

# **Speaking Different Languages?**

Corporate Communications and  
Wikipedia

“Imagine a world in which **every single person** on the planet is given free access to the **sum of all human knowledge.**”

-- Jimmy Wales

“...No one in the PR industry has ever put forward a cogent argument...why it is important that they take the potentially... reputation damaging step of directly editing entries where they are acting as paid advocates. What I have found - and the evidence for this is pretty comprehensive - is that people who are acting as **paid advocates do not make good editors.** They insert puffery and spin. That's what they do because that it is what paid advocates do.”

–Jimmy Wales, in 2012 responding to Phil Gomes

“People shouldn't do it, including me...I wish I hadn't done it. It's in poor taste.... People have a lot of information about themselves but **staying objective is difficult**. That's the trade-off in editing entries about yourself.... If you see a blatant error or misconception about yourself, **you really want to set it straight.**”

--Jimmy Wales, in 2005 on editing his own article

Wikipedia is **important**.

- **8 billion** words in **19 million** articles
- **283** language editions
- 4 editions over **1 million** articles each
- 6 editions over **700,000** articles
- 40 editions **100,000** articles,
- 109 editions over **10,000 articles**

## English Wikipedia

- **3,875,474** articles, **26,301,442** pages
- **50 times larger** than Microsoft Encarta's 2002 Deluxe edition
- **517,319,601** edits, **250,000** per day
- **794,530** uploaded files
- **16,284,081** registered users
- **147,203** active in the last 30 days
- **1,507** administrators.

**Why you should care.**



- Alexa rank: **#6** in the world
- **88,824,929** unique visitors
- **8,314,393** in a year
- **1,565,841** in a month
- **#1 most influential** website in blog mentions
- **First page, top 3, or #1** Google result on thousands of searches

## In January 2012 **alone**

- Krispy Kreme: viewed **25,119** times
- BP: **75,014** times
- Pepsi: **105,766** times
- Walmart: **155,171** times
- Lady Gaga: **1,101,475** times

Wikipedia is **trusted**.

- 2005 *Nature* study: Wikipedia's scientific articles **came close to the level of accuracy** in Encyclopædia Britannica.
- 2008 – 2010 pathology, toxicology, oncology and pharmaceuticals studies **compared** Wikipedia to **professional and peer-reviewed sources** and found that **Wikipedia's** depth and coverage were of a **high standard**.

How Wikipedia **works**.

"I call this Revolution 2.0. Revolution 2.0 is, is — I say that our revolution is like Wikipedia, OK? **Everyone is contributing content.** You don't know the names of the people contributing the content ... This is exactly what happened... Everyone was contributing **small pieces, bits and pieces.** We drew this whole picture. We drew this whole picture of a revolution. And that picture — **no one is the hero** in that picture."

--Activist Wael Ghonim on the peaceful protests in Egypt that lead to the overthrow of President Hosni Mubarak.

“The problem with Wikipedia is that  
it only works **in practice**.

**In theory**, it can never work.”

**What Wikipedia is.**



The encyclopedia that **anyone can edit**, whose mission is to **summarize published reliable sources**.

What Wikipedia **is not**.

- a **dictionary**
- a publisher of **original thought**
- a **soapbox** or means of **promotion**
- a **mirror** or a repository of links, images, or media files
- a **blog**, webspace provider, **social network**, or **memorial** site
- a **directory**
- a **manual**, guidebook, textbook, or scientific journal
- a **crystal ball**
- a **newspaper**
- an **indiscriminate collection** of information
- **censored**

What the Wikipedia **community**  
is not.

- an **anarchy**
- a **democracy**
- a **bureaucracy**
- a **battleground**
- **compulsory**

# **The Core Policies.**

# Neutral Point of View **(NPOV)**

“Editing from a neutral point of view (NPOV) means representing **fairly, proportionately, and as far as possible without bias**, all significant views that have been published by **reliable sources**.”

In a nutshell: Articles **mustn't take sides**, but should **explain the sides**, fairly and without bias. This applies to both what you say and how you say it.



Verifiability

(V)

“Verifiability on Wikipedia is the ability to **cite reliable sources** that directly support the information in an article. The threshold for inclusion in Wikipedia is **verifiability, not truth**—whether readers can check that material in Wikipedia has already been published by a reliable source, not whether editors think it is true.”

In a nutshell: Other people have to be **able to check** that you didn't just make things up. This means that all quotations and any material **challenged or likely to be challenged** must be attributed to a reliable, published source using an **inline citation**.

Original Research  
**(OR)**

“Wikipedia articles must not contain **original research**. The term...is used on Wikipedia to refer to material—such as facts, allegations, and ideas—for which **no reliable, published sources exist**. This includes any analysis or synthesis of published material that serves to **advance a position** not advanced by the sources.”

In a nutshell: Wikipedia does not publish original thought: all material in Wikipedia must be **attributable to a reliable, published source**. Articles may not contain any new analysis or synthesis of published material that serves to advance a position not clearly advanced by the sources.

Civility  
**(CIVIL)**

“Stated simply, editors should **always** treat each other with **consideration and respect**. In order to keep the focus on improving the encyclopedia and to help maintain a pleasant editing environment, editors should behave **politely, calmly and reasonably**, even during heated debates.”

In a nutshell: Participate in a respectful and considerate way, and avoid directing profane and offensive language at other users. **Do not ignore the positions and conclusions of others**. Try to discourage others from being uncivil, and avoid upsetting other editors whenever possible.

**What is Public Relations?**

“Public relations is a **strategic** communication process that builds **mutually beneficial** relationships between organizations and their publics.”

--PRSA definition of PR



- Anticipating, analyzing and interpreting **public opinion, attitudes and issues** that might **impact**, for good or ill, the operations and plans of the organization.
- **Counseling** management at all levels in the organization with regard to policy decisions, courses of action and communication, taking into account their **public ramifications** and the organization's **social or citizenship responsibilities**.
- Researching, conducting and evaluating, on a continuing basis, programs of action and communication to achieve **the informed public understanding** necessary to the **success** of an organization's aims. These may include marketing; financial; fund raising; employee, community or government relations; and other programs.
- Planning and implementing the organization's efforts to **influence or change public policy**. Setting objectives, planning, budgeting, recruiting and training staff, developing facilities — in short, **managing the resources** needed to perform all of the above.

What does **ethical** public relations entail?

- **ADVOCACY** We serve the **public interest** by acting as **responsible advocates** for those we represent. We provide a voice in the marketplace of ideas, facts, and viewpoints to **aid informed public debate**.
- **HONESTY** We adhere to the **highest standards of accuracy and truth** in **advancing the interests** of those we represent and in communicating with the public.
- **EXPERTISE** We acquire and responsibly use specialized knowledge and experience. We **advance the profession** through continued professional development, research, and education. We build **mutual understanding, credibility, and relationships** among a wide array of institutions and audiences.
- **INDEPENDENCE** We provide **objective counsel** to those we represent. We are **accountable for our actions**.
- **LOYALTY** We are **faithful** to those we represent, while **honoring our obligation** to serve the **public interest**.
- **FAIRNESS** We **deal fairly** with clients, employers, competitors, peers, vendors, the media, and the general public. We **respect all opinions** and support the **right of free expression**.

- Be **honest and accurate** in all communications.
- **Reveal sponsors** for represented causes and interests.
- Act in the **best interest of clients** or employers.
- **Disclose financial interests** in a client's organization.
- Safeguard the **confidences and privacy rights** of clients and employees.
- Follow **ethical hiring practices** to respect free and open competition.
- Avoid **conflicts** between **personal and professional** interests.
- **Decline** representation of clients requiring actions **contrary to the Code**.
- Accurately **define** what public relations activities can **accomplish**.
- **Report** all **ethical violations** to the appropriate authority.
- Preserve the **integrity** of the process of **communication**.
- Be **honest and accurate** in all communications.

- Reveal the sponsors for causes and interests represented.
- **Disclose financial interest** (such as stock ownership) in a client's organization.
- Avoid **deceptive** practices.
- **Protect** privileged, confidential, or insider **information** gained from a client or organization.
- Immediately **advise** an appropriate authority if a member discovers that **confidential information** is being **divulged** by an employee of a client company or organization.
- Act in the **best interests of the client** or employer, even **subordinating** the member's **personal interests**.
- **Avoid** actions and circumstances that may appear to **compromise good business judgment** or create a **conflict** between **personal and professional interests**.
- **Disclose** promptly any existing or potential **conflict of interest** to affected clients or organizations.

- Act promptly to **correct erroneous communications** for which the practitioner is responsible.
- Preserve the **free flow of unprejudiced information** when giving or receiving gifts by ensuring that gifts are nominal, legal, and infrequent.
- Preserve **intellectual property** rights in the marketplace.
- Investigate the **truthfulness and accuracy of information** released on behalf of those represented.
- Encourage clients and customers to **determine if a conflict exists**
- Acknowledge that there is an **obligation to protect and enhance** the profession.
- **Keep informed and educated** about practices in the profession to ensure **ethical conduct**.
- Actively pursue **personal professional development**.
- Accurately **define** what public relations activities can **accomplish**.
- **Counsel subordinates** in proper ethical decision making.
- **Require that subordinates** adhere to the **ethical requirements** of the Code.

# The **History** of Paid Editing.

“And it’s true that as an industry we’ve done terrible things to Wikipedia. We’ve **censored** content, posted [**advertisements**] and introduced **bias**. In the headlines you see complex conspiracies exposed, but Wikipedia deals with our inadequacies every day. We **spam** external links because we **didn’t know about Wikipedia’s rules** on official links. We create articles on companies that haven’t earned them because we **didn’t read Wikipedia’s criteria** for notability of companies. We edit **anonymously**, even though Wikipedia urges us to disclose our identity. Editing Wikipedia is easy and tempting, but **being a good Wikipedian is hard**. It’s about time we take up the challenge. We can’t improve Wikipedia...pushing for broader editing privileges we **haven’t earned**. We can atone for marketers’ past misdeeds by becoming students, creating experts and making Wikipedia a better place because we were there.”

--Marketer **David King** on [pr-squared.com](http://pr-squared.com)



Who has **edited** with a COI?

MyWikiBiz, **Microsoft**, the Vatican, **the CIA**, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the US Democratic Party's Congressional Campaign Committee, the **US Republican Party**, Britain's Labour Party, Britain's Conservative Party, the Canadian government, **Industry Canada**, the Department of Prime Minister, Cabinet, and Defence in Australia, the United Nations, **the US Senate**, the US Department of Homeland Security, the US Environmental Protection Agency, Montana Senator Conrad Burns, Ohio Governor Bob Taft, **the Israeli government**, Exxon Mobil, Walmart, AstraZeneca, Diebold, **Dow Chemical**, Disney, Dell, **Anheuser-Busch**, Nestle, Pepsi, Boeing, Sony Computer Entertainment, EA, SCO Group, **MySpace**, Pfizer, Raytheon, **DuPont**, Anglican and Catholic churches, the Church of Scientology, the World Harvest Church, Amnesty International, the Discovery Channel, **Fox News**, CBS, the **Washington Post**, the National Rifle Association, News International, Al Jazeera, Bob Jones University, Ohio State University, **Bell Pottinger**, Portland Communications, Anheuser-Busch InBev, Stella Artois, **Newt Gingrich**, United Kingdom Parliament...

Those are **only** the ones that made  
the **news**.

**The Consequences?**

- Significant **public backlash**
- **Embarrassing PR**
- Risk of **alienating** clients
- **Taints** Wikipedia's reputation

# Conflict of Interest Policy (COI)

"It is **difficult** to get a man to understand something, when his **salary** depends upon his **not** understanding it."

--Upton Sinclair

What is a **COI**?



“A conflict of interest is an **incompatibility** between the aim of Wikipedia, which is to produce a **neutral, reliably sourced encyclopedia**, and the aims of an individual editor. COI editing involves contributing to Wikipedia in order to **promote your own interests** or those of other individuals, companies, or groups. Where advancing outside interests is more important to an editor than advancing the aims of Wikipedia, that editor stands in a **conflict of interest.**”

In a nutshell: Do not edit Wikipedia to promote your own interests, or those of other individuals or of organizations, including employers. Do not write about these things unless you are **certain that a neutral editor would agree** that your edits improve Wikipedia.

There are **no firm criteria** to determine whether a conflict of interest exists, but there are **warning signs**:

- Adding material that **appears to promote the interests or visibility** of an article's author, its author's family members, employer, associates, or their business or personal interests, places the author in a conflict of interest.
- When editors write to promote their own interests, their contributions often show a characteristic **lack of connection** to anything the general reader might want to consult as a reference.

Can you **edit** with a COI?

“COI editing is **strongly discouraged**. When editing causes **disruption** to the encyclopedia through violation of policies such as neutral point of view, what Wikipedia is not, and copyright compliance, accounts **may be blocked**. COI editing also risks causing **public embarrassment** for the individuals and groups being promoted.”

Why COI editing **matters.**

“Anything you say and do on Wikipedia can have **real world consequences**. COI editing is **routinely exposed** and can be reported adversely in the media. All edits are on the public record and remain so indefinitely. You do not control articles and others may delete them, keep them, or add information that would have remained little-known. While Wikipedians generally avoid naming editors and their paymasters, other media routinely do. This has led at times to **extreme media embarrassment** for the company or organization, dismissal (firing) of those at fault, and at times even court actions or charges, if done in a work or professional context. Editing in the interests of public relations (other than obvious corrections) is particularly frowned upon. This includes, but is not limited to, professionals paid to create or edit Wikipedia articles. Wikipedia is a very **public forum**, and news of attempts to improperly influence Wikipedia are **frequently reported** in the media.”

Saying **who you are** and **what you do**  
is to your **benefit.**

“Editors with COIs are strongly encouraged—but not actually required—to **declare their interests**, both on their user pages and on the talk page of the related article they are editing, particularly if those edits may be contested. Editors who **disguise their COIs** are often exposed, creating a perception that they, and perhaps their employer, are **trying to distort Wikipedia.**”

“When someone voluntarily discloses a conflict of interest, other editors should always **assume the editor is trying to do the right thing**. Do **not** use a voluntarily disclosed conflict of interest as a **weapon against** the editor.”



Reasons to **declare** a conflict of interest:

You will benefit from the **assumption of good faith**. Most editors will appreciate your honesty and **try to help** you.

You lay the basis for **requesting help** from others to post material for you, or to review material you wish to post yourself.

Professional public relations firms may be **required** to abide by a **code of ethics**, such as the GA code of ethics or PRSA code of ethics.

## Wikipedia's Law of **Unintended Consequences**:

If you write in Wikipedia **about yourself**, your group, your company, or your pet idea, once the article is created, you have **no rights to control its content**, and **no right to delete it** outside our normal channels.

Content is irrevocably added with every edit, and once added will not be deleted just because the author **doesn't like it** anymore. **Any editor** has the right to add or remove material to the article within the terms of our content policies. If there is anything publicly available on a topic that you would not want included in an article, it will probably **find its way there eventually**...If you breach our editing policies or "**edit war**" in an attempt to obtain a version of your liking you are likely to have your editing access removed. In addition, if your article is found to **not be worthy of inclusion** in the first place, **it will be deleted**, as per our deletion policies. Therefore, **do not create promotional or other articles lightly**, especially on subjects you care about.

Arguments in **favor** of COI editing.

“You can **destroy** someone's  
reputation in **one minute** and it will  
take **years to rebuild.**”

-- Lord Bell, head of Bell Pottinger

As a highly influential website, Wikipedia has a **responsibility to be accurate**

Inaccuracies **can do real harm** to real people and their businesses

PR professionals have **time, access, and competence** to write about their client

PR professionals bring a **different point of view** and resource set to articles, **complementing** other editors

Arguments **against** COI editing.

Lengthy **history of non-neutral edits** by PR professionals and COI editors

PR professionals are ultimately **accountable to their employers**, who have a **responsibility to make profit** for their company

Strong incentive to **whitewash negative and promote positive** information

**Neutrality is difficult** enough for editors without a COI, let alone with one

COI editing done **right**.



## **Register with an unrelated username.**

Your username should represent you as an **individual**, and not your company or client. It **may** be your real name, or it may be a name you invent to represent yourself, but it should **not** be your company or client's official name or the names of their products or services or be designed to promote them. Also, **multiple people may not ever use the same account**. Any of these are grounds for a block of the account until the username is changed.

## **Read the notability guideline.**

**Not every** company, person, artist, artwork, event, or website can **have a Wikipedia article**. This site is not a business directory, an index, or a collection of marketing brochures. The only subjects that can have articles are those **with in-depth, significant coverage** from **published, reliable, third-party sources**. If your subject does not yet have this kind of coverage from independent sources, then you should **wait** until a later time to consider creating an article, or consider looking at **alternative outlets**.

**Disclose your conflict of interest on your talk page and the article's talk page.**

Being **transparent** about who you are and who you're working for is the easiest way to **gain the community's trust**, get help, and **avoid embarrassing revelations** of misconduct.

## Start with a draft.

**Drafting** is highly recommended when you want to add or change content. Articles started this way have the **best odds** of remaining in Wikipedia after other editors see what you've done. You can use the **new article wizard**, which lets experienced editors review your article, or you can create a **userspace draft** and then request someone review it through Wikipedia:Feedback, the live help channel, or Articles for Creation. For existing articles, **post drafts** of changes on the article's **talk page**.

## Sources, sources, sources.

Wikipedia exists to **summarize and synthesize** the best published sources, not a company's inside goals or mission. **Do not use self-published material** from companies and groups as the base of articles. Instead, try to collect what independent, published, reliable sources have said about companies and ideas. **Good** sources include **newspaper articles and websites, magazine profiles, authoritative expert websites, and academic journals.** **Poor** sources include self-published **blogs, press releases,** and sources with a **direct** connection to the subject. Other people must be able to realistically **verify** whether information can be backed up by a reliable source. This is done by **citing** where you found information.

## **Neutralize your conflict of interest.**

Take extra care to **write without bias**. You must pretend you do not have a financial stake in the company and **write neutrally**. Write so your **biggest competitor** would think it was **fair and balanced**. Write so it's impossible to tell that someone who works for the company wrote it. If not, you will harm the chances of the article or edits remaining at all, as promotional content is tagged and **removed promptly**.

## **Avoid spam.**

Articles should **not** include links to **promotional pages** or content. A simple link to a business' **official website** is allowed and is **sufficient**.

## Have other editors review your work.

Ask for **feedback** from an experienced, uninvolved editor. To have a draft reviewed, come into the **live help channel** and ask for a review, or paste **{{subst:submit}}** on top of your new article draft. Request a second opinion at the **Conflict of interest noticeboard**, **Editor assistance requests**, or WikiProject Cooperation's **Paid Editor Help**. For specific edits to articles, place **{{requested edit}}** on the article's talk page and explain your proposed changes.



## **Don't use other articles as excuses.**

If you find other articles similar to the one you plan to write or edit, and they have the **same problems** that your work does, do **not** use them as **justification**. Make your **own content better** according to policies and guidelines; then it will **last**.

## Don't rush.

Although you or your company may be under a deadline, **Wikipedia is not**. We operate on the timescale of months, years, and **decades**. If a company is not yet notable, then it will not have an article about it **until/unless** it becomes notable. If there is a factual error or libelous information in an existing article, it is **still often best** to seek the community's feedback before making changes to the article directly. For articles about **living people**, sometimes urgency takes precedence over procedure.

What does a **COI declaration** look like?

Hello, this is an account that I have set up to suggest changes and possibly make small, uncontroversial, edits to articles related to **Monitor Group**. I'm **aware** that there are guidelines about editing pages if there is a potential **conflict of interest**, so I would like to **disclose** here that these contributions are made on behalf of Monitor Group and in consultation with them, and I intend to **follow all of Wikipedia's guidelines**, including those on WP:COI, WP:RS, WP:V and WP:NPOV, very closely. My aim is **to work with and seek advice from impartial editors** to make positive contributions to Monitor Group's article, hopefully leading to a much improved article. **On any pages** where I look for assistance, I will be sure **to disclose my relationship** to Monitor in the interests of transparency. If you would like **to help me**, please let me know. Thanks

--CanalPark (talk) 22:12, 13 April 2011 (UTC)

My name is Melissa Drozdowski, and I work **for Interprose Public Relations**.  
Our firm represents a number of high-tech clients in a variety of markets,  
such as mobile and telecoms. While we **do not intend to directly edit** our  
clients' Wikipedia entries, we are happy to **act as a resource** for the editing  
community by **providing factual, non-advertorial information** and  
accompanying third-party citations.

--Mdrazdowski (talk) 15:28, 2 July 2010 (UTC)

What to do if something goes **wrong**.

## **If your article was deleted.**

**Seek to understand** why by reading the deletion rationale. Was it **promotional**? Did it lack **good sources**? Did it fail to assert the subject's **importance**? Fix these issues and/or use the new article wizard to have your **draft reviewed** before resubmitting. If you think the article was incorrectly deleted, **attempt talk to the administrator** who deleted it first. Submit a **request for undeletion** for uncontroversial deletions. For controversial deletions use **Deletion Review**. If you need a copy of the deleted article, ask for it to be '**userfied**' by either the administrator who deleted it or someone on the list of administrators willing to userfy articles.

## **If your account was blocked.**

Stay **calm**. Seek to understand **why**. Was your article blatantly **promotional**? Does your **username** represent an entire company or organization rather than you as an **individual**? **Ask the administrator** who blocked you for an explanation. Read the **guide to appealing blocks**; **then appeal the block** by placing **{{unblock}}** on your Talk page, followed by a comment defending your intentions **and acknowledging** if you made a **mistake** and how you will avoid in the future. Or, do the same by speaking with administrators in our **online unblock chat**.



**If no good sources exist for your article.**

Do more **research**. Ask for help locating **sources** at the **Reference Desk**. Advance the subject's coverage by contacting high quality sources and **asking them** to write about it. **Wait**. Try again.

**If there's a mistake in your article.**

For **minor** spelling, grammar, or factual corrections, **fix it yourself** (click **Edit** at the top right of the page and Save your changes). For any **substantial** changes, **seek input** from other editors and **let them do it**.

**If someone is editing your article.**

Remember that **nobody**, not **even the subjects** of articles, **owns** them. Accept that others will make changes and engage them in **civil and constructive dialogue**.

## **If someone is vandalizing your article.**

You can revert (undo) obvious **vandalism** yourself by using the History tab at the top right of the article. Remember that vandalism only applies to **intentionally destructive changes**, not edits you just **disagree with**. For any significant changes, **discuss** it with other editors **first**.

**If you want to make changes to the article.**

Post **requested edits** on the article's talk page using **{{requested edit}}**, ask for help at WikiProject Cooperation's **Paid Editor Help page** or at the Conflict of interest **noticeboard**.

**If you disagree strongly with other editors and they're not changing their minds.**

Stay **civil**. Read the relevant **policies**. Seek the **input** of other uninvolved editors. Ask for a **third opinion**. Use the **dispute resolution** procedures. Post at a relevant **noticeboard**. Pursue formal **mediation**.

**If you requested feedback but haven't received a timely response.**

Be **transparent** about your identity and conflict of interest, use the **Talk pages** of the article, raise issues on **noticeboards**, go to relevant **WikiProjects**, use the **Biography of Living Persons** noticeboard or **Conflict of interest** noticeboard, asking someone from the **WikiProject Cooperation** to assist and review edits, applying for **page protection** so the article can only be edited by select accounts, go to **Jimmy Wales highly Talk page**, email **info@wikipedia.org**, or seek assistance from Wikipedia's **Arbitration Committee**.

**If you're overwhelmed by Wikipedia's interface and policies.**

Take your **time**. Ask for **help**. Ask **questions**. Remember we're here to assist you and we're **not your enemy**.



Is there **hope**?

To be sure, there are some who wish to **abuse the system**... But on the whole, we believe that PR professionals, particularly those whose work adheres to the PRSA Code of Ethics, are **responsible and respectful** of the online communities in which they engage and seek to influence...Our position on this matter is simple: it's wrong for the PR profession to think it can **run roughshod over the established Wikipedia community**. PR professionals **must engage** with it in a reasonable manner that respects the community's rules and protocols, while also ensuring they are **acting in their clients' best interests**. But the engagement should be a **two-way street** in which Wikipedia is willing to see and **accommodate both sides** of the issue. At the moment, we do **not believe that to be the case**.

--Gerald Corbett, head of PRSA

What is needed is a **widespread understanding** and **acceptance** of the most appropriate way for public relations professionals to go about this. For the time being, we may have to start with an acceptance that Wikipedians **have a problem with our profession** and this reputation has unfortunately **been earned**. We **can't change this overnight** but by working in partnership with Wikimedia UK and Wikipedians, through outreach, diplomacy and dialogue, **we can make a difference**.

--Jane Wilson, head of CIPR

Imagine a world in which **every single person** on the planet is given free access to the **sum of all human knowledge**.

That's our **commitment.**

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