



WAV GROUP

Gaining an Edge in Real Estate
with Smartphones

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Contents

Overview	1
Achieving Business Success in a Changing Real Estate Market	1
Demanding Consumers Spur Change	1
Prompt Communication is the Key	2
Streamlining Information Access with Smartphones	2
Smartphones' Impact on Real Estate Sales Success	2
Improving Responsiveness with Smartphones	2
Multi-tasking Made Easy with Smartphones	3
Improving Lead Conversions with Smartphones	4
Maximizing Client Retention	5
Advanced Smartphone Capabilities Enhance Client Relationships	5
Comparing Traditional and Smartphone-Enhanced REALTOR® Activities	7
Selecting the Best Smartphone for the Job: Smartphone Satisfaction Ratings	8
Features Vital to Improving Responsiveness	8
Edging Out the Competition with Better Technology	10
Resources	11

Overview

Real estate agents intent on maintaining a competitive edge and gaining success in today's dynamic real estate environment are increasingly turning to a versatile, capable tool: the smartphone. Forward-looking, fast-moving agents gain advantages over rivals by enhancing their communication capabilities and responsiveness to clients—tasks that can be substantially streamlined and improved using smartphones.

This paper examines the current state of the real estate market and demonstrates how a well-designed smartphone equipped with the right applications can revolutionize the way real estate professionals compete effectively. Smartphones offer significant benefits and advantages to real estate professionals and help them sell more real estate.

Much of the information contained in this document is based on the WAV Group Smartphone Satisfaction Survey conducted in 2007. In this survey, 1618 real estate professionals in the U.S. and Canada provided insights into their use of smartphones and how smartphones improved responsiveness to clients. They also itemized the smartphone features that were most important to them. Study results can be obtained by contacting WAV Group through their website (www.wavgroup.com).

Achieving Business Success in a Changing Real Estate Market

Changing conditions in today's real estate market have caused many real estate agents to rethink their business and re-evaluate the tools and techniques they use to serve customers. Soft or softening market conditions make it more difficult to sell properties and to motivate buyers to place offers on homes. Faced with these inescapable challenges, every sales tool needs to be examined. Technologies that no longer deliver on their promise must be discarded in favor of those technologies that better meet the needs of their clients.

Demanding Consumers Spur Change

With a better understanding of the real estate market, consumers expect more of real estate professionals today. In the past, many real estate professionals believed their most important asset was MLS information. Now that listing information is readily available to everyone on the Internet, real estate professionals must find other methods for building strong client relationships and securing new customers.

Improving responsiveness to clients can help real estate agents build a stronger customer base and achieve competitive advantages. Leveraging the power of the Internet is a fundamental part of this approach. According to the California Association of REALTORS® 2006 Survey of Home Buyers, satisfaction levels for buyers who used the Internet in their home search were significantly higher than those using traditional methods. When consumers were asked about the one thing they would change about their traditional agent, 35% said "faster response time from my agent".

Prompt Communication is the Key

Prompt response to clients is vital to success in real estate. Statistics from the National Association of REALTORS® indicate that 78% of the time, consumers will work with the first agent that gets back to them. According to study results, the first agent to respond to an Internet inquiry is by far the most likely to secure a new client. The second person to respond to an inquiry has a much lower chance of securing a new client and the third to respond has virtually no chance. As noted in several industry studies, real estate agents answer their email anywhere from two to 52 hours after they receive it. Consumers accustomed to immediate responses from websites find this kind of laggard response completely unacceptable. Those real estate professionals who have recognized the need to answer emails and website inquiries quickly are the ones that are most likely to be building market share in their area. Many of these real estate professionals now use smartphones to boost responsiveness to their clients and to more quickly field lead inquiries.

Streamlining Information Access with Smartphones

Increasingly, real estate professionals are moving away from previous communication tools. Abandoning paper notes, listing printouts, cellular phones, PDAs, handheld organizers and pagers, professionals are embracing multi-function smartphones in growing numbers. According to NAR's 2007 REALTOR® Technology Survey, 28% of REALTORS® currently use smartphones. Another 30% plan to purchase or replace their phone in the next 12 months. Within the next 12 months, approximately 60% of the NAR membership—nearly 800,000 real estate professionals—are projected to own a smartphone.

Smartphones' Impact on Real Estate Sales Success

The 2007 WAV Group Smartphone Satisfaction Survey provided insights and perspectives of real estate professionals that use smartphones. These survey results highlighted features and capabilities of various types of smartphones. Depending on the brand of smartphone used, there were differing capabilities for lead responsiveness, improving the agent's competitive edge and retaining clients.

Improving Responsiveness with Smartphones

Maintaining contact with customers, fellow real estate professionals and support staff is crucial to many aspects of real estate sales, from answering online lead inquiries to scheduling meetings and appointments. Using a variety of communication devices often results in a disjointed, unsatisfactory experience for clients and potential clients. Voicemail messages, email communication that can only be checked at the office, handwritten notes scribbled on phone message pads and conversations with the person on floor time can lead to slower response time to clients. Periods of being out of reach also complicate communication and reduce responsiveness.

Smartphones equipped with the right complement of features—such as push email and instant messaging—can eliminate communication gaps and delays, particularly when coupled with global wireless coverage. One participant in the WAV Group Smartphone Satisfaction Survey stated:

"It [smartphone use] has changed how quickly I respond to people and having one appliance to get calls and pages and e-mails is wonderfully efficient."

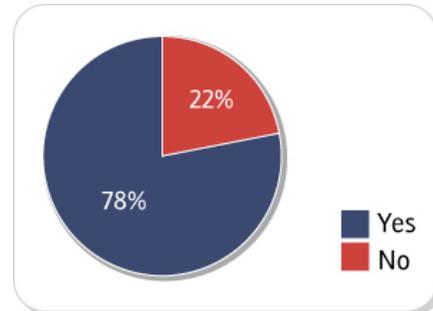
The WAV Group survey asked the question:

Has your smartphone helped you respond more quickly than your competition?

The respondents answered almost four to one, as illustrated in Figure 1, that their smartphone allowed them to respond more quickly than competitors.

Figure 1. Percentage of users citing improved responsiveness over competition

Response time to Internet information requests from prospects is critical to the success of real estate professionals. Internet-centric real estate buyers expect rapid communication responses. These clients expect to be able to reach their agents at any time and communicate frequently, usually in real-time, about the details of current transactions.



According to the California Association of REALTORS® analysis of the 2006 real estate market, 69% of Internet buyers said response time was extremely important. 83% of those buyers chose email as their favorite means for communicating with their agent. 0% chose "in person". Essentially, the Internet has become the new "office visit".

Real estate professionals who use smartphones are taking advantage of this new consumer behavior. A large number of respondents to the 2007 WAV Group Smartphone Satisfaction Survey have programmed their websites to send lead requests directly to their phone so they can respond quickly.

Multi-tasking Made Easy with Smartphones

During times when the real estate market is soft, agents are looking for ways to improve their efficiency in the office and in the field. Smartphones are helping real estate professionals stay on top of a multitude of tasks from a single communication device. Nearly two thirds of the survey respondents believe their smartphone has helped them sell more real estate. They believe their smartphone helps them "keep more irons in the fire". One participant in the WAV Group Smartphone Satisfaction Survey noted:

"I can quickly access information I need on the go or use the phone as an access for laptop web browsing. I can also search web engines for county court appraisal information if needed."

The WAV Group survey asked the question:

Do you believe having a smartphone has helped you sell more real estate?

Almost two thirds of the respondents, as illustrated in Figure 2, agreed that smartphones made selling a greater volume of real estate transactions easier.

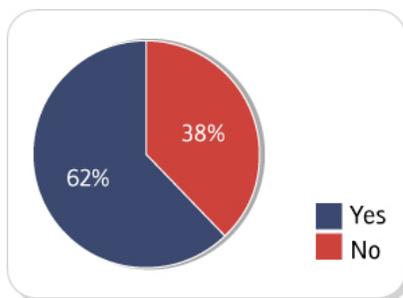


Figure 2. Percentage of respondents convinced that smartphones help sell more real estate

All real estate transactions involve multiple parties. When a property has received an offer or several offers, the listing agent needs to be in continuous contact with all parties to ensure the best offer for their client. When a buyer's agent is in a multiple bid situation, they must be able to maintain constant contact with their buyer to be sure they can negotiate a successful offer.

Moving real estate transactions along from a bid to closing requires timely communication among many individuals—bankers, lawyers, insurance agents, property inspectors and others. Extending communications capabilities, in the minds of survey respondents, clearly has an impact on overall sales. The ability of being able to maintain continuous contact with both the home office and the customer base is a decided advantage.

Sometimes the key to greater productivity is efficiency—working smarter, but not harder. As one real estate professional commented in the WAV Group survey:

“I have been able to handle transactions from anywhere, anytime, even from a beach in Mexico when I had no Internet access, my BlackBerry still worked...I am always able to keep in touch with clients and forward attachments. The instant push email access is the best feature.”

Improving Lead Conversions with Smartphones

Improving lead generation and conversion is vital to sales success and top producers continue to look for more efficient and cost-effective methods for cultivating new leads. Techniques that generate leads—without the need to purchase them from third parties—are highly valued. To keep prospective customers captive and engaged, rapid communication is essential.

According to the 2007 NAR REALTOR® Technology Survey 65% of respondents have their email contact information on real estate agent/business websites. These sites let potential clients register for more information or request direct contact with listing brokers or agents, facilitating quicker communication, especially when leads are forwarded immediately to a push email equipped smartphone for immediate follow-up.

In some extremely competitive real estate markets, there are as many as seven buyers for every agent. If agents can respond more quickly they will have a better opportunity to secure new business. 63% of smartphone users from the WAV Group Smart Phone Satisfaction Survey believe they have secured a new client because their smartphone allowed them to respond more quickly than their competition. Up to half of all buyers, according to the a recent study—California Association of REALTORS® 2005 Internet versus Traditional Buyer—expect real estate professionals to respond to email questions within 30 minutes.

The WAV Group survey asked the question:

Have you ever secured a new client because you responded more quickly than your competition?

More than 60% of the respondents, as shown in Figure 3, believed that their smartphone gave them a competitive advantage in securing new clients.

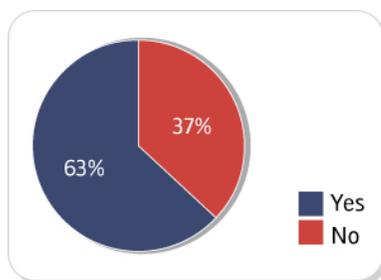


Figure 3. Percentage of smartphone users citing a competitive advantage

Once again, this statistic underscores the importance of prompt response to queries and communication. With customers expecting agents to be available when needed, there is a substantial competitive advantage to using communication tools that maximize availability and access to email, messaging and phone service.

Maximizing Client Retention

Approximately 80% of the 2007 NAR REALTOR® Technology Survey respondents said that referrals and repeat clients are very important methods for generating business. In order to maintain clients and build a strong referral network, they need to provide excellent customer care. Many real estate professionals literally provide 24/7 access and availability to their clients. This level of responsiveness is unprecedented in other industries. It requires a unique set of skills and technology tools to provide this level of customer service. Smartphones are proving to be a key asset because they allow real estate professionals to be connected to their clients constantly. Well-equipped smartphones have a variety of features which serve the mobile real estate professional well, as summarized in the following section.

Advanced Smartphone Capabilities Enhance Client Relationships

Innovative smartphone features empower real estate professionals to support clients in new ways. These lightweight, highly portable devices help agents generate leads, keep in touch with clients and move transactions along.

When asked about the advantages of a smartphone mobility solution for real estate, one respondent commented:

"I am able to get things done faster and easier from anywhere. I don't have to go to the office after every appointment anymore. I get access to my email immediately."

There are several features that can dramatically improve an agent's ability to be responsive to their clients and help them sell more real estate:

1. **Contact Management:** The convergence of PDAs and cellular phones into smartphone solutions simplifies the contact management process. Well-designed smartphones let agents look up a client phone number or even click on a phone number in an email and dial it automatically, saving considerable time and effort. Popular real estate customer relationship management (CRM) software applications, such as Top Producer®, offer smartphone access to their desk-based software. Agents can obtain access to contact information and update it while outside of the office.
2. **Real-time, instant email delivery:** Push email delivery lets agents receive messages as soon as they are sent, rather than the agents having to deliberately log in and retrieve them. This feature distinguishes highly responsive smartphone solutions from less capable approaches. Push email reduces security risks and helps extend battery life. Only available on BlackBerry smartphones, push email provides real estate professionals with one of the best methods for staying in touch in real-time. One of the WAV Group Smartphone Satisfaction Survey respondents said about their BlackBerry smartphones:

"I now have the ability to answer emails quickly, staying in constant communication with my clients. The quick internet connection is awesome. If I drive by a property with my client that we want more info on, it's a way to give an immediate answer to the questions we have."

3. **Lead Notification:** Agents taking full advantage of smartphones have programmed their websites to send leads directly to their phone so they can respond immediately. Internet access available on smartphones also allows an agent to receive appointment showing requests, online forms and of course phone calls, emails and text messages.
4. **Wireless MLS Access:** Wireless access to the Multiple Listing Service is increasing dramatically. According to the NAR's 2006 MLS Technology Survey nearly 75% of MLSs now provide wireless access to their members. With this available technology, REALTORS® no longer need to return to their offices to access the MLS. This is a key advantage smartphones can provide to real estate professionals.
5. **Mapping:** Smartphones with Internet access provide a practical and convenient way to get directions and maps wirelessly. Many smartphone users access Google Maps Mobile and other programs to get directions and maps directly from their phone.
6. **GPS Navigation:** Built-in GPS navigation capabilities in smartphones eliminate the need for a secondary device for agents consulting maps or driving to unfamiliar destinations. According to NAR's 2007 REALTOR® Technology Survey 12% of respondents currently use GPS navigation and another 19% plan to buy GPS navigation systems in the next 12 months. Buying an additional system is unnecessary if a GPS-equipped smartphone is available with audible turn-by-turn directions.
7. **Internet Access:** Having full access to the Internet allows agents to do web searches on demand, regardless of location. Some agents use their smartphones to provide their laptops with wireless Internet access when a small screen doesn't provide enough detail. One WAV Group survey respondent said of their BlackBerry smartphones:

"It serves as a wireless link for my laptop with sufficient data download speed so I have total access to the web and all its capabilities without using an expensive computer card service plan."

For many real estate agents, their smartphone has fundamentally changed the way they do business and has greatly increased their chances of selling properties. For example:

"I was with a client showing them properties. We went through the list of houses that we agreed to see and none of them really excited my client. Instead of giving up, I went online to the MLS and found a couple of other houses that fit her criteria. I punched in the addresses on my built-in GPS navigation receiver on my phone and used the directions to find the new properties. Within minutes we were back on the road looking at houses again. My client fell in love with one of the two houses we found on the MLS and purchased it! I would never have been able to accomplish all of this without my BlackBerry®. I love that phone!"

Comparing Traditional and Smartphone-Enhanced REALTOR® Activities

The following table highlights some common day-to-day activities of the real estate professional and contrasts the experience between the professional equipped with a smartphone versus the professional who relies strictly on traditional means to conduct business.

Scenario	Traditional Solution	Smartphone Solution	Benefit
Client requests some additional properties to view during a series of home tours.	Agent books another day to meet with the client. Returns to office to identify additional properties by means of the MLS.	Agent accesses MLS from smartphone and immediately identifies additional properties to show client.	Time savings for both the agent and client. Client impressed by agent's ability to add value through information access on the fly.
Client visits real estate website and sees a property of interest. Sends email from the site listing to the agent requested more information.	Agent checks email during the next office visit or when next convenient. Response to client is sent hours later.	With a push-email equipped smartphone, agent is immediately notified of the incoming email and responds promptly.	Agent gains more business by being the first to respond to inquiries from prospects. Quick response demonstrates attentiveness to client's needs and helps retain business over the long term.
The agent shows a series of properties, none of which meet expectations. The client would like to see some properties in a different part of the city.	Agent goes back to the office, pulls up listings from the new area of interest and then proceeds to the new area using a Google Map printed from the office computer.	With wireless MLS and a GPS equipped smartphone, the agent gets new listings to view and then enters the destination addresses and listens as the smartphone provides audible directions to the destination.	Agent provides a new home tour in a new destination in minutes and then avoids getting lost and wasting the client's time. Agent avoids having to rely on paper-based maps and secondary devices for directions.
Trying to juggle multiple devices, organizer lists and respond to queries from phone and email, agent misses an important incoming message and upsets an important client.	Check messages on computer, voice mail, appointment system and phone notes at office. Consult paper-based or computer-based organizer for tasks.	View incoming email messages and check voicemail phone queries through a smartphone, while consulting prioritized tasks on smartphone organizer.	Agent consolidates the most important communication capabilities on a single device rather than several, improving efficiency and productivity.
A client who is relocating from out of town sees an appealing property, but wants to delay an offer until his wife can view the garden on a future visit.	Agent books an appointment later in the week, but another buyer places an interim offer, resulting in a bidding war.	Agent takes a digital photo of the garden with her smartphone and immediately emails it to the client's wife for feedback.	Images in real estate can be used to increase customer service and advance the sales process.

Table 1. Comparison of traditional and smartphone-enabled real estate activities

Selecting the Best Smartphone for the Job: Smartphone Satisfaction Ratings

To choose the ideal smartphone, real estate professionals should consider the features that offer them the strongest competitive advantages in their field. Fellow agents can often provide guidance about which smartphone is best for them. The 2007 WAV Group Smartphone Satisfaction Survey shows that BlackBerry smartphones have the highest satisfaction ratings overall, scoring higher than Palm Treo devices (the overall satisfaction rating is shown in the following table). BlackBerry ranked highest in 10 of the 11 key categories measured in the WAV Group study including email, battery life, simplicity of use and other key categories.

Satisfaction Factors	Palm Treo® (Palm OS)	Palm Treo® (Windows)	BlackBerry®
Overall	66%	57%	78%

Table 2. Satisfaction ratings: BlackBerry versus Treo

Features Vital to Improving Responsiveness

The following smartphone features contribute to the responsiveness of real estate professionals in meeting customer needs and staying ahead of the competition.

- **Push Email:** Quick response to customer requests or online queries can help gain new business and retain existing customers. For agents who receive many emails, lead inquiries and other communications, they will want to look at the BlackBerry line first. BlackBerry delivers email differently than any other smart phone on the market today. Instead of delivering email when you push a button to request or at the time interval you set on your phone, BlackBerry sends emails in real-time. The second you receive an email on your computer, the email is delivered simultaneously to your desktop. This allows you to respond as though you were sitting in front of your computer. The BlackBerry email system also works internationally and in places where a regularly Internet connection is not available. This unique email delivery system is why BlackBerry users in the WAV Group Smartphone Satisfaction Survey were so much more satisfied with their email service than other types of phone users.
- **Battery Life:** Real estate professionals depend on extended smartphone battery life to stay connected. Again, BlackBerry was rated highest with WAV Group Smartphone Satisfaction Survey respondents. BlackBerry smartphones are engineered to use available battery power much more efficiently. Push email is the most efficient mechanism for delivering email and information to smartphones. The BlackBerry system also compresses all data sent to and from the device which substantially extends battery life.
- **Simplicity of Use:** Intelligent and intuitive design features keep real estate professionals productive, minimize learning time and streamline tasks when juggling multiple activities. There are several factors to consider which can improve the ease of use of a smartphone. When writing emails and responding to text messages the size of the keyboard is important.

The ergonomically optimized QWERTY keyboard on the BlackBerry smartphones received good scores for size and ease of use in the 2007 WAV Group Smartphone Satisfaction Survey. Screen readability is also important. BlackBerry smartphone screens have built-in light sensing technology that automatically adjusts screen and keypad brightness in response to surrounding conditions. Some users of other smartphones in the WAV Group survey complained about not being able to read their phone's screen in the car or on sunny days. Navigation from feature to feature is also an important consideration. Many smartphones use touch screens with a stylus. While many agents have gotten used to this approach, some complain about the sensitivity of the screen and the need to involve both hands. BlackBerry, by means of trackball or trackwheel, simplifies one-handed operation and integrated applications support related operations, such as automatically phoning a contact located in the address book. BlackBerry again scored highest on satisfaction for ease of use.

- **Advanced Phone Functionality:** Certain advanced smartphone features benefit busy real estate professionals by simplifying common tasks and saving time. Hands-free, voice-activated dialing can be extremely useful to agents who are in an automobile, particularly in areas where regulations against handling cell phones while driving are in force. A dashboard mounted smartphone with a hands-free Bluetooth car kit can simplify communication when driving from point to point. Clarity of reception avoids miscommunication with clients and eliminates the frustration of having to repeat words or phrases. According to WAV Group Smartphone Satisfaction Survey respondents, BlackBerry technology is recognized for delivering exceptional quality audio with strong clarity and signal integrity. Speakerphone support and conference calling also keep agents productive when traveling.
- **Real Estate Application Support:** Agents rely on access to applications in use in their office to perform more efficiently. Many leading real estate software companies are now providing mobile versions of their applications. Agents can complete online forms, use contact management software, use mortgage calculators and use scheduling software wirelessly.
- **Wireless Email Synchronization:** The ability to automatically synchronize email messages wirelessly while traveling keeps real estate agents current and informed. With select email providers and the built-in email address that comes with their device, users can manage their email accounts directly from their BlackBerry smartphones—messages that are read, deleted or sent on their BlackBerry smartphone are also read, deleted or sent on their desktop or web-based email account. BlackBerry smartphones also integrate multiple email accounts so real estate professionals can read all their Webmail or office email just by checking a single inbox. Users can more easily keep track of messages that have been read, messages that have been answered, and messages sent—whether at the home office or on the road. This helps boost the productivity of real estate professionals.
- **Extended Smartphone Features:** Features included with the latest versions of smartphones help real estate professionals maintain an edge while traveling. For example, the BlackBerry 8800 series has an integrated GPS receiver, eliminating the need to buy a separate GPS navigation system or service. Digital cameras and multimedia playback capabilities, included in many current generation smartphones, give agents a way to provide previews or guided video tours of promising properties to clients while on the road.

Edging Out the Competition with Better Technology

The competitive nature of the real estate business drives professionals to find the best tools to serve customers as effectively as possible and to stay highly productive while inside or outside the office. Smartphone technology satisfies many of the most vital requirements of this dynamic, communication-oriented business. Adopters of smartphones, as evidenced by the WAV Group survey results and quotations from smartphone users, strongly believe that in using this technology they gain a competitive edge, function more effectively on the road and gain business and new customers through improved responsiveness.

Given the range of capabilities and product differences in smartphones, real estate professionals should thoroughly evaluate the available choices before making a purchase decision. Professionals have an opportunity to gain a distinct competitive advantage by selecting a smartphone model that best supports their work and fits comfortably into their business approach.

Smartphones provide real estate agents with a comprehensive set of tools to stay in touch while traveling, including: wireless phone, email, text messaging, instant messaging, GPS navigation and support for leading real estate applications from third parties. The WAV Group Smartphone Satisfaction Survey and third party reviews from CNET and PC Magazine suggest that BlackBerry smartphones address the needs of real estate professionals better than other smartphones. This functionality is delivered in a compact, lightweight form with exceptional battery life, outstanding connectivity from any location in the world and integrated application design that streamlines everyday tasks.

Resources

For more Information about the latest smartphone developments for the real estate community, visit the following websites:

- CNET Reviews (<http://reviews.cnet.com/>)
- To see a video review of the new BlackBerry® 8800, click the following link at CNET:
http://reviews.cnet.com/RIM_BlackBerry_8800/4505-6452_7-32329098.html?tag=prod.txt.1
- To see a video of the new Treo 755W, visit:
http://reviews.cnet.com/smart-phones/palm-treo-755p-sprint/4505-6452_7-32434432.html?tag=prod.txt.1

PC Magazine Reviews also offer insights into current smartphones.

- For a review of the BlackBerry® 8800, visit:
<http://www.pcmag.com/article2/0,1759,2093340,00.asp>
- A Treo 755p review can be found at:
<http://www.pcmag.com/article2/0,1759,2127274,00.asp>



Research In Motion Limited commissioned WAV Group to conduct independent research and analysis to assess the use of smartphones by real estate professionals. The content of this report is the product of WAV Group and is based on independent, unbiased research not tied to any vendor product or solution. Although every effort has been made to verify the accuracy of this information, neither WAV Group nor the sponsor of this report can accept any responsibility or liability for reliance by any person on this research or any of the information, opinions, or conclusions set out in the report. Check with service provider for availability, roaming arrangements and service plans. Certain features outlined in this document require a minimum version of BlackBerry Enterprise Server software, BlackBerry Desktop Software, and/or BlackBerry Device Software.

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