

6 e-commerce lessons for healthcare

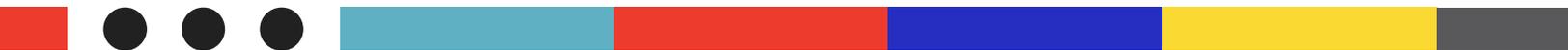
E-commerce has spent hard-fought years learning how to cater to and capture customers. Healthcare can benefit from that experience.

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Introduction

Companies focused on selling goods and services online have spent years learning from their customers and honing digital strategies to optimize the customer experience and to maximize revenue. As healthcare continues its digital transformation, there are valuable lessons to be learned from the e-commerce experience.

With that in mind, here are six successful strategies – areas of focus – to consider when building out your digital front door.



6 Lessons

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1. Focus on SEO.

Organic search is a key element to be discovered, especially for a competitive space like healthcare, as customers are increasingly looking for care. It's how people find places, information, products – and for healthcare, doctors, medical information, treatment options, and more.

How important is organic search? Here are three stats from Search Engine Journal compiled from a range of sources:

53%

of trackable website traffic comes from organic search

32%

average organic clickthrough rate of the first Google desktop search

27%

average organic clickthrough rate of the first Google mobile search

Those last two numbers aren't for clicks on links that performed well at organic SEO. Those are for the links (and the websites behind those links) that hit number one on the Google **SERP (search engine response page)**.

Given these stats, no company can afford to avoid taking organic SEO seriously. Luckily, there are basic steps to take that can dramatically impact organic SEO.

Among the broad categories Google considers **when fetching search results, quality of content and both relevance and usability of websites are all important factors.** Luckily, all three are directly under the control of businesses creating websites. For healthcare, relevance won't be an issue.

If someone is searching for health or medical information, a healthcare company website is exactly what they are looking for.

The two areas that require a bit more work are quality of content and usability of websites.

Quality of content means no typographical or grammatical errors as a baseline and making sure the information presented on a website is factually correct and matches what the website visitor is expecting to find. In fact, providing consistent quality content should be part of any SEO strategy.

Quality of Content



No typographical or grammatical errors.



Should be part of any SEO Strategy.

Usability of Web Pages



Make sure information is factual and correct.

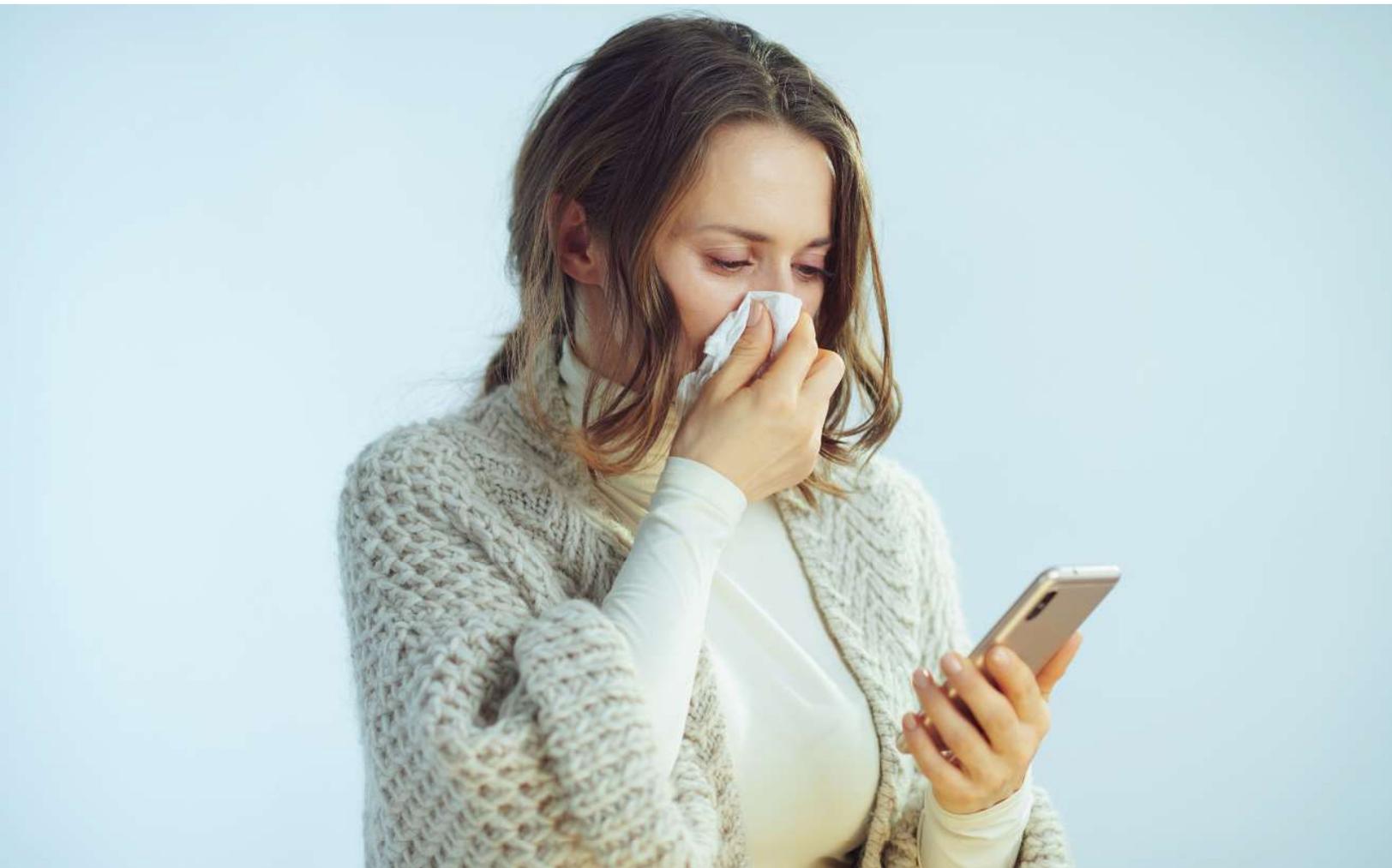
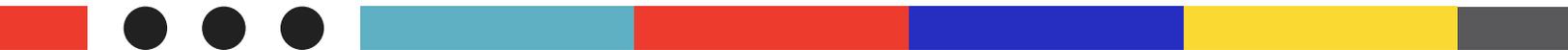


Information should match what visitors expect to find.

Usability also means ensuring the site is both secure and accessible and provides a positive user experience (UX). Positive UX includes a clean and easy to navigate layout – especially important for mobile – that allows the visitor to meet whatever goal they had before clicking on the link. A negative UX would have intrusive and/or confusing design elements, like interstitials, full-page pop ups, and possibly annoying ad formats.

As you build out your digital health strategy, consider the importance of organic search, as it's the battleground to be discovered, found, and ultimately, acquire customers. Presenting an excellent, relevant customer experience extends your reach and visibility in the channels your customers use most.

Effective SEO is part engineering, part content, and a commitment to iterate and adopt new techniques as the goalposts change.



2. Truly be mobile first.

E-commerce is a mobile-first experience. In 2022, nearly 300 million people (roughly 90% of the population) in the United States used a smartphone. Statista reports 31% of e-commerce is now mobile. What this means is healthcare networks must address the ongoing growth in mobile use across the entire digital experience. Today, mobile is the primary touch point to the web, with desktop lagging behind.

People turn to mobile in their digital lives for a myriad of reasons, with convenience at the top of the list. People are on the go, and for many, it's just easier to grab the smartphone while sitting on the couch rather than interact with a desktop or laptop. The bottom line is it's a necessary practice to design the user experience with mobile in mind.

This might sound like an old idea, but you'd be surprised at how quickly customers abandon a poor mobile experience. With 52% of smartphone users gathering health-related information on their phones, the mobile experience requires dedicated focus.

A balanced approach dovetails with many organic SEO elements as well.

Design the user experience with speed in mind; and keep the design clean, simple and user-friendly.

A good mobile user experience will almost certainly become a great desktop user experience. But if you flip that around something that works fine on the desktop can become a nightmare on small screens. Because of this alone, it makes sense to first design the digital experience for mobile and then port that experience to other channels.

“We discovered... that 1 second of site speed is worth 5% of revenue... speed is king”

-- George.com



3. Your website speed matters.

According to Google, the average mobile website load time is 22 seconds. And if you consider that 53% of people abandon a mobile website that takes longer than three seconds to load, having a fast, frictionless experience is paramount.

This stat points to a key learning – people will abandon a website if it’s slow-loading. And while there are a number of elements that contribute to site performance, the JavaScript glut and approaches of the past leave little room to improve site speed. Looking at mobile specifically, it’s difficult to engineer a fast, mobile website given the small screen, limited CPU, and intermittent connectivity.

To understand the value of high performing sites, we partnered with Perficient Digital for a study on 26 customer websites and 9 million Fast Pages. After the data was anonymized, the research found that Fast Pages deliver:

23%

increase in organic traffic

22.6%

increase in SERP impressions

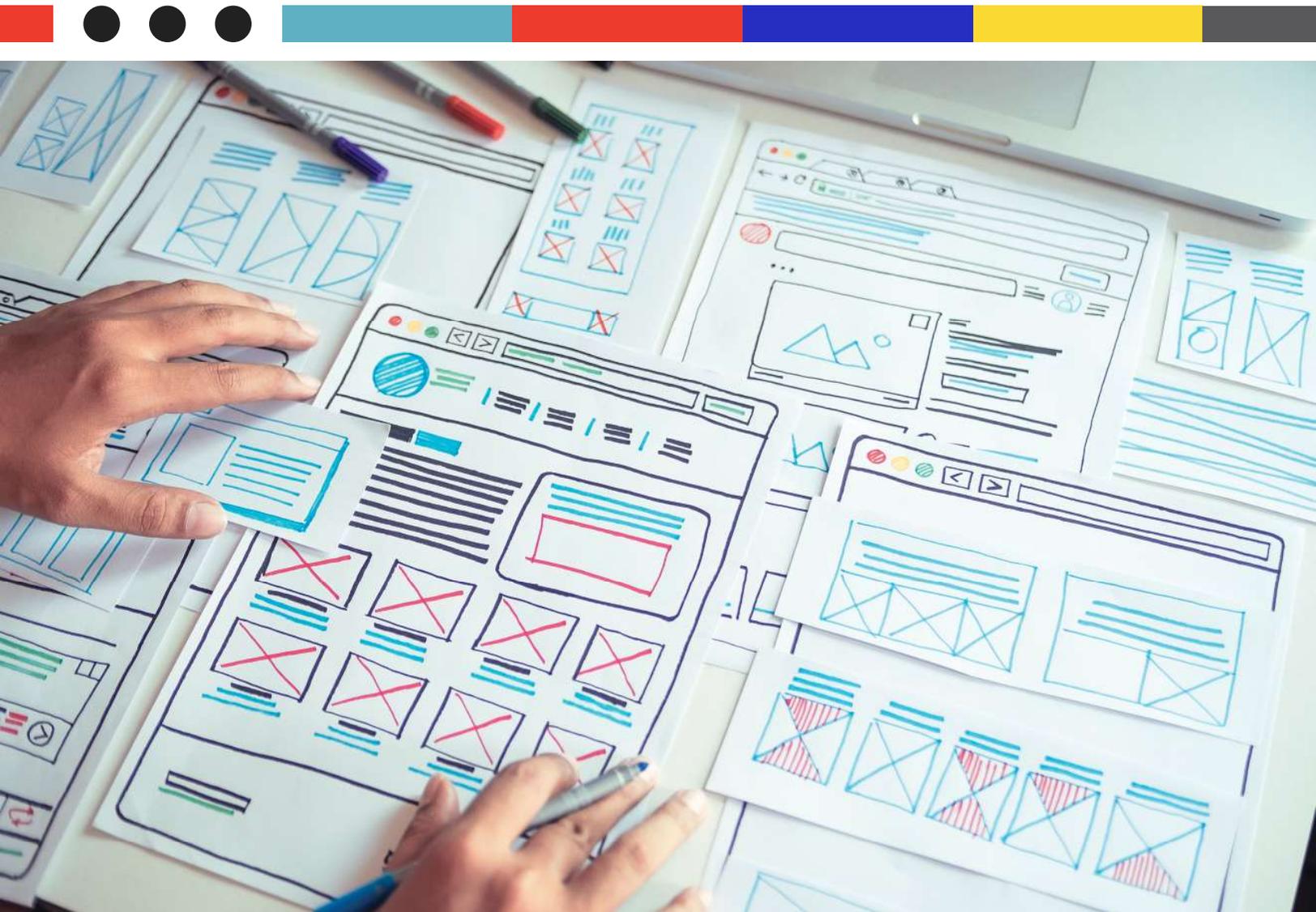
3.8%

higher SERP clickthrough rates

Digging further into research on how website speed directly impacts revenue, Forrester interviewed four e-commerce websites using a design framework that optimizes for speed and found a 20% increase in sales conversion rate and a 10% year-over-year increase in traffic for sites. Per the model used by Forrester, this translated to an increase in hundreds of thousands of dollars in annual profit.

For healthcare websites, this means not overloading website design with elements that significantly impact performance (i.e., an excess of third-party scripts). Research consistently finds that no matter how great or inclusive a website experience might be, if the site doesn't load quickly visitors won't stick around to find out what they might be missing.

Now, achieving speed is an engineering challenge... a theme is emerging.



Split-second speed is a full-stack science—from ensuring APIs scale and UIs are delivered instantly, to eliminating bottlenecks and preventing regression.

A pillar of modern architecture is a cloud-based delivery network that relies on CDNs, caches, and APIs to fetch, synchronize and deliver content to users.

Moving to the cloud and hosting content at the edge is a proven strategy for scalability and sub-second website performance. Because CDNs use a distributed system, the cloud is built to self diagnose when nodes are overloaded and to automatically reroute traffic to available nodes. Self-healing, redundant infrastructure is uniquely able to maintain uptime and deliver virtually unlimited scale.

A core group of technologies further assure performance, even under the heaviest of loads, including modern frameworks, like AMP, along with server-side rendering, and strategic caching.



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4. Combine apps with the web.

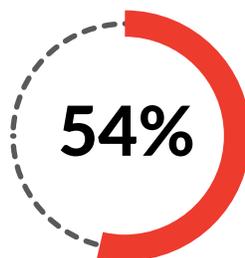
A lesson e-commerce companies have learned is users love the crispness and purpose-built feel of a native app, but at the same time, rely on the web to find information. The progressive web application (PWA) is an effective workaround for this seemingly contradictory expectation (i.e., users love the feel of an app on the web, without having to download to the device).

The PWA is essentially an app delivered via the web in a browser merging the app and web experience. It has wide support across browsers including Chrome, Edge, and Safari. E-commerce giants like Amazon, Walmart, and Alibaba, all use PWA elements. And that's scratching the surface, as most household retail brands have also adopted the framework. The PWA trend is also moving into healthcare, given its success and the ability to deliver a snappy, frictionless customer experience.

One example of an e-commerce PWA success story is JM Bullion, a gold and silver retailer, which after switching to a site engineered for speed with a PWA, found its conversion rate increased 28% and website load time decreased 54%.

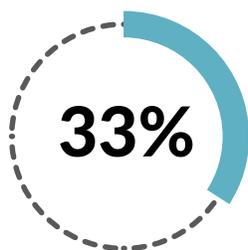


increase in conversion rate

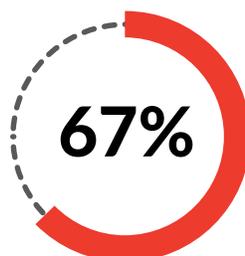


decrease in website load time

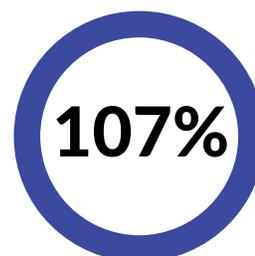
Another example is Bed, Bath & Beyond, which launched a PWA during the 2020 holiday season, and over the five days spanning Thanksgiving to Cyber Monday had a mobile website loading 67% faster with a 33% increase in conversions, and 107% mobile sales growth compared to the same period the year before.



increase in conversion rate



faster mobile load time



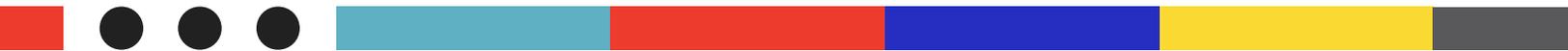
mobile sales growth

5. Search powers purchase.

Most major brands from Best Buy and Expedia to Walmart and Zillow use a prominent, universal search bar to grab and engage users. Healthcare websites have traditionally relied on two points of entry for visitors looking for information -- a search for “find a doctor” and a search for “find a location.”

DexCare has addressed this issue with Omni Search, a tool eliminating separate booking funnels with a single search bar that intuitively takes visitors to whatever they are looking for from one location. When customers search for a doctor, they find doctor profiles. A medical condition search surfaces doctors that specialize in that condition.

Searching for same-day care provides locations of nearby clinics. And so forth. From any page, from a single search interface, customers can perform any search and get the right level of care. No cumbersome funnels, and rigid search results, but a unified gateway to narrow the gap between intent and action.



And let's face it, search on most healthcare websites can be better. Let's count the ways:

- ✓ Results are rigid
- ✓ No natural language
- ✓ Often fails to capture common questions
- ✓ Hardly localized
- ✓ Zero-result search results

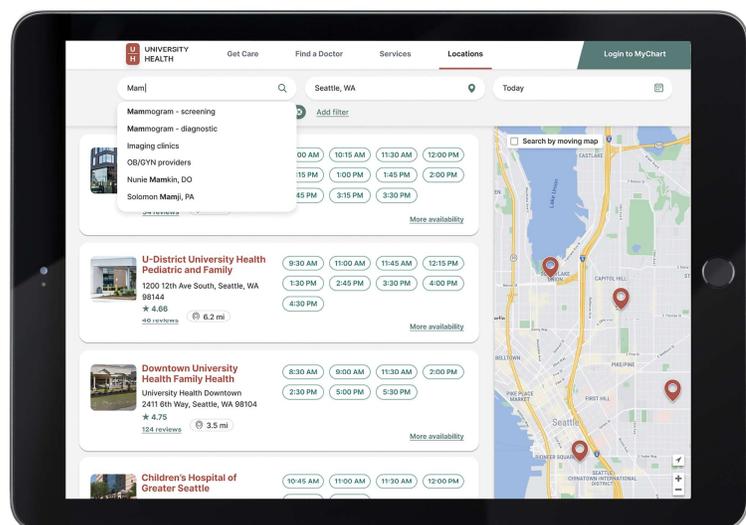
Getting customers the care they are looking for is part of an effective digital front door.

As you've read, optimizing the digital front door includes mirroring e-commerce best practices, and a powerful search experience is central.

Search is the first stop on most websites. Why not for healthcare?

Customers are conditioned to use search. Google has set a standard, and e-commerce has caught up. And it makes sense.

If you can acquire a customer from any page, based on intent, that leads to measurable, meaningful lift.



6. Blend where virtual meets physical.

For e-commerce, where virtual meets physical is the BOPIS concept – buy online, pick up in store. The key to BOPIS working smoothly is a strong digital presence. Without an easy-to-use online experience to make the purchase, retailers with both an e-commerce and brick and mortar locations would never be able to get people into those stores.

There are strong parallels in healthcare. One obvious example is “buying” a doctor visit through an online appointment and then physically meeting the chosen physician. But for an industry that has traditionally relied exclusively on in-person interactions, the digital transformation includes many ways virtual meets physical.



The screenshot shows a 'Book an Appointment' form for a location at 1200 12th Avenue South, Seattle, WA 98144. It features three appointment options: 'In-person' (selected), 'Video', and 'Phone'. Below these is a date selector set to 'Tuesday, October 26'. A grid of time slots is provided, including 11:00 AM, 11:45 AM, 12:15 PM, 1:30 PM, 2:30 PM, 3:45 PM, 4:15 PM, and 6:00 PM.

Unlike the e-commerce BOPIS concept, healthcare virtual meets physical goes beyond a simple “buy” and “pick up.” Telehealth, which became both necessary and widespread because of the COVID-19 pandemic, is a perfect example of virtual meeting physical. It includes that “physical” one-on-one interaction between a doctor and patient, but instead of face-to-face it happens using digital tools in a virtual space. This is an area where healthcare companies can really get creative thinking of different business elements that might apply virtual meeting physical.

To incorporate lesson #5 -- single-interface search -- consider how you display telehealth as an option. Omni Search can decipher intent and route telehealth as the most appropriate care option based on customer input.

Yes, telehealth has swept across most – if not all – health-related fields. But is your digital strategy aligned with how to best display the care options most convenient and relevant for your patients?

Bottom line...

The takeaway from these six tips is healthcare companies should take cues from e-commerce when developing digital experiences. E-commerce companies have spent time and money learning these lessons about what customers want and expect. And each digital decision has a direct correlation to the business.

Digital excellence is the livelihood for e-commerce. And while it's not a one-to-one, healthcare and e-commerce both have the customer at heart. There's digital inspiration and modern techniques worth considering to improve how customers engage with you.



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