

Optimizing Your Website for AI Search

**How to Make Your Site
Crawlable, Credible, and
Conversational for
AI Assistants**



Executive Summary

Search is changing—fast. Consumers aren't just typing keywords into Google anymore. Instead, they're asking AI tools like ChatGPT, Perplexity, and Gemini full questions in the same way they'd ask a friend.

"What's the best cordless drill for small DIY projects under \$200?" has replaced "best cordless drill."

AI mirrors this behavior. Instead of serving up a list of links, it scans, synthesizes, and delivers direct answers—often quoting from websites that structure their content clearly, speak in natural language, and show signs of trust and authority. That shift creates both a challenge and an opportunity for brands.

The challenge:

If your website isn't AI-friendly, it may never show up in these new results.

The opportunity:

If you make your content easy to crawl, credible, and conversational, you can leapfrog ahead of competitors who are still optimizing for yesterday's search engines.

This white paper introduces AI Search Optimization (ASO)—a practical framework for how brands can earn visibility when machines, not just humans, decide what's credible.



Inside, we'll show you how to:

- **Structure your site so AI can easily read, cite, and quote it.**
- **Use influencer content, reviews, and media mentions to build authority.**
- **Write conversational, question-driven content that mirrors how people and AI—search.**
- **Keep your site fresh, factual, and citable to sustain visibility over time.**

At its core, ASO connects everything The Licursi Group does best: media relations, influencer marketing, content creation, and product reviews. Together, they form the foundation of how brands win in AI search.

**The question isn't
whether AI will
shape visibility—
it's whether your
brand will be part
of the answer.**

From the Publisher

For more than a decade, The Licursi Group has helped brands stay visible through every shift in how people discover products—from traditional media to bloggers to influencers and now, AI search.

We built our agency on what moves consumers: credible stories, trusted voices, and authentic proof. Those same elements—media coverage, influencer content, and verified product reviews—are now what AI models rely on to deliver answers.

In other words, the playbook we've always used is now the blueprint for visibility in an AI-driven world.

The Licursi Group was built for this moment. Because when AI goes looking for answers, it's looking for everything we already know how to create: authority, authenticity, and action.

Megan Licursi
President • The Licursi Group

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1. The New Search Landscape



Old SEO:

"best cordless drill" typed into Google.



AI Search:

"What's the best cordless drill for small DIY projects under \$200?" asked to ChatGPT.

For nearly two decades, SEO was built on a simple formula: keywords, backlinks, and rankings. Stuff your page with the right terms, build some links, and hope Google rewarded you with a coveted spot on page one.

But the search landscape has changed. The rise of large language models (LLMs) like ChatGPT, Gemini, and Perplexity has transformed not only how people search—but how they expect to be answered.

The difference? AI doesn't just rank sites—it summarizes, synthesizes, and delivers a single, conversational answer. Instead of scanning 10 blue links, users now expect one clear recommendation pulled directly from the most trustworthy sources.

For brands, this shift is massive. If your content isn't structured in a way that AI can understand, quote, and trust, you risk disappearing from the conversation entirely.

How Voice Search Paved the Way for AI Search

Siri, Alexa, and Google Assistant may not have been perfect, but they completely changed user behavior. Instead of short keywords, people started asking full, natural questions—and expecting a single, spoken response.

Voice search introduced three key shifts:

- **Natural language:** "Hey Google, what's the weather like in Tampa today?" replaced "weather Tampa."
- **Zero-click answers:** Voice assistants gave one answer, not a page of options.
- **Task-based queries:** Beyond information, users started giving commands: "set a timer," "order paper towels," "play music."

For brands, that era became a training ground. Companies began building FAQ-style content and "skills" optimized for those voice assistants.

In short: voice search normalized conversational queries, single-answer results, and direct actions. AI search is simply the next evolution—with far greater nuance, accuracy, and context.

Where Does Paid Search Fit In?

Paid search isn't going away—but it's evolving. In the traditional model, marketers bid on keywords to secure top placement. In the AI model, those ad spaces are shrinking as AI answers take up more real estate.

What to expect:

- **Fewer keyword bidding opportunities** as AI-generated answers push ads further down the page.
- **Higher value on sponsored content** embedded directly within AI answers (already being tested by Google).
- **More pressure on organic visibility**—if you're not cited naturally, you'll pay more to stay visible.

Paid and organic can't be siloed anymore. In an AI-first world, organic authority fuels paid efficiency.

2. How AI Finds and Uses Content

Here's the big shift: AI tools don't just index your site — they *read* it. They scan your pages, reviews, and product listings to pull snippets, examples, and facts that form conversational answers. Your job? Make your content easy for both people and machines to process.

What AI Looks For

- **Clarity:** Clean structure, short sentences, and plain language.
- **Credibility:** signals of expertise — reviews, references, and outbound links to trusted sources.
- **Freshness:** regularly updated content tells AI you're active and relevant.
- **Context:** schema, metadata, and other structured data act like "labels" that help AI understand what each page represents — product, review, FAQ, etc.

Together, these elements make your content discoverable, understandable, and quotable.

```
<script type="application/ld+json">
{
  "@context": "https://schema.org/",
  "@type": "Product",
  "name": "Brinks Heavy Duty Padlock",
  "image": "https://www.example.com/ima
  "description": "A 2-inch solid brass
  "brand": {
    "@type": "Brand",
    "name": "Brinks"
```

**A basic
product
schema in
JSON-LD**

The Two Stages of AI Discovery

According to SEMrush's *2025 AI Visibility Index*, AI follows a two-stage process when deciding which brands to surface:



Stage 1: Discovery

AI listens first — scanning user-generated content, reviews, Reddit threads, YouTube videos, and social chatter to decide which brands are worth considering.



Stage 2: Authority

Once a brand is in the mix, AI verifies it against official sources like your website, pricing pages, Wikipedia entries, and structured data.

To win both stages:

- **Generate buzz** through influencers, reviews, and social engagement.
- **Back it up** with clear, structured, trustworthy content on your site.

AI doesn't just index your site — it reads it.

What the Heck is Schema?

Think of schema as the labels that help machines understand your content. Humans instantly understand this sentence: *"Our cordless drill has a 20V battery and a 2-year warranty."*

AI needs a little extra help. Schema is a piece of code that tells search engines and AI:

- *This product is a cordless drill.*
- *It has a 20V battery.*
- *It comes with a 2-year warranty.*

The payoff:

AI can use your details in answer boxes, comparison tables, and recommendations instead of skipping you for a competitor who's easier to understand.

Schema isn't for people — it's for machines. But it helps machines put your brand in front of people.

3. Foundations of an AI-friendly Website

The Non-Negotiables: Nail These First



Mobile-Friendly

Most searches now happen on phones. If your site isn't responsive or easy to navigate, both people and AI will bounce.



XML Sitemap

Your sitemap acts as a map for crawlers and models. It shows how pages connect and helps AI understand what's most important.



Fast-Loading Pages

Page speed is one of the strongest trust signals. Slow load times tell AI your site is outdated or unreliable.



Visible Content

Don't hide key details in PDFs, pop-ups, or images. If AI can't crawl it, it can't cite it.



Clean Structure

Use logical headings (H1, H2, H3) and short paragraphs. AI favors content that's well-organized and easy to parse.



Secure & Accessible

SSL certificates and alt text aren't optional. Security and accessibility are now table stakes for trust.



Here's the truth: you can't skip the basics. AI search doesn't replace SEO fundamentals — it relies on them.

Think of it this way:

Google's crawlers and AI models like ChatGPT may operate differently, but both need to read, understand, and trust your site.

If your pages are slow, messy, or confusing, neither humans nor machines will be able to make sense of them. And if they can't understand you, they can't recommend you. Before your brand can appear in AI-generated answers, your foundation has to be solid.

Beyond the Basics

Once your foundation is strong, you can start layering in structured data, reviews, and contextual content — but without the fundamentals, those efforts fall flat. If a user can't find what they're looking for, AI won't either. If your content is hard to navigate, AI won't know how to quote it.

**If a human
struggles to
find or read it,
AI will too.**

4. Content That Speaks the Way People Search

The old keyword-first mindset doesn't cut it anymore. People don't type *"best cordless drill lightweight cheap."* They ask, *"What's the best cordless drill for beginners that won't break the bank?"* That difference — between writing for an algorithm and writing like a human — is the difference between being ignored and being cited.

From Keywords to Conversations

This shift isn't new, but it's accelerating fast. Younger generations already treat search like a conversation. My teenager doesn't type *"homework help algebra"* into Google — they press the mic icon and say, *"Siri, how do I solve an equation with fractions?"*

That small difference changes everything. Search has become dialogue, not data entry. AI tools like ChatGPT, Gemini, and Perplexity are trained on the same kind of language — how people naturally talk online. That's why they reward content that's written like a conversation instead of a keyword puzzle.

How AI Mirrors This Behavior

According to Google, **70% of voice searches** are phrased in conversational language — *"What's the best pizza near me?"* instead of *"pizza Tampa."*

And SEMrush's *2025 AI Visibility Index* found that AI models consistently favor content in **Q&A format**, because it aligns with how people actually ask questions. Even Google's new **AI Overviews** reflect this evolution: summarizing clear, conversational answers instead of showing a list of links.

AI search doesn't want your keywords. It wants your conversation.



Old SEO:

"best cordless drill" typed into Google.



AI Search:

"What's the best cordless drill for small DIY projects under \$200?" asked to ChatGPT.

AI search doesn't want your keywords. It wants your conversation.

4. Content That Speaks the Way People Search

(Continued)

Why Brands Need to Adapt

If your content still sounds like it was written for robots, AI won't cite it. What works now:

- **Anticipate customer questions and answer them directly.**
- **Use plain English — not industry jargon.**
- **Keep sentences short, active, and easy to scan.**

The goal isn't just readability. It's *credibility*. AI tools look for content that sounds like it came from a real expert, not a keyword generator.

The Big Takeaway

People — especially younger consumers — already talk to technology. They ask Siri, Alexa, and Google Assistant questions in full sentences and expect one clear answer. AI search simply mirrors that behavior, at scale.

The future of search is a conversation. If you wouldn't say it out loud, don't write it that way. If your website doesn't speak the way your customers do, AI won't use it to answer their questions.

Practical Applications

Here's how to translate conversational tone into content that performs:

FAQs: Build them around actual customer questions. *"How do I install this without tools?"* not *"installation instructions."*

Blog posts: Frame titles as questions that reflect real intent. *"What's the safest way to store tools in a humid garage?"*

Support pages: Use step-by-step explanations in everyday language.

Social content: Repurpose customer DMs and comments into useful on-site content.

The more your content mirrors real human phrasing, the easier it is for AI to find, understand, and quote you.



UGC: The New Currency

SEMrush found that AI models now rely more on forums, reviews, and social content than on traditional SEO signals. In other words, your customers are your SEO team now.

- **Reviews, Reddit threads, and YouTube videos carry more weight than meta descriptions.**
- **Authenticity matters more than optimization.**
- **If people aren't talking about you, AI won't either.**

AI trusts what people say more than what brands publish.

If your website doesn't speak the way your customers do, AI won't use it to answer their questions.

5. Content Formats AI Search Loves

Formats That Win:



1. FAQs

Direct Q&A mirrors how people search — each FAQ is one potential AI answer.

"What's the difference between a ratchet strap & cam buckle strap?"



2. Comparison Tables & Charts

Side-by-side data is gold for AI.

Compare drills by price, weight, and battery life.



3. How-To Guides

Clear, numbered steps are easy for AI to quote or summarize.

"How to install a deadbolt in 5 steps."



4. Glossaries & Definitions

AI frequently pulls short, clear definitions.

"What does ANSI Grade 1 mean?"



5. Checklists

Bullet points = instant citations.

"Before towing a trailer: check hitch, chains, lights, tires."



6. Statistics Pages & Data Hubs

AI thrives on numbers and explicit stats.

"72% of homeowners trust reviews more than ads."



7. Best-Of Lists & Product Comparisons

"Best cordless drills for beginners" or "Deadbolt vs Smart Lock" are AI favorites.

Patagonia dominates sustainable fashion visibility by appearing in nearly every "best of" roundup.



8. Reviews & Ratings

AI listens to what customers say, not just what brands publish.

Garmin's visibility skyrockets because it's cited across Amazon, Best Buy, and Reddit.



9. Support Pages & Forums

Support content doubles as user-generated Q&A.

Apple's support threads are heavily cited in Google's AI Overviews.



10. Case Studies & Examples

Real results build trust and authority.

"A Florida contractor cut install time by 30%."



11. Quick Tips & Callouts

Snackable "Pro Tips" and "Did You Know?" boxes make perfect AI soundbites.



12. Templates & Examples

Repeat structures help AI share practical takeaways.

"Sample maintenance checklist for commercial locks."

It's not just what you write — it's how you structure it. AI assistants prefer content that looks like a ready-made answer: short, scannable, and easy to quote.

According to SEMrush's 2025 *AI Visibility Index*, the brands dominating AI visibility—like Garmin, Patagonia, and Capital One—aren't winning just because of name recognition. They're winning because their content shows up in **listicles, reviews, FAQs, and community posts** that AI models love to reference.



The Big Takeaway

Don't just write blog posts. Think in formats that answer, compare, explain, and simplify. These structures make your content "liftable" by AI — and your brand the one quoted in the answer box.

The future of content isn't just readable — it's reusable.

6. Building Trust and Authority

AI is trained to value credibility. Just like people, it doesn't want to rely on one source — it cross-checks. That means your website alone isn't enough.

From Google's E-E-A-T to AI's Expanded Trust Test

If you're familiar with Google's E-E-A-T (Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness, Trustworthiness), you already know what search engines reward. AI follows the same logic — but with an extra layer. It doesn't just read your site; it checks what the internet says about you.

Experience & Expertise:

Proven knowledge on your site — author bios, product FAQs, detailed documentation.

Authoritativeness: Recognition from others — media mentions, reviews, and "Best Of" lists.

Trustworthiness: Verified reviews, transparent pricing, and consistency across channels.

In short: AI doesn't just check your receipts — it asks around.

Two Sides of Trust



First-Party Trust Signals (on your site):

- Author bylines with bios and credentials
- Transparent pricing and product info
- Support pages in plain, human language
- Consistent tone and branding across platforms



Third-Party Trust Signals (beyond your site):

- Reviews and testimonials on retailer or marketplace sites
- Influencer UGC showing products in real-life use
- Mentions in credible media or industry publications
- Inclusion in "Best Of" lists, forums, and comparison articles across platforms

Why It Matters

SEMrush's 2025 *AI Visibility Index* found that brands like Capital One dominate AI visibility not just because of SEO, but because they're cited across trusted third-party sources — news, listicles, and verified reviews. The good news? You don't need a Fortune 500 budget to earn trust. AI favors evidence over hype. Clear specs, authentic reviews, and transparent FAQs often matter more than big ad campaigns.

First-Party vs. Third-Party Trust

First-Party (Your Site)

- Author bios & credentials
- Transparent pricing & info
- FAQs & how-to guides
- Support pages in plain language
- Consistent brand voice

Third-Party (The Internet's View)

- Reviews on Amazon, Home Depot, Best Buy
- Influencer UGC and social chatter
- Mentions in media and industry pubs
- Inclusion in "Best Of" lists and forums
- Positive discussions on Reddit & YouTube

Quick Takeaway

You need both. One proves what you say; the other proves people believe it.

AI doesn't just check your receipts — it asks around.

7. Giving AI Context with Structure

AI doesn't just want content — it wants context. A person can read your product page and instantly understand what you mean. A machine needs clues — extra labels that explain what is on the page, what type of content it is, and why it matters.

That's where structured data comes in. These behind-the-scenes elements act like a translation layer between your website and AI models, turning your information into something machines can easily read, reference, and trust.

The Building Blocks of Structure

Schema Markup: Bits of code that label your content for machines (e.g., "this is a product," "this is a review," "this is an FAQ").

Metadata: Page titles and descriptions that show up in search results.

Alt Text: Short image descriptions that help both AI and accessibility tools understand visuals.

Open Graph Tags: Code that controls how your page displays when shared on social media.

Internal Linking: Connecting related topics to show depth and relevance.

Why Structure Matters for AI Search

Without structure, your site is like a book without a table of contents — people might find what they need, but AI won't. AI tools use structured elements to:

- **Pull FAQs directly into answer boxes.**
- **Compare products by price, features, and reviews.**
- **Verify which page is the "official" source.**
- **Decide which stat, quote, or review is most credible to cite**

Real World Example

Apple's support pages are a masterclass in structure. They're not flashy, but they're meticulously organized — FAQs, step-by-steps, alt-tagged images, and user-generated forums. SEMrush found they're among the most-cited pages in Google AI Mode because machines can easily "parse" them.

Where TLG Helps

We translate tech jargon into action items. From adding schema to FAQs, to writing accurate alt text, to building internal link hubs — we make your site easier for both humans and AI to understand.

Schema vs. Metadata vs. Alt Text — What's the Difference?



Schema

What it Does:
Labels your content for machines

"Product with a \$14.99 price and 2-year warranty."



Metadata

What it Does:
Creates the preview in search results

Title: "Best Cordless Drill for DIYers"



Alt Text

What it Does:
Describes images for AI and accessibility

"2-inch solid brass padlock with hardened steel shackle."

Schema is for machines, metadata is for search engines, and alt text is for images. Together, they make content crystal clear to AI.

8. Freshness: The Forgotten Ranking System

You wouldn't leave last year's holiday signage up in March. Your website deserves the same upkeep. Freshness isn't new — Google has used it as a ranking signal for years. But in the age of AI search, it's more important than ever. Why? Because AI favors content that feels current, credible, and alive. When you see a blog post from 2017, do you trust it as much as one updated last month? Neither does AI.

Why Freshness Matters

Signals relevance: AI wants to deliver answers that are still accurate today.

Prevents outdated citations: If your "Top Tools for 2020" post is still live, don't expect it to rank in 2025.

Shows activity: Updated content tells AI (and your audience) your brand is engaged, not dormant.

Fresh content signals active brands. Outdated content signals forgotten ones.

What "Fresh" Looks Like in Practice

Timestamps: Show when content was last updated.

Annual refreshes: Revisit cornerstone pages once a year (even small tweaks matter).

New FAQs: Keep up with evolving customer questions.

Rotate case studies: Feature new wins or updated results.

Real World Example

News sites like *The New York Times* and *TechCrunch* dominate AI visibility not just because of authority, but because their content is constantly refreshed. Even evergreen guides like "How to Save for Retirement" are updated with new data and examples.

Brands can borrow that playbook: update your "Top Products" lists, buying guides, or tutorials annually. AI rewards recency signals — even if the core message hasn't changed much.

Evergreen vs. Fresh Content — What's the Difference?



Evergreen Content

Always relevant and long-lasting

"How to Install a Deadbolt."



Fresh Content

Updated regularly or tied to time-sensitive trends

"The Best Door Hardware for 2026"

Evergreen builds your foundation. Fresh signals to AI that you're active, current, and trustworthy. You need both.

9. Be Quotable: Writing for AI Citations

AI doesn't summarize your whole page — it grabs the best lines. That means your job isn't just to write great content. It's to make your content quotable. AI looks for concise, factual, self-contained sentences it can lift, cite, and share as ready-made answers. If you bury your insights in fluff, you'll never get the pull quote.

What Makes Something Quotable

Lead with facts or outcomes:

"The Brinks 2-inch Solid Brass Padlock features a hardened steel shackle and sells for under \$15."

Use numbers and specifics:

"72% of homeowners trust reviews more than ads."

Attribute expertise:

"According to The Licursi Group's 2025 Influencer Benchmark Report, creator content drives 4x higher engagement."

Avoid marketing fluff:

✗ "Our padlocks deliver ultimate protection."

✓ "Our padlocks use a hardened steel shackle tested to 5,000 pounds of pull force."

Where to Add Quotable Lines

Product pages: Add short specs or "Did You Know?" callouts.

Blog posts: Use bold stats or takeaway boxes that stand alone.

Press releases: Include clear results or measurable proof points.

Case studies: Highlight the outcome before the story.

Each of these gives AI something to grab — and gives your brand a voice in the conversation.

Real World Example

When *Bankrate* publishes articles, each section ends with a clear, concise statement — often a stat or quote that AI can cite directly. That structure is why *Bankrate* dominates financial AI summaries. You don't have to be *Bankrate* to do this. You just have to **make your facts easy to find, easy to quote, and easy to trust.**



If it fits on a sticky note, it's most likely quotable.

10. Measuring Success in ASO

Old SEO Metrics vs. New ASO Signals

✓ Old SEO Metrics	✓ What They Measured	✓ New ASO Signals	✓ What They Reveal
1. Organic Traffic	1. Clicks from search results	1. Mentions in AI Answers	1. How often your brand is cited by AI models
2. Backlinks	2. External links to your site	2. Referral Traffic from AI Tools	2. Visits originating from AI platforms or summaries
3. Bounce Rate/Dwell Time	3. Engagement on your site	3. Share of Voice in Reviews/Forums	3. How often people talk about your brand
4. Keyword Rankings	4. Where you appear in Google results	4. Freshness & Citable Snippets	4. How often your content is quoted or summarized

Real World Example

Bankrate continues to dominate AI visibility because it feeds models fresh, factual content that's structured and sourced. Each article includes:

- **Data-backed stats**
- **Clear citations**
- **Regular updates**

It's not a fluke — it's a formula:
Consistency + Credibility + Clarity = AI Visibility.

“AI doesn't care how big your site is — only how relevant, trusted, and quotable it feels.”

You can't manage what you don't measure — but AI visibility requires a new kind of scorecard. Traditional SEO tracked traffic, backlinks, and keyword rankings. But AI search introduces new signals of visibility — some you can measure directly, others you'll need to watch for patterns and clues. Think of ASO as early-stage SEO. Tracking isn't perfect yet, but consistency pays off.

What to Track Now

AI Mentions: Monitor brand references in AI summaries and "Overview" boxes.

Review Growth: Track volume and recency of verified reviews — they boost credibility signals.

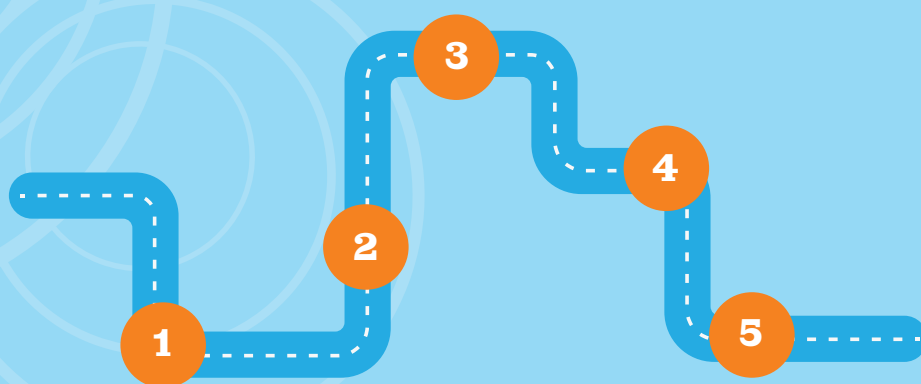
Referral Traffic: Look for spikes from AI tools, content aggregators, or quote-heavy referral sources.

Content Recency: Audit key pages quarterly to ensure data and examples stay current.

Social + Forum Mentions: Log mentions from Reddit, YouTube, and niche communities — AI scrapes those first.

11. Next Steps for Brands

Your Roadmap



1. Audit Your Site

Start with the basics — speed, structure, schema, and clarity. If AI can't read it, it can't cite it.



2. Rewrite for Conversation

Ditch keyword-stuffing. Write the way your customers talk. Questions in, answers out.



3. Diversify Content Formats

Add FAQs, how-tos, reviews, and comparisons — the content AI loves most.



4. Build Trust

Combine on-site proof (bios, specs, support pages) with off-site validation (reviews, UGC, media mentions).



5. Stay Fresh

Update cornerstone content, refresh stats, and add new insights regularly. AI rewards recency and consistency.



AI search isn't coming. It's already here. The question is: will your brand be part of the answer?

Turning Knowledge Into Visibility

AI search isn't coming — it's here. Every brand now competes not just for clicks, but for citations. The question is no longer *"How do we rank?"* It's *"How do we become the source AI trusts enough to quote?"*

The Big Takeaway

You don't need to rebuild your entire marketing strategy. You just need to make sure the work you're already doing — content, influencer programs, reviews, media — speaks the same language AI does. **Brands that adapt early define the categories everyone else chases. Those that wait simply won't be seen.**

Where The Licursi Group Fits In

The Licursi Group helps brands translate this playbook into action — optimizing the content, reviews, and influencer assets you already have so AI can find, trust, and cite them. We make visibility measurable again.



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