

# Cloud Backup: Getting Started



How to create a successful business model with  
Managed Backup Services.

A Business Whitepaper  
by Stefan Utzinger, NovaStor CEO (July 2010)



# Executive Summary

Cloud computing promises great potential. Backup as a Service (including online backup, Storage as a Service and Managed Backup Services) is recommended to get started in the Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) business. Rapid growth in data, huge demand, rising bandwidths and available technologies are prompting more and more companies to take a closer look at outsourcing their backup infrastructure. But not every business model leads to success. This white paper is designed to help you leave standard solutions behind and develop your own individual recipe for success.

## Further information

To supplement this, NovaStor provides background information on markets and their dynamics in its white paper entitled “Managed Services: How to Adapt to the Channel Model of the Future”. See the white paper entitled “Online Backup Survival Guide” for more information about the motivation and needs of various customer groups.

# Introduction

Various studies forecast that backup as a service will see rapid growth over the coming years. IDC, for example, expects a fivefold increase by 2012.

There are already a host of firms offering online backup as a service. A monthly data growth of one to two percent and regular monthly revenues ensure that these services are highly appealing to providers.

But to survive in the market, it is not enough for providers to simply offer an IT service; they must develop and pursue their own recipes for success. The magic formula is in the differentiation that emerges from clearly defined target groups and the provider's existing specialities. Taking this as our guide, small, locally oriented providers are advised to expand their online backup service to cater to on-location services, while national service providers could supplement their online data backup with other Software-as-a-Service offers such as Exchange Hosting.

It is no easy task to develop a successful business model. Frequently, service providers concentrate on selecting the right software and hardware while neglecting their individual and, ideally, distinctive profile. Because of this, the technology is often chosen before the business model is defined – even though the latter is an equally decisive factor behind success and should dictate the choice of hardware and software. Business customers, for example, require a different kind of technical infrastructure than one suited for private users.

In addition, the market is subject to constant change and rising demands made by end consumers. At the same time, a sizeable number of service providers still deploy their own developments that are packed with weaknesses and require regular investment in further development.



# Backup as a Service: Business Models

Both online backup and data backup as a managed service are portrayed in a variety of business models. These, in turn, must be divided and separated from related areas such as file sharing, collaboration and synchronization. They are ill-suited to professional backups and are not included in this document.<sup>1</sup>

## Data backup business models

As a general rule, data backup differentiates between the following business models (BC):

- BC1: Online backup for end consumers' desktops/laptops
- BC2: Online backup for business customers' desktops/laptops/servers
- BC3: Local and Online Backup as a Service for business customers
- BC4: Managed Backup Services

No matter which various technological requirements are placed on the single business models, attention must be paid above all to customer groupings, the required services, distribution and marketing.

### SLAs - the seal of quality

All the business models presented here are professional offers of data backup services. They require the definition of Service Level Agreements (SLAs) to ensure that providers give their customers a specified scope of service that includes service availability and data retrieval over a defined period of time. In this way, SLAs are quite distinct from what are known as "unlimited online backup services", which are offered at a small charge without guarantees or customer service.

The first business model, **Online backup for end consumers' desktops/laptops** (BC1), refers to the provision of standardized services to backup and restore data via the Internet.

The second business model, **Online backup for business customer's desktops/laptops/servers** (BC2), is similar to BC1 but focused on firms that want professional data backups. In this scenario, sophisticated SLAs can make a lot of sense.

What is characteristic about both business models (BC1 and BC2) is that customers are served in a highly standardized way that often involves a loose form of customer relationship.

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<sup>1</sup> Information is available from NovaStor, which compares professional data backup with services like File Sharing.

The other business models are far more individual and enriched by higher-quality services.

In the **Local and Online Backup as a Service for business customer (BC3)** model, the servers are located at the customer's computer centre. These may be more complex environments because the servers at the centre of operations may also integrate branch offices and mobile employees within the data protection concept. There, data is consolidated before being sent via the Internet (or WAN/LAN/VPN connection) to the computer centre of the managed service provider. In many cases the managed service provider takes over the complete administration and monitoring of customers' infrastructures.

**Managed Backup Services (BC4)** is a business model in which the mainframe is located in the managed service provider's computer centre, from where all data backup activities are managed, administered and controlled.

The next section demonstrates the business potential of each business model and their fundamental differences. The measures for helping companies to position their services and market them successfully are then described.

## Backup as a Service: Business Potential

Data Backup as a Service can be offered both as a core business and as part of a more extensive portfolio of offers. The other products in the portfolio need not be overly IT-related. For example, professional associations or other interest groups can offer their members Backup as a Service as an additional service in partnership with a technology partner.

Regardless of its other areas of activity, offering a backup service represents added value to the provider because it strengthens bonds to customers and generates regular earnings. To give you an impression of the sales and earnings potential of a backup service, we have drawn up an example calculation.

We show the income generated from Online Storage and/or Storage as a Service for the four business models defined above, and compare them to the investments needed in ongoing operations. Unique start-up investments and outgoings unconnected to actually running the service are not taken into account. Similarly, the calculation disregards traditional extra revenue generated by supplementary services and support.

The sometimes large differences between the business models is clear even in the basic calculation, and provides a relatively simple way of estimating when return on investment (ROI) is likely to occur and the financial investments that a provider would have to make.



**Table 1: Price/quantity structures**

Price examples	Parameter	BC1	BC2	BC3	BC4
<b>GB per workplace</b>	Overall data volume to back up	5	15	50	
<b>GB per server</b>	Overall data volume to back up		50	500	2.000
<b>Revenue per workplace</b>	monthly	\$5	\$20	\$50	
<b>Revenue per server</b>	monthly		\$100	\$1,000	\$4,000

**Table 2: Comparison of gross profit**

Average values for the various business models	BC1	BC2	BC3	BC4
<b>Customer base: Number of workplaces to back up</b>	5,000	1,000	1,000	0
<b>Customer base: Number of servers to back up</b>		100	100	50
<b>Total data quantities of all customers in GB</b>	25,000	20,000	100,000	100,000
<b>Service provider's (SP) total monthly revenue</b>	\$25,000	\$30,000	\$150,000	\$200,000
<b>SP's total revenue over a 3-year period</b>	\$900,000	\$1,080,000	\$5,400,000	\$7,200,000
<b>Storage production costs (3-year period)</b>	\$270,000	\$216,000	\$1,080,000	\$1,080,000
<b>Gross profit (3-year period)</b>	<b>\$630,000</b>	<b>\$864,000</b>	<b>\$4,320,000</b>	<b>\$6,120,000</b>

**Table 1** shows each business model with its average data quantities per workplace and server. Average monthly revenues per workplace and/or server are based on current market prices and average data quantities.

Based on the values in Table 1, **Table 2** outlines typical scenarios for each business model. Based on the number of workplaces and servers requiring backup in the various business models, it maps out the entire data quantities for all customers, the resulting revenues, the resulting costs (based on €0.30/GB for storage) and, finally, gross profits. Besides the monthly time period relevant for

calculating the charges in a month, the outlook for three years is also included, after which time profitability and a breakeven situation should have been achieved.

### **Complementary services promise in some cases substantial additional revenue**

Besides revenue solely generated by renting online storage, business models BC2, BC3 and BC4 in particular promise far greater revenue and profit potential by offering supplementary services for a fee.

To name just a few examples of these services:

- Installation assistance
- Centralised provision of updates and upgrades
- Technical support for end users or administrators
- Training, consulting on IT infrastructure and data availability planning

The large number of supplementary services makes backup as a service highly interesting not least when financial aspects in the sense of managed services are included in the equation. Plus, data backup services very often pave the way for follow-up projects.

#### **Do you need help designing your business model?**

To stay within the bounds of this white paper, we have not carried out detailed calculations nor have we drawn up a detailed business plan to consider various other factors (e.g. sales and marketing overheads).

Don't hesitate to contact us if you require information about the market, suggestions for your marketing or consulting on your positioning. NovaStor helps its partners in developing a suitable business model and drawing the business plans to go with it.

Contact us at [sales@novastor.com](mailto:sales@novastor.com) or on our website.

# Business Model and Business Development

Defining a business model and its practical implementations are complex processes. The next section shows you the steps involved in the five central aspects, each with a brief explanation.

## Defining your business model

Whether a company is already active in the Backup-as-a-Service business or a new firm is being set up to offer it, the following five aspects should be considered before embarking on actually planning the service.

### 1. Company history / Current business model

How do you currently earn your money? Find out with certainty where your strengths lie and keep this information in mind when planning your service offering. Define which role your online backup service should play within your current business model. Make sure that you have the right team to achieve success.

### 2. Existing customer relationships

Your regular customers represent your capital. Take care to follow up on past successes in nurturing existing customer relationships when developing the marketing strategy for your data backup service and offer it as a standard supplement to your current offering.

### 3. Computer centre quality

As outlined above, the quality of the computer centre you use must meet your customers' demands. If you are targeting private users (BC1), the (lower) cost of the service plays a greater role, but customers have to accept a greater number of outages or storage of their data with an external computer centre partner. If you offer a managed service (BC4) for companies, on the other hand, permanent availability should be guaranteed. In this case, redundant data backups could be the answer. In other words, the backed up customer data is stored at a second computer centre.

### 4. Available resources (staff/finances)

Draw up a solid financial plan that assumes realistic outlays and revenues. In contrast to sales of complete solutions for customer installation, it is your service customers' monthly fees that will pay out. As a result, your cash flow planning must be the subject of special attention.

In the same way as finances, the cost of staffing must also be planned with stability foremost. Large differences arise in upkeep and administrative overheads, for example when deploying an in-house development as an SaaS platform. The same is true if you opt for a system that promises limited or no support by the provider during your business hours, in your language or in your location.





## **5. Corporate strategy (staying focused)**

Use your data backup service to find new customers in your previous line of business and in this way raise monthly revenue from each existing customer. Approaching entirely new target groups will only pay off if you align your entire business to them and put up the necessary resources.

### **Five criteria central to successful business development**

While your business model serves as a guide and vision, developing your business will require concrete planning and implementation. The next section lists the five aspects of planning that quickly become an obstacle if they are not carefully and realistically considered beforehand.

#### **1. Creating a business, marketing and financial plan**

Establishing an online backup or data protection service requires not only the definition of a business model. The provider must also draw up a business plan for its service with set goals. With this as its basis, it can control whether the service and any business and distribution partners are meeting its expectations. The marketing plan ensures that your service becomes known in the market and that you can always give potential customers reasons to book it.

Finally, a data protection service requires solid financial planning to ensure it generates revenues over a certain period of time. On the one hand, financial planning takes into account the charges that you will bill your customers and, on the other, your investments in the service.

#### **2. Focusing on the right business model – Research**

The right service business model will not only be found in the provider's prior business. Further differentiation and limitations will be necessary if the sector or region already offers comparable services. Despite the frequent difficulty of gaining a full picture of the market, discussions with a few existing customers or the potential target group may already help to identify niches that can be approached.

#### **3. The critical selection of key partners**

The core competencies and central quality features of any data protection service are the hardware and software contained in it. Here, providers should use reliable partners who not only meet technological requirements, but strategic ones too. Besides providing fast, qualified and local support during the provider's business hours, the manufacturer's general readiness in assisting providers and their goals as best as possible also pays off over the long term. Rather than concentrating exclusively on technical support when making the selection, a lot also depends on whether partners are willing and able to help in marketing questions. A further key aspect is the partner's location. Software providers in particular should be based in a region with a sound legal system and strict data protection regulations.





#### 4. Provisioning marketing and distribution resources

Ask your technology partners for support in marketing and distribution. Serious providers will offer you assistance either free or for a consideration. This factor can be decisive, since the cost of acquiring new customers frequently exceeds actual operating costs by a large amount.

#### 5. Drawing up and complying with the SLA

As mentioned above, the SLAs are a decisive product element and a key positioning tool. You should therefore make certain that your SLA only makes promises that you can and are prepared to keep. SLAs can also be used as marketing tools or in classifying customer groups (e.g. for offering a premium service).

## Business Models: Setting Priorities

The following section lists key elements for a successful business model and their relative ratings. It is helpful in drawing up a business model and shifting the focus to planning activities.

1. Concrete sales arguments
2. Supplementary services
3. Business partners' service spectrum
4. Selection criteria for the SaaS platform

In making the right decision, the points should be gone over first with a view to the wishes and expectations of your target group and secondly to your company, your qualifications and your technical and staffing resources. The success of your service depends to a large degree on an offering that not only meets your customers' requirements, but that also suits your company.

### Explanation of tables

Columns BC1 to BC4 refer to the defined business models. Each row under these columns rates the named considerations with regard to their significance for the business model in question. "A+" signifies highest priority, "B" medium priority, and "C" no necessity for this point. "D" means that the point should be avoided altogether.

### 1. Sales arguments: Hitting your customers' sore spot

While the one continues to protect your data through manual copies, the other already operates a professional infrastructure to do this. A large number of small- and medium-sized companies actually have no organized data backup system in place. Define your target group. The following table will help you win over your customers with the right line of argumentation.



Argument	Explanation	BC1	BC2	BC3	BC4
Reliability/confidence (SLAs)	Service Level Agreements (SLAs) are fundamental contractual elements. They define which service you guarantee your customers. These include support response times, service availability and other factors. SLAs create transparency in prices and service, and give you the provider security in terms of customer requirements.	B	B	A+	A+
Total costs (TCO/ROI)	The total cost of ownership (TCO) extends from the pure cost of acquisition to all costs incurred in later use. Indications of a solution's total costs when serviced by the customer as opposed to a service represents a separate decision-making aid in the sales process.	B	A	A+	A+
Liability/contractual services	The precise definition of contractual services is a prerequisite to operating an IT service offering. These services are governed by the SLA. In the unlikely case that a legal dispute arises, the general terms and conditions of business determine which laws shall apply. There is an added advantage if the provider's and customer's place of jurisdiction are the same as it gives the customer legal certainty.	B	B	A	A+
Experience/reputation	Providers can underpin their claim to competency by pointing to their experience. This could be IT expertise, specialisation in storage or data protection, and above all particular knowledge of a sector. Your best selling point is the positive experiences your customers already have with your company.	C	B	A	A+
Service portfolio from one source	Each additional service provider that a customer uses incurs administrative overheads. The fewer service providers, the lower overheads for customers. By offering a data protection service, you offer them further services from one source – the more of them, the more appealing you will be.	C	C	A+	A+
Colleagues' recommendations	Satisfied customers are your best sales force. Depending on the target group, you can name reference customers on your website or offer a way of recommending your services to others as part of regular customer contact.	C	A	A+	A+
Technological platform	The SaaS platform as deployed represents a key competitive edge. Unlike in-house developments, products of specialized software produces offer many benefits by virtue of their widespread use and consistent further development. Other factors play other roles. For example, technology supplied by a local provider not only ensures greater understanding, but above all flawless manufacturer support.	B	A+	A+	A+

Argument	Explanation	BC1	BC2	BC3	BC4
Computer centre location	If your computer centre is located near the customer, availability will prove to be an advantage. Computer centres at a certain distance, however, have an additional advantage in the event of a regional natural catastrophe. But besides regional pros and cons, location plays an important role in data protection, too. In this respect, regional providers are clearly in the advantage.	B	B	A	A+
Simple operation	The user interface for the client software must be easy to operate and intuitive. Equally, the software must show immediately whether or not a backup was successful. Errors must always be brought to the user's attention.	A+	A+	B	C
Carefree data protection / Outsourcing	Many companies opt to outsource their data protection or even operation of their entire IT infrastructure to a specialized service provider, enabling them to fully concentrate on their core business. The move reduces their workloads, and they no longer have to factor in costs for energy, personnel, operating their own infrastructure, storage media and management and the like. It also saves time in clearing single or total system errors.	D	C	A+	A+

## 2. Services: Your customers and your profits will love these services

Contrary to what one might think, data protection is an emotional topic. Security, after all, is mostly a feeling, which is why you will find that your customers will not only gladly pay for your services, but will absolutely expect to be offered supplementary services. The fact is that private users with no IT knowledge would rather depend on a data protection system set up by an expert. Company IT heads require documentation, test results and evaluations to convince management of data availability. The following table will help you find the services that offer your customers perfect support.

Service	Explanation	BC1	BC2	BC3	BC4
Support hotline in national language	This is the first port of call for customers wanting to solve a problem. The hotline should be offered in the national language and be available at least during the regular office hours of your country.	A+	A+	A+	A+
On-site service	In addition to a phone service, you can also offer an on-site service for installations, disaster situations, training or complete management of customer infrastructures. This raises customer loyalty and lets you establish yourself as a regional service provider.	B	B	A+	C
Data protection concept	Especially for business models BC3 and BC4, the service provider must be able to provide a data protection concept tailored to the target group.	C	B	A+	A+

Service	Explanation	BC1	BC2	BC3	BC4
Customer portal	A customer portal can be used by customers to book service offers and manage them independently. This helps the service provider to serve customers with a high degree of automation, and gives customers full control over their booked services.	A+	A+	C	C
Target group-specific SLAs	Response times and quality of service play a major role in the SaaS market in ensuring long-term customer satisfaction.	B	B	A+	A+
Managed Services	There are numerous customer groups in the SME segment such as doctors, lawyers, barristers, architects etc. who require their IT infrastructures on site, but do not want to maintain and manage them themselves. This is a lucrative business in which the service provider can offer Managed Services as defined in the BC3 model. They are also offered in the enterprise segment. As a rule, Managed Services involve hosting and full management of complete systems in the service provider's computer centre (BC4).	D	C	A+	A+
Individual adaptations	Large companies especially usually have special requirements. Here, it is important that the software solution manufacturer is prepared to make individual adaptations. This special service offer gives the service provider an opportunity to gain customers.	D	D	A+	A
Professional Services	A further requirement of larger companies lies in integrating and installing software solutions in their existing IT environments. The service provider can offer additional Professional Services to achieve this but should ensure adequate support from the manufacturer when required.	D	B	A+	B
Pre-sales	Support you partners reselling your solutions in pre-sales activities too and acquire important end customers. The manufacturer should, in turn, be able to offer you the same service.	B	A	A+	A+
Delivery/installation of complete packages	To stand out from the competition in a customer project, you should be able to offer your customers complete solutions if they so require. Then, customers receive everything they need from one source. The complete offer could for example consist of your software solution along with the necessary hardware, installation and training.	B	A+	A+	B

### 3. Selecting partners: Identifying the right business partner

Selecting the right business partner is critical to the success of the entire business model, since performance, flexibility and the cost structure depend on it. The worst that can happen to you is

having a provider that considers the business relationship over once the bills have been paid. So check what your technology partners are actually offering. If all it consists of is functions, there is a good possibility that the provider will not offer you any further assistance. We therefore recommend making personal contact with other departments besides Sales during the evaluation phase.

At the same time, not all criteria are equally important to the various business models. Read on to find out where you can make savings and where you should brook no compromises.

### Selection criteria for your business partners

Selection criteria	Explanation	BC1	BC2	BC3	BC4
Focus on the business model	The business partner's focus should be squarely on the business model for which it offers a BaaS solution. Here, it is important to check that the business partner is not in competition and for example offers online backups in its own computer centre.	A+	A+	A+	A+
Local support and training	You need a BaaS software manufacturer whose core competence is directed to this business model and is available when you need help. In the event of data loss, it may prove decisive that your data is restored in an acceptably short space of time. Here, professional help is extremely important. You should therefore check that the manufacturer is located in the same time zone and can offer you local support in technical, sales and marketing matters. If the situation demands, the manufacturer should also be in a position to come to you at short notice.	B	A	A	A+
Local professional service	Your partner should be able to offer you Professional Services that can help you integrate the solutions in your infrastructure and during customer migrations.	B	A	A+	A+
Transparent price structure/licence model	It is crucial that the price and licence model is transparent to you and that it enables budget calculation over the longer term - without any unexpected costs arising through expanding or rescaling the solution.	A+	A+	A+	A+
Marketing support	You should choose a business partner that can help you in developing the appropriate business model and support you in your sales and marketing activities. There should also be opportunities to hold technical discussions with the corresponding partners.	A	A	A+	B

Selection criteria	Explanation	BC1	BC2	BC3	BC4
Storage experience and product line	The market changes very rapidly, and end customers' demands for new functions grow with each day. Many service providers still use in-house software solutions, leading to countless problems that need to be tackled and continual investment in research and development. In this case, we recommend concentrating on your core competence as a service provider and to look for a partner to provide the software solution you need; a partner that has the appropriate expertise and a proven track record in that field. Ideally, the partner will have a complete product range covering all required business scenarios.	A	A+	A+	A+
No competition	It is important to check that the partner is not in competition with you. A great many of them will be offering a comparable service to the same target group.	A+	A+	A+	A+
Partner ecosystem	Most providers active in this market only sell the licences for their solution. In this case, responsibility for the service offering's success rests entirely with the service provider. Ensure that you select a partner that can help you in advertising and actively generates leads for you.	A+	A+	A+	D
Inclusion in roadmap discussion / Equality among partners	In coordination with the SaaS platform manufacturer, the IT service provider is able to draw up a plan of future developments and its ultimate vision. This gives your customers an additional decision-making aid. It is important that service providers and manufacturers are on an equal footing in their dealings. This infers that the service provider has access to all levels at the manufacturer's, and that problems, if required, can be resolved quickly and unbureaucratically at the management level.	D	B	A+	A+

#### 4. BaaS platform functions: Distinguishing between duty and choice.

A data protection service backs up and restores data. That comes as no surprise, right? However, the fact is that some much-touted SaaS platforms fall down at this most basic requirement. To compensate, you might well be offered a whole series of great-sounding additional functions. But do your customers actually need them?

Use the following table to check what your customers expect of you and your service under the various business models.

Function	Explanation	BC1	BC2	BC3	BC4
Easy-to-use application	Ensure you have client software that is easy and intuitive to use. In this way your training and support overheads will be low and your customer satisfaction high.	A+	A+	B	C
Rebranding option	Changing the client software to display your company name in your CI will enhance your professional image.	A+	A+	A+	C
Simple integration in existing infrastructure	For seamless integration into an existing IT infrastructure, such as CRM or an invoicing system, the software solution must have the open interfaces to match.	A+	A+	A+	A+
Online backup with local backup and DR	It is hugely advantageous if you operate a standard software solution for online backups, local backups and image-based DR. If you do, added to the customer being spared the trouble of different user interfaces, the combination of these three key backup methods establishes the ideal and recommended route in the event of an outright computer crash.	A	A+	A+	C
Scalability	A solution's scalability is a vital criterion in achieving ROI and investment security. If the solution can no longer be scaled from a certain point, the established solution has to be renewed in its entirety and the end customer migrated to a new solution.	A+	A+	A+	A+
End-to-end encryption	It is vital that data transmitted via the Internet is securely encrypted on the client system itself and saved to the server.	A+	A+	A+	C
Seed backup	Because the first full backup via the Internet, depending on data volume, might be extremely slow, there should be the option of making a "seed backup". This involves creating the initial backup on a local USB volume and then feeding it into the computer centre. The following backups will then only transfer the changed data.	B	A	A+	C
Incremental backup at block or byte level	To be able to transmit data while keeping Internet bandwidth requirements to a minimum, the software must feature incremental backups. They ensure that only those parts of files with changed data are transferred, and not the complete files.	A+	A+	A+	C
Central management console	Service providers active in BC3 or BC4 must be able to control and monitor their customers' infrastructures from a central management console.	D	B	A+	A+
Enterprise storage technology support	Your solution should support key storage media types such as disk, tape, libraries, VTL, appliances, SAN, NAS, disk-to-disk-to-tape etc.	D	D	C	A+



## Conclusion

Companies are continually calling us looking to find a way into the Backup as a Service business and launch their own data protection service. In discussion it transpires that the platform's functions are all that they have so far considered. Unfortunately, this approach leads to success in just one per cent of cases. Investment is needed in careful planning. The right partner can shorten this step and ensure a successful design.

At the end of the day, only proper consideration and careful planning of all the many aspects of a business will invariably result in triumph. This is not only reflected by the global growth in data, but also the ever-broadening acceptance of Software as a Service across the board.

One last thing. Even if you have already decided on your business model, we recommend that you keep this document where you can refer to it again - the market in which you operate, after all, is a dynamic one. Together with an innovative partner, you should set off on this exciting journey and establish yourself in the market with success.

We wish you that success!



**About the author**

Stefan Utzinger is CEO of NovaStor Software AG ([www.novastor.com](http://www.novastor.com)) and a recognised specialist in cloud computing and the IT channel. After studying business IT and working for various consultancy firms, he set up his first software company to market his channel products in 1992.

On his blog “Blue Ocean Thinking” ([www.blueoceanthinking.com](http://www.blueoceanthinking.com)), he provides tips on management and describes how companies can operate in dynamic markets to ensure long-term success.

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