

WHITE PAPER

Differentiating With Technical Support

JBoss Customer Support Study

August 2008

Introduction

With security, performance, manageability, and scalability requirements for enterprise applications rapidly increasing, choosing the best middleware in today's competitive environment remains imperative. The move to Service Oriented Architectures (SOA) has further complicated the process as the new architectural model can enable great agility, productivity and cost savings but introduces more daunting requirements.

Middleware products are improving on every front, but enterprises continue to face the arduous but necessary task of evaluating solutions to find the best fit for their unique needs. Product factors including, scalability, ease-of-use, standards support, pricing, etc., and vendor factors, such as viability, future direction, and customer references are of obvious importance. The often overlooked evaluation criterion remains the support, service, and relationship management factor.

Strategic organizations are increasingly looking for ways to lower the total cost of ownership (TCO) of their technology assets while improving the return on their investment. It is our view that expert customer support services can have a dramatic impact on both, and we are substantiated by the success of JBoss middleware technology.

Unlike competitors, JBoss, a division of Red Hat, views customer support as a key differentiator and have become the most widely utilized middleware software based on this belief. To ensure that its technical support services continue to meet this objective, Red Hat Inc. sponsored this study of their support customers and their perceptions.

Methodology

A random sample of JBoss Enterprise middleware customers having recently used the JBoss Subscription and technical support from a competing vendor were contacted via email and telephone. They were asked to complete a survey about their experience with the JBoss support group and one other Java EE application server vendor they are most familiar with. Results found that a large majority of respondents had prior or current experience with support groups from other middleware vendors and were able to rate their experience. 199 JBoss support users, a subset of the organization's customer base, participated in the study.

Participants were given a series of statements and asked to rank each by how much they agreed or disagreed based on the following scale:

- 7. = Completely Agree
- 6. = Mostly Agree
- 5. = Somewhat Agree
- 4. = No Opinion
- 3. = Somewhat Disagree
- 2. = Mostly Disagree
- 1. = Completely Disagree

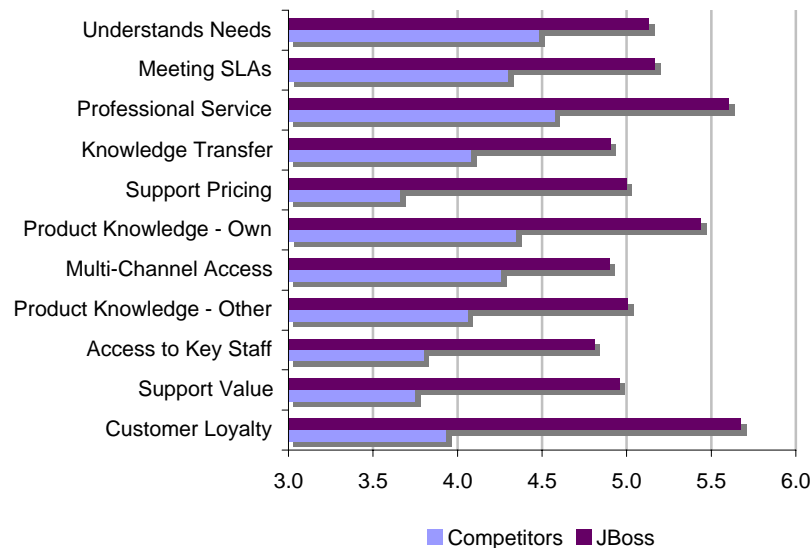
The following sections discuss the aggregate rankings for each statement.

Executive Summary

JBoss, a division of Red Hat, recognizes the importance of world-class technical support. Its goal is that every support interaction strengthens the clients' overall satisfaction with the company and reinforces the strategic relationship. To evaluate the JBoss support offering against competitive benchmarks, customers were asked to rate their level of agreement with the following statements:

- The Vendor understands the needs of my business.
- The Vendor consistently meets or exceeds my Service Level Agreements.
- The Vendor's staff provides service in a professional and courteous manner.
- The Vendor held a knowledge transfer with my team.
- The Vendor's support pricing is competitive.
- The Vendor provides excellent value for my support services investment.
- The Vendor's support staff knows their products well.
- The Vendor's support team's knowledge extends beyond just their products.
- The Vendor's support team is easy to reach through multiple channels.
- I can easily get access to key people at the Vendor organization.
- It is very likely that I would recommend the Vendor to others.

The following chart summarizes and aggregates the quantitative results for each statement.



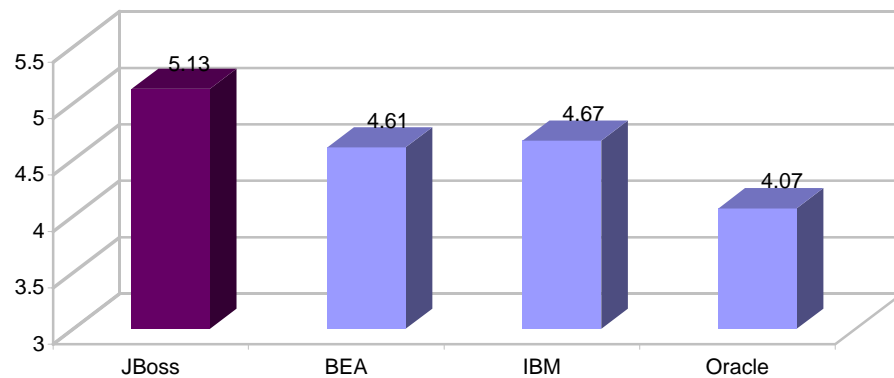
JBoss' mission to provide expert technical support services as a differentiator is clearly being recognized by its client base. This may not come as a surprise since many know the well-being of the company is significantly dependent on the value its customer support services bring. What may come as a surprise is the comprehensive nature by which its service is unsurpassed. Every category that was evaluated resulted in JBoss rating higher than the competition.

Survey Results

Understanding Needs

Customer centricity is a common ideology among the world's most recognizable brands. The software and services industry is no exception. At a minimum, IT organizations have a responsibility to understand a client's IT infrastructure, role(s), and top 'pain points'. A passion for understanding clients' requirements is indicative of a greater underlying trend: an organization driven by customer needs, as opposed to one attempting to drive customer behavior with its technology.

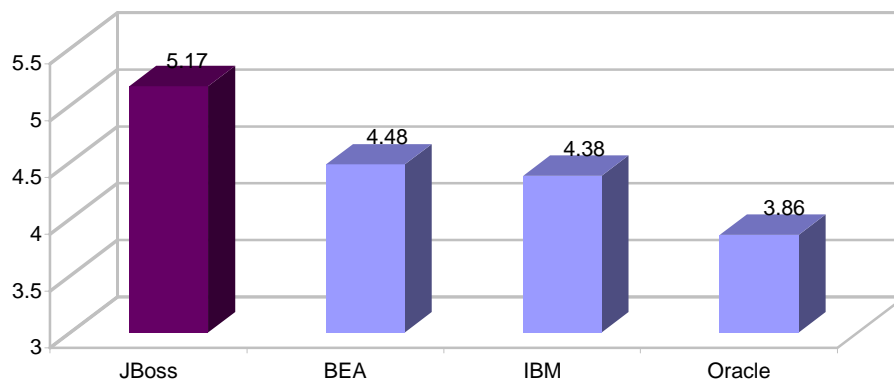
1. The Vendor understands the needs of my business.



Meeting SLAs

A Service Level Agreement (SLA) is the only objective guide to service expectations. SLAs benefit the customer and vendor alike: customers are ensured specific standards regarding service quality, while vendors define expectations to the support organization. The ability to meet or exceed SLAs is perhaps the most effective indicator of vendor performance and critical in risk mitigation. A vendor's ability to consistently meet SLAs should thus be critically examined when evaluating prospective vendors.

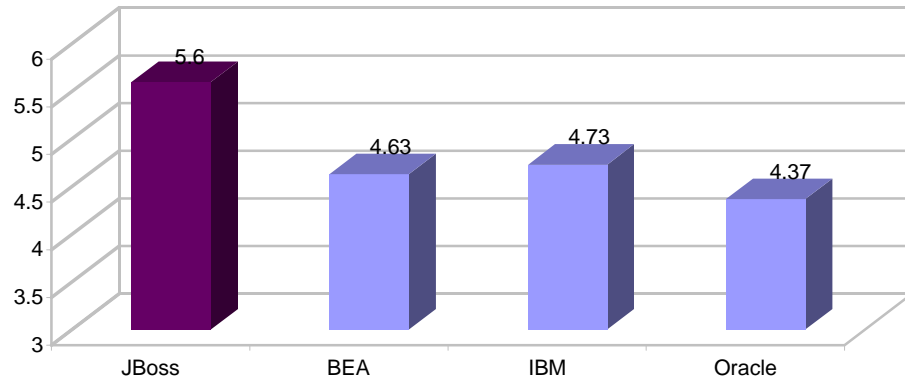
2. The Vendor consistently meets or exceeds my service level agreements.



Professional Service

An organization that truly values the vendor/client relationship understands the importance of each service interaction. Oftentimes, it only takes a single negative interaction to compromise vendor perception. Conscientious organizations understand the importance of professionalism and work diligently to instill this value throughout every level of the support organization.

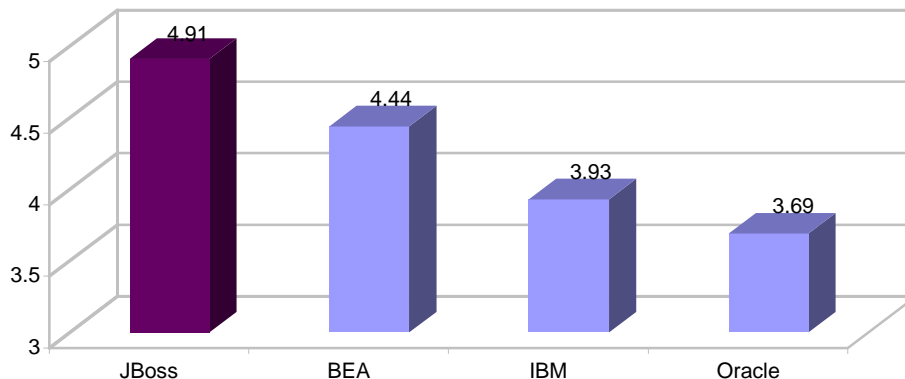
3. The Vendor's support staff provides service in a professional and courteous manner.



Knowledge Transfer

Client expectations and requirements can vary dramatically due to factors such as IT infrastructure, implementation scope, and resource availability. A knowledge transfer serves as an effective venue to thoroughly understand a client's requirements, set expectations, and outline the roles and respective responsibilities with regards to managing the client relationship. A formal knowledge transfer is yet another powerful indicator of commitment to a successful vendor/client relationship.

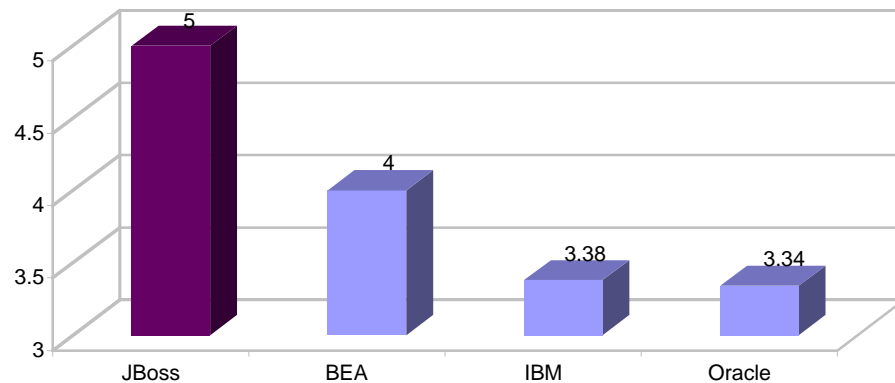
4. The Vendor held a knowledge transfer with my team.



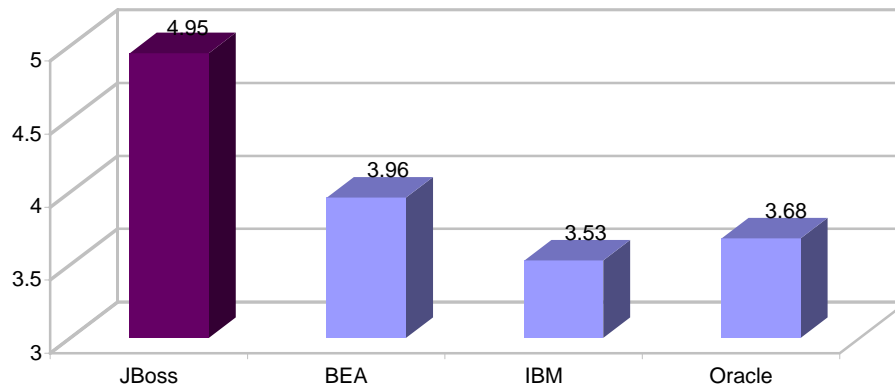
Support Pricing

Nearly every software vendor charges a premium for support services. Most software purchases will require support for the initial implementation and also on an ongoing basis to ensure long-term success. Internally supporting a 3rd party application can quickly absorb resources and may be impossible for smaller IT organizations. While initial support pricing can be useful when conducting a competitive TCO analysis, price/value ratio perception is also an excellent indicator of total cost. Prospective purchasers should sincerely consider the factors that can accelerate support package time-to-value.

5. The Vendor's support pricing is competitive.



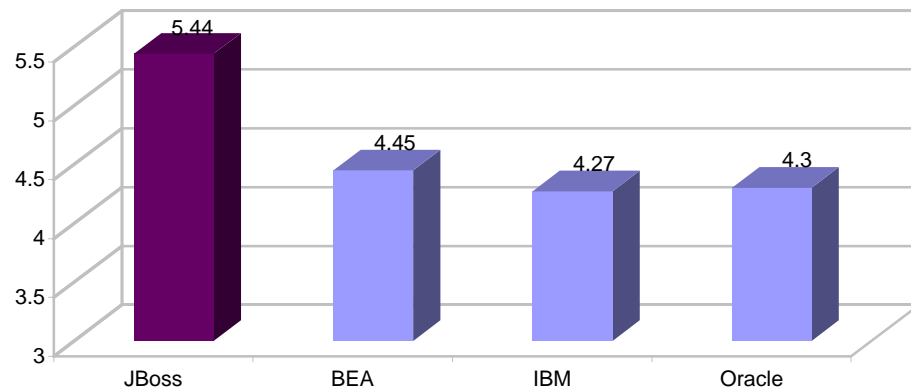
6. The Vendor provides excellent value for my support services investment.



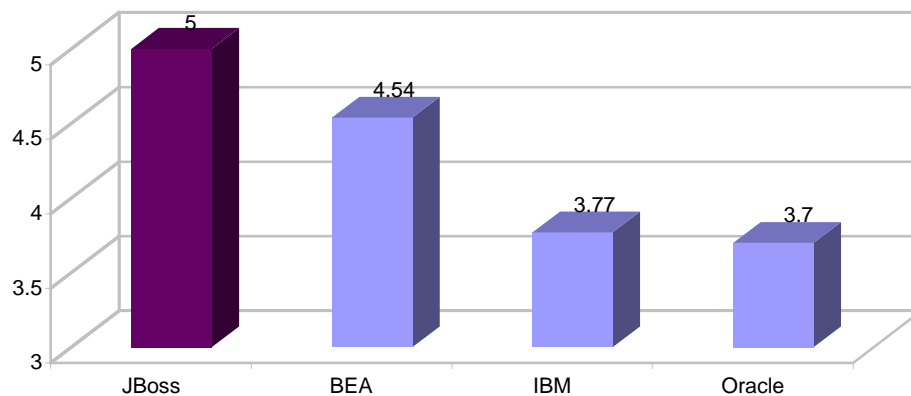
Product Knowledge

Support staff technical aptitude ranges significantly. The most common issues are typically resolved quickly, however, true expertise is required to troubleshoot the more challenging, complex issues. Product knowledge is also extremely useful in supporting versions that were potentially poorly documented and no longer widely utilized. A select group of highly skilled, tenured technicians is required to ensure full supportability of a product. Creating and retaining internal experts can be truly priceless to a customer base.

7. The Vendor's support staff knows their product(s) well.



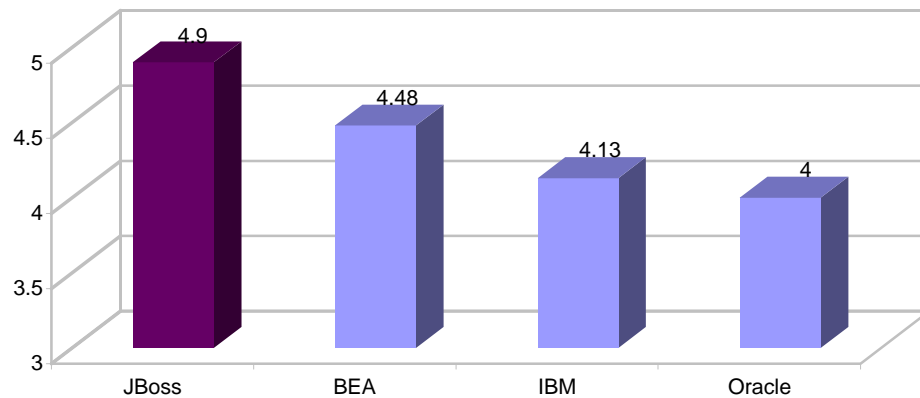
8. The Vendor's support team's knowledge extends beyond just their product(s).



Multi-Channel Access

Expectations have changed. With the rise of self-service functionality the ability to support customers through several different communication channels has become absolutely imperative. Customers not only expect rapid, efficient responses, they also tend to trend towards certain support vehicles. While one customer may prefer a vendor-sponsored support community, another might expect phone support for their services investment. Investing in proficient email, Web-based, and phone support channels is highly beneficial to the customer and vendor alike.

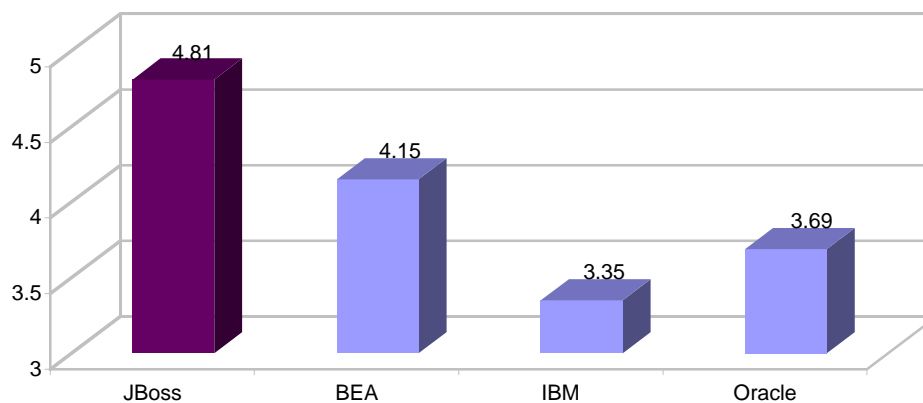
9. The Vendor's support team is easy to reach through multiple channels.



Access to Key Staff

Access to key staff is critical to properly maintain Enterprise IT environments. Although the ability to quickly reach support staff is important, complex issues often require deeper product expertise and rapid troubleshooting to avert disasters such as system downtime. Key experts are often able to divert the most challenging problems from grave impact.

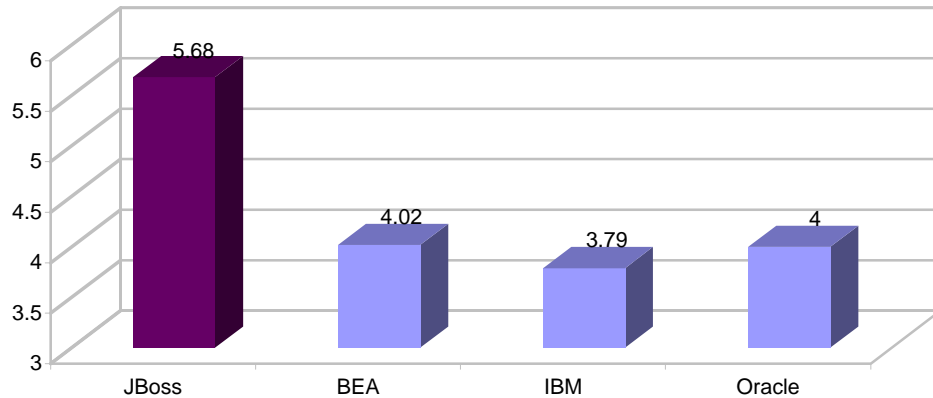
10. I can easily get access to key people at the Vendor.



Customer Loyalty

Consistent vendor excellence and the ability to continually exceed expectations drives customer loyalty. In a competitive environment such as Enterprise middleware, ensuring loyalty is critical. The study's results clearly indicate a highly diversified middleware landscape that demands strong vendor performance to ensure loyalty. Robust loyalty and positive word of mouth will ensure that consistent performers continue to gain traction against competing vendors.

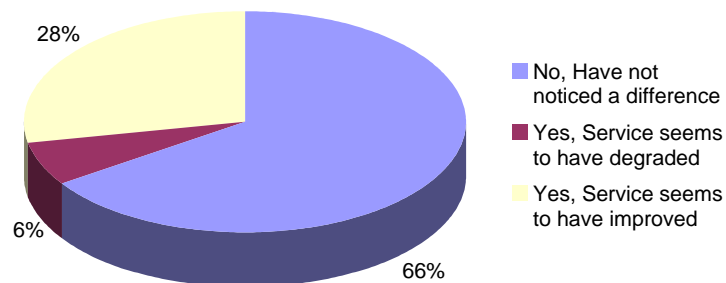
11. It is very likely that I would recommend the Vendor to others.



Post Acquisition Service Improvement

Maintaining or exceeding service levels post-acquisition is critical. The vulnerability of the vendor/client relationship coupled with lagging IT support can quickly lead to customer churn. Forward-thinking organizations are vigilant in their approach to help compensate for any lingering uncertainty and doubt.

12. Have you noticed a difference in service since the acquisition of JBoss by Red Hat Inc.?



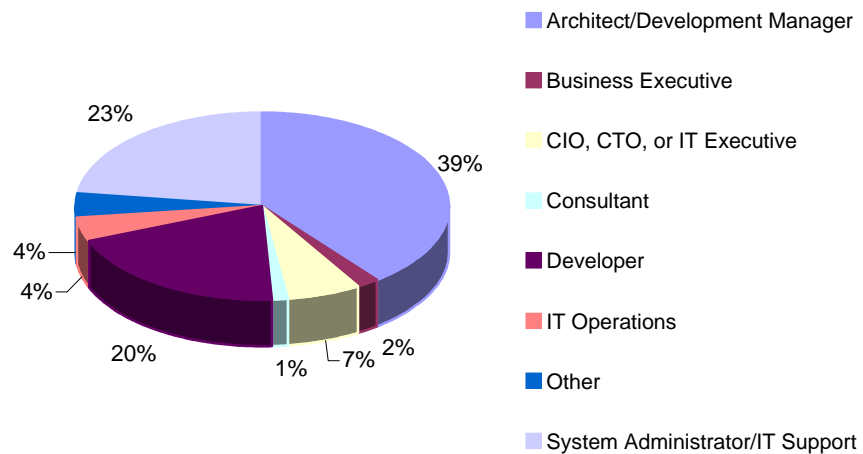
Summary

JBoss' mission to provide expert technical support services as a differentiator is clearly being acknowledged by its client base. This may not come as a surprise since many know the success of the division is significantly dependent on the value its customer support services bring. What may be surprising is the comprehensive nature by which their service is unsurpassed. Every category that was evaluated resulted in JBoss rating higher than the competition. More importantly, JBoss' performance has yielded unprecedented customer loyalty as evidenced by its favorable quantitative loyalty rating. Loyalty indexes remain one of the most valuable tools in predicting future growth. As a result, JBoss' future growth potential appears to remain very robust.

As organizations increasingly turn to open source software to lower their total cost of ownership of IT, JBoss meets their needs with a service organization dedicated to delivering increased savings with faster, more accurate, and more valuable support services. Based on the results of this study, it is our belief that JBoss Subscription services should be seen as a strategic lever to increase benefits and decrease costs when using JBoss middleware products. Objective evidence supporting JBoss' industry-leading performance may also be compelling enough to encourage a reexamination of current enterprise middleware investments and significantly impact current vendor evaluation processes.

About the Study Respondents

A random sampling of all Red Hat, Inc. Technical Support users with experience with other middleware vendor support organizations was contacted to participate in the study. Only users that recently had direct interaction with Red Hat support were asked to provide responses.



The number of individuals providing scores for the each application server follows:

- JBoss – 199
- IBM – 34
- BEA Systems – 65
- Oracle – 30

About Velociti Partners, Inc.

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