

OPEN BOOK

A Practical Guide to Business Growth

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CARDMEMBER STORY —
Theresa Alfaro Daytner
DAYTNER CONSTRUCTION GROUP



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GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

IF YOUR BUSINESS OFFERS GOODS OR SERVICES THE GOVERNMENT NEEDS, THE OBSTACLES BETWEEN YOU AND A CONTRACT CAN BE EASILY OVERCOME

Welcome to the second in our series of guides providing practical advice to help grow your business. This issue focuses on *Government Contracting*, a potentially lucrative field, especially when you consider that the government spends over \$400 billion per year on goods and services, 23 percent of which is required by Congressional mandate to be targeted to small businesses (Source: Small Business Administration [SBA]). It is interesting to note, that while 5 percent of all government contracts are set aside for women entrepreneurs, recent data states that only 3.4 percent of these designations are utilized (Source: SBA).

It is possible that the complexity and confusion sometimes associated with government contracts is discouraging some women from making bids in the first place. It is also conceivable that a lack of resources or advice could be contributing to some bids failing to make the grade. At American Express OPENSM we believe these factors affect all entrepreneurs. That's where this guide comes in.

Here, we will give you the essential information you need to succeed in government contracting, from how to use your status as a small business owner to your advantage, to where you can access outreach programs which can assist preparation of specific bids. We'll take you through the steps of becoming certified and targeting federal agencies, and explain the nuances of programs designed to help small businesses whose owners belong to traditionally disadvantaged groups.

In addition, we have advice from OPEN Expert Anne E. Robinson, who outlines the inside knowledge that can turn you from a novice into a specialist overnight. Our Cardmember Story puts the spotlight on Daytner Construction Group, revealing how it has built its percentage of federally contracted work up from 5 percent to almost 50 percent in the last year alone. Founder Theresa Alfaro Daytner stands as an example for anyone eyeing up a piece of the public-sector pie: With the right advice and the right commitment, anything is possible.

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There are a number of steps involved in winning contracts from the government. Here's our step-by-step guide to gaining your share of the \$400 billion annual pie

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GOVERNMENT CONTRACTING

OPEN Expert Anne E. Robinson shows you how to get your foot in the door, then build a successful working relationship with the government

8. CARDMEMBER STORY —
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We meet the woman who has drawn inspiration from her Hispanic culture to build a company that is winning a steady flow of substantial federal contracts

THE ESSENTIALS

WHO WOULDN'T WANT A CLIENT THAT SPENDS MORE THAN \$400 BILLION EACH YEAR? THIS IS THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO ENSURING YOUR BUSINESSES SECURES ITS SHARE

The U.S. Government is the world's largest purchaser of goods and services (Source: SBA). From airplanes to zippers, the bottom line is that if you sell it, there is every chance the government might buy it.

Government contracts are not just for the larger companies – federal agencies are required to target at least 23 percent of their spending for small businesses (Source: SBA). Beyond this overarching target, the government has a large number of programs which are designed to help small businesses get their fair share of contracts.

While there is much to gain, the federal procurement process can be time-consuming, and challenging for small businesses to navigate. All agency contracts must adhere to regulations detailed in the 1000-plus page Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) guidelines.

However, once the skill set is mastered, selling to the federal government can represent a fantastic opportunity for small businesses. Many of the concerns entrepreneurs have about government procurement – it is too complex, assistance

in navigating the process is difficult to find, they can't compete against large contractors – have all been conquered by those that have been successful.

— *The Power of Small*

In a typical year, the government enters into over 10 million “actions” – the federal term for a contract (Source: SBA). Some 95 percent of these represent purchases under \$100,000, which the government actively seeks to steer to smaller companies. In fact, federal rules require that agencies target small businesses for purchases between \$3,000 and \$100,000 (Source: FAR).

— *An Open Process*

When you're selling in the private sector, it is not always easy to know what your potential customers plan to buy. Federal agencies, however, are often required to publish their purchasing needs, meaning any business can go to a web site such as Federal Business Opportunities (www.fedbizopps.gov) to see what contracts are available. This openness provides a leg up to small companies.

— *Help Is Out There*

Besides designating certain purchase amounts for small businesses, the government also funds outreach programs designed specifically to encourage and assist small businesses to participate in the bidding process. These resources, offered through agencies such as the U.S. Small Business Administration (www.sba.gov), can help answer questions, and facilitate and demystify the application procedure.

— *Uncle Sam Is a Powerful Customer*

Having the U.S. Government as a customer can position your business for significant and steady growth. The government frequently buys in large volume and sometimes, more significantly, it does so over a long period of time. This may not translate into the business equivalent of a winning lottery ticket, but being awarded a government contract is momentous – it forms a solid foundation for growing your company. Moreover, selling to the government gives you a “stamp of approval” that will help you appeal to commercial vendors, too.



HOW DOES THE GOVERNMENT DEFINE SMALL BUSINESS?

The SBA characterizes a small business as a concern that is organized for profit, operates primarily in the U.S., or makes a contribution to the U.S. economy by paying taxes or using American products, material or labor. The company cannot be dominant in its field on a national basis. There are also industry-defined standards for employee size and annual revenue:

- 500 for most manufacturing and mining industries
- 100 for all wholesale trade industries
- \$6.5 million for most retail and service industries
- \$31 million for most construction industries
- \$23 million for computer programming and IT industries
- \$0.75 million annual revenue for most agricultural industries

For more information visit www.sba.gov/size.

BECOMING A CERTIFIED CONTRACTOR

Any company can apply to conduct business with the federal government, but your small business status can be a distinct advantage in the contracting process. For example, certain small businesses may qualify for set-asides that can make qualifying easier. Start your certification and registration process with these basic steps:

Prep for Success

Before you register to sell to the Federal Government, make sure you have all the requisite information organized. This includes:

A Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number: The government identifies all contractors by a DUNS number, available for free from Dun & Bradstreet (www.dnb.com/US/duns_update/index.html).

A Federal Tax ID number (also known as an Employer Identification Number [EIN] or Taxpayer Identification Number [TIN]): Apply for one via the IRS using Form SS-4.

Your classification: You will be asked to classify your business by NAICS (North

American Industry Classification) code and by SIC code. You can look up your six-digit NAICS codes at www.census.gov/epcd/www/naics.html, and your SIC code at www.osha.gov/oshstats/sicser.html (though the NAICS codes have effectively replaced the SIC codes, the government still requires the latter).

Financial routing information: As the government prefers electronic-funds transfer for invoice payments (Source: SBA), you will need to provide bank routing and account numbers. These appear at the bottom of your check, but contact your bank or financial institution to confirm the necessary information.

Build an Eye-Catching CCR Profile

If you want to do business with the Federal Government, then you must enter your business in the Central Contractor Registration (www.ccr.gov) database. Agencies and prime contractors turn to this government-maintained database first when looking for potential vendors. When you enter your information in the CCR, it pays to fill out both the mandatory and optional fields. This way, you paint a detailed portrait of your

company's capabilities and qualifications. Because your CCR profile is one of the key marketing methods in selling to the government, think of it as an elevator pitch. Use it to succinctly explain what you offer and what makes you unique. Include the URL for your web site so that federal buyers can learn more about you. And as your capabilities increase, update your CCR profile accordingly.

Use the SBA to Your Advantage

It can pay to be registered with the U.S Small Business Administration, which manages several programs designed to help specific groups secure federal contracts and subcontracts. These include:

Small Disadvantaged Business (SDB) and 8(a) Program: Designed to help small businesses with disadvantaged owners to compete. For the SDB program, the business must be at least 51 percent owned and controlled by one or more individuals who are socially and economically disadvantaged (Source: SBA). African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Asian Pacific Americans, Subcontinent Asian Americans and Native

Americans are presumed to meet this standard.

HUBZone Program: This program is designed to stimulate and encourage economic development and create jobs in designated urban and rural communities through Federal contracting assistance.

Claim What's Rightfully Yours

Other identifications including background and gender can help certain types of businesses in the contracting process. These include:

Women-owned business: A company that is owned and controlled 51 percent by a woman or women. There is a government-wide goal to have women-owned businesses receive not less than 5 percent of the total value of all prime awards entered into each fiscal year.

Veteran-owned business: A business that is at least 51 percent owned by a veteran.

Service-disabled veteran-owned business: A business that is 51 percent owned by one or more service-disabled veterans, as confirmed by the Veterans Administration, can qualify for certain special procurement opportunities and set-asides (Source: SBA).

**WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AN 8(A) AND A SMALL DISADVANTAGED BUSINESS?**

Both the Small Business Administration's 8(a) program and Small Disadvantaged Business certification are designed to help small businesses whose owners belong to traditionally disadvantaged groups.

While, on the surface, the two programs appear similar, there are often more benefits to getting the tougher-to-land 8(a) certification. For instance, 8(a)-certified businesses can procure sole-source contracts from the government. The 8(a) program also allows for mentor-protégé relationships that are not necessarily part of the Small Disadvantaged Business program. Finally, 8(a)-certified businesses are awarded a nine-year business development program with the SBA, while Small Disadvantaged Businesses are not (Source: SBA).

**START SELLING TO
THE GOVERNMENT**

You've registered your business with the CCR and qualified for the appropriate certifications. Now, how do you start getting ready to sell to the government?

First, approach government contracting with the same strategies you would use in the commercial sector. The federal government is an enormous institution with hundreds of agencies with different needs and requirements. Devise a plan to learn the needs of the myriad agencies so you can correctly target your efforts. Use these guidelines to start your plan:

Inspect Your Options

First, check out the Federal Procurement Data System (www.fpds.gov), a hub of government-contracting data, to determine which agencies have a history of buying your type of goods and services. Next, visit the Federal Business Opportunities web site (www.fbo.gov), also known as FedBizOpps. This government-wide site is used to announce all contract opportunities of \$25,000 or more. Use the advanced

search feature to look for "sources sought" opportunities for your NAICS code. "Sources sought" opportunities are not contracts, but are notices from agencies that are looking to see if any small businesses have the capabilities they need. Responding to these lets you promote your capabilities to agencies, and can put you in a good position once an actual bid is sought.

Target Officials

Once you've identified federal agencies likely to work with you, make use of the help offered by each. The Department of Defense, for example, operates Procurement Technology Assistance Centers (PTACs), which can help guide your contracting plan; they also may organize matchmaking events that connect you with procurement officers. Many federal agencies sponsor monthly vendor outreach sessions, hugely valuable face-to-face opportunities. Finally, agencies frequently have Offices of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBUs). Talk to them to find out about marketing opportunities within their agencies and get answers to questions about navigating the bidding process.

Get Financially Fit

Government contracts do not pay in advance, which means that you must ensure that your business has adequate cash flow to get it through the billing and payment cycle. Before you start going after contracts, it may be beneficial to have a line of credit or other financing methods in place to ensure you're able to maintain your financial stability throughout the project.

Line Up Your Advisors

If you're serious about going after government contracts, confer with your professional advisors. For example, your attorney should understand how federal contracts work, and your CPA should be able to help you with the financial aspects of these opportunities; if they don't have the relevant experience, get references for those who do. Finally, consider working with a contracting consultant to help you navigate the process and learn how the government does business.

Prime or Sub?

The government frequently relies on established relationships when selecting contractors, which can hamper first-time applicants (Source: SBA). Depending on the product or service you sell, it may be advantageous to begin as a subcontractor, and use the experience you gain to help you in future solicitations as a prime contractor. Large businesses with prime contracts worth more than \$550,000 (or \$1 million for construction projects) must provide a plan with subcontracting opportunities for multiple categories of small business (Source: SBA).

Get on the GSA Schedule

Because a wide swath of agencies have common purchasing needs – anything from coffee to computer supplies – the government centralizes some of this purchasing through the General Services Administration (GSA). Under its GSA Schedule program (www.gsa.gov/schedules), the GSA establishes long-term contracts that allow agencies to order certain commercial supplies and services directly from GSA contractors. Becoming a GSA Schedule contractor can increase your chances for contracts across all levels of government and is an obvious business boon.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS —**DUNS (Data Universal Numbering System) —**

A database maintained by Dun & Bradstreet that is used by the federal government to identify a contractor, its address, telephone number, employee size and other information.

FAR (Federal Acquisition Regulation) —

The principal set of rules that government agencies must follow when purchasing goods and services.

GSA (General Services Administration) —

An independent agency of the federal government that establishes policy for procurement and secures the buildings, products, services, technology and other workplace essentials that government agencies need.

**NAICS (North American Industry
Classification System) —**

A set of categories developed by the United States, Canada and Mexico to provide common industry definitions within the three countries. In the U.S., NAICS is replacing the SIC code system, but the government still requires both.

**SIC Code (Standard Industrial
Classification Code) —**

A number established by the federal government to specify various industries as defined by their function and products.

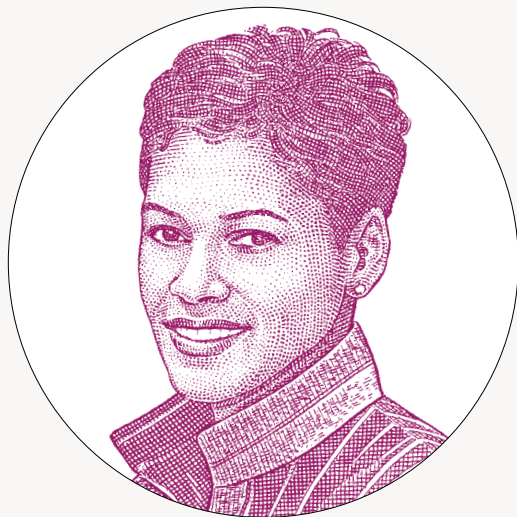
SBA (Small Business Administration) —

The SBA was created in 1953 as an independent agency to protect the interests of small businesses and maintain free competitive enterprise.

SDB (Small Disadvantaged Business) —

A term used by the government to define a business that is at least 51 percent owned and controlled by a socially and economically disadvantaged individual or individuals.





Name: ANNE E. ROBINSON
Job Title: VICE PRESIDENT AND
 SENIOR COUNSEL
Description: PROVIDES LEGAL
 GUIDANCE FOR ALL
 SMALL BUSINESS
 PRODUCTS AND
 SERVICES
Member Since: 1990

EXPERT OPINION

OBTAINING AND FULFILLING GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS CAN SEEM DAUNTING, BUT THERE IS NO NEED TO BE INTIMIDATED, AS OPEN EXPERT ANNE E. ROBINSON REVEALS

The secret of making government contracts a key part of your business is gaining a thorough understanding of their specific demands. While the art of building a relationship with a government agency is essentially the same as with any other client, you must conduct your operations in a certain way to maximize your chance of winning the contracts, of fulfilling them to the satisfaction of the agency, then of consistently having them renewed.

In this sector, perhaps more than any other, you must be able to draw on deep reserves of perseverance and patience to deal with the circumstances that arise from working in such an accountable domain. Above all, the following five areas need particular attention when it comes to meeting the unique demands of the government market:

— KNOW THE RULES

To succeed in contracting, it helps to be intimate with the rules and regulations that govern the process. Otherwise, you may be at risk of doing something illegal that can put a contract in jeopardy. These rules are published in the Federal Acquisition Regulation, aka

“the FAR,” the bible of federal contracting. When you meet with agency purchasing officers, you may find them referring to the FAR, particularly in terms of what they’re able and not able to do. The must-read sections are Part 19 (Small Business Programs) and Part 52, which details the standard terms and conditions of government contracts. You can view the FAR online at www.arnet.gov/far.

— BUILD PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

The networking skills that benefit a business in the commercial world can be used in the government sector as well. Cultivate relationships with procurement officers to learn about bid opportunities and familiarize them with your skills. Get to know the client, so that you are fully aware of their needs. Take advantage of government outreach events, such as agency procurement fairs, contractor matchmaking sessions and conferences to cement relationships with buyers and suppliers. Finally, by attending sessions where your contracting contacts may be speaking, you can find out some more about them.

— PROMOTE YOURSELF

The government market is competitive, and to grow your business you will need to develop a solid marketing campaign that helps procurement officials understand the benefits of working with your company. Past contracting success can lead to future contracts, so leverage your accomplishments in your marketing efforts, using case studies that show how you solved an agency’s problem. Testimonials and referrals from successful government projects can also be invaluable. One caveat, however: Always get permission from the agency first – you need to make sure that your marketing collateral does not disclose any part of a contract that could be deemed sensitive.

— TALK THE TALK

Communication breakdowns are one of the most common obstacles that come between aspiring or inexperienced contractors and federal buyers. Contractors do not always understand what they’re being told by government purchasers, or they’re unable to read the purchasers’ messages

as to whether or not their performance is considered satisfactory. The problem lies in the fact that governmental organizations often use language that can seem opaque to the uninitiated – so it’s not your fault if you don’t understand everything at first. But you have to get used to it, so learn government-speak by attending as many information sessions as you can and perhaps even getting help from a contracting consultant.

— KEEP YOUR HOUSE IN ORDER

The quality of your documentation can be the difference between keeping and losing government contracts. Develop a rock-solid paper trail by maintaining accurate records related to all facets of your contracts, such as important transactions and meetings – you may need to refer to such information during project debriefings. Above all ensure you have a Quality Assurance and Quality Control (QAQC) plan in place. Consider also using a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system to keep track of key factors such as bid status, award data and profiles of decision makers.

Name: THERESA ALFARO DAYTNER
Company: DAYTNER CONSTRUCTION GROUP
Founded: 2003
Location: MT AIRY, MD

DAYTNER CONSTRUCTION GROUP

TWO VITAL KEYWORDS FOR GOVERNMENT CONTRACTORS ARE “TENACITY” AND “NETWORKING.” BUT FOR THERESA ALFARO DAYTNER, THEY ARE ALSO PARTS OF HER CULTURE

Five years ago, Theresa Alfaro Daytner attended the U.S. Small Business Administration’s annual conference in Washington, DC. Her company, Daytner Construction Group – a construction management and consulting company which represents building owners in overseeing aspects of building assembly from budgeting through construction and move-in – was looking to break into government contracting. Over drinks and canapés, she met a woman named Olga Martinez, who also ran a construction company. “She really took me under her wing,” says Daytner. “The day after I met her, she was due at Capitol Hill to testify before the Small Business Committee, and she took me with her and introduced me to all the top players in government contracting. It made all the difference.”

Today, Daytner Construction is working on its largest federal contract – a two-year, \$52 million construction project in DC for the General Services Administration. This job has bumped up her company’s percentage of federally contracted work to almost 50 percent up from just 5 percent a year ago,

and is forecast to push the company’s annual revenue into seven figures. It’s a triumphant vindication not only of Daytner’s decision to focus on the lucrative government contracting sector but also of the strategy she used to court federal procurement officials, which can be summed up in one word: tenacity.

“Getting that initial foot in the door when it comes to government contracting costs more and takes longer than you’d ever imagine,” says Daytner with a laugh. “There’s a huge learning curve to figuring out the system. Given that, it makes sense to have already been in business for two or three years. Very few companies start by selling to the government, unless they happen to be retired government employees themselves, and already know the procedures. Other than that, be persistent,” Daytner advises. “Put in the face-time, meet the right people at expos and trade fairs, show up and cultivate relationships so that they recognize you and know you’re a serious player who’s here to stay. Get involved in business organizations” (Daytner is currently vice-president of the Maryland Hispanic Chamber of Commerce). “You don’t need to know 500



people, you probably only need five really strong contacts, so focus on those. Mentoring, in the way Olga helped me, can be a huge bonus, but luck, in this context, is a matter of being prepared and making sure you’re in the right place at the right time.”

Daytner also credits her ethnicity and gender as significant factors in her success. “Hispanic culture is very supporting,” she says. “I’ve met a few Hispanic high rollers, who think nothing of giving you access to their own networks of contacts. That’s been hugely helpful. Plus I love letting my hair down with my people.” But from talking to the effervescent Daytner, one feels she would have made it regardless of her background. “I always wanted to be a financially independent woman,” she says emphatically. “I would say I’m pretty competitive. I wasn’t about to be mediocre or average.”

Daytner’s clear-sighted confidence and ferocious work ethic were instilled in her by her parents. She was born and raised in Maryland; her father, a Chilean/Venezuelan immigrant, worked in many different fields, including publishing and hairdressing, while

her mother studied geology at college and would take Daytner and her siblings off to look for fossils. “Most adults aren’t innovative in their thinking; caution tends to kick in as you get older,” she says. “My parents were the opposite, and I’ve inherited that single-minded streak.” For a start, Daytner realized that it wasn’t her destiny to be an employee in a large company. “I’ve found it impossible to work for anyone but myself,” she says, laughing. “The number of times I’ve heard, ‘If you could just learn to focus, you’d be alright...’ She trails off, exasperated. “I saw my lack of focus as a gift. I’m a creative, innovative thinker, and I have a lot of energy.”

Daytner plowed that energy into her own enterprises. She started a roofing company as a young mother in her early twenties: “My then-husband was a roofer and I saw that most of his contractors were quite unprofessional,” she says matter-of-factly. “So I thought, well, it can’t be hard to improve on that. I just have to advertise, get the licenses and insurance, set up a commercial number, get reliable laborers, and go through the home-builder phone-book. By the time I got

to B we had more work than we could handle. That experience formed my business mantra: Use your initiative.”

A couple of years later Daytner left her husband and nascent roofing company and became a CPA. “I never saw accounting as a be-all and end-all,” she says, “but it helped broaden my experience, and also gave me more respect and credibility as a businesswoman.” In 1990, she was working as a project accountant for a general contractor in DC when she met her second husband Allen, who was the project manager. She continued to work as a CPA operating her own practice until 2001, but in 2003 she decided to set up her own company with her husband. “I convinced him that he should combine his technical skills with my entrepreneurial experience,” she says with a laugh, and Daytner Construction Group was born. The early years of the company were exhausting – at one point, Daytner had four children under 10 (including 18-month-old twins) plus two teenage daughters to deal with – but, she says, she and Allen became champion jugglers of their family and business lives. “We simply made it work,” she shrugs.

“I’m pretty good at not carrying baggage, and I’m not a control freak. Just because something has traditionally been done in a certain way, it doesn’t mean it’s set in stone. We’ve got around 15 employees at a 50-50 male-female split, and we make a lot of our policy on the hoof. For instance, we cover 100 percent of our employees’ and their families’ health insurance. That’s unusual, but extremely important to us. That’s where a family-friendly culture starts.”

Daytner set up the construction company with a view to getting government contracts. However, in their first four years of business, their revenues were in the private sector. “The federal government is extremely focused on past performance,” says Daytner. “They can’t afford to take too many risks on untried companies. It can be a bit of a catch-22; that’s where you have to put the legwork in and God knows I did.” Last year, Daytner Construction won a couple of small contracts for the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, which, along with the advocacy of Olga Martinez, set them up nicely for their current contract. The company is now operating at the 50-50 government/

private-commercial sector split that Daytner originally envisaged. “The mix is good, because one sector can help prop up the other,” she says. “But for us to have this large, high-profile government project is huge; it’s great for our business development.”

In 2006 Daytner won the Make Mine A Million \$ Business program – designed to help female entrepreneurs grow their businesses with a combination of money, mentoring and marketing – but now she has her eyes on a different kind of prize.

Daytner is in talks to set up a strategic alliance with a much larger international construction firm. “They’re much further along their life-cycle than we are,” she says, “and we can get each other into mutually beneficial territories. It would be like a great marriage. And our cultures are aligned.” The latter is surely an allusion to the fact that the company she’s teamed up with is owned and run by another Hispanic woman. Given what Daytner has accomplished to date, both in government contracting and in her personal life, this formidable coalition will certainly be unstoppable.



**FOR MORE INFO ON
DAYTNER CONSTRUCTION
GROUP SEE:**
www.daytnercorp.com

OPPOSITE PAGE
*Theresa and Allen's
blueprint for success*

ABOVE LEFT
*A new angle on the
daily grind*

TOP
*Theresa confers with
colleague Kim Seal*

ABOVE
*Keeping the plans on
the level*

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