

Web Site Design, Usability, Documentation

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A PTS Heuristic Evaluation

Heuristic Evaluation of the Fog City Diner Web Site San Francisco, CA



Introduction

There are several significant areas on the site that need attention on the Fog City Diner Website. Although the look and feel of the site overall is pleasing, there are a number of issues which will cause problems for users of the site. These problems can be solved so that the site meets the heuristics of Web site design, and users will have satisfying experiences when visiting the site.

What is a Heuristic Evaluation?

A heuristic (expert) evaluation of a Web site is a systematic inspection of a site design measured against recognized usability principles. The purpose of a heuristic evaluation is to identify a majority of the usability problems in a Web site.

Heuristic evaluations generally explore questions like:

- Is the look and feel of the site appropriate for the site's purpose?
- Are the design elements well integrated and consistent throughout the site?
- How simple to use is the site?

- How clear are the meanings of graphical elements such as icons and toolbar buttons? Are they overused or underused?
- How well is the site organized? Are navigational aids adequate to support the organization? What feedback is provided to orient the user?
- Are instructions or explanations presented clearly, without unnecessary complication or ambiguity? Is the language direct, simple, and non-wordy, so that users can read/hear as few words as possible?
- What information must users encounter that they don't need? What information might be missing?

Method

This evaluation examines each page in the Fog City Diner Web site for usability problems, based on current usability research. Screen shots of most pages (or parts of pages) are included to show the usability problems in detail, and results and some basic recommendations will be noted for each page in the site. In some cases, new graphics are included to show how correcting a usability problems will look on the page.

Author

The author of this heuristic evaluation, Phillip Scarborough, is an experienced senior usability engineer and Web designer. His company, PTS Technical Writing is located in Half Moon Bay, CA. Phillip has over 18 years of experience managing usability engineering projects for Fortune 500 companies nationwide. Contact Phillip Scarborough at phillipt@techwrite.net

Issue 1 - The Use of Frames

The Fog City Diner (FCD) site uses frames, and the use of frames is unnecessary and causes significant problems with the look and feel of the site, and with search engine results.

Navigation does not work with frames since the unit of navigation is different from the unit of view. If users create a bookmark in their browser, they may not get the same view back when they follow the bookmark at a later date since the bookmark doesn't include a representation of the state of the frames on the page.

Even worse, URLs stop working: the addressing information shown at the top of the browser no longer constitutes a complete specification of the information shown in the window. If an author copies the URL in order to include it as a hypertext anchor in one of his or her own pages then that anchor will not lead readers to the desired view but to the initial state of the frameset.

Similarly, if a user decides to send an email message to a friend with the recommendation to check out a page, then copying the URL from the browser will not work if frames are used since the URL points to the frameset and not to the current view (with the information of interest to the friend). Given that social filtering is one of the most powerful mechanisms for information discovery on the Internet, it is an utter disaster to disable the URL as an addressing mechanism.

Here's what happens now when you look up the Fog City Diner in a search engine. The search engine, Google, will be used here, but users will find the same results in all the major search engines.

The screenshot shows a Google search interface. At the top, the Google logo is on the left, and navigation links for 'Advanced Search', 'Preferences', 'Language Tools', and 'Search Tips' are on the right. Below the logo is a search input field containing 'fog city diner' and a 'Google Search' button. A blue navigation bar below the search bar contains links for 'Web', 'Images', 'Groups', 'Directory', and 'News'. Below this bar, a blue banner indicates 'Searched the web for fog city diner.' and 'Results 1 - 10 of about 44,800'. The search results list includes:

- [The Fog City Diner Cookbook](#)
The **Fog City Diner** Cookbook. Cindy Pawlcyn (Ten Speed, \$24.95, 240 pp.).
If someone asked me to describe the emerging culinary spirit ...
www.outlawcook.com/Page0330.html - 7k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#)
- [Fog City Diner - Home Page](#)
www.fogcitydiner.com/ - 1k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#)
- [Fog City Diner - Home Page](#)
... Still, that doesn't mean **Fog City Diner** is strictly a tourist destination, though it does in fact attract myriad out-of-towners. ... **Fog City Diner** is located at: ...
www.fogcitydiner.com/index_body.html - 4k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#)
[[More results from www.fogcitydiner.com](#)]

Before discussing frames, notice above that when you type in the exact name of the restaurant, it does not appear first in the Google results list, as it should. This is because the site is not optimized, which is discussed later in this evaluation.

Another point before discussing frames is the title and description. The title and description are hidden text. They are on the pages in your site, but you can't see them. However, they are visible to the user in search engine results, as you can see above. The point here is that your title and description must be compelling to make users want to click on the site link. Calling your site, "Fog City Diner - Home page" is not compelling. You may use whatever language you wish, but here's an example of a more compelling title: "Fog City Diner, exciting, contemporary food in a nostalgic setting!" Your description must also be compelling. If you don't create a description, in the hidden text on your site, most search engines like the Google example above will simply use some of the text on the home page. Both title and description are a function of optimization, which is discussed further below.

Regarding frames, in the Google example above, in the indented section, you see a link that says "[More results from www.fogcitydiner.com](#)." If users click that link, they will see the following.



[Fog City Diner - Home Page](#)

[www.fogcitydiner.com/](#) - 1k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#)

[Fog City Diner - Home Page](#)

... Still, that doesn't mean **Fog City Diner** is strictly a tourist destination, though it does in fact attract myriad out-of-towners. ... **Fog City Diner** is located at: ...

[www.fogcitydiner.com/index_body.html](#) - 4k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#)

[Fog City Diner - Other Recommended Restaurants](#)

... American Bix Buckeye Roadhouse **Fog City Diner** Asian Betelnut Baking/Catering Modern Catering Panorama Baking Barbeque Buckeye Roadhouse California Bix **Fog City** ...

[www.fogcitydiner.com/restaurants_body.html](#) - 7k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#)

[Fog City Diner - Other Recommended Restaurants](#)

... American Bix Buckeye Roadhouse **Fog City Diner** Asian Betelnut Sushi Ran Baking Panorama Baking Barbeque Buckeye Roadhouse California Bix Buckeye Roadhouse **Fog** ...

[www.fogcitydiner.com/restaurants_body.shtml](#) - 6k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#)

[Fog City Diner - Menu](#)

[www.fogcitydiner.com/menu.html](#) - 1k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#)

[Fog City Diner - Employment Information](#)

[www.fogcitydiner.com/employment.html](#) - 1k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#)

[Fog City Diner - Home Page](#)

[www.fogcitydiner.com/top_frame.html](#) - 2k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#)

The list is much longer. This is only the first part of the list. Initially, it looks like these are going to be great links to the Diner, but clicking on them shows them without frames and therefore no logo and no navigation. For example, if you click the second link from the top, "Fog City Diner - Home Page," this is what you see (this is the top part of the page).

A DINING LANDMARK

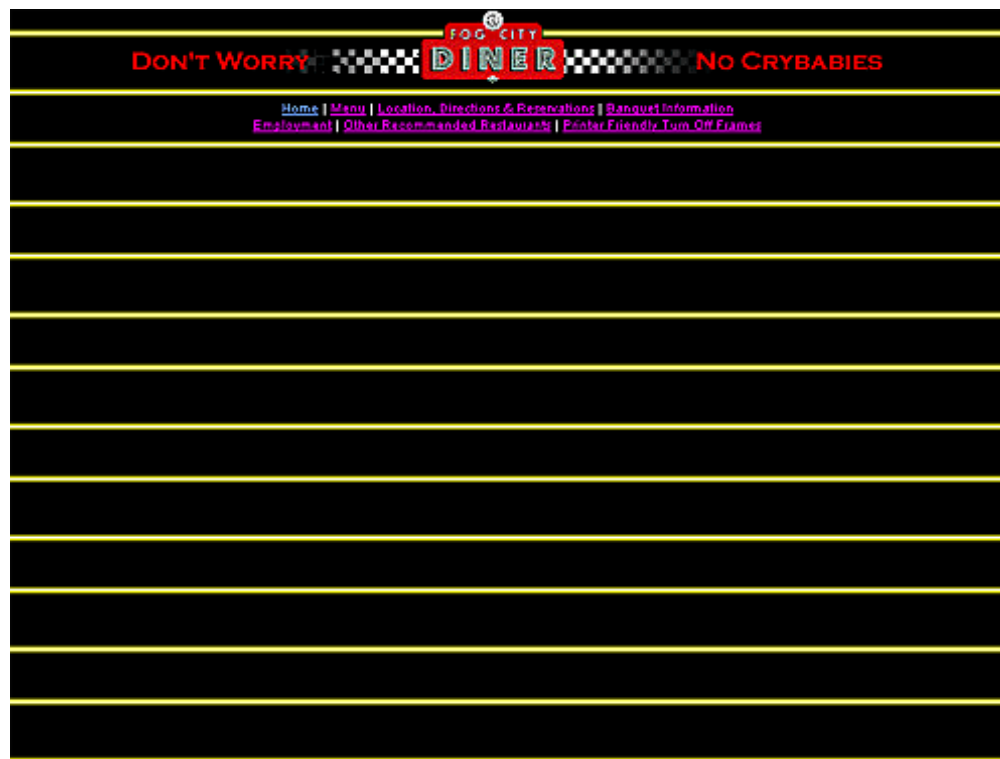


The invitation over the doorway of one of San Francisco's most recognizable dining landmarks is direct: "GET IN HERE." Stepping inside Fog City Diner leads to an experience that's simultaneously nostalgic and contemporary. Nostalgic thanks to the restaurant's roadside-diner ambiance: stainless steel, glowing neon, checkered tile, polished brass, rich mahogany, mirrored bar, tuck-and-roll leather, starched napkins, chrome ceiling. Nostalgic in a 1930s vein. Nostalgic in a classic bistro mode.

But contemporary too, specifically when it comes to Fog City's cookery. Pick up the menu, and it becomes almost instantly clear that this is no ordinary diner. Not at all! There's a "raw bar" slate starring marine delicacies such as oysters, shrimp, prawns, crab, mussels and ahi tuna. Bowl-borne picks include spicy sirloin chili, triple clam chowder and soups du jour. Also chef's special plates both small and large like crabcakes with

As you can see, there is no logo and no navigation to other pages in the site; in other words, no frames are showing. All of the other links are similar, with no logo, and no navigation.

Unfortunately, it gets worse, where pages show nothing but repeating frames, such as the last Google link above. Here's what you see if you click this link.



The author recommends that Fog City Diner remove the frames on the site. The site can look exactly the same without frames, except when scrolling down the page. When scrolling without frames, the logo and menu bar become a part of the page and move with the text when scrolling.

Does this mean frames should never be used? There are several instances where frames can be used for very good reasons. These include keeping track of large lists in one frame while updating the other frame with info, or using one frame for photo thumbnails and another frame for the larger view. However, in the author's opinion, frames should not be used on the FCD Web site which does not need these kinds of Web elements.

Issue 2 - Logo and Menu Bar

The logo in the menu bar which is a sign with a red background and a clock on top is unique and very pleasing to the eye. However the author suggests making it larger and brighter. The reason is the text, just below the logo, "A Dining Landmark" is so large that the eye is immediately drawn to it, and it doesn't tell the name of the restaurant. (In addition, the picture of the restaurant, which also draws the eye, does not show the name of the restaurant.) Because the logo is small (and especially small on laptops), viewers may have to search around trying to find out what restaurant the site is about.

The menu bar text is too small. It is very difficult to see on large monitors, and virtually impossible to see on laptops without getting your nose up to the screen. The author suggests changing from to at least 10 pt. type, and preferably 12 pt..

Below is an example of the original menu bar that now appears on the site, followed by the author's

redesigned menu bar with a larger logo with a brighter white text, and larger link type.

Original Menu Bar



Redesigned Menu Bar



The logo is now emphasized, and the link text is large enough to be seen easily on laptops. In addition, if FCD chooses to get rid of frames, the "Printer Friendly Turn Off Frames" link text will obviously change. Below are other suggestions for improving the menu bar link text. Also suggested below are changes and additions to the other site pages, which will also affect the names of the links.

Issue 3 - Home Page Text

The site has a nice, friendly, professional look and feel, and the text is interestingly written. However, I suggest that much of the text needs to be "chunked." This is a term in usability that means breaking text into smaller "chunks," that contain a complete thought and are often accompanied by a graphic or icon. Why is chunking necessary? The bottom line is that people do not read on the Web...they "scan." One usability error that is often made is putting text on a site as it appears in a print document. The author noticed this problem on the FCD site. The text is written like a restaurant review, and that's fine in a print document. However, for the Web, the text needs to be "chunked." An example of chunking the first paragraph of text on the site is shown below. Remember that people scan, rather than read on the Web. The text in the first sentence mentions the sign, "Get In Here!" over the door. This should be accompanied by a picture of the sign rather than only text.

(Picture of the GET IN HERE sign)

That's your invitation Come in and visit!
Fog City Diner is one of San Francisco's most enduring dining landmarks.

(Picture of restaurant)

Join us for a unique experience of contemporary American cuisine
in a classic bistro style with a nostalgic 1930's setting.

(Picture of smiling staff)

Great food, great service, great ambiance.
So what are you waiting for? "GET IN HERE!"

The original text in the first paragraph goes on to talk about the "restaurant's roadside-diner ambiance: stainless steel, glowing neon, checkered tile, polished brass, rich mahogany, mirrored bar, tuck-and-roll leather, starched napkins, chrome ceiling..." The author suggests that this text was probably intended to describe the restaurant when no pictures accompanied the text. The Web is very visual, and usability research shows that users will grasp shorter, punchier text accompanied by pictures quickly and easily, but will not remember (or even read) long descriptive text statements without accompanying graphics.

Another issue with the home page text is there are no links within the text. Using links with short compelling text helps encourage users to explore your site and find out more about FCD. For example, the second and third paragraphs talk about the food, but not in an organized way (like the menu) and there are no links in the text to the menu.

The author suggests rewriting this text to follow the menu headings and include links (in this case, linking to "anchors," which lead users to the corresponding part of the menu on the Menu Highlights page.) Here's an example of suggestions for part of the text about the menu items on the home page.

(Picture of a patron looking at a menu)

Pick up the [menu](#) and you'll see that this is no ordinary diner. Not at all!

(picture of Raw Bar)

There's a [Raw Bar](#) slate starring marine delicacies such as oysters, shrimp, prawns, crab, mussels and ahi tuna.

(pictures of serving person bringing plates of food to a table))

Try one of our [Small Plates](#) such as Grilled Chicken Skewers with Spicy Peanut Sauce and Curried Cole Slaw,
or Crabcakes with Chinese Mustard and Red Cabbage Slaw.

Or try one of our [Large Plates](#) such as the "Mighty" Meatloaf with Wild Mushroom Gravy and Truffled Mashed Potatoes.

For a lighter fare, enjoy a Burger and Fries, or one of our many [Salads, Sandwiches and Bowls](#), or [Delightful Deserts](#).

And don't forget our outstanding [Wine List](#).
Extraordinary California wines, of course!

(picture of a server pouring wine for a patron)

The author noticed two other text issues on the home page. First, the "Don't Worry" text is explained at the bottom of the text, but "No Crybabies" is not referred to anywhere on the site. Any graphic elements, the purpose of which are not immediately clear, should be explained in the text. If these words appear in the clocks, as is suggested in the text, then pictures of the clocks should be shown along with the explanations.

It is not clear from the home page text that the "Club Car" is actually banquet facilities, and these facilities are often unavailable to regular diners. The term "Club Car" suggests that anyone can use the car, like on a train. The author suggest that this be clarified in the text with a link to the Banquet Facilities page.

Issue 3 - Home Page Graphics

The current picture of the restaurant needs to be changed because it shows more cars than restaurant, and the name of the restaurant does not show because it's covered by the trees in the photograph. In addition the caption text, "A Dining Landmark" is too large and not descriptive enough, and the author suggests it should read, "Fog City Diner, a San Francisco Dining Landmark."

A DINING LANDMARK



The author found a few other pictures shown below that are better than the current picture, but they are copyrighted. The author suggests that all new pictures should be taken (the author can do this), including of a full restaurant, the food, the staff, the chef, the banquet facilities, etc.



Issue 4 - Page Footers

Every page in a Web site should have a header and a footer. The pages in the FCD site do not have footers. This means that when users reach the bottom of the page, they must scroll all the way back to the top of the page to the menu bar to navigate the site. At the very least, menu bar links should be repeated at the bottom of each page. One good way to design a footer is to use a smaller version of the header. The author designed the following footer for FCD as an example.



Issue 5 - Other Pages in the Site

Everything the author has said above applies to all pages in the site. However, there are a few additional items to discuss on other pages. Then, the author will suggest changes in some of the page titles and page purposes.

Location, Directions and Reservations

This link is way too long. The author suggests making Reservations a separate page with its own link. For Location and Directions, the author suggests calling it "How to Get Here" which fits with the "Get In Here" sign. However the current page is called Location, Directions and Reservations, but the title on the page itself says "Hours of Operation."

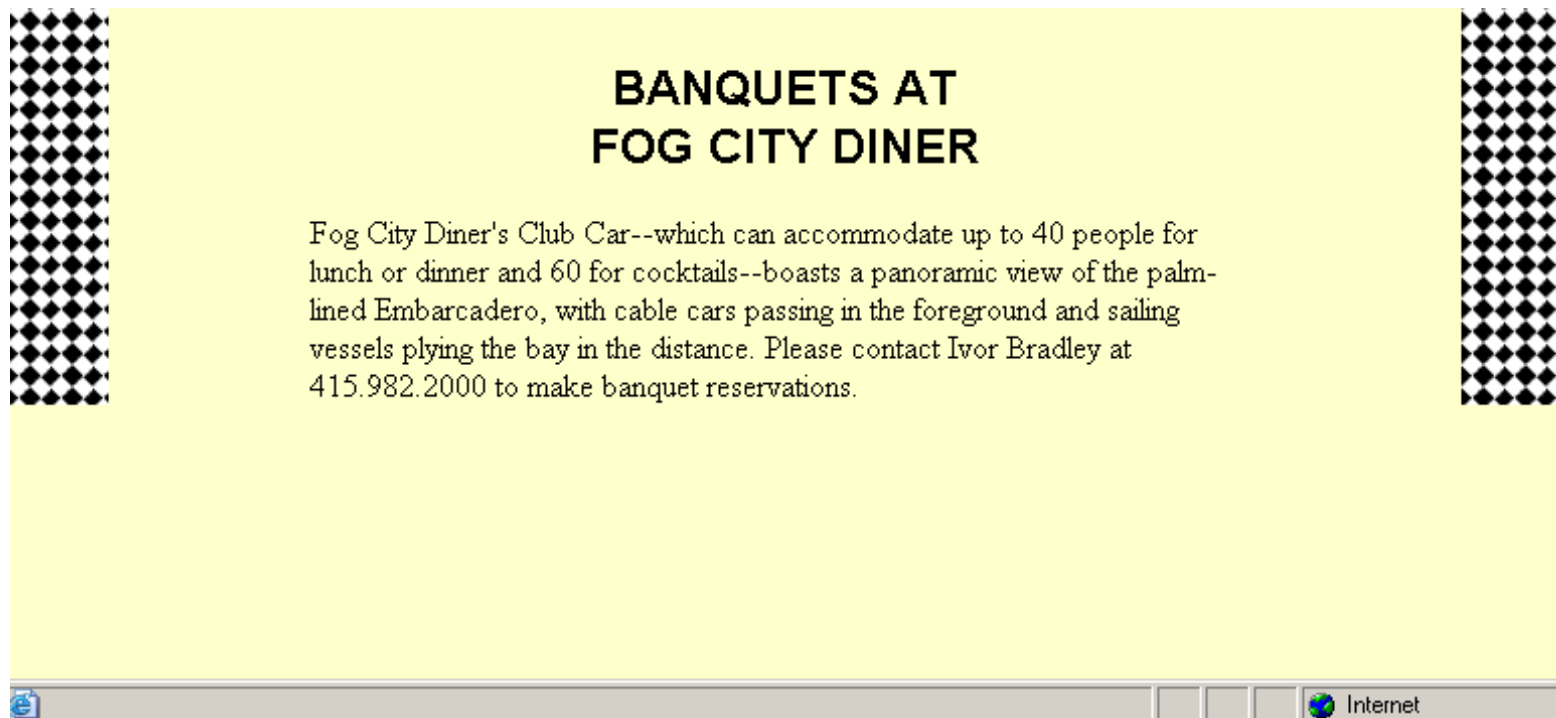
The title, page headings, text and graphics should be coordinated and consistent throughout the site. In addition, at the bottom of the page, the link to the map is resting right on the bottom of the page. Some users may not see this link. There should be a space of a line or two following any text near the bottom of the page. This is another reason each page should have a footer.

Fog City Diner encourages but doesn't require reservations. If you plan to visit us during peak dining hours, for lunch or dinner, making reservations is an especially good idea. But feel free to come by on the spur of the moment. You'll be welcome, and we'll seat you as promptly as possible. To make a reservation, please call 415.982.2000

[Click Here For A Map Of
Fog City Diner's Location](#)

[Banquet Information](#) and [Employment](#) pages

Both of these pages are short, yet they should still be consistent with other pages. On these two pages, the black and white checks on the sides of the page should extend all the way to the bottom of the page, as is the case on all other pages in the site. Example below.



**BANQUETS AT
FOG CITY DINER**

Fog City Diner's Club Car--which can accommodate up to 40 people for lunch or dinner and 60 for cocktails--boasts a panoramic view of the palm-lined Embarcadero, with cable cars passing in the foreground and sailing vessels plying the bay in the distance. Please contact Ivor Bradley at 415.982.2000 to make banquet reservations.

Internet

Printer Friendly Turn Off Frames page

When this link is chosen, the menu bar below is what a user sees. The "Don't Worry" and "No Crybabies" text extends into the checkered area, causing an unattractive appearance. This can easily be eliminated by getting rid of frames altogether and this link will be unnecessary.



The author suggests the following additional page changes to the site.

Personalizing the site is important to draw customers to the restaurant. The author suggests adding the following pages:

About Us

A history of the restaurant, the tradition it comes from, the restaurant group its part of, a note from the GM (with his picture), etc..

Chef and Staff

People come from all over the world to San Francisco to eat great food prepared by great chefs. The page should contain the chef's picture, bio, etc. and some copy and pictures of servers, bartender, etc. People want to know that they'll have fun when they come to Fog City Diner, and the staff is an important part of the experience.

The author suggests removing the page, Other Recommended Restaurants. In general, it is not a good idea to send users to competitors. A Local Links page for visitors to San Francisco is a good idea, but recommending competing businesses usually isn't done.

Issue 6 - Site Optimization

Nearly 90% of traffic to most Web sites comes from search engines. When someone queries a search engine for a keyword related to Fog City Diner, does FDC's page appear in the top 10 matches – or does the competition's?

For example, if a user types in "San Francisco seafood restaurant," on Google, the first result is the Franciscan Restaurant on Fisherman's Warf. The first 10 results are:

1. Franciscan
2. A. Sabellas
3. Joe's Fish Grotto
4. Old San Francisco (in Texas)
5. Farallon
6. Pier 39
7. Moonstar

8. Sinbad's
9. Nick's Lighthouse
10. Scoma's

The author looked at over a hundred results, and Fog City Diner was nowhere in the list.

Virtually everyone begins their Web browsing at one of the eight major search engines. FDC's rank within these search engines determines how many people will find and visit FDC's Web site. How do you achieve a top ranking? The author can "optimize" the site by making sure that the site pages conform to the unique ranking rules of each search engine.

To determine which Web site to return for a particular keyword search, each search engine has its own method of ranking the Web site. Optimization is very complex and there are a number of techniques that the author uses to achieve a top 10 position for your site. Many of these techniques involve using the right key words in the right way on each page in your site (mostly in your pages' hidden text). Each search engine has its own rules about where and how often key words should be used. The author knows these rules.

As an example, the author recently designed and completed an optimization for Scott Hospitality Consultants (www.scotthospitality.com), a resort and conference center consulting firm. On Google, if you type in "resort consultant" in the search field, Scott Hospitality Consultants is number one, out of 277,000 returns. Type in "Conference Center Consultant" and Scott Hospitality Consultants is once again number one, out of 684,000 returns.

Site optimization is virtually free advertising and can significantly increase traffic to Web sites. The author suggests that optimizing the FCD site will result in more business for the restaurant.



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