

Creating a Connected Strategy for STEAM

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Abstract:

The paper comprehensively evaluates various aspects of Steam's business strategy. It analyzes the current strategy, market positioning, and targeted customer segments, examining how the company builds and maintains customer relationships. The paper delves into Steam's value proposition and highlights the organization's specific methods and tactics to execute its strategy effectively.

Additionally, the paper explores Steam's barriers and challenges, such as the problems associated with an abundance of games and a lack of customer service. It assesses the current information flow throughout the customer journey and identifies pertinent customer pain points.

Lastly, the paper proposes a connected strategic solution that focuses on creating a curated offering customer relationship that can significantly increase user retention rate and assist the company in securing its position as the industry leader in PC games. Innovative revenue models and technological solutions are described in greater detail as part of the strategy. Following is a risk and benefit analysis of the proposed strategy.

Understanding the current successes and limitations of Steam's business strategy is essential for developing innovative and realistic strategic solutions, strengthening Steam's capacity to adapt, innovate, and maintain its market competitive advantage.

Keywords: *connected strategy, steam, customer journey, delivery model, curated offering*

Introduction

In the ever-evolving gaming industry landscape, Steam has emerged as a game-changer, revolutionizing how people purchase and play video games. With its comprehensive digital distribution platform and thriving online community, Steam has secured a dominant position in the market. However, the company must employ an effective Connected Strategy to maintain its long-term market leadership. This means continuing to innovate and improve its platform to keep up with changing consumer preferences and technological advancements, ensuring a steady stream of high-quality games and an unparalleled gaming experience for its users. Additionally, it should focus on building strong relationships with game developers and publishers to ensure a steady stream of high-quality games for its users.

This paper will evaluate Steam's current strategy, examining its customer relationship and connected delivery model. The evaluation of Steam's customer relationship will involve identifying the customer journey and the pain points experienced at each stage. By understanding the challenges and opportunities in the customer relationship, recommendations can be made to enhance user satisfaction and engagement. Additionally, the repeat business and customization level will be

assessed to determine how well Steam personalizes its offerings based on individual preferences and data insights. Furthermore, evaluating Steam's connected delivery model will involve analyzing its position within the competitive landscape and its ability to adapt to emerging trends and technologies. This analysis will identify opportunities for Steam to improve its connected architecture, explore potential partnerships, and develop new features that provide users a seamless and engaging gaming experience.

By conducting a comprehensive evaluation of Steam's strategy, this paper aims to identify areas for improvement and propose innovative ideas and provide valuable insights into how the company can optimize its Connected Strategy and further solidify its position as a leading online gaming platform.

I. Subject Company Introduction

Company Overview

Steam has undergone a significant evolution since its inception in 2003. Originally developed by Valve Corporation as a solution for delivering game updates, it has since emerged as a comprehensive digital distribution platform and a thriving online community for gaming enthusiasts.

Initially conceived to address the need for efficient game update delivery, Steam provided a centralized platform for Valve's titles like Counter-Strike and Half-Life, incorporating anti-cheat systems and an auto-update feature. This streamlined process ensured Valve games remained consistently updated, greatly enhancing the user experience. In 2004, Steam expanded its horizons by introducing digital distribution of games, starting with the highly acclaimed release of Half-Life 2. This marked a pivotal moment as users could now directly purchase and download games without the reliance on physical copies. The resounding success of Half-Life 2 bolstered Steam's growth, attracting a substantial user base to the platform. Recognizing the advantages of digital distribution, Steam extended its offerings in 2005 to include games from independent developers. This paradigm shift empowered independent game creators, who found Steam a favorable platform for reaching a broader audience. By offering lower commission rates, mitigating piracy risks, and providing unlimited virtual shelf space, Steam became an attractive channel for independent developers to distribute their creations.

As Steam continued to expand, its game catalog swelled to encompass a staggering collection of over 50,000 titles. Spanning diverse genres, the platform caters to a wide spectrum of gaming preferences, establishing Steam as the go-to destination for PC gamers.

Moreover, Steam has evolved into a vibrant online community, facilitating interaction and engagement between game designers and players. With features such as user reviews, forums, and community hubs, gamers can connect, share experiences, and provide feedback. The platform also supports multiplayer functionality, enabling users to engage in collaborative online gaming experiences with friends.

Additionally, Steam incorporates various social and interactive elements, such as user profiles, achievements, and trading cards, which enhance the overall gaming experience and foster community involvement. This fusion of digital distribution, community features, and gameplay enhancements has solidified Steam's position as a central hub for the global gaming community.

In summary, Steam has transcended its initial purpose as a mere update delivery system to become a multifaceted digital distribution platform. With its expansive library of games, support for independent developers, and thriving online community, Steam has become an indispensable destination for game designers and discerning gamers worldwide.

General Strategy

Steam is a comprehensive online gaming platform that

offers its users a wide range of services. These services include downloading and playing games, creating and sharing mods (user-made content of their favorite games), trading virtual items, and accessing valuable game-related information through its online community. The platform caters primarily to young PC game enthusiasts who are passionate about gaming.

In addition to serving gamers, Steam also provides valuable services to game developers through its Steamworks program. Game developers gain access to essential tools, resources, and information necessary for launching their games on the platform. Steamworks empowers developers by offering them a robust framework to distribute and manage their games effectively.

Steam's reach is truly global, operating across different countries and catering to diverse cultures. Its user base spans globally, making it a prominent platform for gamers worldwide. The popularity of Steam has created a thriving community where gamers can connect, engage, and enjoy their favorite games together.

Value Proposition

Steam is a platform that links players and game developers while providing huge benefits to both. The gaming experience for players was improved. There is a sizable selection of games available on a single platform. Its regular sales and free-to-play options make it accessible to gamers of all budgets. Furthermore, Steam offers various social features that allow players to connect with each other and share their gaming experiences. With its user-friendly interface, extensive game library, and robust community features, Steam has become the go-to platform for gamers seeking a vast selection of games and opportunities to interact and share experiences with other like-minded individuals. Its global presence and widespread adoption have made it a central hub for the gaming community, fostering a sense of belonging and camaraderie among its users.

For game developers, Steam provides a trustworthy and secure platform for distributing their games and gathering user feedback. It also assisted them in reaching a large audience.

Overall, Steam offers a comprehensive suite of services for both gamers and game developers, catering to the needs of the gaming community worldwide. It continues to evolve and innovate, solidifying its position as a leading online gaming platform.

Positive Feedback Loop

Steam was able to establish a positive feedback loop, giving it a competitive edge over other market

participants. The engine for increasing user adoption and stickiness is the positive feedback loop. With the help of fantastic games, Steam has amassed a sizable user base. They also improve the gaming experience by running an online community and enabling users to become “prosumers” by making their mods. As a result, a sizable user base and a high level of active users draw game developers from all over the world, from indie to AAA developers. Another service called Steamworks supports them. Some games might be huge successes and aid Steam in gaining more users. The positive feedback loop that Steam established is a sign of the platform’s larger economic aspirations.

Financial Performance

Despite fierce competition from other industry players, Epic being a notable rival, Steam continues to hold the lion’s share of the market. The steam games market reached USD6.6 billion in gross revenue in 2021, and its games revenues grew by 31% in 2020 and a further 11% in 2021 (VG Insights, 2022). In 2022, Valve generated approximately USD13 billion in total revenue, of which USD10 billion came from the Steam store (Daniel, 2023). By the end of 2000, there were approximately 120 million active players, 62.6 million daily active players, 24.8

million peak concurrent players, and approximately 2.6 million monthly purchasers (Finances Online, 2021). In 2022, there were over 46,000 games available on Steam, with over 10,000 games being released in 2021 alone (Daniel, 2023).

II. Evaluation of the Current Strategy

Method

In the following analysis, a set of business analytic tools invented by Wharton Online are used to track the effectiveness of Steam’s current strategy. The analysis consists of two segments, the first of which evaluates the current customer relationship and the second of which evaluates the current connected delivery model.

Current Customer Relationship Evaluation

The tools used to complete the designated evaluation consist of evaluating the current customer relationship, information flow, level of repeat and customization, and customer willingness-to-pay drivers.

1. The current customer relationship

When evaluating the current customer relationship, it is critical to identify the customer journey and the pain points at each stage.

	Customer Journey	Pain Points
Latent need	Seek a sense of accomplishment and fulfillment (the desire to excel and be recognized for our skills can contribute to our overall self-esteem). Connecting with others who share similar interests fosters a sense of belonging.	Customers may not be aware of their need for a particular game or struggle to identify their preferences and interests, making it challenging to initiate the customer journey.
Awareness of need	Customers became aware of their need to play PC games to gain control, confidence, and belonging.	Customers might face difficulty discovering or realizing their specific gaming needs, leading to a lack of clarity and uncertainty about the type of game they want to play.
Look for options	Consumers utilize various tools, such as Steam’s search bar, genre filters, or recommendations from friends, to explore the vast library of games available. Consumers may also find PC games through other avenues, including online marketplaces (such as Epic Games Store), gaming forums, review websites, and gaming publications.	Customers may encounter challenges finding relevant and desirable gaming options due to the vast number of games available, making it overwhelming to navigate the choices effectively.
Decide on options	Customers evaluate different factors such as game reviews, ratings, gameplay videos, and recommendations from friends to make an informed decision about which PC game to choose.	Customers may be indecisive due to the many options. They may have trouble choosing games based on reviews, ratings, and recommendations.

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Order & pay	Review order details, and proceed to the payment stage. They provide the necessary payment information, such as credit card details, or use digital payment platforms to complete the transaction.	Customers may encounter issues during the ordering and payment process, such as technical glitches, payment failures, or concerns about the security of their personal and financial information.
Receive	Downloading the game to their Steam account immediately after purchase.	Customers may experience delays or issues downloading or activating their games, which can cause frustration and delay playtime.
Experience of good/ service	Dive into immersive gameplay experiences, connect with online communities, and enjoy the platform's regular updates and content releases.	Customers may encounter technical problems, performance issues, or bugs within the game, affecting their overall gameplay experience and potentially diminishing their satisfaction.
Post-purchase experience	<p>Online community: they may leave reviews and ratings, sharing their thoughts and experiences with the game.</p> <p>Access to game developers' updates provides ongoing value and enhances the gaming experience.</p> <p>Workshop: a platform for users to browse, download, and share mods created by the community.</p> <p>Cosmetic skin trading: allowing players to exchange or sell in-game cosmetic items and skins with other users.</p>	<p>Customers might face challenges in finding a community or engaging with other players, which can limit their ability to fully participate in discussions, share experiences, or access additional content released by the developers.</p> <p>Customers might seek refunds for games that fall below their satisfaction, and this process can be frustrating and time-consuming.</p>

2. The current information flow

	Description of information	Trigger	Frequency	Richness	Customer effort
Latent need	Potential gaming preferences, interests, and desires.	Customers trigger information flow by casually exploring gaming-related content and discussing gaming experiences with peers.	Low	Low	Low
Awareness of need	Refining the customer's understanding of their gaming needs.	The trigger can arise from various sources, including conversations with friends, exposure to gaming-related content, or interactions with gaming communities.	The frequency can range from occasional instances to more dedicated research sessions.	This stage has more information than latent needs. Customers may engage in more focused research on gaming websites, review platforms, online forums, and social media groups dedicated to gaming.	Moderate

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Search for options	The information focuses on discovering and exploring various gaming options available in the market.	Customers actively seek information to identify games that align with their preferences, such as specific genres, themes, or gameplay mechanics they are interested in.	Occasionally or regularly.	High	Moderate to high
Decide on options	The information focuses on evaluating and comparing the available gaming options to make a final decision.	Customers actively seek information to assess the games' quality, value, and suitability.	Occasionally or regularly.	High	Moderate to high
Order & pay	The information primarily focuses on the transactional aspects of purchasing the selected game.	The trigger for information in this stage is the customer's intention to proceed with the purchase.	A one-time occurrence for each purchase.	Moderate	Moderate
Receive	The information focuses on the delivery or access to the purchased game.	The customer completes the order and payment process.	A one-time occurrence for each purchase.	Low	Low
Experience in good/ service	Information, flow revolves around the actual gameplay experience and interaction with the purchased game.	The trigger of information is the customer's initiation of the game and their active engagement in playing it.	Occasionally or regularly.	High	Efforts can range from casual exploration and gameplay to more dedicated efforts. Game complexity and personal gaming goals can influence the level of effort.
Post-purchase experience	The information primarily focuses on the customer's satisfaction, feedback, and any additional support or services offered after the purchase.	Customers trigger the information flow when they need assistance.	Occasionally or regularly.	High	Moderate to high

3. The current level of repeat and customization

Steam's current level of individual and population

learning of customer data remains low. Therefore, the level of customization remains low as well. This limitation

hinders the platform’s ability to provide users personalized recommendations and tailored gaming experiences.

4. Customer pain points that remain unfulfilled.

4.1 Flood of Games: With the extensive library of games available on Steam, customers often face the challenge of sifting through a flood of options to find games that align with their specific preferences and needs. The sheer volume of games makes it difficult to discover titles that cater to their interests, resulting in a potentially overwhelming and time-consuming search process.

4.2 Lack of Customer Support: Steam’s customer support system primarily relies on email communication, which

can lead to delays in response times. Users may encounter difficulties when seeking assistance or resolving issues related to their games or accounts. The lack of real-time support options can frustrate customers who require prompt solutions to their concerns.

Current Connected Delivery Model Evaluation

In this section, a connected strategy matrix is used to categorize the currently connected architecture of Steam and its main competitors. Additionally, the matrix is used to generate innovative ideas for connected strategies.

1. Connected strategy matrix

	Connected Producer	Connected Retailer	Connected Market Maker	Crowded Orchestrator	P2P Network Creator
Respond-to-desire	Steam Epic Ubisoft	Steam Epic Ubisoft GOG		Steam	Steam Epic Ubisoft GOG
Curated offering					
Coaching behavior					
Automatic execution					

Numerous digital gaming platforms compete with Steam. Some distribute third-party games (connected retailers), while others distribute their own (connected producers). Most have created online communities where gamers can interact (P2P network creator).

Steam is known for its robust support for mods and the Steam Workshop. It allows users to create, share, and download game modifications or custom content for various games. Additionally, Steam provides a marketplace for trading and purchasing cosmetic items, such as skins or in-game cosmetics, through its Steam Community Market. These unique features made it a crowded orchestrator.

2. Innovative ideas

All industry participants excel at establishing a customer relationship based on a smooth response to a customer’s desire, but they struggle to create a successful curated-offering customer experience. If Steam could achieve a breakthrough in developing a curated-offering customer experience, it could further solidify its industry-leading position. It would assist in resolving the issue of a “flood of games,” making it easier for users to find games that meet their specific requirements and making the platform more engaging overall.

IV. Strategic Solution

Based on an evaluation of Steam’s current customer

relationship and connected delivery model, two major unresolved customer pain points and innovative ideas for its connected architecture are identified. With the information, we propose GamerHive as the ultimate strategic solution for becoming a trusted partner with customers, which creates a curated-offering customer relationship, evolves into deeper customization through meta-learning, and enhances the post-purchase experience by establishing a real-time support channel.

Proposed Connected Customer Relationship

1. Curated-offering

By improving the collection and analysis of customer data, Steam can enhance its understanding of user preferences, offering more targeted content suggestions and enhancing overall user satisfaction. Additionally, increased customization options can foster a stronger sense of community among gamers, leading to a more engaging and immersive gaming environment on the platform.

This could involve refining recommendation algorithms, incorporating user preferences and feedback, and highlighting games based on specific genres, themes, or gameplay mechanics.

2. Deeper customization

In order to improve the “repeat” element of connected customer relationships, Steam should utilize information

collected along the customer journey and study it on both an individual and population level. Creating a high level of customer customization for individuals will allow the company to optimize its service offerings and develop new products and services.

3. Real-time support channel

A live chat would allow users to receive immediate assistance when encountering issues. This would reduce the wait time and provide a more satisfactory customer support experience.

Proposed Connected Delivery Model

	Connected Producer	Connected Retailer	Connected Market Maker	Crowded Orchestrator	P2P Network Creator
Respond-to-desire	Epic Ubisoft	Epic Ubisoft GOG		Steam	Steam Epic Ubisoft GOG
Curated offering	Steam	Steam			
Coaching behavior					
Automatic execution					

2. Revenue model

Steam generates income through various revenue models, including commissions from game sales and in-game sales of virtual items, Steam Community Market transactions.

Steam could introduce a brand new annual subscription service GamerHive. It grants gamers unlimited access to an extraordinary realm of curated gaming experiences. GamerHive goes beyond traditional subscription models by offering tailored experiences for different groups of users. Through advanced data analysis techniques, GamerHive studies population-level data, uncovering trends and patterns that shape gaming experiences. This wealth of information allows GamerHive to curate collections of games specifically designed to resonate with different user groups.

The service provides customized game recommendations based on user gaming history, preferences, and

In order to realize the proposed connected customer relationship, the connected delivery model must be in place, and it consists primarily of the three components outlined below.

1. Connected architecture

Steam is recommended to retain its connected architecture, as it encompasses numerous aspects, such as connected producer and retailer, crowded orchestrator, and P2P network creator. As shown in the following table, a new level of customer relationship should result in a new position within the connected strategy matrix.

demographic information. For example, GamerHive might recommend very different games to a user who is a huge fan of immersive RPGs, a lover of heart-pounding action games, or an explorer of hidden gems from smaller game developers.

GamerHive emphasizes “repeat” in the connected customer experience as it continually evolves and adapts, incorporating feedback from the online community to refine its suggestions.

3. Technology infrastructure

The proposed connected strategy can only be implemented using a set of technologies. This report analyzes the required technological solutions by deconstructing the connected strategy concept.

3.1 Deconstructing the connected strategy concept

The connected strategy can be deconstructed into various subfunctions.

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	Sense	Transmit	Analyze	React
Become aware of the need	Monitor user interactions and behaviors within the Steam platform. Gather data on user preferences; game genres played, playtime, wishlist activity, and browsing history.	Utilize data tracking mechanisms and algorithms to transfer relevant information securely and efficiently.	Identify patterns, trends, and correlations in user behavior and preferences.	Develop algorithms and machine learning models to match users with curated game offerings.
Search and decide on an option.	Monitor user interactions within the GamerHive service, including search queries, game browsing, and wishlist activity.	Ensure the seamless transmission of data between user devices and the GamerHive service.	Identify trends and correlations to enhance the understanding of user preferences.	Optimize the presentation of game suggestions and related content on users' front pages to facilitate easy access and decision-making.
Order, pay & receive	Capture user subscription data, including the start date, duration, and selected subscription plan.	Securely transfer user subscription and payment data within the GamerHive service.	Evaluate payment success rates, identify issues or errors, and improve the overall payment process.	Confirm successful payment and activate the user's GamerHive subscription.
Experience	Monitor user activity and engagement within the GamerHive service, including game launches, playtime, and user preferences.	Enable seamless downloading and installation of games included in the curated offering.	Evaluate user feedback and ratings to assess the popularity and quality of games within the curated offering.	Personalize game recommendations and related content on users' front pages based on their preferences and play history.
After-sale	Track user preferences and interests based on their gameplay behavior and choices.	Enable communication channels for users to interact with each other and provide feedback or support.	Extract sentiment and sentiment analysis from user feedback to understand overall user sentiment and satisfaction levels.	Foster community engagement by promoting discussions, organizing events, or featuring user-generated content to enhance the overall experience.
Repeat (learn and improve)	Monitor repeated action patterns, such as frequently played games, frequently visited game categories, or common playtime durations.	Enable data synchronization across devices to maintain a consistent view of user behavior.	Analyze user behavior data to identify repetition patterns, such as frequently played genres, frequently accessed game features or preferred game mechanics.	Adjust the presentation and organization of game suggestions on the user's front pages to prioritize repeated preferences.

Connection architecture (utilize P2P network)	Track engagement levels, popular topics, and user-generated content trends within the online community.	Enable seamless sharing and visibility of user-generated content, such as reviews, ratings, and community events.	Evaluate trends, discussions, and user feedback to uncover emerging interests, preferences, and areas for improvement.	Implement improvements, features, and updates based on community insights to enhance the overall experience.
Revenue model (annual subscription)	Monitor user behavior related to subscription renewals.	Facilitate secure and seamless payment transactions within the GamerHive service.	Analyze user purchasing behavior and transaction data to gain insights into spending patterns.	Adjust pricing strategies, discounts, or bundling options to maximize user engagement and monetization potential.

3.2 Technological solution

Several technologies should be used to deliver and implement the proposed connected strategies identified in the previous sections. These technologies are selected based on their compatibility with the overall connected strategy and their ability to meet the specific requirements of the subfunction.

3.2.1 Machine learning and AI algorithms

GamerHive is a data-intensive strategy. Hence, efficient and accurate data analysis technique is crucial. Machine learning and AI algorithms can perform analysis of user preferences, play history, ratings, and community interactions to provide personalized game suggestions and content recommendations.

This includes training models to understand user preferences and behavior and generate real-time recommendations. Techniques like natural language processing (NLP), deep learning, and reinforcement learning can be utilized to improve the accuracy and effectiveness of the personalized game offering.

3.2.2 Cloud infrastructure

Cloud solutions allow for flexible resource allocation, elastic scaling, and high availability to handle the storage, processing, and delivery of game content and user data.

3.2.3 User interface (UI) and design

UI and design are crucial in providing an intuitive and user-friendly experience within GamerHive. This includes designing visually appealing interfaces, easy navigation, clear presentation of curated game offerings, and interactive features that enhance user engagement and satisfaction.

Part V. Risk-Benefit Analysis

Risk (internal and external constraints)

The implementation of GamerHive may face both internal and external constraints.

Internal constraints include technical infrastructure, integration challenges, and data privacy and security. Upgrading the existing technical infrastructure of Steam to support the new service may require significant investments in hardware, software, and network capabilities. Integrating GamerHive’s technology may be difficult. Planning, coordination, and testing are needed to integrate recommendation systems, data analytic tools, payment systems, and community platforms. GamerHive collects and analyzes user data to personalize experiences, making data privacy and security crucial.

External constraints consist of competition, licensing, and partnerships. The digital gaming industry is highly competitive. GamerHive’s success depends on its ability to differentiate itself from competitors and attract users to its curated game offering. Securing partnerships and licensing agreements with game developers and publishers is essential to offering a wide range of games within GamerHive. Negotiating favorable agreements and ensuring a diverse and appealing game catalog may present external challenges, as game developers may have existing contracts with other platforms.

Benefit

The implementation of GamerHive introduces a new revenue model for Steam. The annual subscription fees can contribute to a more stable and predictable revenue stream for the platform, reducing reliance solely on individual game sales.

GamerHive can enhance user engagement on the platform by providing a curated game offering. Users are likelier to spend more time exploring and playing games that align with their interests, increasing user satisfaction and retention.

Part VI. Conclusion

The research evaluated and summarized Steam’s current

strategy and developed a connected strategy to secure its dominant position in the digital game distribution market. The paper has outlined several areas for improvement: the limited information being transferred into usable data, the flood of games, and the lack of customer support. First and foremost, Steam possesses vast data inventory and sources; they could use this information to train their AI, create customer-specific customization, and produce differentiation that stands out in the online video game market. The abundance of games on Steam is another drawback. There are so many games on Steam that it is difficult for users to sift through all the options to find the ones that best suit their preferences. Last but not least, Steam's customer service is inadequate and in dire need of a revolution. The lack of timely responses and the inability to resolve issues efficiently have been persistent complaints from Steam users. The platform must prioritize improving customer service to enhance the overall user experience and maintain customer satisfaction. To solve and improve Steam's current issue, we suggested a solution: focusing on curated offerings, deeper customization, and a real-time support channel. By harnessing customer data, Steam can gain valuable insights into user preferences, resulting in tailored content suggestions and improved user satisfaction. Enhanced customization options can foster a vibrant gaming community, cultivating a more immersive and engaging experience. Fine-tuning recommendation algorithms,

incorporating user feedback, and emphasizing games based on genres, themes, and gameplay mechanics can drive this progress. To strengthen customer relationships, Steam should leverage collected data from the customer journey, studying it at individual and population levels. By prioritizing personalized customization, the platform can optimize its services, introduce new products, and enhance the "repeat" factor, fostering long-term customer loyalty and satisfaction. Implementing a live chat feature would offer users instant support, minimizing wait times and improving customer satisfaction with enhanced customer support. Steam can ensure its dominant position in the market by employing these strategies and ensuring the best user experience.

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