



W Wolfenden

The Digital Dose.

Unpacking The Pillars Of
SEO Performance.

Marketing
That Matters.



Unpacking The Pillars of SEO Performance.

One of the basic principles in Google's Webmaster Guidelines is to create pages primarily for users, not search engines.

Always remember that Google's goal is to show the most relevant search to the user, so the factors its algorithm uses to determine the relevancy and quality of a page in relation to a particular search term is always going to be aligned with what the user would want and expect to see when they make that search.

Over the years, Google has been refining its algorithms to better determine how to show the right result to users, and so for us in the SEO industry, it's largely been a game of trying to keep up with what factors its looking for. However, increasingly, the line between good SEO and just good marketing has blurred – although SEO still involves a hell of a lot of

technical expertise and know-how – the overarching principle of good SEO is to provide the best possible user experience for your target audience.

For that reason, SEO can't be a siloed service, and by that we mean you can't just leave your SEO team to it and only check in on them to look at ranking reports and traffic levels; what they're working on has to be completely aligned with your wider marketing and business strategy.

What we'll cover in this guide are the main areas of SEO you and your business should consider to make your organic performance work harder. It's always advisable to get some expert advice on building a strong SEO strategy but there are a few basic things you can implement yourself.



Building a Strong Foundation.

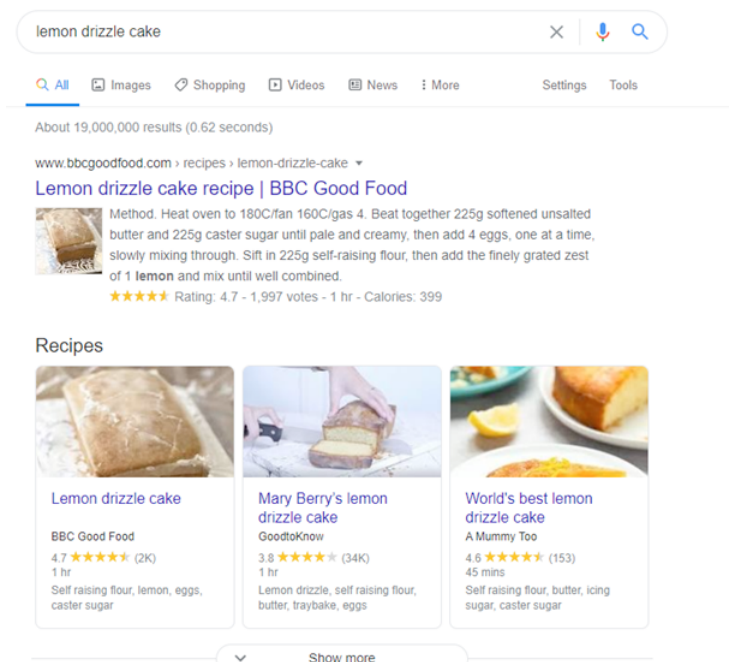
You could be securing top tier national coverage and have one of the biggest brands in your sector, but unless your website is optimised from a technical SEO perspective, Google won't know what to rank you for.

Having a good foundation of technical SEO can cover everything from sitemaps, meta tags, internal linking, in-depth keyword research and much more. This is also fundamental from a user experience perspective – having a solid technical foundation helps your users more easily find what they're looking for on your site.

Google needs to be able to understand the make-up of your pages to understand the content on your pages, and how relevant you are for particular search terms. Structured data is a key way that helps Google to do this.

Structured data explicitly tells Google what your website / web page is about: it's a standardised format for providing information about a page and classifying the page content. Google also uses this structured data to enable special search result features, for example, showing websites on a knowledge graph.

Take a look at the example on the right – Google has pulled the recipe for a lemon drizzle cake straight into the search results, along with the recipe rating, how long it takes to cook, and how many calories it has.



“Unless your website is optimised from a technical SEO perspective, Google won't know what to rank you for.”

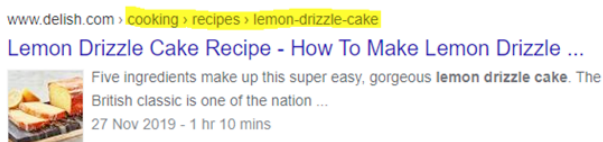
Another way structured data helps the appearance of your search result is with



enriched search features; these include breadcrumbs and sitelinks.

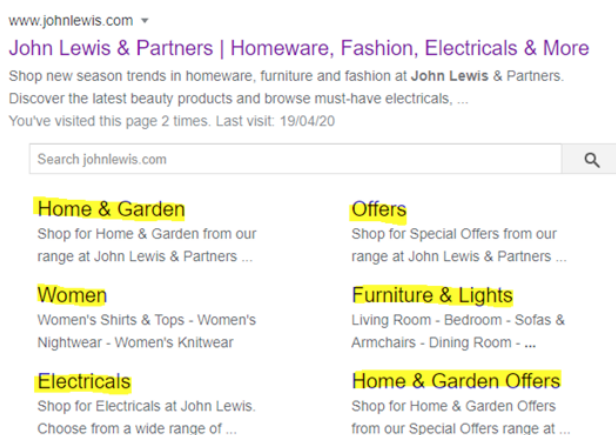
Breadcrumbs indicate a page's position in the site hierarchy, not only are they super useful for users on your site to help them navigate and know where they are on your site, but they can also appear in your search listing and make your link more attractive to users.

For example, if we stick with the lemon drizzle cake search:



You can see instantly where that recipe page sits on the delish.com website, and you can even click into the "cooking" or "recipes" categories straight from the results page.

Sitelinks are another way to enhance your search listings, these are additional links that are displayed beneath a search result that navigate to different parts of the website. Google will pull these links into the SERP when it thinks that these additional links would benefit the user. For example:



Outside of the SERPs, you can also use structured data to mark-up your email campaigns, for example, if you send emails to confirm reservations or bookings, you can help this information be summarised at the top of the email for convenience for the user.

You can try managing your structured data yourself using Google's Structured Data Mark-up Helper and Testing tools, but with a large website or a particularly competitive industry, it is advised to seek expert help. Once you've done it, be patient – Google can take weeks to crawl your new HTML mark-up and decide what information it wants to pull into the SERPs.

“Breadcrumbs make
your SERP more
attractive to users.”





So, Where Does Content Come In?

It's no secret that to rank well on search engines, you need a solid content strategy. And this isn't about tricks to fill as many keywords as you can on certain areas of your pages or churning out post after post of slight variations of keyword-heavy copy; again, just bring it back to the user. What content would be useful for them? What would make them trust that content? What content would give them most value?

As we know, Google is trying to emulate what the user would want to see – so they need to be able to measure the value and relevancy of content to users in order to rank them. Google's way of assessing high-quality page content is called E.A.T. = Expertise, Authority, Trustworthiness.

These are the three pillars Google is measuring your content against to determine if you're the

best result for a particular user with a particular query.

E.A.T. has been talked about ever since a Google algorithm update in August 2018, where a lot of websites offering health and medical advice were negatively hit. These websites could be categorised under "YMYL" content – meaning Your Money or Your Life. This is content that has the potential to negatively impact a user's happiness, health or wealth. In other words, if these pages are low quality, they have the potential to impact a person's wellbeing.

So when it comes to this type of content, Google wants to make sure it's recommending sites that are offering expert advice and can be trusted by the public. It's essentially Google's way of protecting searchers from really low-quality content.



Google's human Quality Rater team uses an extensive guidelines document – the [Search Quality Evaluator Guidelines](#) – to determine the quality of a web page's content. Here are some tips we can take from how they measure a page's E.A.T:

Expertise

How can you create expert content? Firstly, you need to find out what your audience is searching for and then meet and exceed their needs, this all begins with thorough keyword research. But it's not just enough for you to understand the search terms around your product / service / industry, you need to understand the intent behind the searches for you to really be able to serve that query with the right content.

Some of this will be down to what stage in the consumer journey that person is at, for example, if someone is searching "cheap washing machines" – you know that this person is in the market to buy a washing machine, as they've included the word "cheap" so they're actively looking for prices and to make a transaction. But the fact they've searched for "washing machines" in general tells you that they've not found a particular model and don't seem to be looking for a particular brand, so if you're a company which sells washing machines, a guide to the best rated low-budget washing machines would be what you want to get in front of them here.

Understanding the stage of the journey and intent can also inform the style of writing and

the way you format your content, for example, if the search term used makes it clear that the searcher is new to the subject – try not to use too much jargon or complicated language in your content.

To be seen as an expert on the terms you're targeting, you'll want to become the go-to source of information in your field. So try to create content across the consumer journey – with the ultimate aim of trying to push the searcher along to the next stage of their journey.

To be seen as an expert, you'll also want to display credentials which supports the content creator as an expert. One way is to have author pages for your content authors which show their bio and any relevant credentials they might have such as industry qualifications, awards, reviews. The credentials of the site as a whole will also be measured: so how many positive reviews you have, how many recommendations from other experts, how many news articles there are about you.

It's also a good idea to make sure you have an About Us page and talk about the history of your business, who founded it, what relevant industry accreditations and qualifications you have, any awards you've been shortlisted for or won, any companies you partner with, and any professional organisations your business belongs to. This will all add credence to your expertise in your field.



Authority

We all know links play a big part in SEO success; and in assessing your authority, Google will look for links to you from relevant and authoritative websites. There's no better endorsement a website can get from another website owner than a link – it's almost like a recommendation, and the bigger the domain authority (DA) of the website recommending you, the better.

But this isn't just about links, when measuring the authority of a website – Google will also look for mentions. So coverage and mentions of your company even without a link is still really important. Social media mentions also come under this umbrella, if your content is widely shared – genuinely and consistently – across social media, this is also a good sign of your authority.

Relevancy is also a factor here: links gained need to be relevant to your field, content you create on-site has to be relevant to your audience and your products / services, any citations from individuals, companies and organisations should be relevant to your industry.

Trustworthiness

Why should users – and therefore Google – trust you and your content? And how can you demonstrate that you are a trustworthy company? Google has been really clear in its quality guidelines that too many bad reviews is a sign of low quality and trust.

Positive reviews on third-party platforms like TripAdvisor, TrustPilot, Facebook and Google My Business are really going to help here. And you should integrate these within your site – don't post static reviews – you want to show you've got nothing to hide.

Another way to promote trustworthiness on your site is having a really clear way for users to be able to contact the website owners, a lack of any contact information is a really negative sign. Speaking of contact details, it's also a good sign if you can associate the website with a physical location.

Technical aspects of your website are also really important here – so making sure your website's domain is secure with correct implementation of HTTPS, making sure any comment sections and forums are free from spam, making sure any ecommerce pages function properly and it's easy to find and purchase products.

Content around products and services is key too; do you have clear refunds and returns policies if you're selling products? Do you have comprehensive specifications of products and any safety advice customers may need?

Expertise, authoritativeness and trustworthiness all take time to build and nurture, with no real shortcuts, but if you do all of this right and you achieve a high E.A.T. – it will be really hard for competitors to knock you off the top ranking spots.



Why Local SEO Matters.

Unsurprisingly, local SEO is really important if you have physical store or office locations. It really isn't all that different from usual SEO principles: keyword research, content, links, technical SEO – it's just that it all has a local focus.

HubSpot's State of Marketing report reveals that 72% of consumers that did a local search then visited a store within 5 miles, and GoGulf revealed that almost half (46%) of all Google searches are looking for local information.

You'll likely do this yourself all of the time. Imagine you were looking to hire a dog walker to take your dog out when you're at work. You would probably search "dog walkers near me", or "dog walkers Leeds" or whatever your location is, or even just simply "dog walkers". If you're a dog walking company in that location, these searches are going to be incredibly powerful for you.

Firstly, do your keyword research – you can use a range of tools to do this, Google Trends, Google AdWords Keyword Planner (if you have a Google AdWords account), Google's Keyword Planner, and find all of the relevant keywords around your product, service or industry.

"Local SEO really isn't all that different from usual SEO principles."



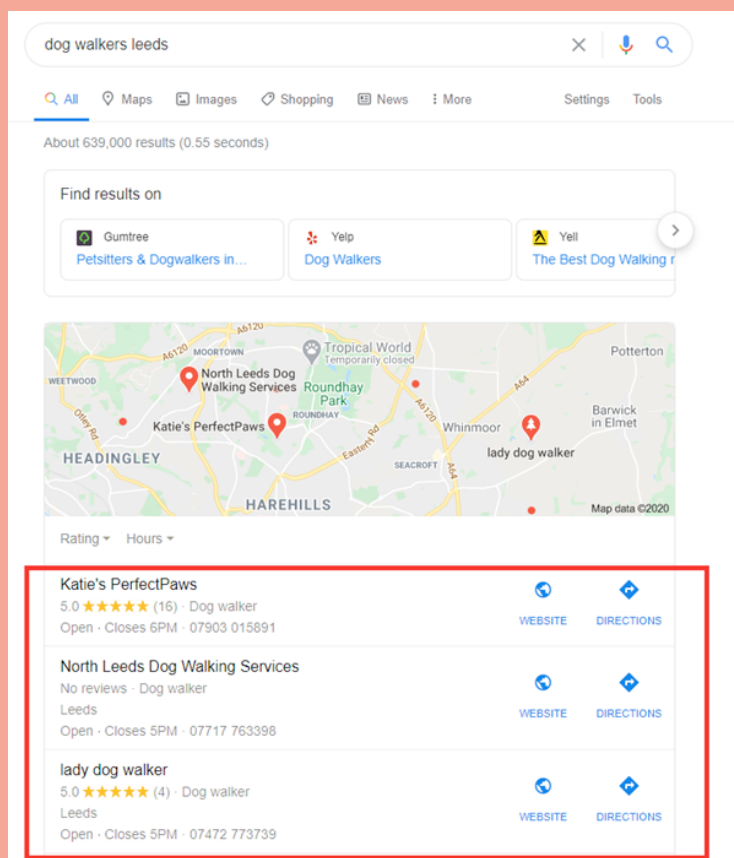


Another great tool is Also Asked, where you can type in a question and find out what other related questions people are asking, as well as Answer the Public which shows you what questions people are asking around a particular question. These are both great tools for discovering the long-tail searches people are making in relation to your product, service or industry and create a great basis for your content strategy.

For this though, we're just trying to discover and pull out the searches with local intent, so you can identify what searches you need to be targeting. Then you need to ensure you've set yourself up correctly to do everything you can to be found in your area, here are some things to check you have:

Google My Business: Create and verify a Google My Business page, it's free and definitely worth doing for every physical location you have. Make sure all of your contact information is up-to-date and be sure to upload some relevant and high-quality images of your office and perhaps your local team, this will help to lend some credibility to your business. Google will use the information in here to pull into the "local pack"

or "3 pack" as it's sometimes known, this is the block of 3 business listings that appear below the map in the SERPs shown after a search with local intent, for example:





A mobile friendly website: Local search and mobile search go hand-in-hand, some of the most common ways people will find your site in a mobile environment is to look up reviews, find directions to your location and search for contact information. Google revealed that 74% of consumers that search for something local on their phone visit a store that same day. Your website should be designed and developed with a mobile-first approach regardless, but if you want to drive customers to physical locations, this is even more important for you.

Consistent NAP: Also known as citations, this is your Name, Address, and Phone number – and these are obviously particularly important to get correct for local SEO. You need to make sure these are the same across every location they're displayed, so on your website, social channels, review sites, online directories etc. If they're inconsistent and incorrect, Google and users will lose trust in you.

Relevant links and coverage: As part of your wider digital PR & outreach strategy, if you have physical locations it's a really good idea to focus some effort on your local SEO link profile. This could include local directory websites, local partner sites, local newspaper and magazine sites and local bloggers.

“Local search and mobile search go hand-in-hand.”

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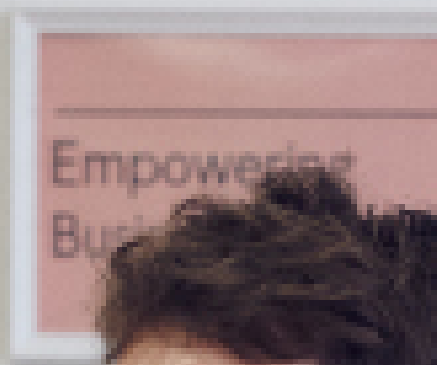
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hello@wolfenden.agency



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Getting a Site Migration Right.

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We often see clients coming to us who have had their site migration badly handled, or have even had no SEO input on their site migration, and they're struggling with rankings, visibility and traffic which has tanked. A poorly implemented site migration can destroy a brand's organic performance.

When you migrate your site, remember that Google will need to crawl the site again and update its index accordingly – for this reason it will almost always result in a temporary loss of traffic – but if you've migrated in the right way, it should return.

"A poorly implemented site migration can destroy a brand's organic performance."

Here are some things to remember from an SEO perspective when planning a site migration:

Testing: Never do a site migration without testing everything first on a test server, this way, you can make sure that all redirects are working as they should and you can do all of your checks in private before going public.

Timing is everything: Plan your site migration for a typically slow period. If you're a business that has some seasonality to its performance, plan this in for a down period. As mentioned, you'll always likely see a temporary dip in performance, but minimise the impact to your business by rolling out in a typically slow performing period anyway.

Do a site crawl: Using a tool such as Screaming Frog, download a complete list of URLs for your old site so that nothing ends up getting lost in the transition. This will also give you a good opportunity to uncover any crawl errors and

redirects that exist on the old site, so you can fix them on the new site.

Benchmark your Analytics: Make a copy of your Google Analytics data, you'll need this so that you can quickly identify if any traffic has been lost after the migration. In most cases, losses of traffic can be pinned down to isolated pages. You'll also want to use Google Analytics annotations to mark critical data during the migration, again, helping with any issues that might crop up in traffic performance.

Don't cull lots of content: Ideally, all or most of the old pages from your website should exist on the new site, don't use it as an opportunity to cull a load of content. Dropping too many pages could lead Google to conclude that the new site isn't the same as the old site, causing you to lose your rankings.

Update links: For all of your internal links, you might be tempted to leave them as they are as they'll redirect to the new site anyway, but this could impact your page rank, so be sure to take the time to go through and update all internal links to the new URLs. For backlinks, ask your team to reach out to your most prominent and high value links and ask them to update it to the new link. Not all of them will, but even if a few do, it will be worth it. And of course, make sure any paid activity such as PPC or paid social is using the new URLs, don't rely on redirects for these as you'll lose the attribution in Google Analytics.

Step up your tracking: Get Google Analytics on the new domain up and running before you launch the site, you don't want to have any missing data during the transition. Keep a really close eye on traffic, performance and rankings on a daily basis for at least the first few weeks, and look out for any particular pages that have lost a lot of traffic so then you can inspect them for crawl errors or linking issues.



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How To Approach Your Off-site Strategy.

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Coming back to Google's E.A.T. measurement – your marketing activity outside of your onsite actions can play a part in how Google assess you against this, too. Your off-site strategy isn't just 'link building', although obviously links are a big factor.

The goal is to accumulate positive signals and interactions for your brand, those signals and interactions being positive reviews, more brand mentions, more brand searches, relevant and high-quality links, social media engagement and so on.

So, how can you put a strategy in place to generate this? Above all, we need to remember that at the core of optimising your business for SEO, you are optimising it for the user. You want to reach the most relevant audience for your product / service, help them easily find what they're looking for, eventually generating the right kind of business for you. If you keep your audience front of mind when thinking about your off-site strategy, you won't go far wrong.

Think about the following elements when piecing together your off-site strategy:

Your social media presence: Make sure that someone in your team is always monitoring your accounts and can respond to any posts or questions quickly and effectively. Remember as well that this is somewhere you can show a bit

of your brand personality, so be human, don't copy and paste robotic, corporate responses. This is a valuable channel to really connect with your audience on a personal level. The level of brand mentions and engagement here is also something Google will take into account.

Find the conversation, and be a part of it: Where are your audience reading and talking about your product / service / industry? Where are your competitors talking about it? Your audience might be inspired by Instagram influencers, or they might read buying guides in a lifestyle magazine. Do your research to find a list of targets, and work out the best approach for each and topics which will resonate with your audience in that environment.

Collect and respond to reviews: Reviews are taken into account by Google when assessing the trustworthiness of your site in a few different ways, such as the percentage of positive reviews vs. negative, and whether you're responding to both positive and negative reviews. It's clear then that as part of your off-site strategy you should be factoring in how to collect and effectively respond to reviews. A BrightLocal study found that 70% of people will leave a review if asked, so make sure as part of your customer journey you are asking people to leave a review – this could just be an email sent after your customer has received their order / service.



The Weight of Your Brand.

This brings us nicely to the importance of your brand and its impact on your SEO performance. Brand is undoubtedly important when we think about organic rankings – for a lot of the reasons we’ve spoken about above.

Getting positive reviews, gaining relevant press coverage, getting plenty of engagement on social media – are all factors contributing to the strength of your organic performance, and the better this is, the stronger your brand presence is. The stronger your brand is – the more you’ll positive mentions you’ll get and so forth.

Ultimately, the strength of your brand comes down to the quality of the experience you offer your customer, both online and offline. When your product or service is recognised as the best of its kind, SEO becomes much easier. That’s because both online and offline, people are more likely to be saying great things about you – leading to more visits to your site and obviously increased sales.

People expect to see brands in the search results, people trust brands – and therefore that’s what Google wants to show them. So it makes sense that Google is looking for the entities of what makes a great brand. It can therefore be assumed that Google is using the traits of E.A.T. to assess the quality and relevancy of your brand, and whether to show it for particular products or services.

So we come back then, to the point made in the introduction that SEO cannot be a siloed service. With so many factors – offline as well as online, offsite as well as onsite – contributing to how Google is measuring the quality and relevancy of your site for particular search terms, SEO need to interlink with so many other areas of your business and other marketing channels to succeed.

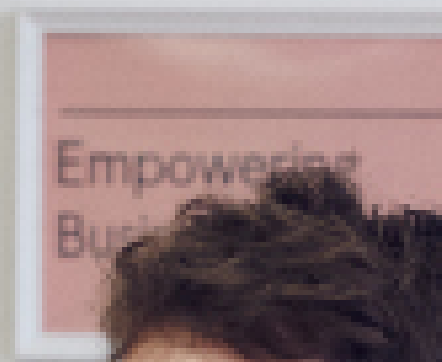


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hello@wolfenden.agency



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What to Action Now.

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Measure, measure, measure: If you don't have tracking setup correctly on your site, you'll never know which areas of the site might be causing you to lose traffic and lose sales. If you're doing any kind of marketing to drive traffic to your site, you should have proper Analytics tracking setup with Google Tag Manager to help you attribute conversions back to specific areas of your marketing. If you need any help with this, let us know.

Don't misjudge the impact of a solid technical foundation: You could be building hundreds of links a month but if your website isn't properly optimised to be crawled correctly by search engines or to offer a high quality user experience to your customers: it won't rank and it won't convert. Let an expert do a proper technical audit of any outstanding issues on your site which could be hampering your performance, the fixes are likely simpler and quicker to make than you think.

Setup Google My Business pages for physical locations: This is really important if you want to focus on sending customers to your stores or getting in touch with you for local services. It's

relatively easy (and free) to setup yourself as well.

Review your link strategy: Some businesses are still so focused on driving a huge number of links, with little interest for their relevancy or quality, because that's what they think will help them to rank. Links do play a big part in SEO visibility – no doubt about it – but it's not a numbers game, Google looks for the authority, relevancy and quality of the links pointing to your site. Your backlink profile is something that needs continuous review and maintenance too, you might lose high value links over time without realising, or have low quality links sat in your profile hindering performance.

“Links do play a big part in SEO visibility – but it's not a numbers game, Google looks for the authority, relevancy and quality of the links.”

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If you need any help with any of the points raised above, the Wolfenden team would be happy to carry out a free audit to uncover any potential issues that could be impacting your rankings, visibility and traffic.

Get in touch to get yours.

wolfenden.agency
hello@wolfenden.agency

0113 833 0239

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