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# The Role of English in Fostering Online Business in Indonesia

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#### **Abstract**

Currently, English is very important in attracting and gaining customers in the social media where the online business is based. This happens for many reasons. The use of English in labelling both the name of the shops and the products, for instance, dominates almost all online shops in the social media. In addition, the commonly used taglines such as "ready stock", "open PO (Pre-Order)", "hot seller", also dominate the script of the products. Above all, the most important role of English is as the media of communication between the seller and the customers, especially from abroad. In this way, a seller is motivated to be able to speak and write in English in order to enhance his/her sales. Despite those facts, English itself has become a major trend language among the users of social media in Indonesia. Most of the Indonesians, especially youth, regard English as a "cool" language. In line with that, online business in Indonesia is also steadily growing. Day by day, many online shops appear by offering various products with various brands written in English. That is why, it is not doubtful to say that English has a significant role for Indonesians to get involved in the world market. Therefore, this research paper aims to examine the significance of English as a potential supply in fostering the success of online business, especially in Indonesia.

Keywords: English, significant role, online business, globalization era

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#### 1. Introduction

English is the language used in international business, tourism, science, education, politics, and diplomacy and the lingua franca across many regions of the world. Nowadays, English also becomes the language of technology, especially in computers and the internet. Therefore, proficiency in English is very important. Proficiency in English has become a valuable commodity because of its utility as a basic skill of modern life comparable with the ability to drive a car or use a personal computer [1]. English is important for those who need a common language that allows them to communicate across their borders. Throughout the world, when people from different countries with different languages meet in one place, the commonly and even automatically used English to communicate.

In the business world, English is considered crucial for a country like Indonesia to compete with other countries within ASEAN community, and even with other great countries like China, South Korea, the United States, and so on. Ward and Francis [2] state that "In the next five years, all state employees younger than 40 will be required to master at least 1000 English phrases, and all schools will begin teaching English in kindergarten." Although perhaps for some people, it is a language that is difficult to learn,

once they know English, it will make them have a greater chance to get a better education and a better job.

In this digital era of our daily life, we actually cannot stay away from English since all electronic devices such as hand phone, smart phone, computer, laptop, and also television, air conditioner, refrigerator, and so on use English as the language of instruction: "English is typically the language of latest version applications and programs and new freeware, shareware, peer-to-peer, social media networks and websites. Software manuals, hardware installation guides and product fact sheets of popular consumer electronics and entertainment devices usually are available in English first before being translated into other languages" [3].

In line with the recent era, the content produced on the internet is mostly written in English. So knowing English will allow people to access to an incredible amount of information without wasting much time. Most of world's box office movies, best-seller books, international journals, and top chart's songs are produced in English, and those can be accessed freely through the internet. Therefore, by learning English, it is expected that people will have access to a great wealth of education and entertainment and will be able to have a greater cultural understanding. Above all, the most important aspect of learning English is because English is the dominant business language and almost becomes a necessity for people to speak English if they are about to enter the educational field or company in the global scope. Research from all over the world shows that

cross-border business communication is most often conducted in English. Its importance in the global marketplace therefore cannot be understated since it really can change people's life [4].

Related to the business world, today, along with the progress of science and technology, online business (business conducted via The Internet or social networks)—in this case, online shop—is steadily growing. The development of science and technology in the world makes all people in many countries, including Indonesia continues to follow the developments in technology. Almost all Indonesian people use existing technology, especially in terms of communication by utilizing the internet. According to the data shown by internetworldstats.com, in 2015, Indonesia is ranked as the fourth country in Asia with the highest number of the internet users, as can be seen in the diagram below:

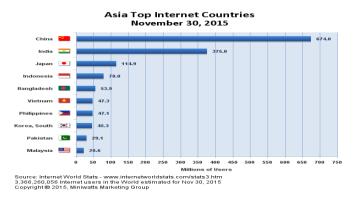


Fig. 1. Internet Users in Asia

The graph above shows that the highest number of internet users in Asia is in China with more than 600 million users. The second place is India with almost 400 million users and it is followed by Japan in the third place with more than 100 million users. Among all countries in Asia, Indonesia is in the fourth place. It shows that Indonesian people are aware of the usefulness of the internet as part of their life.

The development of the technology by utilizing the internet itself encourages the emergence of a wide range of supporting applications, for instance, Blackberry Messengers (BBM), which was initially only, serves to communicate briefly and quickly, but now most users in Indonesia use it as a medium to run business (online shop). By displaying photos of items being sold, customers who become members of the BBM can see the products and do the transactions process effectively and efficiently, as can be seen in the picture below:

The transaction process is then followed by transferring the money according to the price agreed upon via bank transfer and sending proof of bank transfer by attaching also the name and address of the customer so that the delivery process can soon be done. This kind of transaction process is regarded as easy and very profitable because the seller does not need to spend a lot of money to rent stalls/shops to sell his/her products, but he/she only needs

to pay a subscription to access the internet, while the profit for the buyer, they do not have to go outside to look for things they want because all they need to do is ordering, and the goods will be sent directly to their homes. That is why many entrepreneurs who initially relied on offline stores switches to open an online shop.



Fig. 2. Example of promoting product via BBM Service

Based on the description above, it can be drawn that online business (or online shopping) offers many benefits both for the sellers and for the customers. Kotler et al [5] propose five benefits for customers:

#### a. Convenience

Customers do not have to get into the traffic, find parking spaces, and trek through stores and aisles to find and examine certain products. They can do comparative

shopping by browsing through mail catalogs or social media, or surfing websites. Customers do not have to worry if they only have time at night or at dawn since the sellers never close their doors in the online world. It means that all information about all products offered on the internet is available 24 hours a day.

#### b. Easiness and Privacy

Customers can order products 24 hours a day from wherever they are without wasting time to face and listen to the promotion by the salesperson. The customers can privately and comfortably, without feeling guilty or worry to move from one shop to another, to learn about and buy products or services without waiting for and tying up time with that salesperson.

#### c. Product Access and Selection

Unrestrained with physical boundaries, cyber-sellers can offer unlimited selection. Certainly it provides customers with many choices that can be accessed and selected as they wish. Therefore, customers should not feel worried if they cannot find things they want in one shop since they can inspect other shops comfortably. They also can make other preferences of the products based on the price, the size, the update, and so forth.

## d. Information

Customers can obtain comparative information about the companies, products, and competitors without leaving their office or home. They can focus on objective criteria such as the price, quality, performance, and availability. Besides that basic information, we can know about the reputation of the shop by reading the testimonials from the previous customers. Testimonials can be the evidence that the shop exists and can be trusted. Usually, testimonials contain the comment about the quality of the product or the fast delivery service.

#### e. Interaction and Immediacy

Customers can interact with the seller's site to create exactly the configuration of information, products or services they desire, then order or download them on the spot. Here, the customers can notice how well the service given by the seller, and determine whether they will continue the transaction with the seller or not, usually based on the service given by the seller. If the seller gives fast and polite response toward customers' questions, it will make a good impression, and therefore, it is not impossible that the customers will rely on the seller. On the other hand, if a seller takes long to reply to the customers' questions, then it is also normal for customers to move to another seller. This condition is normal since psychologically, people, especially customers, need fast response and fast service

for everything they want. Therefore, the immediacy of a seller toward his/her customers is very important.

Meanwhile, for the sellers, online shopping provides [5]:

#### a. Customer Relationship Building

The internet is a powerful tool to build a relationship with customers because of its one-to-one, interactive nature. A seller can interact online with his/her customers to learn more about specific needs and wants. With today's technology, an online marketer can select small groups or even individual consumers, personalize offers to their special needs and wants and promote these offers through individualized communication. In turn, online customers can ask questions and give feedback. Based on this ongoing interaction, the seller can increase customer value and satisfaction through product and service refinements.

## b. Reducing Costs and Increasing Speed and Efficiency

Online sellers can avoid the expense of maintaining a store and related costs of rent, insurance, and utilities. They can create digital catalogues at a much lower cost than printing and shipping paper catalogue. Because customers deal directly with the sellers, the order processing, inventory handling, delivery, and trade promotion can be done more effectively and of course efficiently.

## c. Flexibility

The seller is allowed to make adjustments to his/her offers and program. An online catalog can be adjusted daily, or even hourly, adapting product assortments, prices, and promotions to match changing market condition. This allows the seller to flexibly give a discount, free gift, voucher, or other offers to increase his/her sale or to attract more customers.

# d. Globalism

The internet is a truly global medium that allows buyers and sellers to click from one country to another in seconds. That is why, when one is ready to take benefits from the internet, it means that he/she has to be ready to be part of global community which has no boundaries. However, the boundaries will be really invisible if both sellers and buyers understand each other. In this case, those need to be able to use English to make them possible to communicate.

During the whole time, the offline stores can only reach a limited local market, but with the advancement of communication technology like internet, it could be the most appropriate means for those entrepreneurs to expand their market share. Through the internet, a shop owner can reach a wider market, not only the local market but can reach a national and even international markets.

To achieve that purpose, interesting promotions should be done to attract customers to buy the products offered. To create attractive promotions, it certainly needs attractive

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language as well, both verbally and non-verbally. Verbally, the language used to create branding of the store and products' names, and also to make the scripts used to describe the store and products. It was then supported by the form of non-verbal communication through pictures, attractive logo, and the emoticon feature.

In the case of the use of language as a promotion medium in the online media, the English language has a very important role in improving the effectiveness of marketing, especially in terms of attracting customers to glance and then to buy the products being offered. The most evident role of English in online business in Indonesia can be seen from the number of new terms in English which have become a common register in the world of online business, such as "ready stock", "pre-order", "reseller", "drop-shipper", "limited stock", and so forth. Those terms have become common terms used in transactions through social media. With the advent of these terms, implicitly, both sellers and buyers are required to understand them in order to achieve the effective and efficient transaction. To explore this phenomenon, this paper aims to dissect the role of English as an effective strategy in promoting the products in the online media, especially in Indonesia.

The method used in this research is descriptive research method by collecting real-time information that describes in detail the existing symptoms, identifying a problem or checking the existing conditions and practices. This method is used to describe systematically the fact about online shop phenomenon that is growing rapidly in Indonesia, where the English language is also involved as one of the effective media campaigns. Data is collected through participative observation; here the researcher actively participates in the activities related to the online shop.

## 2. Marketing Strategy

## 2.1. Marketing Strategy in Online Business

There is always a special place where people gather to seek certain business which can help them to fulfil their needs. In this digital era, all we have to do (as businessmen) is to name our shop according to the product being sold, and spread it over in blog, website, and social media. For instance, one names his/her shop "Girls Fashion". Just by looking at the name, those who need clothes or accessories for women will find out more about what is in the shop by clicking the link. Here, to name a shop based on the products offered is one strategy that can be done in marketing.

Marketing, according to Kotler et al [5], is all about customers. All people are actually a customer in all aspects of life. When people become a customer, he/she needs satisfaction for both products and services, as what Kotler explains:

"Customers are an essential component of marketing system. Each one of us is a customer in every area of human interrelation, from the consumption of education and health care and the queue in the post office to flying in a discount airline, and in every financial transaction, from the buying of biscuits to the purchase of a mobile phone. Creating customer value and satisfaction is at the very heart of modern marketing thinking and practice" [5].

Further, Kotler states that the goal of marketing is to attract new customers by promising superior value, and to keep current customers by delivering satisfaction [5]. Although finding new customers is very important, retaining the profitable customers and building lasting relationship with them is much more important since they can be the standard in determining the strategy that should be applied.

In this digital era where the internet becomes the primary need of people's life, it therefore influences all aspects of people's life as well, including in the marketing process, like what Nain [5] says "the internet is revolutionizing the way we think about ... how to construct relationships with suppliers and customers, how to create value for them, and how to make money in the process; in other words, its revolutionizing marketing." To run business in this digital era (through online media), individuals or companies need additional competencies (such as the ability to use computer and internet, the ability to use English) and practices if they want to grow and their market. Through online marketing, information about the products can reach the far-away consumers without having to go directly to the area to promote the products offered by the sellers.

Another expert, Garris and Mishra [6] propose NOTE as the marketing strategy in online business. That NOTE states for:

**Needs**: a seller needs to conduct a certain survey to his/her current customers and friends about what they might need or expect from his/her online shop. Then, he/she needs to make a list of these needs and ask them to tell him/her what would be most important. Besides, it is better for him/her to conduct research on what his/her competitors do to decide certain strategy in improving his/her own business.

**Objectives**: the seller should think about what business objective he'd/she'd like to address, whether it is to increase customers, get more traffic to the store, urge people to try new products or flavours, or to build loyalty, he/she should prioritize customer needs based on his/her business goal in mind.

**Tactics**: Now that the seller has an understanding of what he/she needs to accomplish, balancing customer needs with objectives, consider the right tactics to use to bring these features to live. For instance, if the seller's objective is to get more traffic to the store, he/she can offer benefits for people in order to make them follow his/her account; or if his/her objective is to build loyalty, he/she can give special discount or free gift to customers with certain

requirements, such as "buy 2 get 1". Of course, to action this tactic, he/she needs to set a plan beforehand.

**Execution**: once the seller begins building or executing the tactics, it is better for him/her to make time to monitor the analytics, to look for areas (or potential customers) to optimize or improve. By doing this, the seller is expected to be able to decide whether the tactics work or not, or whether the tactics need to be improved or changed.

Those strategies are supported by Griffiths [7] by proposing five essential keys of effective advertising:

- a. Establishing the exact message that he/she is trying to put forward;
- b. Being clear about his/her target audience;
- Making his/her advertisement stands out from millions of others:
- d. Ensuring people see his/her advertising often;
- e. Giving his/her advertising time to work [7].

In short, it can be drawn that to run online business, a seller needs to decide his/her target market and conducts research about what their target market needs or wants. Then, he/she can take advantage of various features in the internet such as website, blog, social media, YouTube, and so forth to promote their products. Of course, he/she needs to make a plan of promotion before they put it online. After all the things have been done, he/she needs to maintain his/her communication with their customers by keeping the quality of products and giving the best service.

# 2.2. The Use of English in Online Business

Suci [8] in her research entitled Online Business: Relax business through Internet explains these following eight things to consider when deciding to run online business:

- a. The ability to use computer and the internet
- b. The ability to use English
- c. The ability to write
- d. The ability to communicate, both verbally and orally.
- e. The ability to sell (marketing)
- f. The ability to make graphic designs
- g. The ability to make website
- h. The ability to do Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

Among those abilities, the ability to use English is put on the second place. It is implied that English has an important role in fostering the online business. Further, Suci explains that by using English in promoting the products, it will be easier for the products to be recognized globally. If someone wants to buy or sell things, he/she has to be able to communicate with a diverse range of customers, suppliers, and other business partners, who probably do not share the same language. That is why; they need to use a lingua franca that makes it possible for them to communicate to each other. Neeley [9] states that: "Companies that fail to devise a language strategy are essentially limiting their growth opportunities to the markets where their language is spoken, clearly putting themselves at a disadvantage to competitors that have adopted English-only policies" [9].

Since a business cannot be separated from the competitive pressure, English is needed as the basic modal to defend and expand the business. Without English, it seems impossible to compete in both local and global arena, and therefore, it is likely hard to make the business successful.

## 3. English and Online Business

#### 3.1. Common English Terms in Online Business

If someone wants to open up an online shop, it is better for him/her to know or to learn several terms, generally in English, which are commonly found and used in online business, especially in online shop. Actually, these terms are not only for the sellers, but also it is important for the customers to know them before buying certain products promoted in BBM, websites, or other kinds of social media.

Some basic terms used in online shop business are:

- a. Seller: the owner of online shop; the one who sells products
- b. Buyer: the consumer; the one who buys thing from the seller.
- c. Customer: the loyal buyer; the one who frequently buys a thing from the seller.
- d. Supplier: the one who provides the products to be sold by the seller.
- e. Reseller: a person who sells products from another seller
- f. Dropship: the process of delivering products by the name of reseller (the one who orders the products is the reseller's buyer).
- g. Fit to (size): explain the size of certain products, usually related to clothes.
- All size: a product, usually clothes, which fits to any size, usually ranged from Medium (M) to Extra Large (XL) size.
- i. Keep a product that has been booked by a buyer, but he/she does not have sufficient time to do the payment at the moment, so he/she keeps the product in order not be bought by other people.
- j. Hit and run: a term for a buyer who keeps a product from the seller, but he/she does not have any intention to do the payment for a long time, and even he/she suddenly disappears from the seller's contact. This term also becomes a label for those who frequently ask about certain product in detail but never buy it.
- k. Giveaway: Free gift for the customer; usually with several requirements.
- No Afgan: Afgan is an Indonesian singer who has a famous song entitled "Sadis" (sadist). In online shop, No Afgan means that a buyer may bargain for certain product, but not too far from the price offered.
- m. Ready Stock: a product is available and ready to be bought and delivered.
- n. Refund: the cancellation of transaction process by

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returning the product to the seller and returning the money to the buyer.

- o. Reject: a bad condition of a product.
- p. Sold/sold out: a product is out of stock.
- Restock: a product becomes available again after being out of stock (sold out).
- Return: exchange a product that has been bought with another.
- s. Shipping Cost: the cost of delivering the products from the seller to the buyer. This shipping cost becomes the buyer's responsibility.
- t. Testimonial: a short comment about the satisfaction of a customer toward the products. It is usually used to convince other buyers.
- Trusted: real online shop, usually proven by screenshots of testimonials from the customers.

Besides those terms, there are also several abbreviations commonly used in online shop as the following:

- a. OS: Online Shop; a shop doing its business through the use of internet, mostly through social media such as Facebook, Instagram, BBM, Twitter, and so on.
- b. TF: Transfer; the process of delivering money to the seller via banking process.
- c. PO: Pre Order; this term is commonly used by the sellers who sell imported stuffs or produce certain custom products. It means that the product will be ordered or produced after the scheduled of PO is over, or it will be delivered after it is ready.
- d. DP: Down Payment; a payment system for ordering products from PO system, usually 50% of the product's price.
- e. COD: Cash on Delivery; a seller and his/her buyer can meet up in certain place according to their agreement and do the payment on the spot.

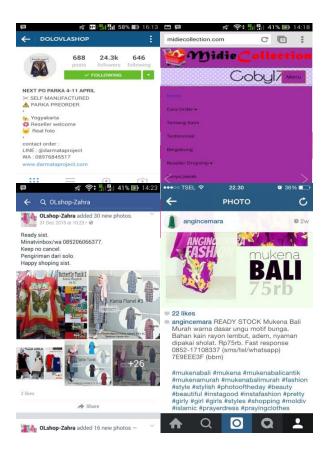


Fig. 3 Example of Terms used in Online Shop

By knowing those basic terms, both seller and buyer can apply on which system is suitable for them. In addition, the seller can use those terms in improving their promotion so that his/her shop looks update and can be recognized by more people.

#### 3.2. The Significance of English in Online Business

English has been widely known to have a great role in our daily life today, including in the world of business. In the world of business, especially online business in general, and online shop in particular, English also has important roles in improving the business itself, among them are:

# 3.2.1. English as Medium of Promotion

Promotion becomes one of methods in making public knows about our brands or products. Promotion can be done in many kinds of media; one of those is through social media. Promoting products through social media has become a major trend today. Many people, especially in Indonesia, start to sell things, from tiny accessories to electronic devices, in BBM, Instagram, Facebook, Line, and so on. Since there are more people who start running online shop in the social media, there are certainly many competitors as well. Therefore, a good strategy in doing promotion should be done in order to attract more

customers.

To create a good promotion needs a good visualization of the product itself and a good language to convey the message related to the product. Both visualization and language used in promotion will determine the image of the brand or shop, whether it has an excellent, good, fair, or poor image.

Related to the language, English certainly has an important role in making an effective promotion. By showing a sophisticated logo or picture of the product, supported by English to create the name of the brand, the name of the product, and the script of the product, it is not impossible for an online shop to be widely recognized among the internet users all over the world. Even when an online seller is only targeting domestic/Indonesian market, English still needs to be used in order to make the shop looks update and trusted by using the English terms which are commonly used in online business as listed in C.1. Besides, once again, it makes the communication and transaction run effectively.

## 3.2.2. English as Medium of Customer Service

A service is any activity or benefit that one party can offer to another which is essentially intangible and does not result in the ownership of anything [5]. Activities such as renting car, depositing money in a bank, traveling on a plane, visiting a doctor all involve buying a service.

It is not a new thing that a seller is frequently getting compliments from his/her customers when they feel satisfied with both the product and also the service was given by the seller. When the customers feel satisfied with the product, but not with the service given, some of them usually will keep silent. On the other hand, it is also not a new thing that sometimes, the seller may get complaints from his/her customers if they do not feel satisfied with the products or with the service given.

Based on the description, it seems that service becomes the main attention rather than the product itself. Naomi Klein (in Johnson, 2009: 5) explains that today's corporate advertisements are focused not on promoting the quality of a product, but on communicating an attitude, experience, or life-style that is attractive to their target audience. Further, Johnson explains that many advertising companies capitalize on lingual imagery, using English when they want to communicate about modernism and globalism (2009: 5).

A seller must be able to find the best way to communicate with his/her customers in order to make his/her thought is precisely conveyed. Moreover, if the customer is someone from different countries, the seller must be ready with his/her language ability, especially English. Beside to answer compliments or complaints, English is also used to offer products, to give benefit to the customers, to give discount sale, or anything related to building a good relation and service with the customers.

#### 3.2.3. International Communication

Communication is the key to success in any business. Whether someone wants to sell a product, answer a query or complaint or convince his/her customers, good communication often means the difference between success and failure. Bennie (2009: vii) states that: "At best, imprecise language, clumsy sentences, or long-winded 'waffle', whether in speech or writing, will give a poor impression of you or your business; at worst, what you are trying to say will be misunderstood or ignored. In contrast, clear, precise English will be enjoyable to read or listen to, and is likely to evoke the response you want."

In other words, if a seller does not have a good ability to communicate, it will hard for him/her to convince his/her customers, and therefore, it is impossible as well to get a loyal customer. As he/she improve his/her communication skills, he/she will find it very satisfying to be able to express him/herself clearly and succinctly, and to get his/her precise meaning across to his/her customers. Not only will he/she has the satisfaction of a job well done, but he/she will know that there is a greater chance that people will react in the way he/she wants them to.

Since English is the language commonly used for international matter, it has significant role in communicating the products both written and orally. If an online shop is ready to go international, the first thing to do is to change the script of the products into English so that people from different countries can understand about the product being offered. For the domestic/Indonesian customers, they regard the use of English as a brand or script of product looks "cooler", update, trusted, and luxurious.

### 4. Conclusion and Suggestion

Mastering English does not mean that we have to use it all the time and forget our mother tongue or our national language. It is expected that by mastering English, we can adapt to today's digital era where most technologies and information are produced in English. To operate electronic devices, to fix viruses on computer, to watch Transformers, to get the update on Taylor Swift's relationship, to create an email account, or to be the member of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and other social media, we need to at least understand English as the instruction language; it will be better if we know how to use it; and it will be much better if we can take benefits of using it, for instance, in the world of business.

By using English in promoting products through the use of the internet, it is expected that the promotion itself becomes more attractive and can be understood by more people from different countries. There are many terms in English which are used as register in the online shopping business, especially in Indonesia. Indonesian sellers use those terms to make an effective promotion and communication toward their customers. Certainly, the customers are also expected to understand those terms in order to decide their choice. Here, English also helps seller

in building good relation and communication with their potential customers both local and international.

In spite of the advantages of English, it cannot be denied that there are still many Indonesian people who find it difficult in learning English. However, the difficulties cannot be the reason to stop learning since there are many ways to learn English, one of those is through interaction. Pica, Kanagy, and Falodun (in Astika, 2015: 93) propose a theory called interactionist theory. It is stated in the theory that the most effective way in learning a language is through interaction. By keeping interacting with English through browsing, blogging, chatting activities, they can improve their English. Besides, they can join in English courses to improve the ability in English. Moreover, in a business world, one is insisted on keeping learning everything related to the current trend in order to be able to maintain his/her business. In this case, English becomes a part of the current trend. Therefore, there is no excuse for not learning English.

Language is a key toward the development of a country like Indonesia to compete with other countries in the world. Indonesian people should realize the importance of being able to communicate in English as an important

tool for running business so that it can be widely recognized. Besides, by mastering English, they will not face a handicap to benefit from the fruits of globalization

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