

2025 / 2026

PERFORMANCE REPORT

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What drives Performance in 2026?



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** the focus of this report is B2B traditional industries, not B2C products.

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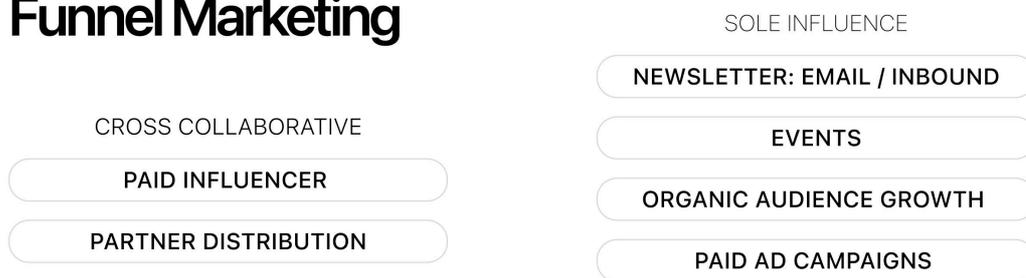
What is Performance?

WHAT IS PERFORMANCE?

IF MARKETING CAN'T BE TIED TO REVENUE, IT ISN'T MANAGEABLE.

Performance is about linking marketing to commercial outcomes so it can be managed and reallocated based on evidence.

Types of Early Funnel Marketing



If you run sales in a traditional B2B business, “performance marketing” matters because it’s the difference between marketing being a cost that leaks and marketing being a commercial lever you can continuously improve. You don’t need more activity for activity’s sake; you need a system that shows what is working, for whom, and under what conditions, so you can put money and effort behind what actually creates revenue.

In a market where growth is unstable and buyers are harder to reach, the biggest risk is guessing. Performance marketing is the discipline that replaces guesswork with observable signals you can act on, so marketing becomes legible in the same way sales is legible: pipeline, progression, and outcomes.

The first problem is access. Buyers are doing more of the work before they ever invite a rep into the conversation, and many actively prefer a rep-free experience until late in the journey. At the same time, irrelevant outreach doesn’t just fail to help; it teaches buyers to avoid you. That

is why “more marketing” can produce less access and why the old playbook of pushing harder often stops working. Performance marketing solves this by making early influence measurable and repeatable. Instead of spraying messages and hoping, you learn which segments respond to which value angles, which channels actually earn attention, and which behaviors signal real intent. For a sales owner, this translates into fewer dead-end conversations, better-timed engagement, and a clearer sense of which accounts are becoming reachable before your team burns cycles chasing them blindly.

The second problem is that B2B buying is not a single conversion moment; it’s a committee trying to reach consensus in a non-linear process, often with real internal conflict. Deals stall not because one person needs another follow-up, but because different stakeholders have different fears, incentives, and definitions of success. This is exactly where traditional marketing reporting breaks down, because clicks, leads, and vague “engagement” don’t explain why opportunities advance or freeze, and they don’t give you anything you can forecast on.

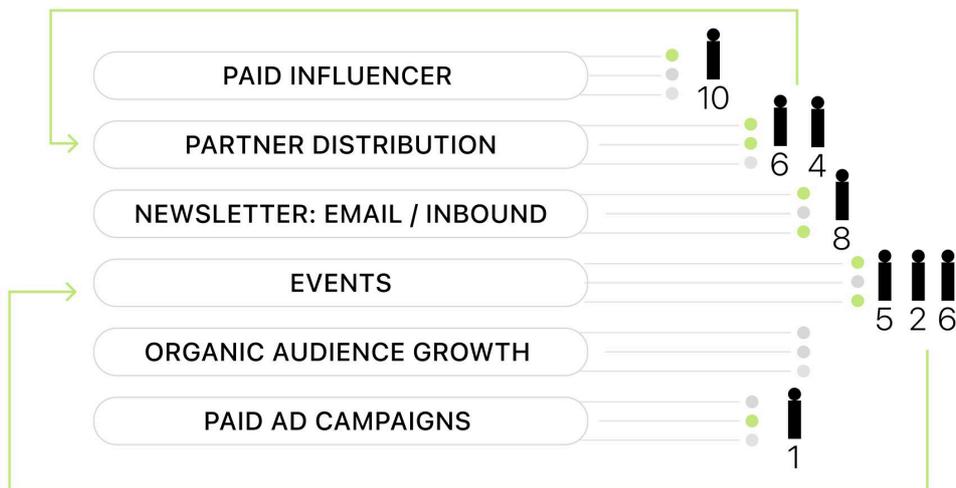
Performance marketing closes that gap by tying marketing activity to commercial movement. It measures which messages and assets help deals progress, which objections are showing up at different stages, and which stakeholders need which proof to align.

B2B BUYING IS MULTI-STAKEHOLDER; "LEADS" RARELY EXPLAIN OUTCOMES

Buying groups, non-linear journeys, and the risk of using easy-to-count proxies (like lead volume) may not explain deal progression

Rep Free Experience to the Engage Buyers Committee

B2B Buying Committee, Company AB:
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10



**goal engage all from Buyers Committee
and re-use what worked.*

The point isn't to pretend marketing can predict every deal; it's to reduce uncertainty fast enough that you can diagnose stalls, improve the journey, and create more predictable pipeline motion.

The third problem is consistency across a buyer journey that now spans many touchpoints.

When buyers bounce between your website, ads, content, partners, and sellers, even small inconsistencies in claims, pricing logic, timelines, or value story erode trust and slow decisions. From a sales leader's perspective, that's not a "marketing problem" in the abstract; it's a direct cause of longer cycles, tougher late-stage conversations, and more deals that go dark.

Traditional industries feel extra friction here because experimentation can seem risky when you have distributors, negotiated pricing, and relationship-based routes to market.

Performance marketing offers a controlled way to fix this: you establish a consistent narrative across touchpoints, then you test and learn in contained, low-risk ways to see what improves progression without creating channel conflict.

MEASURING ALLOWS FOR BETTER PERFORMANCE

WITHOUT PERFORMANCE, MARKETING SPEND BECOMES GUESSWORK

Without a performance discipline, decisions default to weak proxies or misread signals, making budget allocation less evidence-based.

That's why "performance branding" is gaining ground too: more than half of many budgets sit in upper and mid funnel, and the goal is to apply measurement discipline earlier without mistakenly judging it only by last-click or lower-funnel metrics and accidentally cutting what quietly feeds pipeline.

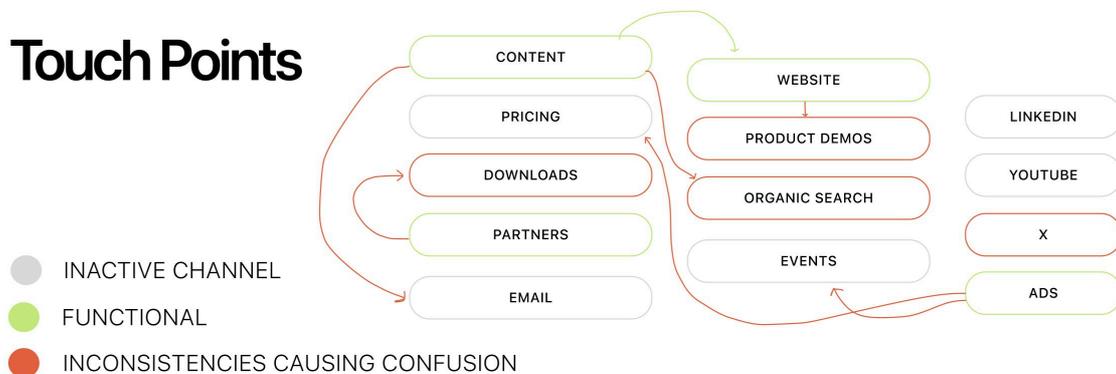
Instead of locking spend into annual plans that assume yesterday's behavior you build the capability to observe what's happening now and reallocate resources toward what produces business value.

In the end, when a B2B business says "we need performance," what they usually mean is "we need to stop guessing."

Performance marketing isn't "new" as an idea; it's the modern version of a very old demand: make marketing accountable to commercial outcomes. What's newer is the amount of data, tooling, and channel complexity that makes that accountability possible at scale. In B2B, "performance" is the word people use when they want marketing

Performance marketing is the discipline of knowing what is working, for whom, and under what conditions, well enough that you can stop guessing and start reallocating time and spend with confidence. What it offers B2B companies is predictability through learning speed.

Touch Points



Stop guessing which accounts are truly reachable, which messages resonate with the buying group, which channels create real opportunity, and whether marketing is helping sales or just generating noise. Performance marketing is marketing treated as a measurable system you can improve over time, so it becomes more predictable and more useful to revenue.

(usually discussed as channels and activity) to connect cleanly to what sales actually lives on every quarter: meetings, opportunities, wins, and retained accounts. It matters because "more activity" can now create less access—buyers actively avoid irrelevant outreach—and because buying isn't a single conversion moment anymore; it's a committee trying to reach consensus, often with unhealthy conflict.

The companies investing most aggressively are the ones feeling the revenue pressure first: sales-led B2B firms where access is declining, cycles are stretching, and every wasted dollar hurts, plus traditional/industrial businesses trying to modernize without breaking distributor relationships.

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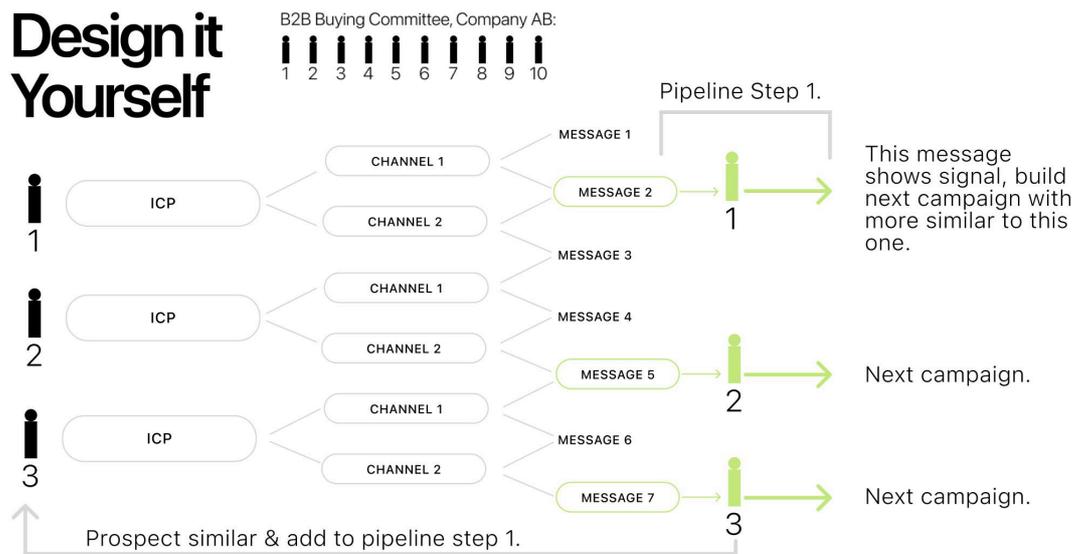
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How do you design
for it?

HOW DO YOU DESIGN FOR IT?

BUILD A REVENUE LEARNING SYSTEM, NOT “CAMPAIGNS”

Clear outcomes, fast testing, and constant reallocation



Designing for performance marketing starts with a mindset shift: you are not “running campaigns,” you are building a learning system that turns money into predictable pipeline.

The first design decision is commercial, not creative. Pick one primary outcome the business actually cares about—qualified pipeline created, pipeline velocity, or revenue from a defined segment—and then define the guardrails that keep you honest, like CAC payback, win rate, or sales cycle length. When performance marketing works, it works because everyone can agree what “better” means, and the conversation moves from opinions about tactics to evidence about movement.

The second design decision is measurement architecture, because in

2026 you rarely get truth from a single lens.

You need a practical “triangulation” approach: attribution to understand observable journeys, incrementality tests to prove causality, and marketing mix modeling to explain cross-channel impact when tracking is imperfect. Google’s modern measurement guidance explicitly frames this combined approach as a way to power better decisions in a privacy-first environment, rather than relying on one fragile method.

Third, you design the data foundation before you design the channel plan. Performance breaks when your CRM is messy, lifecycle stages are inconsistent, and the definition of a “qualified” opportunity changes depending on who is asked.

Build clean handoffs and shared definitions across sales and marketing, then ensure your tracking can connect touchpoints to revenue outcomes (including offline conversions where relevant). This is where RevOps becomes a performance enabler: it’s not a trendy org chart, it’s the operating layer that keeps data, process, and accountability aligned so your marketing learns in the same language your sales forecast uses.

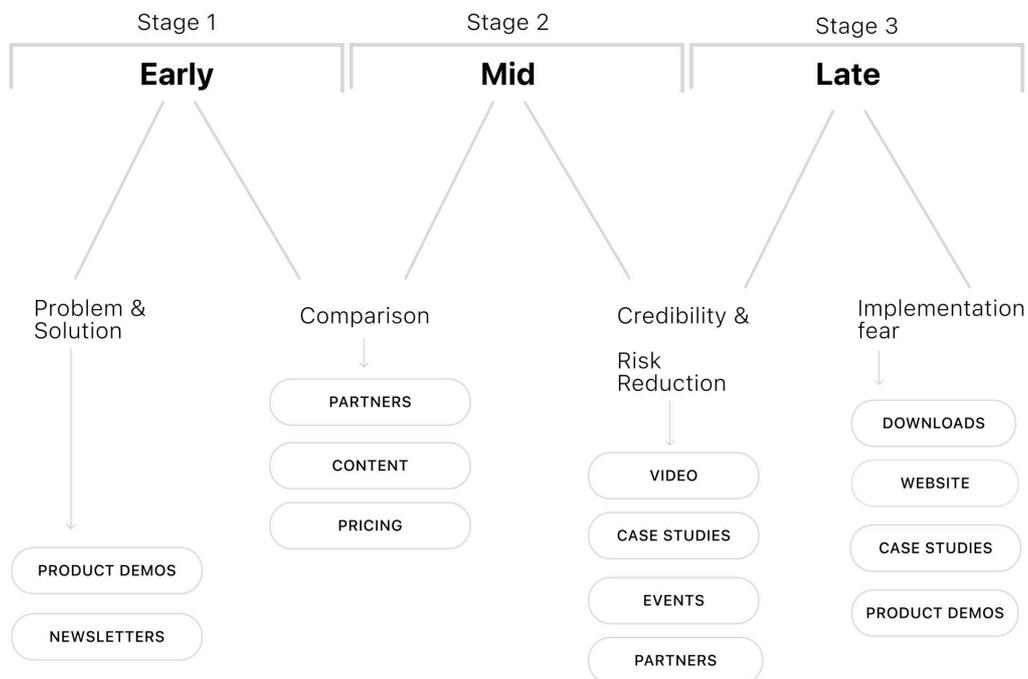
Design for B2B reality: performance doesn’t mean “optimize for leads,” it means “optimize for the buying group.” That requires an ICP you can actually target, and a stakeholder map you can actually influence.

WAYS YOU MEASURE AND PROVE MARKETING IMPACT

MEASURE WHAT MOVES PIPELINE (TRIANGULATE, DON'T GUESS)

Use multiple methods to prove revenue impact

Pipeline stages



Translate your value proposition into a small set of testable messages that match different roles (economic buyer, technical evaluator, operations owner), then build offers and proof that reduce risk for each. The goal is not to be clever; it's to be relevant enough that you earn attention without triggering avoidance.

Fifth, build a channel portfolio that reflects how buyers behave today: demand capture for in-market intent, demand creation to earn future intent, and nurturing to keep committees aligned while deals move unevenly. In practice, that means your paid channels (search, paid social, retargeting, programmatic) should not exist as a separate universe from owned channels (website, landing pages,

email, webinars, product education) and sales-assisted channels (SDR sequences, events, partner motions).

Performance design here is consistency and sequencing: the same promise, the same proof, and the same expectations showing up across touchpoints so you don't create late-stage friction by accident.

MOMENTS THE BUYER INTERACTS WITH YOUR COMPANY

ORCHESTRATE CHANNELS FOR CONSISTENCY, SPEED, AND TRUST

One story across touchpoints to reduce friction

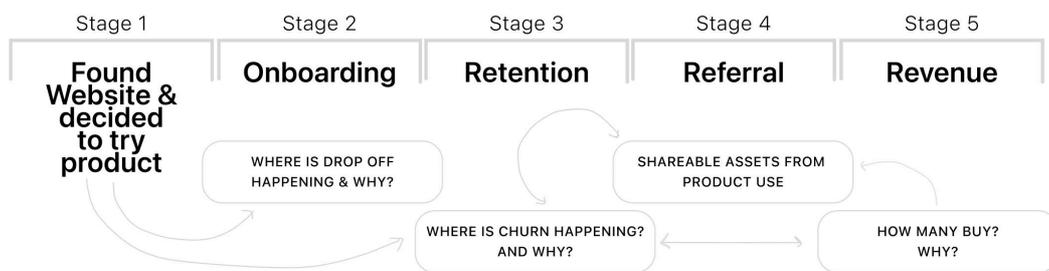
Geo-based testing, segmented offers, and clear rules on lead handling let you learn safely while maintaining trust with the people who still carry revenue in traditional industries.

Sixth, make “content” a performance asset, not a brand artifact. Every major stage should have a clear job-to-be-done: early stage reduces uncertainty and frames the problem, mid-stage provides comparison and credibility, late-stage resolves risk and implementation fear. When teams talk about performance branding,

Incrementality testing is increasingly treated as the gold standard for understanding true impact because it answers the question, “What happened because of marketing that would not have happened otherwise?” Google’s measurement guidance and product updates emphasize incrementality

Lastly, design the budget process as dynamic, not annual. Performance organizations don’t just “report results,” they create decision rights and a cadence for reallocating spend based on what is being learned. This is where modern MMM becomes useful: it gives you a macro view across channels,

Product Led Growth & Marketing



this is what they’re trying to protect: the upstream material that quietly makes downstream conversion easier, even when it doesn’t look like a direct-response metric on day one. McKinsey-style thinking aside, the practical point is simple: if you only measure what is easy to count, you will cut what is actually helping.

Design an experimentation system that your business can sustain without chaos.

experiments and lift-style tests as a way to get causal answers even as privacy and tracking constraints increase. On the operational side, geo-holdout tests—pausing or reducing activity in a set of regions and comparing outcomes to controls—are one of the most practical ways B2B teams can test impact without needing perfect user-level tracking.

seasons, and external factors, and can help you avoid over-crediting the last click or the loudest platform dashboard. The IAB’s best-practices framing for modernized MMM is explicitly about making models timely and decision-ready, so finance and marketing can share a credible basis for investment shifts rather than arguing from different spreadsheets.

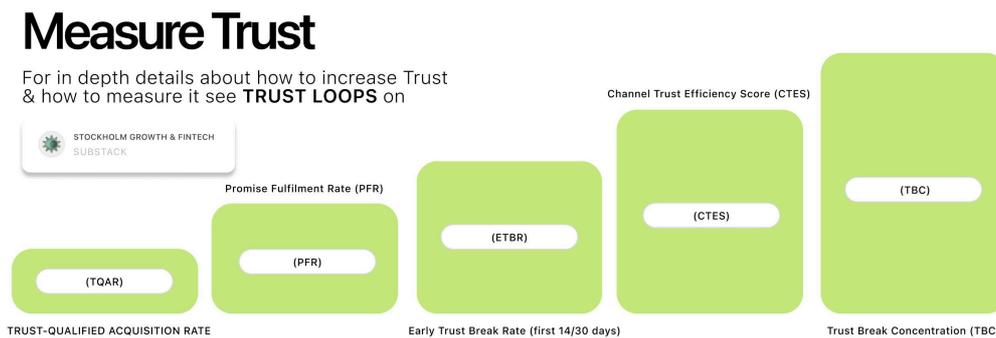
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What Performed best in 2025?

BUDGETS FLATLINE BUT GROWTH TARGETS DON'T

Performance budgets stayed flat at 7.7% of company revenue (from 2024 to 2025)



In 2025, what “performed best” wasn’t a single channel hack— it was anything that let marketing leaders do more with less certainty and flatter budgets. Gartner’s 2025 CMO Spend Survey reported budgets holding at about 7.7% of company revenue, which is basically the environment that forces performance discipline: tighter scrutiny, higher pressure, fewer tolerated experiments that can’t prove business value.

That pressure is exactly why performance marketing dominated the CMO conversation in 2025. Gartner’s reporting showed a majority of CMOs prioritizing performance marketing over brand marketing, because when growth is under strain, leaders look for levers that can show measurable impact fast. The “best performing” theme here is not that brand stopped mattering—it’s that performance became the operating language for defending budget and reallocating spend with confidence.

At the same time, one of the most important 2025 lessons is that pure short-term performance can start to underperform if it starves trust-building. Gartner also highlighted that higher-performing businesses allocate a greater share of marketing budget to brand marketing, which is a polite way of saying: the companies that win don’t choose brand or performance—they integrate them so short-term capture doesn’t run out of long-term demand. If you want “what worked,” it’s the balance that stops your funnel from becoming a treadmill.

Across B2B specifically, trust emerged as a measurable performance input, not a soft brand concept. LinkedIn’s 2025 B2B Marketing Benchmark framed “trust as the new KPI,” with surveyed marketers overwhelmingly agreeing that trust is central to B2B success—and emphasizing video and influence as key tools for earning it across the journey. In plain terms, the best-performing programs in

2025 didn’t just chase attention; they built credibility in formats buyers actually consume.

Video was one of the clearest “worked in 2025” signals because it does multiple jobs at once: it creates reach, explains complex value, and reduces perceived risk without demanding a sales conversation. LinkedIn noted video as a fast-growing format on the platform, and WARC coverage of B2B influence similarly pointed to video’s role in shaping buying decisions, especially when paired with trusted voices. The winning pattern was not “make more videos,” but “use video as proof”—customer stories, demos, and founder-led clarity that a committee can pass around internally.

Influence also matured in 2025 from a B2C-looking tactic into a B2B credibility engine. WARC’s reporting on creators moving into B2B highlighted that many creators see B2B influencer content performing as well as (or better than) B2C on engagement and even conversions.

CREDIBILITY, CONSISTENCY, AND PROOF

Reduce the buyer's perceived risk and make your claims feel safe to act on

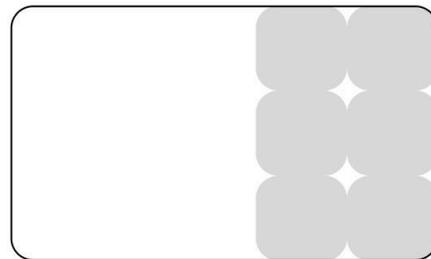
2025

What worked best?



Trust Building Videos

- Customer stories
- Demos
- Founder clarity



Webinars

- Intent
- Educate
- Engagement

On the content side, the “best performing” direction in 2025 was content that earns attention and survives measurement scrutiny. Content Marketing Institute’s 2025 B2B benchmarks showed marketers planning to increase investment in video and thought leadership, while also leaning into AI for content optimization and performance. The winners weren’t publishing for volume; they were

building fewer, stronger assets that map to buyer questions and can be amplified across paid, owned, and sales-assisted touchpoints.

Webinars and digital events also stayed in the performance mix because they’re one of the rare touchpoints that can simultaneously generate intent, educate multiple stakeholders, and create first-party engagement signals.

Finally, AI was everywhere in 2025, but the performance story wasn’t hype—it was accountability.

So if you want the cleanest summary of “what performed best in 2025,” it’s this: integrated brand + performance, trust-building formats like video and credible influence, first-party data strength, and an operating model that proves impact fast enough to reallocate spend before the quarter is over.

EXPERIENCE

About

Alexandra P. Grisanti

hi, I'm Alexandra. I live in Stockholm and was trained in Architecture. In 2022, I got into White Label B2B Fintech Product Design. From there- I discovered Product Led Growth and worked closely with Marketers to understand their challenges. Since, I have designed over +9 new products and launches, designed +6 brands (one for a +200 person corporation) and have had countless learnings.

Together with Marketeers, I find opportunities in product experiences for distribution, partnership and traction.

I also write the newsletter Stockholm Growth & Fintech and participate in Nordic Fintech events. Please Subscribe and thanks for being here!



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