Best Practices for Automating SAP® Order-to-Cash

Summary
This white paper describes how SAP® Business Suite customers can use Winshuttle software to automate the Order-to-Cash business process through the user-enabled loading of Excel data. It describes how Winshuttle software can speed data integration and improve productivity. The paper is written for business decision makers (BDMs) in medium or large enterprises who have responsibility for the Order-to-Cash business process.

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Executive Summary

SAP Order-to-Cash is one of the highest value business processes performed at most manufacturing companies. By using Winshuttle software, Order-to-Cash business users can automate the loading of Excel data into their SAP solutions and reduce the vast amount of time and cost expended on data entry.

When companies want their entire organization to perform consistently across business perspectives, many businesses choose SAP Business Suite industry solutions, the leading Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) applications, to fulfill their business needs, end-to-end.

The SAP Order-to-Cash business process involves the end-to-end logistics from receiving the sales order from a customer, and shipping the product, through to receiving payment. The Order-to-Cash business process uses the two major modules in the SAP Business Suite — the SAP ERP Operations and SAP ERP Financials.

Managing the consistency, accuracy, and timeliness of Order-to-Cash data in the SAP system is critical to keeping the enterprise running efficiently and profitably. However, moving critical information in and out of data-intensive Order-to-Cash transactions typically involves a large staff of data entry clerks. The Order-to-Cash data collection process is commonly error prone, where data entry errors can propagate and create a multitude of problems that are difficult to resolve.

Business users typically use spreadsheets, such as the Microsoft Office Excel application, as the tool of choice for managing the data used in Order-to-Cash transactions. Spreadsheets offer a convenient way for business users to create, update, and transfer large amounts of data. For example, business users stage the data for SAP transactions in Excel because it provides a full view of the data, rather than navigating through multiple screens, with each screen giving only a partial view of the data.

However, transferring manually-entered data from spreadsheets to Order-to-Cash transactions remains a challenge for most organizations and business users are constantly searching for a convenient way to automate the loading of spreadsheet data into the SAP system. User-enabled data loading offers a simple, convenient opportunity to significantly improve the efficiency of the Order-to-Cash business process.

This white paper describes how Winshuttle solutions can empower SAP Order-to-Cash business users to speed data integration and improve their productivity. The paper describes how Winshuttle software is being used to automate the SAP data entry process. It illustrates the benefits that can be achieved through this automation using case studies from three manufacturing companies that use Winshuttle software — Hubbell, Apotex, and Cutter & Buck.

This paper is intended for business decision makers (BDMs) who have responsibility for the Order-to-Cash business process. It assumes that the reader has at least a general understanding of SAP ERP solutions and Microsoft Office applications.
SAP Order-to-Cash Business Process

The Order-to-Cash business process uses two major applications in the SAP Business Suite — the Logistics/Operations solution and the Financials solution.

The Order-to-Cash process uses SAP transactional data objects including sales orders, outbound shipments, billing data, delivery notes, customer invoices, incoming payments, and others, as shown in Figure 1. These transactional data objects are dependent on several master data objects including the material master, customer master, and pricing conditions.

Data Management Challenges

The large amount of data to be managed in the Order-to-Cash business process imposes a unique set of challenges. The Order-to-Cash data is interconnected and is used in cross-organizational business processes — one error can cause a “ripple effect” and propagate across the entire SAP system.

Errors in master data are particularly problematic since they propagate downstream and affect many transactions. This problem is well publicized — one report shows that errors in master data can lead to an up to 15 percent decrease in profitability.

The primary challenges for data management are manual data entry and the inherent difficulties in automating business processes, as described in the following sections.

Manual Data Entry

Manual data entry for day-to-day transactional data, such as sales orders or credit memos, is a resource-intensive and costly activity. Typically, manual data entry consists of entering a large number of line items that involve multiple transaction screens. In addition, manual entry of new master data such as the customer master or material master, or changes to existing master data, requires entry in several dozen fields on dozens of screens.

Manual data entry is time-consuming and error prone. Often, the process of verifying the data and re-entering it into the SAP solution manually to make corrections introduces errors. Moreover, much of this manual data entry into the SAP solution is entirely avoidable since the data being entered is already available in spreadsheets and other tools. This includes the entry of data from external sources and the manipulation of data stored in nonstandard digital formats.

Automation Challenges

The automated entry of SAP data from spreadsheets can improve the speed of the upload, but this automation typically requires IT support. Since technical resources and staff are usually overcommitted or insufficient, most IT departments are typically backlogged, which makes them slow to respond to business users, without the capability to fully support the requests for automation, and unable to respond to changes and other maintenance requirements.

Together, these factors result in a situation where normal business processes become tedious and inefficient, delays are common, and productivity breaks down. The effect of not being able to automate the Order-to-Cash business process to enter data in a timely manner can include delays in order processing and order fulfillment and errors that can effect data quality.

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The Winshuttle Solution

Businesses want a convenient, timely, manageable, and maintainable data entry solution for the Order-to-Cash business process. Winshuttle software eliminates the costly, resource-intensive activities associated with manual data entry and it significantly reduces IT custom programming efforts. This software empowers business users to become data stewards.

Winshuttle software can provide substantial support to SAP data management teams in a number of key business scenarios. It allows many aspects of the Order-to-Cash business process to be automated. Winshuttle software is simple to use, learn, and deploy. This software connects easily to the SAP system and synchronizes Excel data with SAP business processes seamlessly for any SAP solution.

Winshuttle software uses standard SAP authorization profiles to restrict user access, preserving SAP security standards. Winshuttle software requires SAP user authentication each time the software is used to run data uploads.

Advantages and Customer Value

Winshuttle software delivers these advantages:

• Empower SAP information workers and analysts providing control over their own data, making them more self-sufficient and reducing dependence on others.
• Handle mass uploads and data maintenance tasks instantaneously saving over-subscribed SAP support and implementation teams time and resources.
• Eliminate redundant double-entry of data and hand-keying errors, saving data entry resources.
• Reduce or eliminate custom programming efforts significantly saving IT technical resources.

Winshuttle software provides high value to SAP customers:

• Empowers business users to become data stewards and simplifies business processes.
• Faster and better error handling. Shortens the data entry and uploading cycle and allows data stewards to manage their own data.
• Allows for “data shuttling”. Automates the data entry process, thereby reducing manual data entry requirements, resources, and costs.
• Reduces resources and costs. Managing data no longer requires IT intervention, which creates greater efficiency with fewer resources.

Minimum Requirements

• No programming or coding in SAP solutions, Excel, or Access.
• No changes to your standard SAP Business Suite solutions.
• Adheres to SAP authorization and authentication services.

Advantages and Customer Value

Winshuttle software allows business users to easily automate the uploading of data from Excel to SAP solutions, and it also supports data downloads. The typical payback period with Winshuttle is an average of 45 days for most customers. The estimated savings for a Winshuttle customer is over $600,000 per year in reduced data entry time and reduced IT resource requirements.

Winshuttle software delivers important advantages and customer value as described in the following sections.
Winshuttle Order-to-Cash Scenarios

Winshuttle software is ideal for two major scenarios that are used with Order-to-Cash — Data Synchronization and Data Maintenance. Each of these business scenarios is described below.

**Data Synchronization**

In the Data Synchronization scenario, a large volume of transactional data or master data is received or created in Excel spreadsheets, as shown in Figure 2. The Excel data needs to be synchronized with the SAP system. An example of the type of data used in this scenario includes sales orders and credit memos received from customers.

![Figure 2. Data Synchronization scenario](image)

**Data Maintenance**

In the Data Maintenance scenario, a large volume of master or transactional data records in SAP master and transactional data need to be changed as the result of some business event, as shown in Figure 3. An example of this type of data maintenance activity would include a price change for thousands of materials in the SAP system.

![Figure 3. Data Maintenance scenario](image)
Winshuttle Order-to-Cash Examples

Winshuttle software has shown very high value in automating key activities within the Order-to-Cash business process as described by the specific examples in the following sections.

Sales Order or Credit Memo Creation
Many companies have expended a large amount of time and resources automating the process of sales order creation using Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) and Service Oriented Architecture (SOA) technologies. However, spreadsheets still remain a very common business collaboration tool. Spreadsheets are particularly prevalent in SAP transactions such as reseller orders, orders from smaller customers, and returns. Most of this spreadsheet data is currently entered in SAP solutions manually, leading to unnecessary delays in order fulfillment, and the resulting revenue recognition.

Material Master Creation for Finished Goods
The creation of SAP finished material master records is an on-going task at most manufacturing companies as new Stock Keeping Units (SKUs) are created. In some cases, the creation of a single material for sale may involve accurate data entry into over 100 fields on at least 20 screens. Spreadsheets are the most common way to create new materials since they give a complete view of one material on one sheet and errors between records can be easily identified. Once again, business users create most new materials by manually entering the spreadsheet data into the SAP solution, which is often a resource-intensive and time-consuming process. Moreover, even small errors in the material master creation process can have a very large negative effect downstream.

Pricing Condition Changes
Updating and maintaining SAP pricing conditions is at least an annual exercise at most companies. Pricing data has to be incrementally changed and approved by many stakeholders. Therefore, it is almost always created in Excel spreadsheets. Delays and errors in loading pricing data into the SAP system can lead to lost potential revenues.

Customer Master Changes
Timely changes to SAP customer master data are a persistent and important requirement of the Order-to-Cash business process. Changing credit terms for customers, changing the block/unblock status for a customer, and changing customer addresses are common processes where the ability to load data from Excel is required.

Winshuttle transactionSHUTTLE

Winshuttle transactionSHUTTLE software greatly simplifies the automated recording, mapping, and running of SAP ERP transactional data using Microsoft Office Excel and Access. It allows business users to maximize the opportunities for data integration and it improves data quality.

transactionSHUTTLE Three-Step Process
Data loading from transactionSHUTTLE to the SAP solution is very similar to manually entering the data into the SAP solution. The transactionSHUTTLE user is considered just another SAP user who is entering data at a very fast pace. Selecting New starts the process of creating a new SHUTTLEfile recording, as shown in Figure 4.

Creating a New SHUTTLEfile
You create a new SHUTTLEfile using the Create New File screen. This screen has just three steps – Record, Map, and Run. You perform these steps in sequence to complete the process.
1 — Record the Business Process

On the Record screen, you enter the SAP transaction code such as VA01 to connect to the SAP solution and begin a new recording. You logon to transactionSHUTTLE using standard SAP authorization profiles. transactionSHUTTLE preserves SAP security standards.

Once connected, you can record the transaction and create a SHUTTLEfile recording (.TxR file extension). The recording indicates the way in which transactionSHUTTLE runs the SAP transaction including which screens to use and which fields to populate.

Figure 4. Create New File screen
This example shows a recording that uses the VA01 transaction to create a new Sales Order in SAP ERP. There are three screens — Create Sales Order (Initial Screen), a view of the Header information entry screen, and a view of the Line Item entry screen, as shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Example of SAP VA01 transaction screens
2 — Map SAP Data without IT Intervention
When the recording is completed, you would select Create Mapping to map the SAP data fields captured. This makes the mapping process simple and intuitive. The Map screen with the Basic tab contains all of the fields that were touched during the recording, as shown in Figure 6. The bottom of the screen contains a preview of the Excel mapping for the SHUTTLE file.

Figure 6. Create New Mapping screen (Basic tab)
This Map screen has two modes – a Basic tab and an Expert tab. The screen also has a Properties slide-in and a Filter option that allows you to choose many other features.

3 — Load and Run Records
The Run screen lets you run the SHUTTLE file recording using the SAP fields that were mapped to Excel, as shown in Figure 7. Each run can execute the recorded SAP transaction one time or thousands of times, depending on the number of rows in the Excel spreadsheet. In order to ensure secure access to the SAP system, transactionSHUTTLE requires user authentication each time the SAP system is accessed such as to run data uploads.

The Run screen contains Advanced Run Options and a built-in scheduler. When the scheduler is used, transactionSHUTTLE automatically connects to the SAP system using secure authentication, runs the transaction as scheduled, and closes the connection with the SAP system when complete.

Figure 7. Run screen
(Note that the run-time only version of transactionSHUTTLE, called runSHUTTLE, can be used to run the recordings). The VA01 data records in the Excel spreadsheet are uploaded to the SAP system using the transactionSHUTTLE recording, as shown in Figure 8.

Figure 8. Example of a VA01 data upload using Excel
If errors are encountered, transactionSHUTTLE continues to upload data for the remaining records. Any success and error messages returned from the SAP system are logged into a user-specified Excel column, with one log per record, making this a self-documenting file.
CASE STUDY:
Hubbell — transactionSHUTTLE Advances SAP Data Quality

“We were impressed with transactionSHUTTLE’s ease of use and how quickly it corrected large volumes of master data. Shortly thereafter, we signed a license agreement.”

Paul Cahill, Director of Information Technology, Hubbell Wiring Systems

Situation
Hubbell, Incorporated is an international manufacturer of quality electrical and electronic products for the residential, commercial, industrial, utility, and telecommunications markets. Based in Orange, Connecticut, the company operates manufacturing divisions and subsidiaries in the United States and worldwide.

Hubbell is organized across five business “platforms” — Hubbell Wiring Systems, Hubbell Electrical Products, Hubbell Lighting Systems, Hubbell Power Systems, and Hubbell Industrial Technologies. In 2006 Hubbell had $2.4 billion in revenues. In October, 2004, Hubbell Wiring Systems (HWS) was the first platform to implement the SAP R/3® solution, followed by their other four platforms, ending in 2006.

Challenge
The first challenge Hubbell (HWS) faced was the need to improve the quality of data going into SAP solutions. In particular, they experienced a higher level of maintenance and data quality issues with their customer and vendor information.

When the SAP solution was implemented at HWS, it required the day-to-day migration of data from 16 different systems to one SAP environment. HWS hired temporary workers to manually key-in and correct the master data. They also utilized a SAP mass transaction tool, but it did not address their needs conveniently. They discovered much of the data going into the SAP system was of poor quality, which created an adverse impact on the integrity of customer, material, vendor, and pricing conditions data. HWS also encountered a number of master data challenges including mass updates.

HWS wanted to empower business users to own and maintain their own data, but they were unable to find a practical solution due to the large amount of errors occurring with the hand-keying of data, and the difficulty in finding the “right” tool for data migration.

In addition, HWS encountered delays from their Central Information Technology (IT) group. Any request to the Central IT group for master data typically required a number of days to process.

Solution
"transactionSHUTTLE gives us the ability to do things we weren’t able to do before. Our business users can now automatically upload master data, as well as easily manipulate data already in SAP. This has improved data quality, and significantly reduced our manual data entry costs, reduced our overall headcount, and minimized the burden on our IT resources.”

Paul Cahill, Director of Information Technology, Hubbell Wiring Systems

In 2005, HWS introduced Winshuttle “transactionSHUTTLE”, formerly “TxShuttle”, software at one of its plants in Puerto Rico — one year after going live with the SAP solution. HWS found that transactionSHUTTLE was simple to install and use. HWS business users were able to upload data to SAP solutions easily including error handling, and download data conveniently.

Because transactionSHUTTLE loads data using Microsoft Excel, HWS users quickly became proficient in using this software, thereby limiting the need for manual data entry and for IT intervention. In addition, transactionSHUTTLE uses standard SAP authorization profiles to limit user access, and provides a complete audit trail of all updates and activity.

HWS initially deployed transactionSHUTTLE for master data uploads including customer information updates such as the sales hierarchy and partner functions, material creations and updates, vendor updates, pricing creation and updates, and employee updates. Then HWS expanded its use of transactionSHUTTLE to include transactional data including inventory, receivables, purchase orders, production orders, and quote updates.
Since its initial deployment of transactionSHUTTLE across all five platforms, Hubbell has realized substantial benefits. The company has enjoyed a dramatic increase in the overall quality of data by eliminating the need for manual data entry and IT support. transactionSHUTTLE has allowed HWS to create a faster, responsive SAP data management process that provides improved service levels across the entire organization.

“Our initial deployment of transactionSHUTTLE has grown and now every platform across Hubbell is utilizing transactionSHUTTLE. The four other platforms have benefited from what we learned and all went live with transactionSHUTTLE when they went live with SAP.”

Paul Cahill, Director of Information Technology, Hubbell Wiring Systems.

CASE STUDY:
Apotex — transactionSHUTTLE Delivers Very Fast SAP Data Transfers Using Excel

“By implementing transactionSHUTTLE, we can automate the transfer of data between Excel and SAP, and save an enormous amount of time, better spent performing value-added tasks.”

Tim Williams, Manager of Direct Procurement for Apotex, Inc.

Situation
Apotex, Inc., founded in 1974, is the largest Canadian-owned pharmaceutical company. Apotex produces more than 300 generic pharmaceuticals in over 4000 dosages and formats which, in Canada, are used to fill over 70 million prescriptions a year — the largest amount of any pharmaceutical company. The company’s pharmaceuticals can be found in virtually every pharmacy and healthcare facility in Canada and are exported to over 115 countries around the globe. The worldwide sales of the Apotex Group of companies exceed $1 billion (Canadian $) per year. In the last few years, Apotex has hired over 1200 new employees in Production, Engineering, Operations, Quality and Research.

Challenge
Apotex encountered challenges in performing manual data transfers to data between Microsoft Excel and SAP business processes including a high level of errors. The business users are responsible for the timely physical entry of data into SAP transactions, which is a resource-intensive and costly activity. Often, the process of verifying the data and re-entering it into the SAP solution manually to make corrections also introduces errors.

Apotex decided that the costs and risks associated with manual entry and data transfers between Excel to SAP system were too high. They determined that the best solution was to fully automate their data entry practices. Apotex also wanted to empower business users to own and maintain their own data. They were unable to find an automation solution that was practical for their company.

Apotex wanted to ensure that the data in SAP applications is accurate and consistent. The data entered in SAP transactions is interconnected and is used in cross-organizational business processes — one mistake can result in many problems. For example, if incorrect data is entered to place an order, it can cause a “ripple effect”, where the error is propagated in other related SAP business processes.

Solution
Apotex introduced Winshuttle “transactionSHUTTLE”, formerly “TxShuttle”, desktop software to provide a conduit between Excel and the SAP solution that supports automated data uploads. They found that transactionSHUTTLE’s strength is that it is simple to install and operate using the record, map, and run method. It can be deployed to desktops in a manner that is not computer resource-intensive.

By using transactionSHUTTLE, Apotex substantially reduced the costs associated with manual data entry with many SAP applications. Because this software is supported by the end user, and not IT, business users can perform data uploads and manipulation without requiring custom programs. In addition, there is no need to monitor the application in the event of errors and it provides for effective error handling.

transactionSHUTTLE loads data using Microsoft Excel, which allows end users to quickly become proficient in its use. In addition, transactionSHUTTLE uses standard SAP authorization profiles to limit user access, and it provides complete audit trails of all updates and activity.
transactionSHUTTLE allows for extremely fast data transfers between Excel and the SAP solutions. Business users can run multiple uploads at a time in the background, while performing other work on the computer.

In addition, Apotex can generate reports automatically during off-peak hours, and then these reports can be saved to local files on users’ hard drives. Script-linking allows users to perform multiple transactions using the same data and same Excel spreadsheet.

For example, the creation of material masters, manufacturer part numbers, q-info records, and final assignment to inspection plans must be performed on each material master Apotex creates. If a single user entered all of this data into the SAP solution manually, this series of transactions would consume approximately 50 minutes per material. By using transactionSHUTTLE, Apotex shortened their data entry time to approximately 10 seconds per material.

Since Apotex creates thousands of materials per year, transactionSHUTTLE automation resulted in savings thousands of hours of staff time.

CASE STUDY: Cutter & Buck — transactionSHUTTLE Speeds Data Integration and Improves Data Quality

Situation
Cutter & Buck, a subsidiary of New Wave Group AB, designs and markets upscale sportswear under the Cutter & Buck brand name. Cutter & Buck (C&B) products feature distinctive, comfortable designs, high quality materials, and rich detailing. The company sells its products through golf pro shops and resorts, specialty retail shops, corporate sales, and online. Headquartered in Seattle, Washington, C & B earned $131 million in revenues in 2006.

Challenge
After Cutter & Buck implemented their new SAP system, the company realized it needed to find a solution that would decrease the amount of time it was taking to enter data into the SAP system, increase the accuracy of the data to be uploaded and not tie up already burdened IT resources.

“We recognized that we had to do something soon to assist the users with data entry. The users were frustrated with the time-consuming data entry process.”

Rick Davis, IT Director, Cutter & Buck

The company considered several options including using their existing conversion programs, building new applications, using SAP scripting tools, or using a third-party solution. C & B determined that using their existing conversion programs and building new applications were not feasible due to their extensive data preparation work and heavy reliance on IT resources. Similarly, C & B also decided that the SAP tools — Legacy System Migration Workbench (LSMW) and Computer Aided Test Tool (CATT) did not address their specific requirements. C & B needed to find a third-party solution that could meet all of their data entry requirements.

Solution
C & B first introduced to “transactionSHUTTLE”, also called “TxShuttle”, desktop software to their business and functional analysts. These business users were immediately struck by how easy it was to learn and use, and how quickly they were able to create scripts in a relatively short period of time.

The business users were impressed that there is no need to transport data — They just need to point to the new system or client. In addition, the users appreciated that transactionSHUTTLE resides on the user’s PC and does not bypass SAP authorization profiles.

C & B decided to utilize transactionSHUTTLE because it can record new data entry tasks with little or no IT resources. They have also found that, by using this software, users are taking command of their own data entry needs, thereby reducing manual data entry costs. transactionSHUTTLE gives them the flexibility to decide when and where to use the data integration tool.

C & B immediately deployed transactionSHUTTLE to automate material master data in the accounting and financial systems. Before they implemented this software, it took C & B more than 560 hours to complete material master creation per season. With transactionSHUTTLE, the total time required to complete this task was reduced to only eight total hours per season — a 99 percent savings in staff time. In fact, C & B realized a very
B realized a very rapid payback period just from their use of transactionSHUTTLE for material master automation. Since its initial implementation, C & B is continuing to find new ways to utilize transactionSHUTTLE including uploading condition records, information records, journal entries, payable entries, planning data, and customer master changes.

Users have improved their productivity since they now have more time to perform other important aspects of their jobs, besides entering data into the SAP solution. In addition, the users report feeling empowered because they can take ownership of their data.

“We have automated our data entry, enhanced our data quality, and increased employee productivity. We continue to find new uses for the product and have received a $75,000 return on investment in a short period of time.”

Rick Davis, IT Director, Cutter & Buck
Conclusion

SAP Business Suite customers can use Winshuttle software to automate the Order-to-Cash business process through the user-enabled loading of Excel data. The large amount of data to be managed in the Order-to-Cash business process imposes a unique set of challenges in data management including the issues related to manual data entry and the inherent difficulties in automating SAP business processes. Businesses want a convenient, timely, manageable, and maintainable data entry solution for the Order-to-Cash business process. Examples of Order-to-Cash activities that can benefit from using Winshuttle software include sales order or credit memo creation, material master creation for finished goods, pricing condition changes, and customer master changes.

Winshuttle software eliminates the costly, resource-intensive activities associated with manual data entry and it significantly reduces IT custom programming efforts. It allows business users to maximize the opportunities for data integration, improve data quality, and increase their productivity. Winshuttle software empowers business users to become data stewards.

Winshuttle transactionSHUTTLE software greatly simplifies the automated recording, mapping, and running of SAP ERP transactional data using Microsoft Office Excel and Access. For more information about transactionSHUTTLE, go to the Winshuttle Web site at: www.winshuttle.com

You can also request a 15-day trial of Winshuttle software. Please go to the link below to fill out a request form and a Winshuttle representative will promptly send you a link to download and install the software: www.winshuttle.com/resources/resources_downloads.htm
About Winshuttle

Winshuttle, Inc. is a software company that has been providing user-enabled SAP data shuttling applications for SAP users worldwide since 2000. Winshuttle is one of the fastest growing SAP solution providers ranking 124 of the Inc. 500 (Inc. magazine’s) fastest growing companies for 2007, and only the 5th in Washington State.

More than 250 Global 2000 companies are using Winshuttle solutions including Hubbell, Inc., Apotex, Inc., Cutter & Buck, Inc., Canada Post, Medtronic, Inc., and Coca Cola Bottling Company Consolidated. Winshuttle software is simple to learn, simple to use, and simple to deploy, especially because they do not require any programming or utilize IT resources. Winshuttle software empowers business users in Order-to-Cash, financials, and human capital management to easily automate the incorporation of Excel data into any of the SAP Business Suite modules, transforming business processes across the enterprise.

Contact Information
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