarial procedures to litigation as a last resort.

This is fine in theory but practice suggests that in recent years lawyers have actually become more confrontational and prepared to play *hard ball* in litigation – possibly out of fear of being sued by their clients if they don't win.

Geoffrey Bindman, one of the solicitors involved in the long running Patricia Eaton case, suggests one reason for the reluctance to settle is that in order to keep down their internal costs, law firms are relying increasingly on relatively junior fee earners who, rather than negotiate, "blindly follow procedures".

Ironically it is computerisation in the shape of case management systems that are often setting the procedures for these fee earners to follow.

In fact one of the selling points for much of this software is that firms can dispense with assistant solicitors and delegate litigation to junior paralegals, safe in the knowledge that technology will manage the case and prevent the fee earner from diverging from set procedures.

Lord Woolf has said that "litigation must be conducted not for the convenience of the lawyers but for the convenience of the parties". The danger with these proposals is that litigation could end up being conducted for the convenience of computer systems. □

DIARY DATES

☎ **4 September – Excel Spreadsheets for Beginners.** One day course organised by the Institute of Legal Cashiers & Administrators, takes place at the ILCA office in Eltham. Fee £130 + VAT (ILCA members £100 + VAT). Starts 9.30am call ILCA on ☎ 0181 294 2887 for details. ☞ There is also an **Excel Intermediate Course** on **2 October**. Fee £240 + VAT (ILCA members £200 + VAT).

☎ **September – Speech Recognition Systems** IBM is running a series of morning seminars to show its VoiceType dictation system on 12 September (London), 19 September (Manchester) and 24 September (Warwick). Admission is free and to book a space call IBM on ☎ 01705 492249.

☎ **16 September – The Future of Fax in the Legal Profession** Seminar at Lincoln's Inn, London. Speakers include Mike Shore of Herbert Smith and Charles Christian of **LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER**. Admission is free, starts 15.30pm, ends 18.00, call Simon Watkins of Hexar on ☎ 0181 563 9000 for details.

☎ **25 & 26 September – Software for Solicitors** Technology exhibition features major legal systems suppliers, at the Albany Suite, Forte Crest Hotel, Birmingham. Admission is free, call Truemist on ☎ 0181 742 3399 for details.

☎ **28 October – Internet for Professional Services** One day conference on developing and maintaining a competitive advantage through the Net. Speakers from Bird & Bird, Masons, Clifford Chance and the *Guardian* New Media Lab. The event, which is sponsored by **LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER**, carries 6.20 hours CPD credits 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. □

LTI INFORMATION - A FREE SERVICE FOR SUBSCRIBERS

Need a telephone number, a product name, a contact name or any other elusive item of information concerning legal technology? We can help.

As a free service - and only available to subscribers - you can call **LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER** on ☎ 01379 687518 (or email jcxtian@cloudnine.co.uk) and we will provide you with the specialist information you require.

We are happy to provide the names of products, information on systems, suppliers, telephone contacts etc between 9-30 and 17.00 Monday to Friday. But, please note the information we supply should not be regarded as an official endorsement - and nor do we offer IT consultancy services.

QUESTIONS ANSWERED

Among the questions dealt with over the past month have been:

We are considering employing a partially sighted trainee solicitor at our firm but are concerned she will be unable to cope with our computerised case management system. Are there any gadgets or devices we could buy to help her? The Employment Development & Technology Unit at the Royal National Institute for the Blind (☎ 0171 388 1266) produced a series of fact sheets earlier this year on a variety of products for both partially sighted and blind users of computer systems. For further details contact Zoe Neumann or Paul Porter at the RNIB.

The European Union also has its GUIB project examining ways of making it easier for blind people to work with Windows-style graphical user interfaces.

The next edition of **LTI** will be looking at some of the specialist systems available for blind and partially sighted computer users.

We appear to have three addresses for Meridian Systems, including one in Stockport and one in Stamford. Which is the correct one - and do they have anything to offer solicitors practices?

In fact there are two entirely separate companies here: Meridian Information Systems Ltd (☎ 0161 442 2227) which produce the Meridian Law product for barristers' chambers. Along with the Stockport head office, this company also has an office near the Temple in London (☎ 0171 356 0880).

The second - and unrelated - company is Meridian Legal Systems Ltd (☎ 01780 482795). This is based in Stamford and distributes the Solpak for Windows accounts and practice management system for solicitors' practices.

Have you any information about a library automation system called Custodian? In response to the request for further information in the last edition of **LTI**, Hugh Davis, the IT Manager of Brown Jacobson in Nottingham, phoned in to say the product is available from Custodian Computer Systems, 14 Cannons Close, Bicknacre, Chelmsford, Essex CM3 4HS (☎ 01245 224395). The version Mr Davis used (when he worked for a firm of chartered accountants) was a DOS application. A bar code reader is also available and a Windows version is scheduled for delivery in early 1997. ☐

HAVE LAPTOP, WILL TRAVEL

The Marriott Hotels group (☎ 0171 591 1100) has woken up to the needs of modern business travellers and is starting to refit its hotels to include "Rooms that Work".

In other words accommodation that includes desk units suitable for working at with laptop computers, along with accessible power points and phone sockets, desk lights and adjustable chairs. Hopefully this will mean no more scrambling under beds trying to fit modem cables into telephone sockets. ☐

NAME CHANGE

Reflecting the changing nature of its business, network fax software specialist Fontware has changed its name to Kommunicate. Its address and phone number (☎ 01252 815514) stays the same.

NUMBER CHANGE

Avenue Legal Systems has installed a new telephone exchange. The main switchboard number for the company's Fareham head office is now ☎ 01489 609000. The new fax number is 01489 609999. There is no change to Avenue's postal and DX addresses.

NEW LIBRARY SYSTEM

Library systems specialists Soutron (☎ 0115 944 1664) has entered into an exclusive contract with Contec Data Systems of New Zealand to make the C2 library automation system available to public, academic and specialist libraries in the UK.

☞ Soutron say C2, which uses Windows-based client/server technology can handle all the features required of modern specialist libraries, including multimedia, document imaging, WWW interfaces and hypertext. C2 makes its UK debut at Libtech '96 at the University of Hertfordshire, 4th & 5th September.

ME AND MY PC

Michael Kaye, the senior partner of Kaye Tesler & Co in north London, is probably better known to readers for his seminars advocating the benefits of voice recognition technology.

However, he is also a firm believer that computing is essential for smaller practices if they are to remain competitive and be able to handle low margin work, such as conveyancing, in a profitable manner. To this end both he and his firm have been using computers since as long ago as 1978.

What systems does your firm use? Solpak for accounts (see also page 5), WordPerfect wordprocessing although we are switching to Microsoft Office and the DPS case management system from MCS.

What is your main PC hardware? It is my own concoction with a 166MHz Pentium processor, 32Mb of RAM, a one Gigabyte plus hard disk and the IBM VoiceType speech recognition system.

What are the main applications you run? Wordprocessing, with speech recognition.

What is your favourite program? WordPerfect.

What is the most disappointing system you have encountered? All aspects of the Internet because of the difficulty in finding anything useful.

When is your PC turned on in the morning - and switched off again at night? As I come in and as I leave.

What was your worst moment with a computer? In the early days an assistant managed to wipe the data store. He couldn't believe that he had done something wrong, so ➡

➡ he tried it again with the back-up copy and managed to erase that too!

Have you ever surfed the Internet and what is your favourite site? My own web site.

How many times a day do you check your email? Once a day. (Michael Kaye is also a regular contributor to discussions on LINK about voice technology.)

What do you never leave home without? The keys to the office.

Have you one piece of advice you would like to pass on to lawyers working with computers? The key to any system is training and while solicitors generally will spend thousands of pounds on hardware and software, they rarely use it fully because they are extremely mean when it comes to training.

From your experiences would you describe IT as being a benefit or a liability? Neither, I would describe IT as a necessity.

SPEECH RECOGNITION NEWS

Philips Electronics has reorganised its speech technology operations by merging the dictation systems business unit in Colchester with the "dialogue" systems unit, which has been responsible for translating the work of the company's research laboratories in Aachen into practical business applications. The newly formed unit is called Philips Speech Processing and its UK head office remains based at Colchester (☎ 01206 755880).

☞ Shakespeare SpeechWriter UK (☎ 01342 316456) has produced a Java development kit so users can program their Java applications by speaking to their computers, as well as building speech recognition into their developing applications.

COMMUNIC@TIONS

FUTURES

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

IFL SAY "CEASE AND DESIST"
The ability to download text and images from Web pages has always meant copying is a potential problem for commercial sites and there can be occasions when imitation may be felt to go beyond flattery.

Information for Lawyers Ltd (IFL) has recently been involved in a spat with a company called mi2g Ltd over a new legal Web site. In particular IFL felt there was a similarity between the list of links the mi2g pages carried and material published on the IFL site.

Information for Lawyers issued a "cease and desist" letter to mi2g alleging copyright infringement and although mi2g strenuously denied the allegations, they subsequently removed or amended the pages in question. The IFL site at <http://www.infolaw.co.uk/ifl> was recently voted the Best Legal WWW Site in the 1996 Loties Awards run by **LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER** and *In Brief*. □

LINK EXPLAIN EXPLORER BROWSER POSITION

The announcement that the new version of Microsoft's Web browser software Internet Explorer 3.0 would initially only be available for Windows 95 and NT platforms has created a major headache for Legalease, whose already delayed Link 96 system was to have been based around Explorer.

Last week Legalease managing director John Pritchard explained to **LTI** why he was still committed to the new Microsoft system and would be delaying the launch of the Link upgrade until Explorer 3.0 was also available in a Windows 3.1 version. ➔

➔ "It is not so much the browser aspect of Explorer 3.0 that is important to us but the better – and easier to use – email and discussion groups.

"Netscape and Explorer 2.0 have those facilities but they are crude in comparison. More to the point, for most of our users, who are relatively unsophisticated and inexperienced, they are not self explanatory on Netscape whilst on Explorer they are obvious.

"My view is Link has to be incredibly simple to use if we are to pull in the mass of the legal profession, who generally do not know one end of a browser from another. So, if they cannot send emails or join in discussion groups without it being obvious what to do, then we are better to stick – for the time being – with the system we already have.

"I am not prepared to release Link 96 without an easy to use email and discussion group facility. In my opinion it is better to wait for the formal release of the superior product (ie Microsoft Explorer 3.0 for Windows 3.1).

"I accept this will frustrate many of our regular and enthusiastic users who have Netscape and can handle an unfriendly email/discussion front end, but I am looking at the wider picture of having a product any lawyer can use."

☞ **Comment...** Legalease will shortly be putting a "slimmed down" demonstration version of Link 96 on its Web site at <http://www.link.org>

In the meantime, given a Windows 3.1 version of Explorer 3.0 may not be available until "the end of 1996" – which in turn means the new version of Link may be unavailable until the New Year – perhaps Legalease could deal with some of the problems with the existing system.

A frequent complaint is that it has fallen behind on modem support, in particular for users of laptops with PCMCIA/PC card modems who can no longer log in to check their email from remote locations. Fixing such problems would be a welcome move. □

100% COVER WITH 0645 NUMBER

The Easynet Group (☎ 0171 681 4444) has announced a new service providing local call access to the Net for 100% of the UK through a single 0645 number. This also means "roaming users" with laptops will no longer need to reconfigure Internet connect software dependent on location.

ILCA NOW ON THE WEB

The Institute of Legal Cashiers & Administrators has opened a Web site containing information about the benefits of membership, along with a listing of the ILCA's forthcoming programme of events and training courses. The site is at <http://www.cloudnine.co.uk/cloudnine/ilcahome.htm>

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Don't miss the next edition No 22 out: 9th September

Alexis Byter's COMPUTER LORE

So now we are three. Or, more to the point, so now the Internet world's two favourite Web browsers Netscape Navigator and Microsoft Explorer have been upgraded to Version 3.0.

And golly gosh how exciting that is. In fact over the last fortnight so many people have been trying to download the new software that both companies have had to apologise for the delays and excessive download times now being encountered. (Although this should have hardly come as a surprise to anyone, given both programs are enormous.)

But, at the risk of seeming a party pooper, why are so many people scrambling to get hold of this software?

Here I exclude one rather sad trainee solicitor who spent the best part of the hours between dusk and dawn online to the Net trying to download Explorer 3.0 apparently oblivious to the fact it currently only runs on Windows 95 and NT platforms whereas he still has Windows 3.1 on his PC.

Call me old fashioned but I have always believed there is no point in being a guinea pig and that it is better to wait until a new software product is at least stable before you load it onto your system. For example, the latest versions of both Navigator and Explorer have ➔

➔ been found to contain bugs that at the time of writing have yet to be remedied.

Perhaps a more fundamental question to ask is who really needs these upgrades anyway?

For instance, the commercial release version of Navigator 2.0 was only formally launched in the UK in February of this year and – avid Web surfer I may be – I reckon that in common with 90% of Navigator users I only use about 10% of the software's functionality. But of course now I can buy Version 3.0 and get even more features I am never going to use.

Or, I could wait until the next new version comes along – and that could be quite soon. Netscape has already said Navigator 4.0 (code named Galileo) is “on the way” and Microsoft is expected to start issuing the first beta versions of Explorer 4.0 before the end of the year.

No doubt these will contain even more pointless features no-one in the real world will ever want or use. But, just as people scramble for new cars that have little to recommend them over the previous model except they can exceed the legal speed limit by even more miles per hour, so I suspect there will be an equally thriving demand for subsequent releases of Web browser software.

And I also suspect that in due course I too will be burning the midnight oil as I download the latest upgrades. ☐

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