



# **Back-to-Business Communications Playbook**

**Readying the strategies, tactics and tools you will  
need to succeed in a post-pandemic marketplace**

# Let's get started.

It's a new world. Whether your business has been open, closed, or somewhere in-between as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, your communications strategy needs to adapt to a new "normal." In fact, there are significant go-forward opportunities for brands that reassess and evolve their messaging (especially since there will be a number of brands, including those likely in your category, that will not). This is your opportunity to separate and elevate your brand and achieve competitive advantage.

There have been countless books published and articles written that claim to answer the question: "What is a brand?" At Sullivan, our answer is simple:

Your brand is what the people most important to your enterprise think and feel about your company right now.

As times change (especially when they change drastically due to a large-scale event), the way in which people think and feel about your company and your brand is surely impacted.

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***In a crisis, everything – from internal culture, to consumer behavior, to external marketing plans – is affected. How you respond makes all the difference.***

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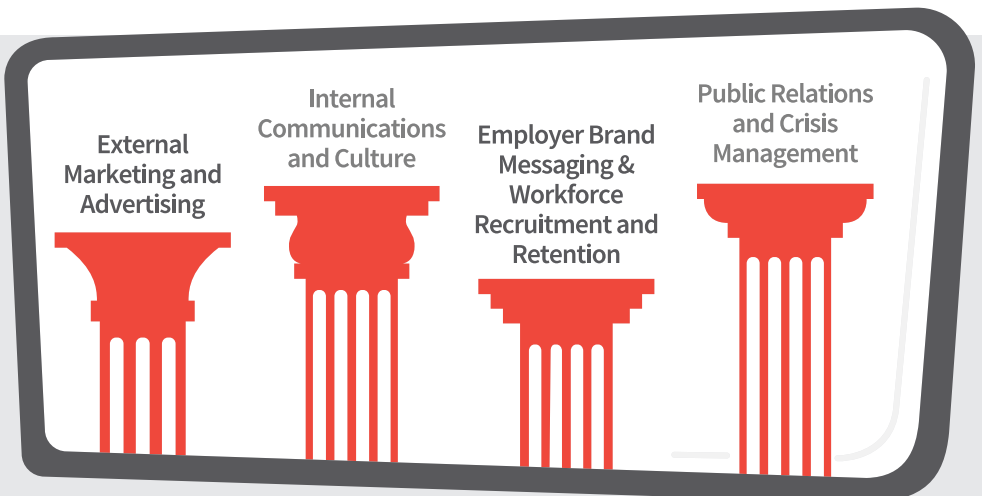
As a result, everything – from internal culture, to consumer insights, to marketing opportunities – is affected.

Ensuring success in this environment comes down to understanding the new reality in which you are operating, how your company and brand can succeed in this reality, and how to align your brand communications accordingly.

The Sullivan Back-to-Business Communications Playbook is a program designed to get you back to market in a way that ensures your brand is strategically positioned for competitive advantage and tactically equipped for success.

**The Sullivan Back-to-Business Playbook** integrates the four key pillars of your brand ecosystem.

While this approach was developed to provide intentional overlap of messaging across these pillars, each one is also developed to stand on its own and can be addressed independently when required.



# External Marketing & Advertising

We will use insights gained during this crisis that indicate how the actions, attitudes, and activities of customers have changed (some for good) to determine how to tell your story and activate/grow your customer base. This process begins with three steps:

***Re-evaluate*** | ***Re-align*** | ***Re-activate***

These steps ensure your brand re-emerges with a competitive advantage in the new marketplace.



## ***Re-evaluate***

We begin by reviewing and comparing your brand in terms of its pre- and post-pandemic orientation. What endures? What must change? We guide and help you work through material questions, surfacing key insights that will form the foundation of the strategies and tactics you will employ to get back to market.

Among the questions we ask and areas we cover:

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- *Where does your brand stand now?*
  - *What have you learned?*
  - *Why is it here?*
  - *Where should your brand be headed?*
  - *How has it changed?*
  - *How are your competitors positioned?*
  - *How has it remained the same?*
  - *Who are your audiences?*
  - *How has your industry evolved?*
  - *How have your audiences changed?*
- 

We then distill key insights into a SWOT analysis that reveals strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats as they exist for your brand in this new, post-pandemic world.

The results ensure you capture the information required to realign your brand with market realities.

## Re-align

This step builds on insights surfaced during the re-evaluation exercise and will provide the information required to develop the Brand Plan that will separate and elevate you in the marketplace.

We will **affirm/formulate** all key elements of your plan:

- *Vision*
- *Goals*
- *Purpose*
- *Promise*
- *Values*
- *Positioning*

We also:

**Develop** refined target audience profiles/personas

**Craft** your get-back-to-market umbrella strategy

**Devise micro-strategies** for Marketing & Advertising, Internal Communications & Culture, Workforce Recruitment & Retention, PR & Crisis Management

## Re-activate

This is where we leverage your Brand Plan to develop the Creative Brief and Big Idea Platform. The result of this step is the development of an umbrella concept (think “What’s in your wallet? or “Just Do It”) through which the benefits of your brand are communicated consistently, across all channels.

Your Big Idea Platform must be ownable and compelling, with a powerful relevance that engages and informs every audience – from internal teams to external customers, from potential hires to industry and media.

Your Big Idea Platform becomes the short-hand for the values, beliefs and benefits of your brand – and is manifest in a consistent look, feel, voice, messaging and rallying cry.

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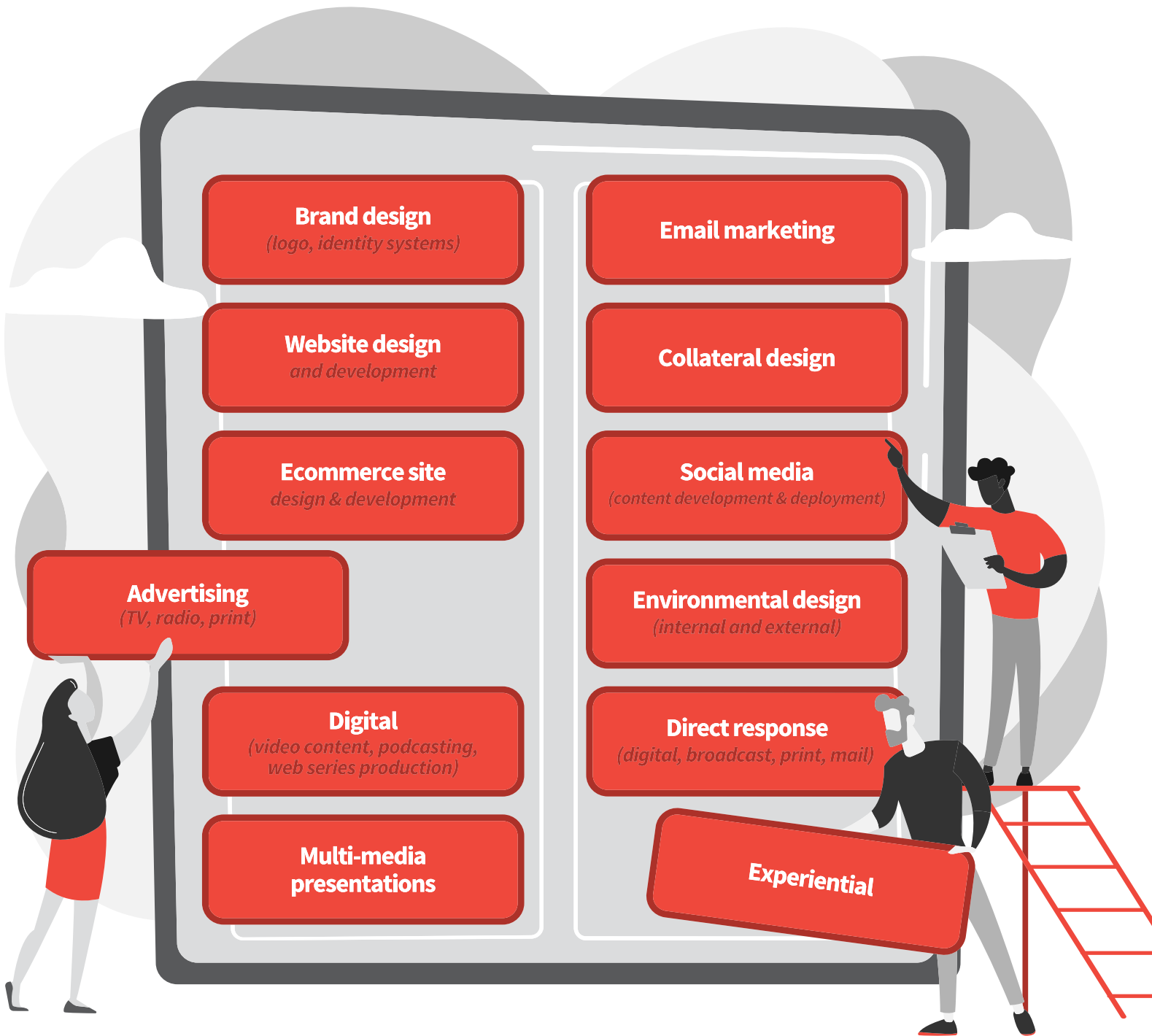
***Success requires a strategically ownable, creatively compelling idea that helps you quickly gain competitive advantage.***

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## External Activation

Leveraging the previously developed creative brief and resulting Big Idea Platform, we transform the Big Idea into a creative campaign that presses your competitive advantage in the marketplace.

As a fully integrated marketing and creative resource for your brand, Sullivan is able to develop the executional elements required and bring them to life across an integrated array of owned, earned and paid media, including:



# 2 Culture and Internal Communications

Perhaps no group has been affected during this crisis more than your team members. It is more critical now than ever before to develop and/or elevate your internal culture and communications to ensure your employees feel valued, connected and engaged.



## Steps to Developing a Powerful Internal Culture

**1 Create a Rallying Cry:** Develop an action-orientated messaging platform that complements and amplifies your external brand and can be used to unite your employees. This rallying cry will act as a simple, actionable shorthand for what you expect from employees, and what they can expect from you in return.

**2 Understand key stakeholders:** Identify the various levels of employees within your organization and the unique needs of each. Determine how culture support should be developed and deployed against those needs and ensure that you are creating solutions that meet employees where they are. Stakeholders might include:

- a. *Company leadership*
- b. *Company management*
- c. *Customer-facing employees*
- d. *Back-of-house employees*
- e. *Contractors/outsourced labor*

**3 Create comprehensive programming to launch and foster your culture:** Looking at the entire lifecycle of your employees, develop tools, resources and programs that bring your culture to life. Programs could include:

- a. *New hire welcome kit*
- b. *Onboarding*
- c. *Ongoing training*
- d. *Recognition*
- e. *Apparel/giveaways*
- f. *Physical space activations*
- g. *Wellness*
- h. *Corporate responsibility/community service*
- i. *Leadership development*
- j. *Events (in-person and/or virtual)*
- k. *Employee engagement opportunities*

**4 Measure and Optimize:** Institute mechanisms to test the effectiveness of your approach against key business metrics and develop a process to make adjustments based on findings. Measurement opportunities include:

- a. *Employee satisfaction surveys*
- b. *Customer satisfaction surveys*
- c. *Employee focus groups/round tables*
- d. *Exit interviews*

**Your Internal Communications** recognize that your internal audience can be the biggest amplifier for (or detractor of) your brand's voice, and how well you communicate with your employees can determine the impact they will have on your overall business.

A successful brand must be driven by robust internal communications efforts that makes your employees feel informed and invested in your key strategic priorities and business decisions. To ensure an effective and sustainable internal communications effort, we will help you with the following:

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### Channel and messaging audit and exploration

We'll help you understand your current internal communications ecosystem by auditing how, when and by whom messages are shared today. We will work with you to understand opportunities to evolve your channels to best meet the needs of your audience.

Channel exploration could include:

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|------------------------|---|
| a. <i>Intranet</i>     | f. <i>Physical space</i>                        |
| b. <i>Email</i>        | g. <i>branding/<br/>messaging</i>               |
| c. <i>Social media</i> |   |
| d. <i>Internal app</i> | g. <i>Events (virtual<br/>and/or in-person)</i> |
| e. <i>Newsletter</i>   |   |

### Communications plan & process development

We'll work with you to understand the unique chain of influence in your business – that order in which internal stakeholders should be informed about the latest news and developments.

Then we will create a communication plan and processes to ensure that you can easily and effectively get the right message to the right audience via the right channel at the right time.

### Ongoing execution

Our team is adept at acting as an extension of your own internal team. In lean operating conditions, we can augment your staff and assist in curating, creating, editing and distributing content in ways that make your internal audiences feel seen and heard.

### Message activation

We'll help you get creative in how you deploy messages, thinking beyond the traditional memo in order to connect with your internal audience on a deeper, more emotional level.

Potential executions include:

- |   |                        |
|---|------------------------|
| a. <i>Brand plans</i>                       | d. <i>Infographics</i> |
| b. <i>Town halls</i>                        | e. <i>Gifs</i>         |
| c. <i>Monthly leader<br/>virtual events</i> | f. <i>Videos</i>       |
|   | g. <i>Podcasts</i>     |

# 3

## Employer Brand Messaging & Workforce Recruitment and Retention

### Employer Brand Messaging

As the economy recovers and the war for top talent shifts into overdrive, the battles will be won by those employers that position themselves properly. We help you accomplish this by focusing on 4 key areas:

#### 1 Telling your employer brand story externally:

- *Building a social media plan*
- *Deploying an attractive, well-placed career site and building engagement on that site*
- *Executing activities that engage your target audiences*

#### 3 Building internal engagement:

- *Sharing the special DNA of your company with candidates*
- *Leveraging your employees as leaders and brand ambassadors*
- *Communicating business priorities in a timely manner across all levels of the organization*

#### 2 External talent pipelining:

- *Identifying the types of roles to be hired in a given timeframe and building a detailed “activity plan” for the year*
- *Creating insightful, attractive job postings*
- *Leveraging those postings to describe your culture and values*

#### 4 Empowering internal employees:

- *Building an onboarding network*
- *Growing career planning and talent growth options to boost retention*

As we develop your overall brand, we will place great emphasis on communicating the authenticity of your brand as a tool for employee engagement which, according to a recent Gallup poll, directly correlates to greater recruitment success, higher employee productivity and improved bottom line results.





## Workforce Recruitment and Retention

This is where we work with you to develop a strategy to attract top tier candidates. In this effort, we help you evaluate where your business is headed and take into consideration any organizational or industry-wide changes in the near future. We also help you think through the type of talent you are seeking to attract and evaluate the following:

- *Experience level*
- *Departments within your organization*
- *Location*
- *Main field or preferred studies*
- *Industry experience*

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***A thoughtfully developed employer brand ensures focused searches that attract your most desired candidates.***

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The last step in defining your target candidates is to develop candidate personas. Some features we consider are:

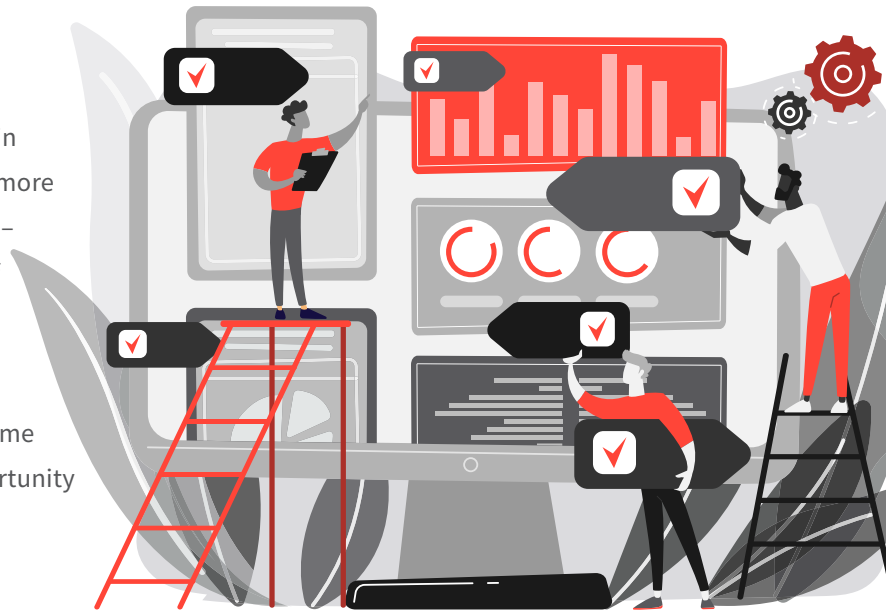
- *Current role/experience*
- *Skills*
- *Professional goals*
- *Background/demographics*
- *Challenges (why are they leaving their current job)*
- *Influencers (who impacts their social life)*
- *Channels (websites, social media)*
- *Personal (interests, hobbies)*



# Public Relations and Crisis Management

As your brand emerges from this pandemic-driven disruption, public relations will play a pivotal role in your reemergence. Dealing with the media will be more challenging and will require thorough preparation – as many topics may drift back to issues of safety of employees, customers and suppliers. These challenges will also surface in social media.

At the same time, the resurgence of business is a time when every company and brand will have an opportunity to show leadership and gain positive attention.



## *Your public relations objectives should continue to be:*

- Demonstrate leadership and engender trust
- Gain positive attention for your company, brand and products
- Get the conversation started about you company, brands and products in a positive way among target audiences
- Generate media coverage of your brand, products and services
- Announce and herald milestones and accomplishments
- Establish yourself as a thought leader in your industry
- Build a strong, lasting image that both enables you in good times and protects you in difficult circumstances

## *Your PR approach will need to be tonally evolved, be supremely flexible, and must address the following:*

- What is the most effective tone and messaging to engender trust between your audiences and your brand now?
- What is the proper balance of business focus and cultural empathy in your communications?
- To what extent should the pandemic be referenced, if at all, and how is that decision reached?
- What is your messaging if the virus and related business/employee/societal impacts return?

# Crisis Communications

By definition, a crisis or high-impact event is any unplanned situation that suddenly or unexpectedly has a significant adverse impact on an organization, its reputation or operations and/or poses a significant economic, safety, health or legal liability. We'll work with you to leverage what you've learned through your company's response to the pandemic to create or update your crisis communications plan to ensure you're prepared for whatever lies ahead.

The objective of implementing a crisis communication plan is to guarantee that the organization does all it can to ensure:

- Facts are communicated clearly, effectively and at the right time
- Communication efforts are carefully planned, organized and coordinated
- The impact of the issue on the organization is neutral at worst over the long term – and in some cases, may even serve to have a positive impact on a reputation and trust with key stakeholders

As high-impact events occur or when circumstances dictate that a potential crisis may impact an organization, it must quickly evaluate the following to develop effective strategies and action plans that make it possible to protect its reputation:

- What to communicate
- When to communicate
- The channel(s) of communication
- Who will be the messenger(s)
- Who needs to be reached

**The first step in any crisis**, internal or external, whether you had control over it or not, and whether it is isolated to you or more general to your community or industry, is to uncover the facts as they relate to your business, employees, customers and suppliers and own up to them. This is quickly followed by communicating what you have done to address the issue. Negative always fills a void in information, so fill it with facts. People respect honesty and action. Most crisis are exacerbated by believing three things: no one will be able to figure out what happened so we don't need to tell them; this will pass if we just keep quiet; and different audiences can be told different things. People will eventually figure out what happened, so you might as well get ahead of the curve and begin the healing.

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*Effective crisis communication is built upon preparation, honesty, consistency and timeliness.*

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## Every crisis plan has three phases



### Audience Preparation:

As a major component of your plan, Sullivan will help with your crisis communications audience preparation. This includes identifying all audiences relevant to your brand, company and business, and how to prioritize and based on its severity, to assign a level of urgency of communication for each audience.

Critical steps in successfully preparing include exercises and plans for:

- *Creating a “first critical statement”*
- *Being targeted*
- *Being personal*
- *Acting swiftly*
- *Keeping it concise—but comprehensive*
- *Managing the narrative*
- *Being candid*
- *Being transparent*
- *Having a heart*
- *Monitoring the media in real time*
- *Getting the right person out in front*

### Crisis Fundamentals:

#### ***The Team***

The Crisis Communications Team will vary based on every organization and the types of crisis. Sullivan will work with you to create the right team for you.

#### ***The Types of Crisis***

In our experience there are 18 crisis types that can threaten a brand. In our preparation with you, we will examine all 18 in relation to your business.

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*Let's get you back to market.*

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