# **GPO Depository CD-ROMs:**Problems and Issues

by Suzanne Wise, Marie Clark, and Joel Sigmon

hen the Government Printing Office (GPO) began distributing information to depository libraries in CD-ROM format, a whole new era in electronic data retrieval began for documents librarians. Suddenly, high-priced subscription items like the National Trade Data Bank were available to these depositories free of charge.

Nonetheless, these materials are expensive to use because of equipment costs, staff commitment, and training responsibilities. The Documents Section sponsored a program at the 1991 North Carolina Library Association Conference called "GPO Depository CD-ROMS — Problems and Issues" in which a panel of speakers addressed a variety of concepts related not only to CD-ROM formats but also to electronic access to information in general.

The Impact of Compact Disc Products on Reference Staffing
— Suzanne Wise

I am not a computer guru. I have trouble changing a light bulb. Anyone from Appalachian State University will vouch for the fact that I demand to have all instructions relating to computers in writing, in great detail—you have to tell me to turn on the power, press the enter key, etc. I can handle the intellectual end of searching, but I am convinced that computers are just expensive boxes with magic pebbles inside. Luckily, Appalachian has staff who are true techies who love to figure out how to run electronic products. In my department, I'm like the Mikey of cereal commercial fame: let's let Suzanne try it — if it works for her, it will work for anybody!

Confessions made, I would like to discuss the impact of compact disc products on reference staffing. Most of us old timers will probably agree that the skills necessary to provide exemplary public service have changed tremendously since we first entered the profession. Even ten years ago we felt very progressive if we performed a few online searches.

In 1991 a large part of my day is consumed signing up patrons for a CD workstation (we have ten, and they are so popular that most have to be reserved ahead of time), instructing them in the basics of searching the CD, fixing balky printers, explaining how to download, etc. I feel less like a librarian than a plumber/electrician/mechanical engineer.

From the information seeker's point of view, however, compact discs are a godsend. It is easier than ever before to access more information, quicker, and to get it in a customized package. Certainly none of us prefers to search the printed volumes of the Monthly Catalog of Government Publications if we can use its CD version instead. Electronic products are much more appeal-

ing to the public than print versions; they actually attract people to the library. All of us have witnessed the crowds of people waiting to get to InfoTrac, for instance. No amount of persuasion will convince them to use a printed index instead. They want to use that computer.

Compact discs have affected government publications in a big way. Agencies have discovered that they can disseminate information more cheaply on compact disc than on paper. Not knowing what may be made available in electronic format in the future, Appalachian receives all the catch-all electronic product item categories. Unfortunately, we must wade through a lot of trivia to acquire the few treasures; every new box of documents from GPO contains a disc or two.

At first I felt overwhelmed. Somehow, the glitzy format of these products made them seem more important than the old tried and true paper and microfiche publications, and I agonized over the fact that they were relegated to the long queue of tasks our computer support staff had before them. Gradually I have realized that, just like print or microform, some are more valuable to our users than others, so I select those I think will be most useful for immediate loading on our compact disc workstations. The rest are languishing until we have a chance to bring them up. Given the esoteric nature of these "orphans," I doubt there will be a demand for them in this century.

Some statements from a collection of essays prepared for the 1991 LITA President's Program at ALA claim:

Citizens must have the necessary skills to gain access to and utilize electronically stored and disseminated information. Government information must be interpreted and/or explained for users on request by expert agency personnel and/or other well-informed specialists. <sup>2</sup>

And we know who those "well-informed specialists" are expected to be; we have met the experts, and they are us!

The crux of our problem is that a new type of literacy is becoming essential for anyone who wants to find information. In the past, the ability to comprehend the words of a printed text was sufficient. Today, information seekers must also be electronically literate — they must be able to use the technology required to access that information.

At present most of the information seekers we work with are not electronically literate, or at best they have only marginal electronic skills. Who is to teach them? That is the problem we face.

Ideally, libraries should provide all the information needed by all their patrons. If a service or product is needed, and we do not offer it, users will find someone who does. This explains the success of commercial information brokers. It is certain that if we don't get on the electronic information train, we will be run over by it. However, we are not fueled by the profit motive. Increased demand does not translate into more resources to satisfy that demand. The level and type of service we can offer are governed by staffing, budget, and physical space constraints. At Appalachian our seven reference librarians also handle government documents and interlibrary loan, as well as a large bibliographic instruction program, online search services, and collection development. We are open ninety-nine hours a week and answer about fifty thousand questions at the reference desk each year. The services we offer to users of compact discs must be planned so as not to damage our primary responsibility as we see it: one-on-one research consultation at the desk.

The greatest impact of compact disc technology on service is without doubt in the area of staffing. More time is required to get electronic products ready to use (you can't just set them out, like printed volumes on a shelf), more time is required to maintain them (hardware and software problems occur, new software releases must be loaded, etc.), and librarians need more training to be able to teach patrons to use them competently. We, too, must be electronically literate. The principal obstacle is that most government compact discs are not bibliographic file. They are tables of numbers, arranged higgledy-piggledy, with little or no user-friendly software or printed documentation. They are electronic relatives of those printed beasties such as Simmons Study of Media & Markets and Beilsteins Handbook of Organic Chemistry. Information is organized in a totally exotic format.

So let's address the first requirement of offering CD products to the public. We have to be knowledgeable enough about our resources to guide patrons to them and get them started. I have never claimed to be a biologist, but I can help patrons do a reasonably decent search of *Biological Abstracts*. I should be able to offer the same service to users of electronic products. What that means is committing time to staff training — not just talking about it, but doing it. Someone in the library must be formally responsible for getting a CD product running, and someone should be designated the in-house "expert," the person who trains other staff members, who writes user aids, who handles the difficult searches. It is no different from learning how to use an especially gruesome new printed reference work.

Next we come to patron instruction. Training the public in the use of electronic products forces us to make some choices in service priorities. Everyone wants to use compact discs, and we have no way to reach them all with even introductory training. However, we must remind ourselves that users don't have to do perfect searches. Their search strategies and choice of print products have often been suspect, and the same will hold true with compact discs. At first Appalachian held small group sessions every day to teach patrons the basics of using CDs, but they were not well attended, tied up a valuable workstation and a scarce librarian for an hour, and we still had to do a lot of one-onone teaching. (You know the scenario: student comes in at 9:00 P.M. and says piteously, "I have an assignment due tomorrow and my teacher said I have to use the computer and find five articles in refereed journals on the economic and social impact of llama ranches in western North Carolina."). Although there are drawbacks, we have finally settled on a policy of on-demand basic instruction from the desk, fuller instruction by appointment, and brief printed user aids for the various CD products, with occasional large class demonstrations at the request of an instructor. This is essentially the same service we have traditionally offered for print products. And as has always been the case, there is a lot of peer teaching going on among users.

We have discovered an unexpected benefit of electronic products. Because they are required to sign up for a workstation and to return for their ID cards when they are finished, users have to talk to librarians. Once the ice is broken, they are much more likely to ask follow-up questions about how to use the product of how to get better results. We can then explain the importance of

verifying search terms or suggest alternative sources of information. When users of print products are unsuccessful, they often stomp off in frustration and we never have the chance to work with them.

One of the most helpful aspects of our electronic reference services at Appalachian is our use of a LAN (local area network). At present we have eight CDs loaded on the LAN, and they can be used simultaneously at any of five different workstations. We have opted to put the most heavily used discs on the LAN, reducing the need for loading and unloading discs for patrons. It was vividly brought home to us just how valuable the LAN is when it went down for repairs not long ago. We were run ragged taking discs in and out.

All of us have experienced the stress of trying to fix jammed printers while patrons wait impatiently for help. Using student workers to answer the basic needs of CD users — loading and unloading discs, attending to printer problems, etc. — can relieve desk staff of some of the clerical burden. We have tried this at Appalachian with mixed results. We are unable to staff a CD assistance desk all the hours the library is open, and so patrons sometimes become confused as to where they should go for what types of assistance. Also, students staffing a CD assistance desk should be very clear as to the limits of their duties. Even with the problems we have encountered, I believe this is an effective way to provide better electronic reference service because it deploys staff at appropriate knowledge levels.

The biggest question regarding service levels at this time is whether we will provide database management software such as dBase and Lotus in the library and, if we do, at what level of service we will support them. Many of the federal compact disc products are structured to be manipulated in this way. The real issue is not so much the cost of the software, but the staffing implications. In a specialized environment where most patrons are sophisticated computer users who can handle file manipulation themselves, this is not a problem. At Appalachian, however, most of our users are undergraduates who are not comfortable with computers generally and have no experience with such software programs. We cannot logistically free enough staff to spend an hour or more per user teaching several thousand students to use dBase, and most students would be unwilling to devote much of their time to the training. Thus we have for the moment instituted a service policy in which we do not offer database management or spreadsheet software in the library or instruction on how to use it. Patrons may download data and take it elsewhere for manipulation if they wish. We are hedging on the electronic literacy issue; we believe in it, but are unable to accept the responsibility of primary teacher due to lack of resources. This decision concerns me because it makes us CD "disc jockeys" rather than search consultants, plumbers rather than mediators. Once again, however, fiscal reality forces a compromise.

One possible solution to the handholding quandary is remote location. For example, the TIGER/Line files have caused much consternation among documents librarians. TIGER/Line is a magnificent source of information that requires considerable expertise, not to mention very expensive software, to be used effectively. At Appalachian it is being housed in the Map Library, which is operated by the Department of Geography and Planning. Geography and Planning faculty and the graduate students who staff the Map Library have experience using the software and equipment needed to make maps with TIGER/Line. This concept of remote housing of very specialized products offers several benefits. It places the information closer to the primary clientele, and it relieves reference staff of trying to manage knowledgeably yet another electronic product. Appalachian is currently talking with the local hospital about housing Epi Info, which deals with epidemiology. Of course, in instances of remote housing, a written agreement must insure that all citizens have free access to

User Fees

Electronic products are here to stay both because of the superior way in which they make information available and because in the long run they are cheaper to produce. Libraries must be farsighted enough to realize that the methods and formats of providing information are changing; the support group for electronic products has moved beyond reference to include general library technical staff. Libraries must do what is necessary organizationally to offer and support with equipment and staff their most important priority — information access. If we don't do it and do it well, believe me, someone else will step in and fill the void, usurping resources that should be the library's.

Most importantly, we must decide what role librarians will play in bringing electronic information to the user. Will we be plumbers, or will we be able to offer consultative services? The answer to this question depends on our service orientation, our staffing levels, and most of all, our willingness to abandon our comfort zone of traditional library organization and service in

favor of new ways of defining patron services.

I believe that in the very near future libraries, perhaps in cooperation with institutional computer services, will undertake the responsibility of providing the technical support demanded by the public by operating computer labs. These labs can be physically separate from the electronic reference area. Users will work with reference librarians to access pertinent information in one area, download it, and then take it to the computer lab, where trained staff will help them customize the output, print, and so forth.

The hardest time we will face regarding electronic products is the present transition period. To paraphrase Georgia Tech Dean of Libraries Miriam Drake, transition is by nature a financial undertaking.<sup>3</sup> We are making difficult infrastructure changes while trying to do everything we did before. That takes money to accomplish and when those funds are not forthcoming, we encounter such problems as we are discussing today.

Library users are becoming more electronically sophisticated every day, as information presented in electronic format becomes more common. For the present, we must use creative organization and staffing to provide as much specialized instructional and technical support as we can without damaging other equally important services. A checklist of minimum, medium, and maximum electronic service levels is contained in an article by Linda Piele in the Summer 1991 issue of *Library Trends*.<sup>4</sup>

The key to keeping all this technological razzle dazzle in perspective with regard to service levels is to adhere to GPO's own requirement of comparability. Provide the same level of service for electronic products as you do for other formats, and work to raise that level as resouces and technological improvements allow.

Notes

<sup>1</sup> Citizen Rights and Access to Electronic Information; A Collection of Background Essays Prepared for the 1991 LITA President's Program, ed. Dennis J. Reynolds (Chicago: Library and Information Technology Association, 1991), 28.

2Ibid., 57.

<sup>3</sup>Miriam Drake, Comments during general discussion of the Federal Depository Library Council. Fall meeting, Washington, DC, October 23, 1991.

<sup>4</sup>Linda J. Piele, "Reference Services and Staff Training for Patron-Use Software," *Library Trends* 40 (Summer 1991): 97-119.

On March 25, 1991, Tony Zagami, General Counsel of the Government Printing Office, issued an advisory opinion to the Public Printer of the United States. In that opinion Zagami wrote:

You have requested our opinion as to whether it is permissible under existing law for depository libraries to impose library user fees upon depository library patrons who desire to obtain government information which is available in electronic format. It is our opinion that depository libraries are prohibited under existing law from charging the public for accessing government information supplied under the aegis of the Depository Library Program.<sup>1</sup>

That's good news for those of us who believe that the public has a right to free and open access to government information. And Zagami's opinion will remain good news as long as U.S. Code Title 44, Section 1911 remains in effect. Title 44 is, of course, the law which governs depository libraries. Section 1911 of Title 44 reads, "Depository libraries shall make government publications available for the free use of the general public." Zagami based his opinion on Section 1911, interpreting government information in electronic format to fall within the definition of "government publications." Whether government information in electronic format will continue to be protected under Section 1911, or under similar legislation, is another question. As documents librarians, we need to be vigilant advocates for the public's right to free access to government information amidst any congressional or executive branch attempts to change that.

Attorney Zagami's ruling prohibits depositories from imposing user fees on patrons to obtain access to government information in electronic format, but we need to ask ourselves if there are other user fees that we can, or should, charge. If we impose such fees, what is the effect of doing that? What is the effect of

not charging user fees?

Free access to government publications in electronic format means you can look at it for free. It doesn't mean that you can print up a copy for free. But then it never meant that even when we were dealing with just paper publications. Anybody who wanted his or her own copy had to buy it - either through the Government Printing Office or through the magic of Xerox. The same is true for anyone who wants a copy printed from microfiche. Is there really any difference just because the images are on a computer screen? The real difference these days seems to be that electronic database users are printing out by the mile for free. One of the original descriptions of this part of the panel discussion was "Service fees? Should we or shouldn't we? Can we charge 'em by the tree for printing out stuff they used to copy? Should libraries invest in ink jet futures?" In other words, what are some of the economic - and environmental - realities brought home to us when we display information electronically and find that display hitched to a mechanical scribe?

At Duke University Library we go through hundred of boxes, and thousands of dollars worth, of computer paper each year. So far the library has absorbed these costs. But there are a number of libraries that do not, or cannot. Many California libraries have installed coin-op devices on their printers, charging patrons for printing out citations from both government and private vendor electronic databases as well as from the libraries' online public access catalogs (OPACs). We know that headaches involved with the care and feeding of coin- or card-operated printers may be more than any of us cares to deal with. Sometimes we spend dimes — or dollars — to collect nickels. However, with increasingly lean economic times ahead of us, it may be a choice of coinops for printouts or not having any paper at all. I do not believe

the print for free situation at Duke will last forever — and probably not a lot longer. In the budget "trickle-down" situation that is in process at Duke, department heads increasingly will be asked to make choices between personnel costs and equipment, materials, and service costs. Environmentally speaking, in the printout by the mile syndrome, most libraries could take a cue from the University of California at Berkeley, where they are recyling paper from the acquisitions department and not charg-

ing patrons for printouts.

With the imposition of user fees for printing out from electronic databases, other problems arise. How do you deal with a patron who needs to print out only one or two copies and doesn't need a five dollar card? Do you charge a flat fee to all library users as a way to pay for paper? Do you impose time limits on the use of the CD-ROM machine which might result in patrons saying they can use the machine as long as they want to? That situation can create real problems if the CD-ROMs are not networked and one patron ties up one product for long periods of time. I should note that we did have one patron who offered to bring in a box of computer paper because he needed to print out extensive information from the National Trade Data Bank. There is always the option for the patron to download to disk. Patrons can bring their own disks and download most information they need within a reasonable amount of time. At Duke we have supplied disks for patrons to borrow — but we have also come up short on getting them returned. I anticipate we will probably be selling disks over the Documents Reference desk or setting up a disk-filled vending machine as a means of expediting patrons' use of various databases.

When we talk about user fees, the point is that all user fees proposals revolve around the issue of inequities. We have already accepted certain inequities when we accepted the fact that some patrons can afford to photocopy an entire government publication while some patrons can't afford to copy one page. Paying to print out electronic files can be viewed the same way. Life just is inherently unfair in many areas and, as someone once said, "The rich are different — they have more money." But where we can — and must — try to be fair, try to preserve equality for all is in protecting the public's right to access government information, be it paper, microfilm, or electronic databases. User fees at the access level must be resisted to the fullest, now and always.

Notes

<sup>1</sup> Administrative Notes, v. 12, no. 18 (August 15, 1991), p. 16.

Public Access Bulletin Boards for Government Documents Librarians: What's Available, How to Access Them, and When They are Worth the Effort

— Joel Sigmon

Four electronic bulletin boards of interest to North Carolina government documents librarians are: (1) the Federal Depository Library Program Bulletin Board, (2) the Economic Bulletin Board produced by the U.S. Department of Commerce, (3) the North Carolina Information Network bulletin boards, and (4) the U.S. Bureau of the Census State Data Center Census-BEA Electronic Forum. The Federal Depository Library Program Bulletin is described in detail below. A brief annotation is provided for each of the other boards.

1. Federal Depository Library Program Bulletin Board (FDLP) The FDLP began operation in June 1991. Project Hermes, a preliminary version of the bulletin board, began in February 1991 and contained the U.S. Supreme Court slip opinions. FDLP bulletin board services currently include the following:

an Information Center which contains an overview of the system and description of services

SIGs (Special Interest Groups) which are message databases with attached files relating to topics of interest to documents librarians

an Account Display/Edit service which provides information about the user

a File Library System which provides a means of file transfer a Registry of Users containing information about all users on the board who have completed the online registration

The SIGs area is a major component of the board. Currently SIGs are available for Supreme Court opinions, time sensitive news, selected articles from *Administrative Notes*, technical bulletins about the board, a list of contacts for electronic products distributed by GPO, and an issues file containing discussion of policy issues related to the GPO depository system. After choosing a SIG, the user can read or write messages, attach (upload) a file to a message, or set up a teleconference with users who are logged onto the board simultaneously.

The other major component of the FDLP is the file library. Five file libraries are available: Main, Court91a, Court91c, Court92a, and Court92c. The main library contains information about the operation of the board. The court libraries contain the slip opinions and any other file related to specific Supreme Court cases. Files containing a 'c' in the name are in self-extracting compressed format to reduce the download time. The libraries may be searched by docket number and/or date. Files may be downloaded using standard transfer protocols.

Getting on the Board.

To access the board, users will require a microcomputer, telecommunications software, and a modem. The telecommunications

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protocols needed for the modem to communicate with the host computer are:

1200, 2400, or 9600 baud

Parity = N

Data bits = 8

Stop bits = 1

No echo

Full duplex

The telephone number for the board is (202) 512-1387 (current as of October 15, 1991). At present, access is not available via INTERNET. When logging on for the first time, the user should enter 'new' when prompted. The library's depository number should be used when asked to supply an identification number (i.e., four digits plus a letter, if needed). The user will then be prompted for a personal password. Limited access is granted on the first use of the board. After one to two days the system operator (SYSOP) will clear new users for full access.

Any questions concerning the FDLP bulletin board should be directed to Tony Ford (SYSOP) at (202) 512-1126.

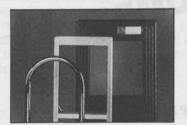
#### 2. Economic Bulletin Board.

The U.S. Dept. of Commerce's Economic Bulletin Board (EBB) consists of three major components: a bulletin board system, a file system, and a utilities system.

The bulletin board system provides general economic news releases, a calendar of release dates for upcoming economic news, contacts in economic statistical agencies, and instructions on using the EBB.

Over ninety-five percent of the information in the EBB is contained in the file system. Files are available from the following agencies: Bureau of Economic Analysis, Bureau of the Census (mostly foreign trade data), Bureau of Labor Statistics, Federal Reserve Board, Dept. of the Treasury (bond rates), and the International Trade Administration (Trade Opportunities (TOPS)

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Wes Brewer, Sales Representative 2921 Welcome Drive Durham, North Carolina 27705 (919) 493-2161 files). Files may be downloaded using standard transfer protocols. Some files are in ASCII text format, some are in ASCII commadelimited format, and a few are in LOTUS .WK1 format.

The Utilities system allows the user to perform such housekeeping functions as defining a download protocol or changing passwords.

There is an annual subscription fee and a per minute connect charge for using the board. The board can be ordered through the National Technical Information Service.

3. North Carolina Information Network (NCIN) Bulletin Boards. The NCIN bulletin boards are available without charge to all North Carolina libraries connected to LINCNET, the X.25 telecommunications network operated by the University of North Carolina's Educational Computing Service (ECS). The boards may also be accessed via AT&T's Easylink service. Sometime in 1992, access via Easylink will be discontinued; all current users will be switched to access via LINCNET. Plans also call for INTERNET access sometime in 1992.

Three NCIN boards, NCBUS, NCCON, and NCDOT, provide information on state contracts for general business services and equipment, construction, and highway bids.

NCADMIN lists all available state government job opportunities announced by the North Carolina Office of State Personnel. This board is updated twice a week. Professional library positions are listed in NCJOBS.

Some of the NCIN bulletin boards are being offered alternatively in an interactive database format. These files provide enhanced searching capability, including Boolean searching on selected fields. At present, NCCAL (the state calendar of events for librarians) and NCADMIN are available as searchable databases. In a cooperative project with the North Carolina Division of Archives and History, the MARS (Manuscripts and Archives Reference System) database is also available to NCIN users. Questions should be directed to Diana Young, Director of Network Operations, (919) 733-2570.

#### 4. Census-BEA Electronic Forum

The Census-BEA Electronic Forum provides message services and a data file library. Until recently, access to files was limited to State Data Center affiliates. Other users may now apply for full access privileges. As with the FDLP bulletin board, this board is arranged by SIGs. Users simply choose an appropriate SIG. They can then read or write messages or download files. Each SIG has its own file library. The data files include information produced by the Census Bureau and the Bureau of Economic Analysis. Typically, the files are in ASCII comma-delimited format. Those files containing no tabulated data will be in an ASCII text format. In most cases, the files are stored in self-extracting compressed format.

Of particular interest to government documents librarians is the SIG on CD-ROM products. This SIG provides a very active message database that addresses many of the issues and technical problems related to the use of the Census Bureau's CD-ROM products. Software and documentation produced by the Bureau are also available for downloading in the CD-ROM SIG.

In some cases, the Census Bureau's online database, CENDATA, may be a better choice for users. CENDATA is available via DIALOG and CompuServe. Press releases and general information about Bureau products are easier to retrieve in CENDATA. Also, specific queries where the user is not familiar with which data series to consult may best be answered by consulting CENDATA rather than the bulletin board.

There are no fees for using the bulletin board. At present there are no plans to make the board available via INTERNET.

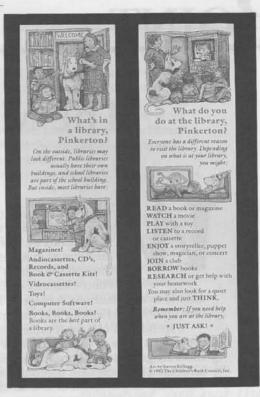
State Data Center affiliates wishing to use the bulletin board may contact Joel Sigmon, State Library of North Carolina, at (919) 733-3683. Other users should contact John Rowe at the Census Bureau, (301) 763-1580.

### The Children's Book Council Inc.

For a fun-filled Summer Reading Incentive and Award Program, the Children's Book Council presents a packet

of full-color materials by Bruce Degen of The Magic School Bus series fame. Included are three 12" x 13" mini-posters that convey the spirit of summer fun including, of course, reading. 50 Summer Reader Cards (3 3/4" x 2 1/2") that can be personalized with young readers' names, and 50 Achievement Certificates (8 3/4" x 6 1/2") that recognize program participation.





The important role libraries play in our lives is underscored by Steven Kellogg's humorous approach in a new 2 1/2" x 9 1/4" fullcolor bookmark from the Children's Book Council. Kellogg's engaging and rambunctious Great Dane Pinkerton, star of Pinkerton Behave and Prehistoric Pinkerton, romps through information about what's in a library and what to do in one.

For further information about the Summer Reading Packet, the Pinkerton Library Bookmark and/or other current reading-encouragement materials send a business (#10), stamped (1 oz. first class), self-addressed envelope to: Spring Materials Brochure, Children's Book Council, 568 Broadway, Suite 404, New York, NY 10012.

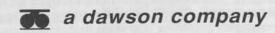
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