

Launching Business ~ Creating Jobs





Enterprise Northern Ireland and the Regional Start Initiative Launching Business - ~ *Creating Jobs*

Invest Northern Ireland's Regional Start Initiative, the national business start-up initiative for Northern Ireland, has been delivered by the incumbent delivery agency, Enterprise Northern Ireland and the Local Enterprise Agency network since the programme's inception in October 2012. Enterprise Northern Ireland and the organisation's regional network of delivery partners have therefore played a key role in helping thousands of would-be business owners to develop business plans and start new enterprises through the provision of a range of guidance, support, training and business clinics to develop and grow businesses. Enterprise Northern Ireland and the Local Enterprise Agency network firmly believe that the main benefits and strengths of the current Regional Start programme derive from its national nature – that the same level and quality of provision, support and guidance is offered across Northern Ireland.

Enterprise Northern Ireland was also delivery partner for the earlier versions of Regional Start. From 2002-2009, Enterprise Northern Ireland managed the Start a Business Programme, dealing with almost 60,000 enquiries from aspirant business owners; and from 2009-2011, managed the Enterprise Development Programme, which helped over 7,000 people start their own business.

This demonstrates the excellent track record of Enterprise Northern Ireland and the Local Enterprise Agency network in providing thousands of entrepreneurs and small business owners with the advice, information and support to make their dreams of business ownership a reality, and illustrates their importance in contributing to enterprise development and economic growth.





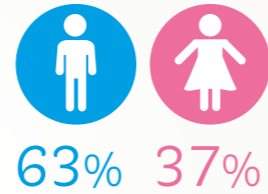
About Enterprise Northern Ireland

Enterprise Northern Ireland is the representative body for the network of Local Enterprise Agencies across Northern Ireland which has delivered the following outputs in a two year period between October 2012 when the Programme commenced and October 2014:

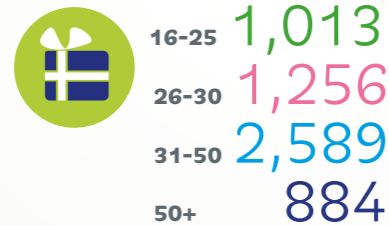
Number of Business Plans



Male/Female Split



Age Demographics



Emerging Sectors

Leisure & Personal Services
Professional Services
Retail
Creative Industries
Hospitality & Tourism

Direct Referrals to Invest NI



Estimated Staff Employed



Enterprise Northern Ireland also represents the thousands of small businesses who have, through their participation in Enterprise Northern Ireland-managed programmes, gone on to make a valuable contribution to the local economy in terms of new venture creation, job creation and wealth generation. We are therefore at the heart of a dynamic, high profile network, and are a major player in the delivery of small business support interventions in terms of facilitating loans to small businesses, creating thousands of new businesses and providing managed workspace accommodation via our network of Local Enterprise Agencies. Further, through the administration and management of specialist programmes,

Enterprise Northern Ireland has experience in successfully delivering incentives which help small businesses enter and succeed in the marketplace, such as training, business development assistance, mentoring programmes and financial assistance.

Enterprise Northern Ireland also has a strong lobbying and campaigning remit, working to influence policy and ensuring that the voice of the enterprise support sector is heard in debates, consultations and policy development processes. Enterprise Northern Ireland has a close working relationship with NI Executive Ministers and MLAs and is secretariat for the All Party Group on SMEs at Stormont.

We are...
at the heart of a dynamic, high profile network... a major player in the delivery of small business support



About Local Enterprise Agencies

Northern Ireland's Local Enterprise Agencies are a major regional asset and are an integral part of Northern Ireland's successful social economy.

Local Enterprise Agencies are locally-based not for profit companies, many of which are registered charities. All Local Enterprise Agencies deliver a suite of pre-start, start up and business development interventions (sometimes in association with local councils and further education colleges.) Each Local Enterprise Agency also provides flexible and low cost accommodation for local businesses and access to the Enterprise Northern Ireland Loan Funds. The facts are impressive. Local Enterprise Agencies operate from 40 branded points of presence across Northern Ireland. They employ almost 300 staff supported by around 300 voluntary directors. Collectively, Local Enterprise Agencies have over 2,000,000 square feet of workspace accommodation available for small businesses and provide accommodation for over 7,500 jobs across Northern Ireland.

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The Northern Ireland Economy

Northern Ireland faces greater challenges than most other parts of the UK in recovering from the global economic downturn. According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, an international study measuring the entrepreneurial activity of individuals, Northern Ireland has consistently had one of the lowest rates of early stage entrepreneurial activity compared to other UK regions, and is recovering from the recession at a much slower rate. This has made it much more difficult for local micro businesses and SMEs to access finance to assist business creation and growth.

Support for new business venturing has long been at the core of social and economic development strategies. Entrepreneurship and business start-up are recognised as key drivers in the development of society and the economy in terms of job creation, wealth generation and innovation, and have been fostered for their key role in increasing competition and economic growth. A dynamic small business

sector, and a culture of enterprise, are vitally important to the success and prosperity of the economy, and contribute to employment and competitiveness. Small businesses are, for instance, an important source of employment; they fulfil local consumer needs and are important elements within the supply chain which serves the requirements of larger businesses.

Government recognises that expansion of the private sector in Northern Ireland is crucial to efforts to rebuild and rebalance the economy by creating jobs, wealth and prosperity. The expansion of the private sector, in terms of increasing the number, size and competitiveness of businesses through a focus on export activity, is a key objective across all regions and industries. Entrepreneurial activity is therefore a key policy priority in the region to address the low level of business starts and to increase the quality and quantity of new business ventures, in order to stimulate economic growth.

Enterprise Northern Ireland & Regional Start: a successful approach

The key role played by Enterprise Northern Ireland and the network of Local Enterprise Agencies in helping boost business activity and rebuild the economy by promoting opportunities for self-employment has been acknowledged by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. Invest Northern Ireland also praised the work of Enterprise Northern Ireland and the Local Enterprise Agencies for delivering a coherent, comprehensive programme under Regional Start, contributing to the growth of the micro enterprise and SME sector.

Enterprise Northern Ireland, and its network of Local Enterprise Agencies, has played a key role in expanding the private sector through the successful management and delivery of the Regional Start Initiative, and its predecessor start-up programmes. The programme is focused on encouraging aspirant entrepreneurs to produce a business plan as one of the key early steps of starting a business and moving into self-employment, as demonstrated:





- Regional Start Initiative: in the 24 months since the Programme's inception in October 2012, 6,565 high quality business plans were achieved through the Enterprise Northern Ireland network of Local Enterprise Agencies, resulting in around 5,000 jobs promoted.
- Enterprise Development Programme (2009-2011): over 7,000 business plans were achieved resulting in around 5,000 new business starts
- Start a Business programme (2002-2009): there were over 17,000 new business start-ups during this period.

These statistics demonstrate the vast contribution that Enterprise Northern Ireland and its network of Local Enterprise Agencies have made in providing focused and innovative advisory and training support to individuals across the region, in order to raise the overall number and quality of business starts. The production of high quality business plans, as delivered through the Enterprise Northern Ireland LEA network, is recognised as an important first step in the start-

up process, as a business plan helps crystallise ideas and goals, and sets a roadmap for the direction of the business.

Enterprise Northern Ireland's achievements in boosting business activity are best demonstrated by the following success stories, which represent the vibrant and dynamic nature of start-ups across the new District Council areas. Each new business profiled started with the support of the Enterprise Northern Ireland network of Local Enterprise Agencies and the Regional Start Initiative.

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Plant & Play Wildlife Garden: Ards & North Down District Council Vikki Sows the Seeds of Success

It's only been a matter of months since local zoologist and mother, Vikki Bustard, opened Plant & Play Wildlife Garden in Bangor, County Down and the shoots of success are already evident as schools and families flock to the garden to plant and play.

Having availed of Invest Northern Ireland's Regional Start Initiative, Vikki developed a robust business plan along with her business advisor at her Local Enterprise Agency, North Down Development Organisation. This plan helped to shape her idea and to secure funding from ENI Start Up Loans to develop the gardens and indoor areas.

The educational wildlife garden teaches children about seasonal fruit and vegetables, and hosts horticultural and conservation workshops, school visits and birthday parties – Vikki's favourite part of the business is *"hosting children's birthday parties and getting the school groups involved in all kinds of quirky crafts, seeing them get their hands mucky and really enjoying themselves"*.

There is also an on-site shop, where customers can purchase gardening related items including books, seasonal plants and vegetables, as well as made-to-order unique hand carved garden furniture. Vikki also offers wildlife garden design and creation services as well as the planting and maintenance of living willow fencing and domes.

Vikki acknowledges that *"none of this would have been possible without the Regional Start Initiative. I wouldn't have had a clue where to start, what funding was available to me and how to check if the business would actually be viable. Luckily I contacted Invest Northern Ireland who referred me to North Down Development Organisation to get my business plan developed. This document then allowed me to secure funding to get the business up and running"*.

Having availed of an Enterprise Northern Ireland Start Up Loan, Vikki was nominated for a Start Up Loans Regional Award in November 2014, which she went on to win. Attending a high profile awards ceremony at City Hall in London, Vikki received her award and a cheque for £500.

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Kimmi's Quilts: Belfast City Council

Kimmi's got it covered...

An entrepreneur from Belfast has invented a unique product of a quilt with fleece on one side and cotton on the other side. The quilts can be flipped over, personalised and come in various sizes and design. Kim Doherty, owner of Kimmi's Quilts, took her initial idea to Work West Enterprise Agency in Belfast. With the help of Invest Northern Ireland's Regional Start Initiative, Kim was able to develop the idea into a viable business and find out how to patent her product and protect her quilt design.

"Before taking part in the Regional Start Initiative I was completely in the dark about how to go about protecting the quilt design, but thankfully with the help of my business advisor at Work West Enterprise Agency, I was able to learn about the process and develop my business plan, which was pivotal in helping me access much needed finance from ENI Start Up Loans", said Kim.

Kim continues, "Product development is difficult and takes a lot of patience, but the satisfaction that you get from developing the prototypes and eventually seeing the final product is fantastic. There is so much help and support out there, from Invest Northern Ireland, the Local Enterprise Agencies and ENI Start Up Loans. I would encourage anyone who has that light bulb moment to go along to their Local Enterprise Agency and check out the viability of their idea".

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Independent Agency: Antrim & Newtownabbey District Council Lights, Camera... Business

Budding entrepreneur Philip Young, from County Antrim, used being made redundant to his advantage, by signing up for Invest Northern Ireland's Regional Start Initiative.

"My ambition was always to be self-employed and through Invest Northern Ireland's Regional Start Initiative I got the opportunity to explore the idea further. The current climate and the lack of jobs available fundamentally encouraged me to look at going into business. I focused on my passion for acting, and created an independent actors agency. The positive statistics and information discovered through the market research that I carried out with my business advisor at Antrim Enterprise Agency gave me the confidence to start up on my own. The research demonstrated the overall success of Northern Ireland as a prime location for films, advertisements and TV series."

Philip credits the Regional Start Initiative with aiding him in his entrepreneurial dream, saying: *"Invest Northern Ireland's Regional Start Initiative was a huge support and gave me the confidence to explore my business idea. It allowed me tackle my fear of developing a business plan, managing accounts and*

all the legalities involved in starting up a business".

Philip is already reaping the rewards of his participation in the Initiative, as he has managed to find actors for some very large budget productions being filmed here in Northern Ireland.

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Green Gold Equine: Fermanagh & Omagh District Council For the love of horses...

Having bred horses for 18 years to Olympic standards, Alan Robertson was fully aware of the common ailments suffered by horses, and this experience of the equine industry enabled Alan to develop a range of horse supplements which he is now successfully selling all over Europe.

Alan initially required information on legislation involved with developing health supplements for horses and so turned to his Local Enterprise Agency – Fermanagh Enterprises – for support and guidance. Through Invest Northern Ireland’s Regional Start Initiative, Alan devised a business plan that helped him discover that there was a market for the products that he had developed, and to establish a viable business.

Fermanagh Enterprises were also able to help Alan investigate all legal and product testing requirements so that no stone was left unturned.

“My business advisor at Fermanagh Enterprises assisted me with the development of my business plan in order for me to see my business model clearly and so I knew exactly what I had to do to make the business work”, explains Alan.

Green Gold Equine horse supplements can be given to horses for a range of reasons including gastric ulcers, bone density issues and anti-inflammatory issues. They may be used for preventative measures as well as for the treatment of current ailments.

“The priority for Green Gold Equine over the next year is to link up with suppliers across the world, increase sales and build an excellent reputation for the business and its supplements within the equine industry”, Alan explains.

My business advisor at Fermanagh Enterprises assisted me with the development of my business plan... so I knew exactly what I had to do to make the business work

Walled City Brewery: Derry City & Strabane District Council Toasting success...

After working as a master brewer with Diageo for 11 years, James Huey decided it was time to use his experience to set up his very own craft brewery and restaurant, ‘The Walled City Brewery’.

James turned to Invest Northern Ireland for assistance and was promptly signed up for the Regional Start Initiative through his Local Enterprise Agency, Enterprise North West, to help make his dream a reality. Participating on the programme, James was able to develop a business plan with the support of his business advisor, and this helped to set James off on his entrepreneurial journey.

The business plan was used to secure premises and to help get production moving forward at Derry/Londonderry’s Ebrington Complex through Ilex, a location choice which James explains *“... is perfectly aligned with the plan to develop Ebrington into a world-class cultural and innovation hub.”*

James has his sights set high for the business, explaining: *“The brewery will craft premium quality, flavoursome, innovative beers, and build on the thrilling craft beer revolution that is currently sweeping the UK and Ireland”.* James has also announced that he will be recruiting ten members of staff to work at his brewery, helping the business contribute to employment, creative and economic growth and tourism in the area.





Samantha Livingstone has set up her own PR business, with offices in Lisburn and Belfast, offering media related services including PR, event management, digital marketing, brand development, design and advertising.

Getting business advice was easy thanks to the help and support she received by taking part in Invest Northern Ireland's Regional Start Initiative. She was able to complete a comprehensive business plan with the support of her Local Enterprise Agency, Lisburn Enterprise Organisation, helping her to set the wheels in motion.

Rumour Mill PR is known for big ideas, for smart, resourceful campaigns and for delivering game-changing results. They don't just represent company brands, they breathe life into them.

Even though the proprietor of Rumour Mill PR is an expert in her field, Samantha admits that when she started out, she lacked certain business skills which were essential in the daily

Rumour Mill PR: Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council Did you hear...?

operation of her business, so that's when she decided to register for the Regional Start Initiative.

"The Regional Start Initiative was vital in helping me acquire the business skills that would allow me to develop my business model. Initially I didn't have a clue about book keeping, finance, projecting sales or even completing my tax return, but my business advisor at Lisburn Enterprise Organisation showed me everything I needed to know," explains Samantha.

Rumour Mill PR is a full-service communications firm with core competencies in all aspects of public relations. They have a range of clients on their books from right across Northern Ireland and have created some amazing campaigns.

Só Popcorn: Mid Ulster District Council It's Só Popcorn

Declan McBride, a butcher by trade, has taken the bull by the horns and opted for an altogether different career manufacturing popcorn under the brand of 'Pop Notch!' Taking part in Invest Northern Ireland's Regional Start Initiative, Declan consolidated his idea and developed a business plan which was to be his launch pad to success.

Declan started out back in August 2013 manufacturing luxury popcorn from his home in Straw, Draperstown, but in the last few months Declan set up premises at Workspace Enterprises Ltd in Draperstown. He is now producing 2,000 bags per week of flavoured popcorn, which is sold through distributors to high profile retailers such as the Odyssey, Belfast.

"Starting a manufacturing business during the economic downturn was daunting," explains Declan, *"but having developed a successful business when times are tough, I would encourage others to take the plunge and follow their dream. Invest Northern Ireland's Regional Start Initiative really helped me to focus on developing my product range, how to identify and segment my customers and how to effectively market to them".*

From Cheese and Bacon, Chilli Coriander and Coconut and Lime to sweet temptations such as Double Butter and Chocolate and Marshmallow, 'Pop Notch' has a flavour to tickle every taste bud. And according to proprietor Declan, a range of new and innovative popcorn products are on the way!



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Danann Crafts: Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon District Council Crafters Can with Danann

With more and more people becoming interested in the crafting traditions of the past, such as knitting, sewing, woodwork and jewellery making, Danann Crafts sought help from Invest Northern Ireland's Regional Start Initiative to turn their business selling crafts from market stalls into an online e-commerce website. They were directed to Craigavon Industrial Development Organisation Ltd for help developing a comprehensive business plan as the first step in developing their successful online retail marketplace.

Sinead and Peadar McMahon, proprietors of Danann Crafts, created a website which allows Irish artists and crafters to sell their items online with minimal efforts and without having to worry about maintaining their own website. The website offers a wide range of craft items from handmade body pampering products to bespoke ceramics and jewellery.

Sinead explains, "We were worried about ploughing our time and efforts into a business venture when we didn't really know if we would have any customers. Through the Regional Start Initiative, we received help and advice on how to identify our customer base, and our dedicated business advisor showed us how to conduct appropriate market research which confirmed that there actually was a market for our service in Northern Ireland".

Through the Regional Start Initiative, we received help and advice on how to identify our customer base

Huge Rugby: Mid and East Antrim Council Crouch, Touch, Pause, Engage...

Having been a keen rugby player for 13 years, Jonathan Small engaged with his Local Enterprise Agency to help him develop his rugby related business idea, a retail sports shop that would provide a range of sports items, particularly clothing for rugby players, rugby supporters and the casual sports enthusiast.

Jonathan signed up for Invest Northern Ireland's Regional Start Initiative for help with turning his love of rugby into a business and now operates 'Huge Rugby Ltd' from premises on Church Street in Ballymena as well as via an online website.

The Regional Start Initiative helped Jonathan to plan his course of action for starting the business, carry out relevant market research into the viability of the business idea and ultimately helped him consolidate all this information into a well-structured business plan and financial forecasts.

"Working with Ballymena Business Centre, everything was clearly explained to me and the advice given helped to shape how I would run the business. My business adviser made me aware of the pros and cons of running a business from high street premises and from an e-commerce website," explains Jonathan.

As the popularity of both national and international rugby continues to grow, so is Jonathan's determination to expand the business and to tackle anything that gets in his way!

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**Room2Race:
Causeway Coast & Glens District Council**
Racing towards success

Starting a business can be a challenge, but if you have the right amount of experience and support, success may not be far away, as Ballymoney estate agent, Colin McAleese, has found out.

Encouraged by family, friends and his Local Enterprise Agency, Colin signed up for Invest Northern Ireland's Regional Start Initiative, to get help to turn a business idea into reality, and now runs his business, Room2Race, from premises at the Acorn Business Centre in Ballymoney.

The Regional Start Initiative helped Colin to plan the course of action for starting his racing simulator business, conduct market research into the viability of the business idea and ultimately helped Colin to consolidate all this information into a well-

structured business plan and financial forecast. The business plan was then used to secure funding through the Enterprise Northern Ireland Loan Fund to help Colin fit out the premises and to purchase equipment including simulator pods.

"I had been to other Room2Race centres a few times and had an absolute ball with my friends racing against each other on these virtual race simulators. I felt it was such a good idea, but didn't quite know how to get my business started." Colin explains. The 'Go for It' advertisements spurred Colin into action, who added, *"I am so glad that I signed up to the Regional Start Initiative because if I hadn't, I would still be wondering about my idea today. The business has been up and running for over a year now and is doing better than I ever imagined. I think this is because the Regional Start Initiative encouraged me to think about all aspects of the business and to think about the potential pitfalls ahead, so I was prepared for them"*.

**Katchup:
Newry, Mourne & Down District Council**
Keep your eye on the ball...

After many years of participating in various sports, Anthony Flanagan from Newry used his wealth of knowledge and experience to become involved in sports coaching. Always looking to improve and develop training methods, he identified a need for a device that would achieve maximum aerial potential and to perfect motor, plyometric and key skills for both children and adults, used in the vast majority of ball sports.

As a result of scanning the markets for such a device he was left somewhat disappointed that he couldn't locate anything of this nature. In frustration, Anthony set about designing his own ball skills training device. After many hours of trials and testing, Anthony took his idea to Invest Northern Ireland, who referred him to the Regional Start Initiative.

Through his Local Enterprise Agency, Newry and Mourne Enterprise, a business advisor helped Anthony produce a business plan.

"The support and encouragement I received was invaluable" stated Anthony. *"The programme gave me an insight and the inspiration to take my idea to a new*

level enabling me to start my own business.

"My invention solves many of the concomitant problems and difficulties associated with the development of ball skills in the vast majority of ball sports. It helps coaches to identify areas for development and improvement".

Anthony has had positive feedback from Ulster University's Sports and Science Department, and a number of coaches and clubs, including Tyrone's senior county coach Fergal McCann. Anthony has been working with Ulster University to establish the potential to facilitate add-ons, including a computerised data capture device to improve the product further. It is hoped that this additional functionality will help attract business from a wider variety of customers. Anthony's priority is to now produce a well branded and package model that can be used at home by players.





The Way Forward

The transfer of some economic development responsibilities from Invest Northern Ireland to district councils arising from local government reforms represents an exciting opportunity in the delivery of small business support across Northern Ireland.

Since its inception in October 2012, the Regional Start Initiative has been delivered on a truly comprehensive, regional, basis, with no level of fragmentation in service delivery provision. Central management and administrative co-ordination by Enterprise Northern Ireland means that those interested in starting a business, regardless of geographic location, are provided with the same expert guidance and smart solutions to setting up their own business. Would-be business owners across the entire region receive the same high quality service from their Local Enterprise Agency. There is no post-code lottery in terms of accessing high-quality support. There is consistency in what is delivered in terms of programme content, workshops, access to mentoring and business planning sessions.

The Regional Start Initiative and predecessor start-up programmes are underpinned by Invest Northern Ireland-managed and funded centralised functions, and Invest Northern Ireland and Enterprise Northern Ireland management information systems. These were:

- National advertising campaign using the “Go for It” brand in TV, radio, print and online advertising. This drives significant volume to the programmes. This advertising is supported by a dedicated website (www.goforitni.com) and 0800 telephone number. The call centre team manages enquiries and directs them to the appointed contractors, ie. Enterprise Northern Ireland and the Local Enterprise Agencies;
- An Invest Northern Ireland Management Information System (under SABp and EDP) with Enterprise Northern Ireland providing an equivalent under RSI;

- Grant support to people starting a business. This ranged from universal grant provision under SABp, no grant provision under EDP and selective grant provision (NRA and NEET) under RSI;
- A single contract management point with dedicated staff who manage and quality assure programme delivery as well as ensuring payments to contractors are made on a timely basis.

Enterprise Northern Ireland believes these elements are crucial to support any new business start-up programme. It is difficult to see how existing volumes could be achieved by any future contractor without these elements in place.

Regional Start is currently producing 3,400 business plans per annum and using the current Invest Northern Ireland multiplier, is promoting around 2,500 jobs per annum, which contributes significantly to overall jobs targets contained within the Programme for Government.

Enterprise Northern Ireland suggests that the way forward crucially lies in ensuring that any successor to the Regional Start Initiative is likewise delivered coherently and fully structured, on a national basis. In terms of programme detail, Enterprise Northern Ireland believes business plans are an essential component. They are an important first step in the start-up process and help would-be business owners crystallise their ideas. They are also important for those seeking financial support as they convey their business vision to potential investors. Assistance with business plan development should still be available under future programmes. The key for a new Northern Ireland business start-up programme is flexibility – that those seeking assistance are offered access to generic business skills, mentoring assistance, business plan or financial planning depending on their individual need. This will ensure that outcomes are achieved, as people will receive the support they need.





Enterprise Northern Ireland remains committed to encouraging and supporting new business formation and supporting the growth of businesses in order to achieve a vibrant economy and improve economic competitiveness.

Enterprise Northern Ireland and the Local Enterprise Agency network welcome the opportunity to work closely with all new District Councils in the delivery of enterprise and entrepreneurship interventions.





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