



*be the  
business*

# The secret of productive work: how better communication delivers the biggest wins

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Inspiring stories from founders  
and business leaders



## What's the secret to growing a business?

**You might say it's boosting sales. Sometimes it's taking innovative products to market. Or maybe it's building a world-class team. There's one thing, though, that underpins all three: great communication.**

For businesses large, small or somewhere in the middle, communication is everything. Fluid, open communication is how teams come up with big ideas, make faster decisions and get things done. Businesses that get communication right are the ones that make the biggest productivity gains - and ultimately, come out on top.

**That's what this eBook is all about.** Slack, the productivity platform, and Be the Business, an independent charity inspiring greater productivity, joined forces on a quest to understand how collaboration tools are helping small businesses to improve and grow.

This booklet will help you to enhance communication and collaboration in your own teams by offering real, practical tips to boost your productivity, as well as new research findings from 1,004 decision-makers at small and growing businesses across the UK.

There are also eight personal stories from business leaders who are building collaborative, productive businesses in sectors including B2B, manufacturing, technology and food & drink. Together, we hope you find these new insights, actionable tips and personal stories useful for your business.

## How to improve communication across teams

**Better communication drives productivity. Opening up silos of information - particularly email inboxes - means things don't get missed, ideas are acted on, and teams are more efficient, compliant and adaptable. The shift to hybrid and remote working has only emphasised the need to make sure everybody is engaged, aligned and able to collaborate effectively.**

But there's a gap to fill. According to [one study](#) in late 2023, almost half of hybrid and remote workers say their manager doesn't provide the right tools or means of communication for clarity and connection.

And it's not just hybrid and remote teams: leaders in more "traditional" sectors like finance, retail and manufacturing may not realise how much information is siloed in the office, in store or on site.

### Time to talk technology?

Collaboration software can solve those problems by providing a centralised, digital hub for all communications, where teams can easily find and share information, files or whatever's on their screens with everyone who needs it in real time.

Slack and Be the Business' own research, a YouGov survey of 1,004 UK small business leaders, found that 74% are using collaboration software of some kind in their business - and of those, over three quarters (76%) say it's important for the effective running of their company.

Among the 26% of leaders surveyed who don't use collaboration software, the research suggests that many may be unaware of the benefits: 63% think it's not relevant to their business, 18% still prefer email and 22% say there's nothing stopping them from using it at all.

**Learn how Slack makes communication easier so that your teams can stay organised, save time and get more done. For more information visit [Slack](#).**

## Making productivity gains with collaboration software

**Collaboration software isn't just email 2.0. This research shows there are a whole host of use cases across sectors - from freeing up time spent searching for information, to maximising value from other software to finding creative solutions for business problems.**

But does this improve productivity overall? Yes, according to over four-fifths (82%) of the business leaders who use collaboration software. Leaders in medium-sized businesses (50-249 employees) are the most likely to agree (88%), while among microbusiness leaders (companies with fewer than 10 employees) the figure is 75%.

**Thinking about the collaboration software that your business currently uses, to what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? (Net: Agree)**



# Three clear business opportunities for the future

Looking to the future, we also asked our YouGov research panel of small business leaders where they see the biggest business opportunities for productive communication using a collaboration platform.

Three clear themes emerged in their responses: efficiency improvements (by having everything in one place and reducing meetings), connection and engagement with hybrid/remote teams and closer collaboration with external partners.

## 1. Productivity and efficiency

**“It can help strengthen team relationships, save time and headaches, improve organisation and increase speed and efficiency”**

Read how Opteo cut the number of scheduled meetings in the business by 90% [on page 7](#)

**“We see faster brainstorming for product development, with all notes organised in one place”**

Read how SURREAL supercharged their creativity [on page 9](#)

**“It introduced me to the benefits of AI technology”**

Read how Homemove embedded AI assistants to motivate staff [on page 12](#)

## 2. Connection and engagement with hybrid/remote teams

**“It’s made my business thrive for those who work remotely”**

Read how Social for Good fostered happy and productive employees [on page 5](#)

**“We can recruit from a wider pool of talent, as it facilitates much better hybrid working”**

Read how Starlink Global united a global workforce [on page 10](#)

## 3. Closer collaboration with partners

**“We can bring clients into the workflow so that the products are better designed for them”**

Read how Scalemath’s relationships with clients increased in duration and value [on page 11](#)

You can learn more about these areas for improving productivity from the experience of other business leaders contained in this booklet.

# ‡Social for Good‡

## Avoiding email keeps our team happy and productive, so we can work a four-day week

Kerry Watkins | Founder and Managing Director, Social for Good

**Name:** Social for Good  
**Sector:** Marketing & communications  
**Founded:** 2016  
**Location:** Brighton

### The problem

“I want us to have a good relationship with tech, and I learned a lot about app design when I studied for a diploma in digital wellbeing,” says Kerry Watkins, founder and managing director of social media marketing agency Social for Good.

Social for Good’s hybrid team of eight employees - two of whom are fully remote - helps purpose-led businesses, charities and nonprofits to build their brands on social channels.

“Email apps are designed to make us feel good and keep us coming back. The variable reward [not knowing what you’ll see] is linked to the pleasure centre in our brain where dopamine [the reward hormone] is released.

“And we work a four-day week - so if I’m paying my team 100% of their salaries for 80% of the hours, I don’t want them spending 5% of their week sitting in their email. I want us to use email as little as possible.”

### The solution

Slack has enabled Social for Good to create a team with a culture built around effective communication that maximises their productivity.

“When you’re trying to work productively it’s important that you don’t have notifications popping up everywhere because your brain can’t settle until you’ve opened them,” Kerry says. “It’s about creating a healthy working culture. With Slack, we can stay in touch, but turn notifications off when we don’t want to be distracted.”

Social for Good also uses Slack to measure employee wellbeing and track trends, using the Loopin app integration for Slack. Every day, Loopin asks employees, in Slack, how they’re feeling. Employees just need to pick the emoji that matches their mood, ranging from unhappy to overjoyed.

### The results

Employees love working at Social for Good. The numbers speak for themselves: in the past four years, staff turnover has remained at zero. The Loopin happiness figures sit at around 70% on average, versus 51% for a typical marketing agency.

Furthermore, Social for Good’s healthy working culture has even been scientifically validated. The business took part in a Sussex University research study on the four-day work week, including employee blood tests, body perception tests, sleep analysis and MRI scans.

The results showed that even before the business trialed a four-day week, their baselines for productivity and wellbeing were much higher than average. That was enabled, Kerry says, by Slack.

All of which translates into strong, sustained growth. Year-on-year growth in 2020-21 was 51%, reaching 71% in 2021-22 and 37% in 2022-23.



**“Because we’re communicating in informal channels, employees say the culture is excellent. I’ve had 0% staff turnover in the past four years.”**



## Sharing positive customer reviews and employee shout-outs has boosted our employee engagement

Nelson Sivalingam | CEO, HowNow

**Name:** HowNow  
**Sector:** Learning & development  
**Founded:** 2015  
**Location:** London & Mumbai

### The problem

The team at HowNow, an e-learning experience platform helping companies to upskill their employees, knows all about productive communication. With 78 employees distributed between London and Mumbai, it's essential HowNow's People team can onboard new hires effectively, facilitate learning and development, and keep everyone informed on new initiatives and events.

"When you're scaling a company there's a lot of stuff you're doing on the fly," says CEO Nelson Sivalingam. "And you only realise the pain of that when a new person is onboarding and you realise none of this stuff has been captured or documented somewhere."

### The solution

Slack was the first technology platform HowNow implemented when the business launched. "It's like our digital office," Nelson says. "Everything from formal work conversations to informal chat, happens on Slack. And it's frictionless for us to keep adding more new people to existing Slack channels."

HowNow's People team uses Slack for internal announcements like new starters, anniversaries and birthdays, communications on company initiatives including Black History Month, Diwali and Pride Month, and to share learning and development opportunities.

The whole HowNow team also uses the Officely and Bob integrations for all employees to see who else is in the office on any given day. Officely's AI makes smart recommendations for the best days for in-office collaboration based on team preferences and needs, right in HowNow's Slack workspace.

The team sees perhaps the most value, though, in employee engagement: in HowNow's "HN Love" Slack channel, the team can give colleagues a shout out for their achievements and share customer recognition, visible across the business. Through an integration with reviews website G2, the team can see positive customer feedback in the "HN Love" channel, the moment it appears online.

### The results

HowNow has found that the "HN Love" channel in particular has driven a substantial improvement in employee engagement with learning and development initiatives, which now sits consistently at 92%. The impact on business performance is evident: a Gallup meta-analysis of organisations totalling 2.7 million employees found that employees who are highly engaged drive a 23% increase in profitability.

"We've grown around 1600% over the past three years," Nelson says. "And apart from G Suite [for email, word processing and spreadsheets], Slack is the one tool we haven't changed in the time we've grown from a six person company to almost 80 of us," he adds. "That demonstrates it has been a core part of allowing us to scale."



**"Slack is the one tool we haven't changed in the time we've grown. That demonstrates it has been a core part of allowing us to scale."**



## We cut scheduled meetings by 90% - now employees control their own productivity

Guillaume Devinat | CEO, Opteo

**Name:** Opteo  
**Sector:** B2B marketing  
**Founded:** 2013  
**Location:** London

### The problem

Work meetings come with a hefty price tag. According to a [2022 study](#), employees spend 18 hours a week in them, costing approximately £65,000 per year. But, it's not just the monetary loss, it's the impact on productivity that matters, too. In fact, Slack's research revealed the majority (60%) of UK desk workers feel too many or unnecessary meetings are a significant time drain.

Guillaume Devinat, CEO at marketing software platform [Opteo](#), recognised both the financial and time cost of meetings, and decided on a new approach.

“Working in a purely synchronous way - when people schedule time to work together and connect at the same time - means that meetings not only interrupt workflow, but also become very expensive for the business. It creates a sense of busyness that isn't as pleasant, calm or productive as asynchronous working.”

### The solution

Several years ago, the Opteo team moved to an asynchronous way of working (not requiring all team members to be online simultaneously) by making Slack their core communications platform.

“If you're on a roll and making a lot of headway,” Guillaume says, “you can choose to catch up on everything when you come up for air in three hours, and that's OK. You don't have to interrupt what you're doing to jump on the call. So it's not only the reduction in meetings - it's also all the productivity gains of individuals being in control of their flow states.”

When someone's input is needed immediately, the team can just hit the huddle button in Slack to start an instant audio or video conversation, bringing the feeling of working side-by-side to a virtual space that lets you collaborate and co-create live.

“My recommendation is to use channels for written communication day-to-day with teams so everyone has the information and context they need, and use huddles when you need a quick chat live to hash things out. Working in this way feels very connected and in some ways, enables more focus than a fully in-person office environment.”

### The results

Guillaume attributes Opteo's significant rise in productivity to asynchronous working. “We cut scheduled meetings by 90% and the number of projects we're able to tackle at any one moment has increased significantly... I would wager an estimate of two to three times more projects. When you don't have something like Slack, you're likely limiting yourself to a certain number of projects, as it's difficult to keep everybody on the same page.”

Opteo's time and money spent on meetings has substantially reduced too. “As CEO, it would be normal for me to have two to three big meetings a week with lots of people. And that's obviously very expensive. Now it could be as little as once a month.

“It's become a calmer and more pleasant place to work.”



**“The number of projects we're able to tackle at any one moment has increased significantly ... two to three times more.”**



## Sharing positive company news helps to keep our employees motivated

Paul Wenham | Managing Director, Geometric Manufacturing

**Name:** Geometric Manufacturing  
**Sector:** Manufacturing  
**Founded:** 2002  
**Location:** Tewkesbury

### The problem

At Geometric Manufacturing, a Computer Aided Manufacturing (CAM) business, to keep production moving around the clock, 50 employees work in shifts across two different sites.

This means some teams are rarely on site at the same time as their colleagues. But at the end of each shift, there's critical handover information to share, such as production updates, KPIs for the shift, inventory or pending tasks.

Until 2021, employees would send their handover in a WhatsApp group message. WhatsApp isn't an ideal solution, though: if people weren't in the right group, they wouldn't see the message.

So for managing director Paul Wenham, there was a need to improve transparency between different teams.

"We needed more open communication to make sure that people were all exposed to the same knowledge, and there were no pockets of secret stuff that some people didn't know about," he says.

### The solution

Two years ago, Paul implemented Slack across the business as the primary way to share information openly and improve communication. For the key stakeholders (managers), Slack has become the place to align on priorities, ensuring everybody who needs information can see it.

"The key individuals have created a channel for themselves," says operations manager Zoe Burke. "They'll take responsibility and ownership of the task - organising the day ahead."

But where Slack really shines, Paul says, is motivating the team with stories of Geometric Manufacturing's success.

"People like to know when things are going on. So we have really good engagement in Slack when we share news about our parts being used in customer's projects, or when we visit trade shows and take pictures of our products on customers' stands. And that's very positive.

"People get to see what they've contributed to - they comment in Slack, and say they'd like to see more of it."

### The results

Geometric has now brought a large proportion of their employees on board with using Slack for all internal communication. Looking to the future, Paul's priority is to include those who perhaps need a little more encouragement.

"And it doesn't mean the ones who aren't engaged aren't good staff members - we just need to expand the role of Slack. We're working to increase uptake but embedding technology takes time, particularly in more traditional sectors like manufacturing."



**"People get to see what they've contributed to and say they'd like to see more of it."**



# SURREAL™

## We come up with our best PR ideas in Slack, and have made the news every other month

Kit Gammell | Co-Founder, SURREAL Cereal

**Name:** SURREAL Cereal  
**Sector:** Food & drink  
**Founded:** 2021  
**Location:** London

### The problem

After just two years in business, SURREAL Cereal has achieved something special: a great-tasting product that's great for you too.

But when you're a fresh startup competing for online attention and supermarket shelf space, there's a pressing challenge: you need to move fast. You're up against big brands with big budgets, and smaller competitors are hot on your heels.

### The solution

"For some reason, on email we all start writing really formally and in long paragraphs. It's the complete opposite to how we are day-to-day and how we are on WhatsApp outside of work. Slack takes all the formality out of talking to your team," says Kit.

Faster, more authentic communication, Kit says, has been key to being nimble. "What Slack lets us do is communicate internally, and also externally, with a pace that email or phone just don't come close to."

Slack is also where the team comes up with unconventional ideas to capture attention and grow the business, getting the brand in front of millions of consumers.

"We've got an inspiration channel and an ideas channel - they're like pin boards where you can drop an 'aha' moment in and people can build on the idea in real time," Kit adds.

"For example, we do a lot of stunt-based marketing. A lot of the ideas are fairly stupid - like selling my car on our website. That began as a Slack joke; we were looking for things to sell other than cereals. Within a day, we put my old banger of a VW on the website as a joke.

"And then someone actually bought it for 500 quid! So we had to drive it to Exeter and deliver it to the guy within 48 hours because that's the shipping policy we had on the website."

### The results

SURREAL's eye-catching marketing has put them squarely in the public eye, generating regular coverage in titles including *The Times*, *The Independent* and *The Daily Mail* among dozens of others.

And one thing is for sure: it's very good for business. The company is growing 585% year-on-year - faster than any other cereal brand - and is the number one contributor to value growth in the category. That growth is attributable, at least partially, to the team's consistent knack for big PR wins - driven by productive communication.



**"The number one thing as a business is the speed we move at versus our competitors. What Slack lets us do is communicate internally, but also externally with a pace that email or phone just don't come close to."**

## We can connect our remote teams at a much lower cost than the alternatives

Abdullah Shah | Managing Director, Starlink Global

**Name:** Starlink Global  
**Sector:** B2B technology  
**Founded:** 2013  
**Location:** Liverpool

### The problem

Abdullah Shah, managing director at software agency Starlink Global, has spent 10 years growing his business. He started out with a small core team of four, building websites, apps and software platforms mostly for manufacturing clients. When there were only four people it was easy enough to collaborate in WhatsApp and Google Sheets. As more client work began to pour in though, it was time to make some hires - and the old way of working became increasingly tricky.

“We set up a development centre in Pakistan, then hired more developers in Macedonia,” he says. “We needed to connect our remote teams. In WhatsApp, information was all over the place. And Google Sheets is OK, but the functionality is very basic. When we started getting multiple projects on board at the same time and the team was growing, it became very complex, very quickly.

“And that’s before you think about security - you need to see who’s logging in. We needed to put something better in place. We were looking for a platform where you can see all your employees and all your projects, files and resources in one place.”

### The solution

Abdullah first considered moving the team onto a work management platform. After calculating the individual cost for each user, though, he decided Slack offered much better value.

He chose Slack as the company’s hub for collaboration, allowing the team to better organise their work and increase transparency, align on priorities and work more productively in a secure environment.

“Slack allows us to connect our remote teams at a much lower cost than any of the alternatives. We’ve got all our projects on the dashboard and we can see our progress.

“Plus, I can access it from anywhere - even when I’m travelling abroad. I have access to all the information in one place.”

### The results

“It’s improved the performance of the business because we’re managing our time more efficiently,” Abdullah says. “It’s made a big impact on how we deliver projects.”

Slack has also made it much easier to onboard new hires remotely and facilitate learning and development. That frees up Abdullah’s time to focus on strategy - while employees, he says, feel more supported.

“For employees who’ve just joined, or those in a training programme, you can just add them to the Slack channel. They have access to all the files they need and they can understand without you having to explain everything.”



**“It’s improved the performance of the business because we’re managing our time more efficiently.”**

# scalemath

## We're building stronger client relationships and retaining more business

Alex Panagis | Founder & CEO, Scalemath

**Name:** Scalemath

**Sector:** Advertising, marketing & communications

**Founded:** 2018

**Location:** London

### The problem

Scalemath is an agency delivering marketing content and advertising for software businesses across the world. With a team of eight, mostly located in Eastern Europe or further afield, staying connected and productive across time zones is vital.

"We started out as a remote business because we wanted to hire in whichever country we could find the best people," says founder and CEO Alex Panagis.

For three years, Scalemath used Basecamp as a core platform for managing client projects and keeping the team aligned. But communication wasn't flowing freely enough.

"We had people communicating in the tickets or the task comments, which works well up to a certain point. But then you realise that if you want true collaboration, you do need to lean more into the culture of communicating in real time."

### The solution

"With Slack, we're able to be remote and still have that feeling of working together. Now, new work starts in the Slack thread. I can see the conversations and even the kickoff for every task."

Scalemath isn't just using Slack for internal communications: it also allows Alex and the team to communicate efficiently with clients in real time - rather than waiting days for email replies or a scheduled meeting.

And faster communication pays dividends. "We'd been working on blog content for an existing client," Alex says. "But their product documentation [technical instructions] was always handled by somebody else.

"The client realised that a lot of the content we're already producing is similar to what we would be doing if we wrote the documentation as well. So the client started a discussion in our shared Slack channel, asking 'couldn't Scalemath take over on this?' We were able to dive in and say 'yes, we can.' So now, more so than ever, we're seen as their team as opposed to an external vendor, and they can communicate with us all in one place."

### The results

Scalemath's engagements have increased in duration and value. "We've added new growth deliverables onto at least five or six long-term retainer contracts. I'd say our median client retention is now around four years.

"It's not only about working faster. It's the fact you're putting the effort into building proper relationships. Communicating with clients and figuring out what things are supposed to look like is the most important part of the work."



**"We're able to be remote and still have that feeling of working together."**



## We built a fun, AI-powered sales coach – it’s driving the team forward

Louis O’Connell-Bristow | CEO & Co-Founder, Homemove

**Name:** Homemove  
**Sector:** Property technology  
**Founded:** 2022  
**Location:** Norwich & Derby

### The problem

Homemove is a technology platform helping people reduce the stress of moving home. It connects buyers, sellers and renters with top-rated moving services like estate agents, removals companies and solicitors.

“My co-founder James and I met during Covid,” explains CEO Louis O’Connell-Bristow. “We put our minds together and came up with the idea of Homemove from separate cities.”

With teams split across two UK offices - the tech team in Norwich and the sales team in Derby - finding a way to keep everyone engaged, on track and in the loop on projects was a priority.

### The solution

Homemove adopted Slack as the core channel for communication. The team soon came up with a novel idea: an AI-powered assistant to coach the sales team with Slack messages. It could celebrate success and encourage them to keep pushing, without sounding like an overbearing manager. The whole team loved the idea, and built it.

“Every time there’s a sale, Slack gives us a message that we’ve received a sale for that product, then follows up with a running total for the day,” Louis says.

“It shows the amount of sales we have, what our targets are, and then says something like ‘come on guys, let’s get to 7k today!’. It’s integrated with Giphy too, so it comes up with a random GIF that corresponds to the message.

“By adding some humour, it’s building a culture that drives the sales people forward. It’s creating a mini competition between them - they want to get a higher number. It’s tongue in cheek, whereas using a CRM may be more dry.”

### The results

Homemove employees love the company’s light-hearted culture of innovation. It’s paying off: in the 18 months since securing their seed round (start-up) funding, Homemove has grown 60-120% month-on-month and already launched Homer, the world’s first AI-powered home valuation tool.

“Sometimes the team thinks we’re a bit crazy,” Louis adds. “A lot of what we’re doing here is stuff they’ve never seen before. It’s kind of mind blowing.

“Ever since we launched we’ve been implementing bits of AI into our workflow aided by Slack. Having a free flow of automated messages and original, coherent responses to events that are happening is impressive. That’s something we’re bringing to our clients as well, through integrations with Slack. There are some really cool things we’re testing for the future.”



**“Sometimes the team thinks we’re a bit crazy. A lot of what we’re doing here is stuff they’ve never seen before.”**

## What's your 1% improvement?

The data presented and the business leaders' experiences show that effective communication and collaboration - from efficient exchanges of information, to connecting teams, wherever they work, to closer collaboration with partners - creates tangible business growth.

To get there, you need the right technology and the right approach. Collaboration software, like Slack, is a key enabler for productivity - but effective implementation requires strong management, leadership and digital skills. Successful technology adoption is about bringing everybody on board in the right way.

And making even small changes can result in a big impact: by maintaining a 1% annual improvement in productivity over five years, an average SME employer (1-249 employees) could increase their turnover by £65,000. If replicated across the entire SME employer community, this would add £94 billion to the UK economy. That's equivalent to over half the annual budget for NHS England.

For those who get it right, the rewards are there for the taking.

Ready?

### Take the first step

Discover how [Slack](#) can support your business.

### Looking for additional support?

Get tailored advice from [Be the Business](#).

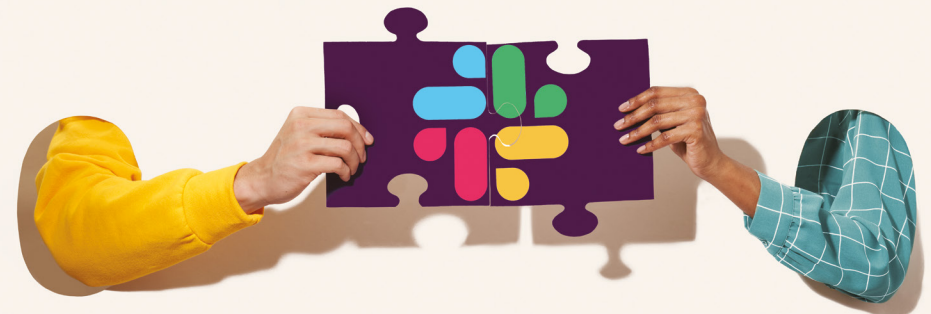
## Research methodology

### Quantitative research

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. The total sample size was 1,004 decision-makers. Fieldwork was undertaken between 23rd October - 7th November 2023. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of British business size and region.

### Qualitative research

Eight interviews with small business leaders who use Slack were conducted between 25th October - 11th December 2023. Participants were asked a series of open-ended questions to establish how and why they use collaboration software in their business.





Slack is on a mission to make people's working lives simpler, more pleasant and more productive. It is the productivity platform for customer companies that improves performance by empowering everyone with no-code automation, making search and knowledge sharing seamless, and keeping teams connected and engaged as they move work forward together. As part of Salesforce, Slack is deeply integrated into the Salesforce Customer 360, supercharging productivity across sales, service and marketing teams.

To learn more and get started for free, visit [Slack](#) or connect with us [@SlackHQ](#).



Be the Business is an independent charity that inspires greater productivity, by connecting leadership teams to the relevant expertise needed to answer today's challenges. By combining peer-to-peer experience, the employee expertise found within our pioneering partners, independent business experts and our research and insights, we inspire leadership teams to create and deliver positive business change. Collectively we're transforming the UK's productivity, raising the value of businesses in our communities, safeguarding jobs and improving standards of living.

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