

Commercial

# Connecting with Consumers in Uncertain Times

Getting approved products to healthcare consumers in the face of business disruptors



**COVID effectively "turned off the tap" of patient referrals from healthcare providers.**



**Jan - Oct 2021: 18 natural disasters in the U.S. caused \$1B of damage each.**



**Today's healthcare consumers go online to educate themselves on treatments, ask questions, and interact on social media.**





## If there is one thing that we can be certain of in these turbulent times, it's that we are not operating business as usual.

Disruptions, both positive and negative, prevent us from doing things the way we always have.

This is especially true for pharmaceutical, biopharma, medical device, and therapeutics companies whose goal is to bring to market approved healthcare solutions that improve consumers' health and wellbeing.

Companies in these industries must consider new ways of maintaining business continuity in the face of disruptions to bringing consumers together with the solutions they need and want.

This whitepaper will discuss the following:



Address the nature of business disruptions and provide a real-life example of how one company has overcome them.



Look at how the 83bar platform enables and accelerates new ways of doing business.



Consider projections for 2022 and beyond.



## Business Disruptors: The Bad and the Good

### COVID-19

When we consider business disruptors over the last two years, COVID-19 has been far and away the worst. From cancelled trials to lack of personnel to supply chain issues to the inability to schedule elective surgeries—COVID has affected nearly every aspect of business.

A particularly troubling issue has been the drop-off in patient referrals from healthcare professionals. Even before COVID, fewer patients were electing to see a primary care provider (PCP) and were going instead to urgent care.

**In fact, in a recent study of patients with healthcare insurance provided by a large, national commercial carrier, “visits to PCPs declined by 24.2% over an eight-year period, while the proportion of adults with no PCP visits in a given year rose from 38.1% to 46.4%.”<sup>1</sup>**



But COVID further reduced scheduled in-office visits. Even doctors using telehealth capabilities were often pressed for time, with little of the time they had available allotted to discussion of longer-term interventions.

At the same time, sales representatives were unable to visit doctors and other healthcare providers, further impeding the consistent flow of candidates for approved products. In facing the disturbances caused by pandemics, companies must find a different way to locate, qualify, and educate consumers actively searching for solutions to their healthcare issues.



## Natural Disasters

Similar to COVID-19, natural disasters such as hurricanes, tornados, floods, fires, and snowstorms have had a big impact on business continuity. Between January 1 and October 8, 2021, alone, 18 weather- or climate-related disasters occurred that resulted in losses of more than one billion dollars each in the United States.

**For the period of 1980 to 2020, the annual average is 7.1 events (CPI-adjusted), and the annual average for the most recent five years (2016-2020) is 16.2 events (CPI-adjusted).<sup>2</sup>**

With natural disasters clearly on the rise, businesses that want to sustain, and even grow, their sales must again be prepared to find an alternative to receiving candidates for their products solely through healthcare providers.

## Changing Consumer Behavior

In addition to the disruptions caused by the pandemic and natural disasters, there is another disruption. Unlike the previous two, it can be turned to businesses' advantage. This is the ongoing change from passive patient to active healthcare consumer.



**According to Deloitte's recent study, 2021 Global Health Care Outlook, "Consumers are driving—and accelerating—the pace of change in health care. Their needs and goals are driving innovation in health-related products, services, and tools."<sup>3</sup>**

Healthcare consumers are becoming increasingly tech savvy. They use multiple platforms, including PCs, tablets and smartphones, to educate themselves on treatments, ask questions, and engage through social media. Many have used telemedicine (especially during the pandemic) and plan to continue to do so into the future. Some consumers have even used remote monitoring technology in their homes.

The bottom line? Today's healthcare consumers have transitioned from passive participants of their healthcare options, to active seekers of solutions that suit their individual needs. These changes in consumer attitude and behavior support the idea of finding a different way to bring consumers together with healthcare solutions.



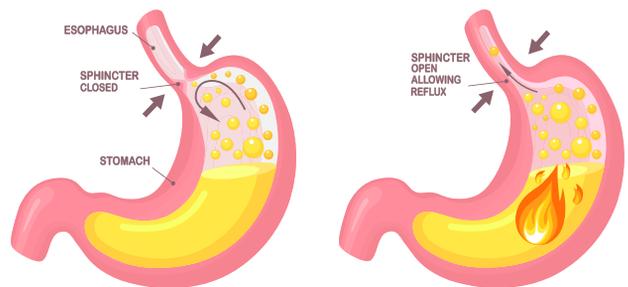
## Successfully navigating clients between a rock and a hard place

83bar is committed to helping businesses in the pharmaceutical, biotech, medical device, and therapeutics industries overcome the business disruptors previously discussed and maintain business continuity and growth. Following is an example of a client that achieved these goals with the help of 83bar's platform.

### Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD)

83bar began working with a medical device company that offers a procedure to address chronic acid reflux.

83bar first conducted a marketing feasibility test at the company's request to demonstrate how marketing directly to consumers could increase the volume of the company's procedure in Chicago.



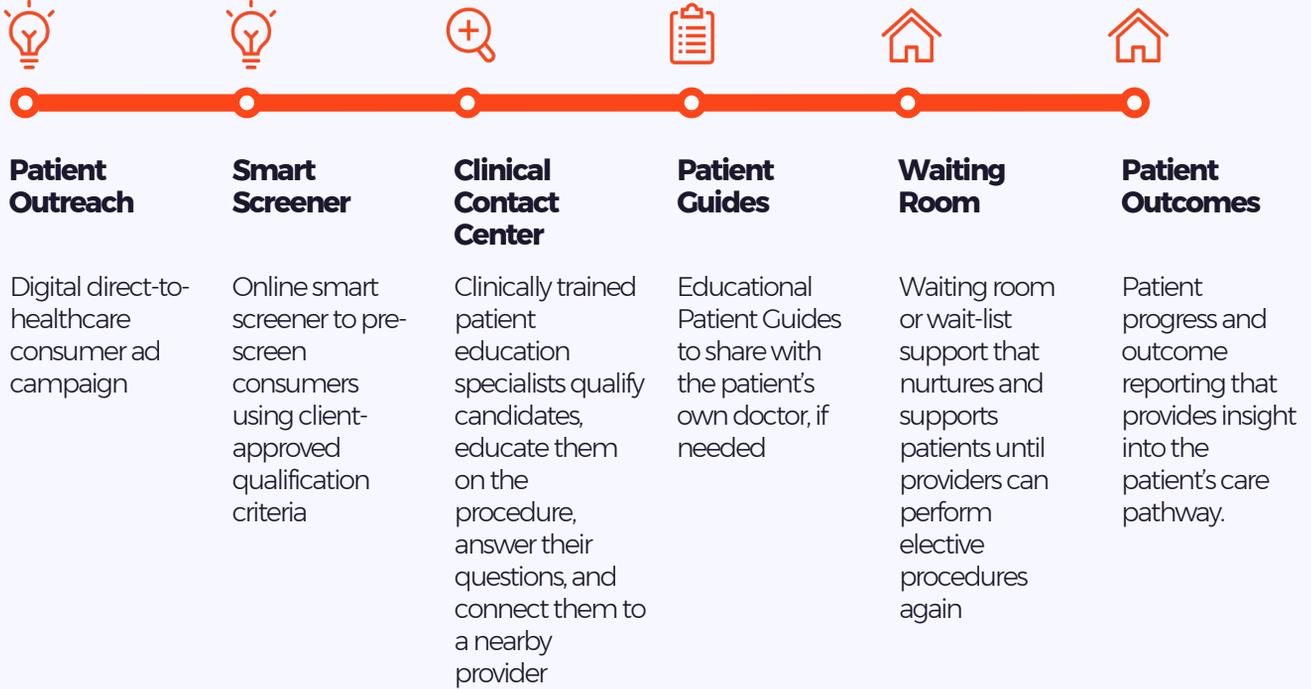
The challenge was to prove 83bar could locate consumers who were:

- Diagnosed with GERD
- Seeking alternative treatment options
- Willing to be referred to a specialist for a second opinion.

Once the study showed that the 83bar platform could generate sufficient leads, the company chose to expand efforts with 83bar to multiple regions. In 2021, the campaigns went nationwide.

## The Patient Journey

This expanded campaign utilized 83bar's full-service patient activation platform, which includes:



**75,736**



**Total Leads**

**23,635**



**Contacted**

**11,965**



**Activated**

**11,965**



**Educated**

**2,427**



**Handoff**

**413**



**Moving Forward**

**336**



**Confirmed Procedures**

## Results

- The ongoing nationwide campaign has helped 83bar's client achieve 5% in high intent activations (i.e., leads that moved toward a procedure)
- Results to date include generation of 68,846 qualified leads and 336 confirmed patient procedures.
- The percentage of patients who confirmed went from 30% at the beginning of the pandemic (March 2020) to a high of 80% (July 2020).



## Applicable Disruptors

### COVID-19 Pandemic

When the pandemic hit in March 2020, all healthcare provider offices were forced to cancel elective procedures, and this remained in force for at least three months. 83bar immediately began working to address this issue by helping the client and involved providers to implement a virtual consulting model.

83bar researched telemedicine platforms and insurance provider requirements and reached out to providers to find out if and when they were planning to utilize telemed platforms. If the providers answered yes and provided a time frame for implementing telemed, 83bar's platform sent out email communications that same week informing patients about the delay. 83bar worked with the client to nurture the relationship with these patients. The patients were put into a virtual "waiting room" or wait list, and 83bar contacted them on a regular basis.

Twenty-three of 26 markets stayed live and continued to perform initial consult appointments via telemed. This resulted in patients moving straight into diagnostics as soon as states and elective surgeries started to open again.

**In fact, of the patients who attended appointments and moved forward to have the procedure, the percentage went from 30% at the beginning of the pandemic (March 2020) to a high of 80% (July 2020).**

### Changing Consumer Behavior

With the move from passive patient to active healthcare consumer well underway and growing preference for online engagement, the 83bar platform helped the client take advantage of this disruptor in a number of ways.

83bar created and launched high-performing social media ad campaigns targeted to healthcare consumers already actively seeking healthcare solutions online. Once candidates viewed the ads, they could click through to an online screening tool developed based on client criteria that allowed candidates to self-select and self-qualify. Once the online smart screener was submitted and the candidate opted in to receive communications from 83bar, a patient education specialist in 83bar's Clinical Contact Center immediately reached out to contact the candidate. The empathetic patient education specialist reached out within minutes rather than days to further qualify the potential patients, answered their questions, and educated them on the advanced treatment option for GERD. In addition, the patient education specialists either provided them with the contact information for a nearby provider of their choice who specializes in the advanced treatment option or connected them directly to the provider's office.



83bar's patient education specialists helped patients get telemedicine appointments scheduled with nearby providers, sent appointment reminder texts and emails, and continued to engage by phone and online with patients whose diagnostic and procedure appointments had been delayed due to the pandemic. 83bar's platform tracked the patients' progress as they moved through the care pathway by gathering data from the provider office updates in 83bar's Referral Hub and from follow-up calls and email communications between patient education specialists and patients.



## Business Continuity Tools

### Market Feasibility Test

This limited time, usually three- to four-day, market feasibility campaign helps 83bar to understand the healthcare consumer population based on client requirements and to demonstrate 83bar's ability to address the client's issues. A Market Feasibility Test can be used to determine if consumers are interested in virtual vs. in-office solutions. In addition, it can be used as part of a forward-looking business continuity plan to validate if 83bar can locate required patients even if a disaster hasn't happened yet or if the effects of a disaster are not yet felt.

### Waiting Room

A standard campaign, encompassing demand generation, qualifying survey/screener, and Clinical Contact Center, is set up and launched, but instead of routing candidates to the client's normal scheduling endpoint, patients are put into a nurture flow (i.e., virtual waiting room or wait list).



## We can't foretell the future, but we can be prepared for the possibilities

### COVID and Beyond

As much as we would like it to be, COVID-19 is not completely vanquished. We still face the ongoing problems of the unvaccinated and of waning immunity starting about six months after vaccination. These factors could impact re-infection rates and spur a repeat of the issues discussed in the beginning of this paper.

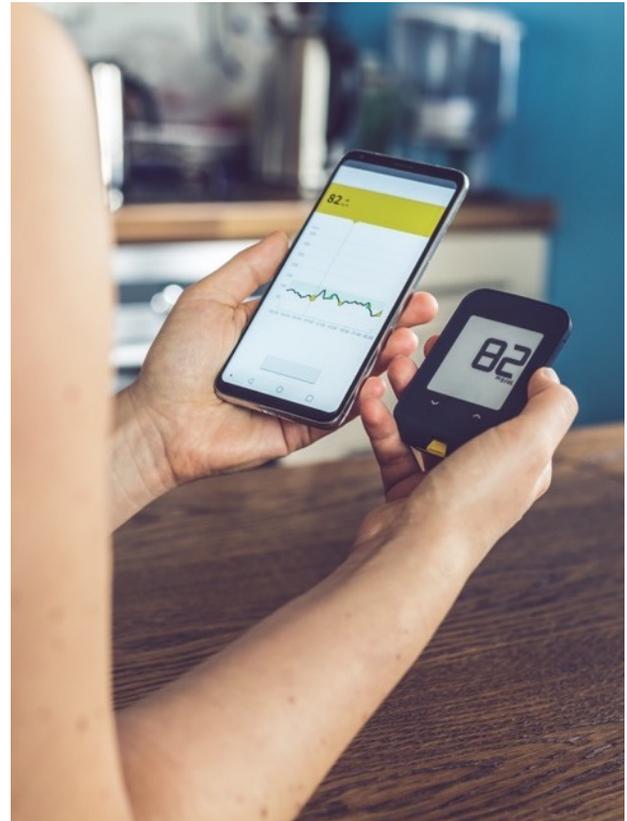
**At the same time, estimates are that between 15% and 80% of patients could experience long COVID four or more weeks after recovering.**

Long COVID, also known as post-COVID conditions, can appear in asymptomatic people and “can present as different types and combinations of health problems and can range in lengths of time, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).”<sup>4</sup>

These conditions can impact consumer mobility, complicate current treatment, affect scheduled surgeries, and put long-term pressure on healthcare systems.

There is also a possibility that COVID could mutate into a more transmissible or even more lethal virus. A mutated virus could escape immunity (natural antibodies or immunization), likely during the late fall, winter, or early spring seasons. This would result in impacts seen during previous waves of the COVID-19 virus.

Finally, we can't discount the possibility of future pandemics. We must be ready with comprehensive business continuity plans.



## Weathering Natural Disasters

The climate crisis is far from abating, and this means that associated natural disasters will continue to grow in strength and number. Looking at summer 2021 in the United States alone, the U.S. experienced drought, wildfires, a deadly heat wave, and then shortly thereafter Hurricanes Henri and Ida, which brought record rainfall and flooding.

**The potential for severe weather events over the winter and into the spring of next year will continue, and 2022 could see even more devastating events than in 2021.**

In addition, if potential developments with COVID overlap with the impacts of natural disasters (as they did in 2020), they could compound difficulties regarding consumer movement (and in-office visits to healthcare providers).

## Consumer Empowerment

Increased focus on, and development of, innovative at-home services and technology will further fuel “non-traditional” healthcare pathways. In addition, there is growing consumer interest in the subscription healthcare services model (as opposed to the fee-for-service model) for episodic conditions— with a view also to include some chronic conditions.

With increased investment in new medical technology comes increased competition, greater choice for consumers, and a more challenging competitive market for current brands.

There is little chance that consumers will be satisfied with returning to the “good old days” of healthcare providers being the single source of healthcare information, which they impart to their passive patients. Technology has changed the equation, with the power balance sliding closer to the consumer.



## Conclusion

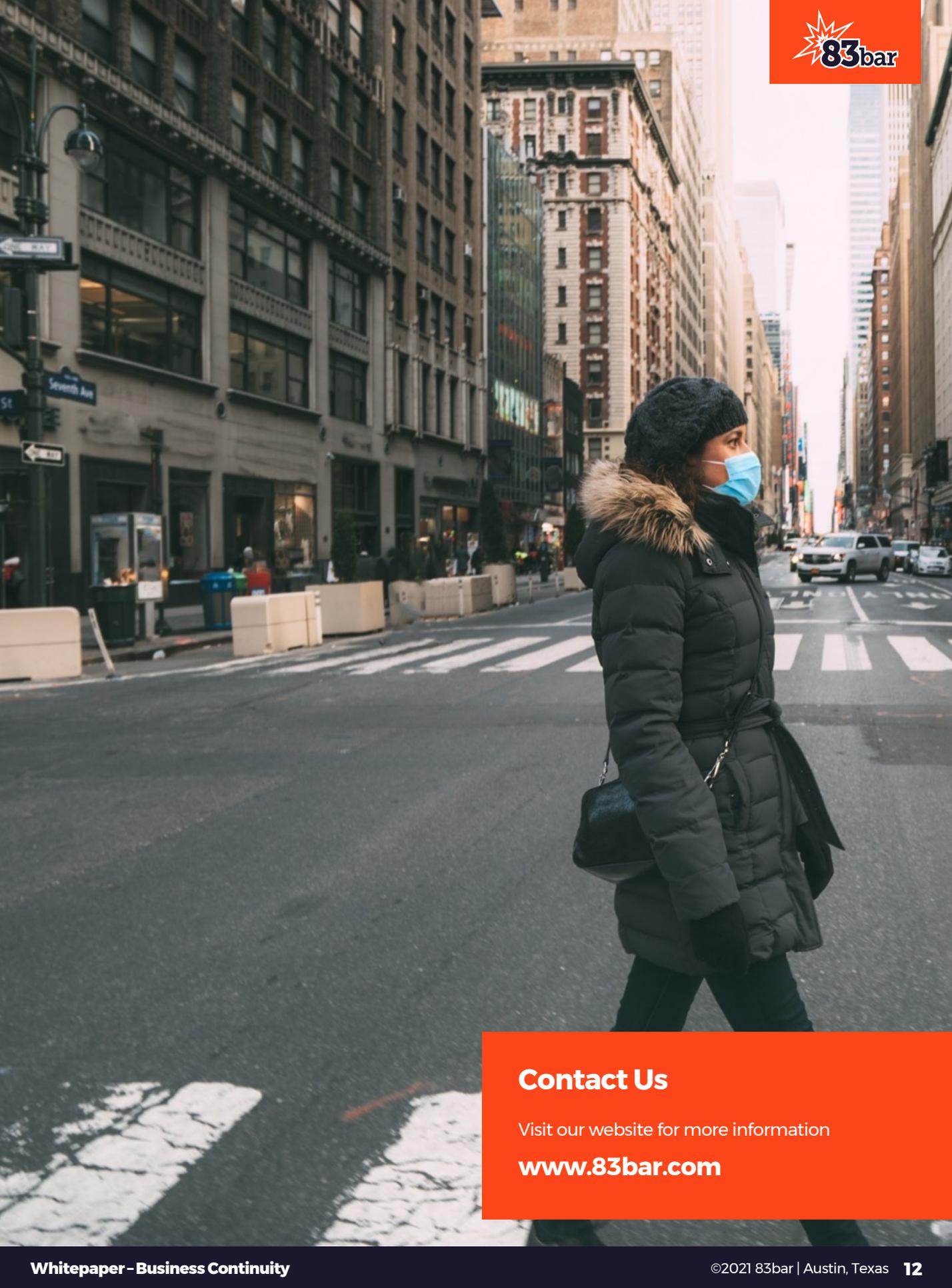
This paper emphasized the importance of preparing for disruptions to business operations, especially as they affect product or treatment acceptance and utilization as well as business growth. Using a real-life client experience with the 83bar platform, the paper explored how the client was able to overcome issues during the COVID pandemic. It also showed how the client turned to their advantage healthcare consumers' increasing use of online technology and the change in their expectations about guiding their own health care.

As we have noted, many unknowns continue to surround COVID-19, and weather-related disasters are only increasing. Certainly, consumers will continue to become more reliant on online and remote technologies because of their immediacy, convenience, and comfort. These are all good reasons to be prepared for the worst and be ready to achieve the best.

## Sources

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