ALTA Guides to Literary Translation:

PROMOTING YOUR LITERARY TRANSLATION



DEDICATED TO THE SERVICE OF LITERARY TRANSLATION AND TRANSLATORS

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PROMOTING YOUR LITERARY TRANSLATION

ven the most brilliant translation Cwon't sell a single copy unless bookstores and readers know that the translation exists. Whereas commercial and university presses usually have in-house publicists to help promote their books, small presses often do not. Small publishers will certainly include your translation in their seasonal book catalogues and will promote it as part of a list. But they might not have the means to promote your book individually. In fact, in many cases, even larger publishers are allocating fewer resources to promotion than in years past. The extent of the promotional campaign for your book will have a lot to do with budget, the publisher's capacity to advertise aggressively, the size and energy of its marketing department, and its interest in promoting a book in ways other than the most conventional. The publisher may welcome the translator's active participation and input in promotion, in which case many of the ideas set out here will be useful. Often, though, the task of promotion may well fall largely on you.

In one respect, this is good: no one not the publisher's acquisitions editor, not the production editor, not the marketing director, not bookstores

selling the book—will bring as much enthusiasm to promoting vour translation as you will. Everyone else will have his attention splintered among many other books. As much as "your" author adores your translation and values your work, she may well be adoring translators in other countries as well. It is up to you to share your enthusiasm and promotional ideas, repeatedly, so that your translation stays in the forefront of these publishing professionals' minds.

As you share your enthusiasm during the promotion process, the publisher will likely resist sharing its money to help you. Know this. Before undertaking any promotional step that involves monetary expenditure, be sure that you and the publisher agree about who will be paying for what.

Some small press publishers, no matter how distinguished, believe on a fundamental level that they are doing translators a favor by publishing their work, especially if it is poetry. Often they take no real responsibility for distribution, nor do they have any effective procedures for distribution, nor are they willing or able to take the time. Each and every aspect of the contractual agreement between the

translator and the publisher must be put in writing—even if said publishers are the nicest people in the world or are your dear friends! For example: who is to contact and choose distributors and how exclusive these arrangements are; who is to develop a mailing list; who is initiate. send. and retrieve to consignments, or even if consignments will be allowed; who is to send query letters; whether complimentary copies will be sent and to whom, and whether this includes postage overseas; whether potentially interested organizations or groups will be contacted and by whom and in what manner; what will be done about seeking reviews from pertinent journal and magazines; lawyer's fees if rights issues arise unexpectedly; cover design and binding choices if they exist; and last but not least, whether a bilingual edition will remain a bilingual edition.

— Leah Zazulyer

Also keep in mind that promotion is competition: competition for page space in distributors' catalogues, for review space magazines in and newspapers, for shelf space bookstores, for space in course syllabi, for space in readers' leisure time. Promotion is competition for highly limited space. Be as creative as possible.

Promotion Begins Before the Translation

The promotion process begins the L day you choose to translate a particular work. The reason you find the book to be worth your time and energy is the same reason a publisher will want to publish it, bookstores will wish to stock it, and readers will want to read it: the work's themes, style, social. uniqueness, literary and significance, the author's renown. When you articulate these issues in a letter to potential publishers, keep in mind that your description of the book is not only enticement to the publisher, but future enticement to readers. The very phrases you draft in your cover letter might later become cornerstone of promotional flyers, book jacket copy, and catalogue descriptions. (If it was the publisher who approached you about doing the translation, you can still be cataloguing these kinds of thoughts.)

Promotion begins with the translator's enthusiasm.

The "Package"

A s distasteful as the notion may be, when it comes to promotion, the translation becomes a product. And packaging is an essential part of promoting a product. Rightly or wrongly, bookstores and readers believe that they *can* tell a book by its cover.

You want to be sure that you participate in the drafting of book jacket copy, the book's description, the author's biography, and, if you're lucky, the translator's biography as well. Is the copy accurate? Does it present the most salient points of the text (style, uniqueness, themes, etc.), its reception in its home country and elsewhere (translations into other languages, awards, etc.), and the author's credits publications, (previous relevant degrees, affiliations, awards, etc.)? Early in the production process, ask your publisher how you can be of help in drafting or reviewing copy, and find out when, during the production process, you will be called upon to provide such help.

Favorable blurbs from writers, authors, and reviewers are an essential component of today's book jackets, usually the back cover. The awkward task of finding pre-publication readers willing to provide blurbs often falls upon the translator. The publisher will usually send uncorrected galleys to a handful of people you suggest. Think about the target markets for your

translation: an academic audience? the general public? a particular community (ethnic, religious, political, or other) within the general public?

With the target markets in mind, consider whose opinion might be of value to a reader deciding whether to purchase your book. Perhaps a literary critic could convince your potential audience, or a popular U.S. author could, or another translator, or a community leader. Do you have any friends or colleagues whose names might not be well known to your readership, but whose titles and affiliations will be meaningful (e.g., "Professor at ...," "Editor of ...," "Author of ...")?

Another source for book jacket blurbs is reviews from the author's home country. Your author surely has a file of local reviews—ask him to send you copies, and then translate key sentences of the reviews. Send these excerpts, along with appropriate bibliographic information, to your publisher. Even if your translated blurbs don't make it to the book's back cover, they might be useful for promotional flyers that you or the publisher prepare later.

Many publishers ask you to complete an author's questionnaire, in which you give information about yourself, the author, and the book. Filling in the questionnaire can seem like a chore, but it's actually quite important. For example, it will ask you to list the names and addresses of individuals who may have an interest in the book. If you know anyone—writers, other translators, professors, journalists who might like to see it, make sure that the publisher has their contact information. These people will be sent copies of your book, and they can be influential in decisions about whether the book is reviewed in a newspaper or magazine, for instance, or whether it is adopted for university courses.

- Bill Johnston

Another component of the book "package" is the cover art. This not only attracts a potential reader's attention, but can suggest the book's theme, locale, and even style. Although publishers generally make the final decisions about cover art, they often welcome the translator's input. Ask whether you'll be able to look at sample cover art before the publisher commits to a particular image; once you see samples, share your thoughts with the publisher. The rights for cover art can be expensive, so if you have taken any photographs that might be suitable as cover art, send them to the publisher as suggestions, explaining that you own the copyright to these photographs and would make them available for a nominal fee or free of charge. Also, see whether your author has any strong preferences about cover design, and communicate these preferences to your publisher.

The Distributor

Whereas large publishers have teams of sales people (a "sales force") that meet with bookstore managers and recommend books to be stocked, small presses often join a group served by a distributor. The distributor has one sales force to represent all the presses in the consortium, puts out a seasonal catalogue, and arranges for books to be shipped to various bookstores.

Publishers and their distributor's sales force typically have regular sales meetings give to the sales representatives a chance to meet the publishers and to hear, from the publishers' perspectives, the most salient points of books being sold. Ask your publisher whether you can attend the particular session of the conference where your translation will presented. Ask whether you can be the one to present the translation to the sales force, even though that may well mean you'll have to pay your own transportation costs.

If you can give the presentation, be aware that you will probably have no more than three minutes to convince the sales reps that your book is marketable. Three minutes, not four, not three and a half. If you go overtime, that means your publisher has less time to present his other books.

This three-minute presentation should include bullet point—like information on the author's importance in her home country and internationally, one or two sentences describing what the book is about, and a list of the kinds of readers likely to find the book of interest. In other words, you want to give the sales reps a sales pitch that they, in turn, can take to bookstores. Most likely, the sales reps will never read your book; however, they will read the distributor's and other promotional catalogue material sent by the publisher. And they will hear you.

As important as the three-minute presentation is to the sales reps, the mere fact of your presence at the conference is even more important. Your presence, which implies that you were serious enough to pay for the cost of travel, shows your commitment to the book as well as your publisher's, and demonstrates that you and your publisher are willing to put your money and time where your pages are.

Keep in mind that your publisher's relationship with the distributor is ongoing. Even though your book is presented as "new" only once, your publisher can periodically send a special alert to the distributor about a series of readings you may have booked, or about a particularly good review. The distributor might then do a special mailing about your book to its sales force, which will, in turn, make another push for your book among bookstores. Send a periodic update to the publisher about your translation: perhaps a certain urban area or region of the country is showing particular interest in your translation, perhaps some courses have adopted it, or it was nominated for a prize. The distributor can use any attention received by your book to generate more attention.

Although I understand this is an unusual practice for most translators, I have always worked with a literary agent who has been very helpful in promoting my work; in fact, she fulfills some of the role of a publicist in this regard. She has, for example, been instrumental in getting "gigs" for me at independent bookstores, introduced me to people in the publishing industry at the L.A. Book Fair and elsewhere, and generally helped spread the word about my interests and availability. The percentage she earns for all this effort

seems minuscule compared to the many contacts I've made with her assistance. Being in academia is also an advantage. My own university bookstore has been wonderful about arranging readings and book signings and publicizing these events locally, and other universities in the area have also demonstrated some interest.

-Andrea G. Labinger

Even without an agent, you can introduce yourself to editors at book conferences. fairs. and panel discussions, and offer to leave or send published samples of your work. You can send information and samples via mail and ask for a brief appointment if you happen to be making a trip to a town where a publishing contact is located. You can also make your own contacts at local bookstores; even if you can't schedule a reading immediately, this gives you a chance to stay "on their radar."

Publication Party

While the distributor is garnering attention for your book among bookstores, you and your publisher will be wanting to generate interest among the book-buying public. An underlying principle of marketing is to generate interest, "buzz." The aura surrounding a

party, reading, lecture, is as important as—or more important than—the event itself.

With this in mind, arrange a publication party. This takes planning and time, but very little money.

When you choose a date for the party, be sure the publisher will *definitely* have books available by then. Not only do you want to sell them, but you want your public to see them, to remember them. The book production process can be beset by unforeseen delays, so plan accordingly.

Another initial consideration is the number of people you realistically expect to attend. This will influence your choice of venue. You'll need a space that will hold your guests comfortably, lend itself to casual chatting, a short book reading, book sales, and a book signing. Also, you'll want a place that is accessible to all your guests.

Perhaps your home or a friend's would work well. Or maybe a community institution will agree to host your event—an academic institution or a cultural or community center perhaps, one that would regard such an event as providing publicity for the institution as well as for your party. Does the

institution put out a newsletter that could mention your reading? Does it have connections with local media and could it issue a press release?

If your publication party is in or near a major urban area, ask the local consulate from your author's home country whether it would be willing to send a speaker to the party to talk about the author, the book, and the home country's literary or cultural life in general. Or perhaps the author herself would be able to attend. Be sure to highlight their presence in your invitation and any press release.

Depending on the money you and/or your publisher choose to invest, the invitation can be as simple as a postcard or as elaborate as a formal invitation. You can design the text with your wordprocessing program and print it out on stationery purchased inexpensively at office supply an store, perhaps something with colorful borders. The invitation itself will ideally include particulars of time and place, the names of sponsoring institutions (might a local consulate, specialty grocery store, or restaurant donate refreshments or funds?) and guest speakers, a brief biographical sketch about your author yourself, and and selected prepublication blurbs.

Prepare a guest list that is as wideranging as you can imagine. You never know who might find the event of interest, or who might tell a friend who will then tell a friend. Also, the invitation serves to announce your book and initiate that ever-desirable buzz. If your publisher won't incur the expense of preparing the invitations, perhaps he'll be willing to cover postage or handle the actual mailing for you. For those guests with e-mail, you could send the invitation as an attachment or prepare it as a regular message and save stationery and postage costs. Be sure to write a short, attention-grabbing note for the memo line of your message.

Who will handle book sales at the publication party? Not you. You will be too busy chatting with guests and autographing copies. If the party is informal, ask a friend to handle sales for you. If the event is more formal, your publisher might send an employee or might invite a local bookseller to handle those sales. True, you would have to share profit from those sales with the bookseller, but you and your publisher would also be developing a relationship with a retail outlet that could be important for you in the future. Keep in mind that a bookseller would be likely to help out only if the event is expected to be large; otherwise the cost to the bookseller of paying an

employee's salary for the duration of the party might be higher than anticipated earnings from sales. If the book sells well at your event, however, the bookseller will likely want to stock it in her store.

Remember that the publication party is just that—a party. Have some finger food and drinks, perhaps snacks and wine from your author's home country. Incorporate chat time where guests can mingle with you, the publisher's representative (if present), and your author or guest speaker. Might there be music from your author's home country?

Do a short reading from your translation, one that represents the author's (and your) style and that will make a lasting impression. Not only do you want your guests to have a good time and buy copies of the book, but you want them to talk about your book afterward.

And consider arranging a group event. Perhaps another local translator has books coming out at the same time as yours. Share expenses and double your mailing list. Create an "international" evening.

Reviews

Book reviews are the cornerstone of book promotion.

In a world full of wonderful books, reviews serve as filters, suggesting to readers what is worth their time. They also alert librarians and buyers for bookstores. However, the process of getting a book reviewed often begins far before publication. For example, your publisher will send uncorrected page proofs to various book reviewers in the hopes of getting a review timed more closely to publication. If you know of any specialized review sources—a friend of yours who reviews for a particular publication, an Internet source, publication review a concentrating on the culture or politics of your author's home countryprovide the contact information to your publisher and ask that a review copy be sent.

Buy a few extra copies of the book—the publisher usually gives you a discount—and send them to prominent people in your field whom you know but did not mention in the author's questionnaire. Especially if the people know that you have been working on a project, it's important for them to see that you've published your book;

they're much more likely to take a real interest if they have the book in front of them without having to go and buy it in the store.

— Bill Johnston

Your publisher can send trade reviews (e.g., from *Publisher's Weekly, Library Journal*) to online bookstores for publication there. In addition, keep in mind that several online bookstore websites permit any reader at all to post brief reviews. Why not ask fellow translators to write such reviews for your translation? In exchange, you can write reviews for them. Perhaps send these translators some quotable homecountry reviews of the original book.

My experience with publishers in terms of promotion has been at best negligible. Not one spent a penny advertising. What I did was ask each publicity department to print up a publicity flyer for me with quotes from reviews, a photo of the cover and price information, etc. These I then sent out myself to groups I thought would be interested in what I translate, which is Yiddish literature: Jewish community centers, synagogues, any organization that might ask me to speak or that would carry the book in their gift shop. This was not productive at all but I tried it every time. I also asked two publishers to print up invitations for

book parties hosted by friends or by Jason Aronson mvself. made Treasury of Sholem Aleichem Children's Stories the leading selection for its book club one month. Other than that it was never advertised, not one copy was sent out for review! Somehow, though, the books have sold, especially my first collection of children's short stories of Sholem Aleichem and that is because Scribners sent out many review copies and it was reviewed extensively and well. It is still in print and I continue to receive an occasional royalty.

— Aliza P. Shevrin

Mailings

The publisher and distributor will handle mailings to bookstores. But what about mailings to the general public? Sometimes, the publisher will prepare a flyer or postcard announcing your book. If so, try to see a draft of the flyer before it has been finalized. Check for accuracy.

If the publisher won't prepare an announcement, you can prepare one yourself, something similar to the invitation. If you can affordably include a picture of your book's cover on the flyer, do so. If not, how about a blackand-white photo of your author? Be sure to include pre-publication blurbs,

the ISBN, and information on where to purchase the book (bookstores, online, through the publisher's or distributor's toll-free number, etc.). If the publisher has a website that presents your book nicely, include the web address.

Perhaps have two mailing lists: local addresses for the publication party invitation, and an all-inclusive list for the announcement. Are there any particular categories of readers who would likely be interested in the subject of your translation? Any university programs such as women's studies. Chicano studies, gender studies? If so. consider compiling a list of professors in such programs—the Internet can be helpful here—and including them on your mailing list. Mail or e-mail the announcement to everyone you can think of. As with the invitation, see whether the publisher will handle the mailing or contribute to the postage costs.

Also send the announcement to your alumni publications and to as many organization newsletters as appropriate. How about local newspapers? Be creative. Be sure to send two copies of your book to ALTA for listing in Annotated Books Received, a wonderfully comprehensive list of current book-length translations.

If you are willing to invest in photocopying and postage, you can make up flyers from the publisher's catalogue copy. (In some cases the publishers themselves will do this to target their own direct mail recipients, and can give you all you want.) You then search the available databases for names of scholars and translators who have written or translated in the same field in recent years. For your Mongolian treatise, Twenty-Nine Ways to Prepare Yak Meat, for example, you might look up under "Cookbooks," "Mongolia," and "Yak." When you find several promising names you can usually get addresses, at least for the academics on the list, from Gale's Directory of American Scholars. (Less recondite subjects will yield a greater harvest.) It will cost you 37 cents—and more to Canada and Europe—to send off each flyer, but even just a few purchases should offset the expense. And, again, you have at least spread the word about your name and the title of your book.

— Norman Shapiro

Internet Promotion

Do you and your author have homepages? List your publications, show your book covers, include excerpts of good reviews. Include these homepage addresses

below your signature line on every single e-mail you send to anyone for any purpose. Try to link your homepage to your publisher's and to the homepages of other writers and translators.

Get a recording, pre-existing or custom-made, if possible, of your writer speaking some text you're translating, and play that when you give a bookstore or other reading. Neruda, for example, made a recording of "Alturas de Macchu Picchu" that conveys a striking immediacy to audiences. Besides its sonorous intensities, it contains a revealing voice-typo: he says "jardin" (garden) rather than the correct word "jazmín" (jasmine), in imagining Macchu Picchu-but this slip suggests his sense of the mythic place as a lost paradise. And Paul Celan's stunning, riveting rendition of "Todesfuge" (Deathfugue), hearable at nortonpoets.com, anticipates a certain line and thus mistakenly speaks it twice—so possessed is he by the poem's inexorable fugue-like impetus. Not only are recordings valuable for readings, you can use a recording of your writer's voice—and your own, too, if you're so inclined—on an appropriate website, in conjunction with the book-and mention that fact and the website address in advertising and flyers.

- John Felstiner

Also, you can post information about your translation to various e-mail discussion lists, and express your availability to do readings. And you can e-mail various organizations and groups that might be interested in your work. Again, be creative. Is your book about World War II? Veterans' groups might be interested. Does the plot involve a particular country or immigrant group? Local cultural or ethnic clubs might be interested.

Readings and Other Events/Outreach

ookstores are less inclined to book D translators for readings than actual authors. Would your author be able to do a few bilingual readings with you in bookstores? If so, ask your publisher to try arranging such readings, particularly at bookstores in your home town and state. If you plan to travel at all, ask your publisher to arrange readings in bookstores at your destination. Or try to arrange a group reading of various translators, and organize it either thematically (e.g., "new international poetry") or regionally (e.g., "new writing from Southeast Asia"). Even if your readings have small attendance, remember that the publicity surrounding the reading-bookstore flyers, local newspaper a calendars—is helpful promotion as well.

Arranging book readings is a tedious, time-consuming task. Bookstores and other venues often plan readings far in advance of the actual reading date, often half a year in advance, or even more. And be sure that you know, in advance, whether the publisher will be contributing to your travel expenses.

Does the book you've translated lend itself to a lecture? If, for example, it's a novel about contemporary Israeli-Palestinian relations, perhaps you could write a lecture about the subject and incorporate excerpts of the translation as illustrations of your points.

Community groups might be interested in your presentation, which could lead to a discussion of the book, and sales. Or maybe you and a fellow translator of literature from the same country could propose a joint lecture or reading so as to augment the chances of obtaining an audience.

Might a college course invite you as a guest lecturer? Are there any adult education programs in your area that have lecture series? How about seniors' groups: seniors tend to have more time to read than others, and may be more likely to value literature than the younger, video/Internet generation.

Could you create or participate on a

panel at a professional conference? ALTA or the MLA, for example?

Are there any local radio shows or cable-access television shows that might be interested in you as a guest? These venues can't pay guests and are often looking for speakers. Don't forget your local National Public Radio outlet, either, especially if it has any programs targeting books, cultural issues, or topics related to your translation. Send a flyer or press release to the person in charge of the program, and follow up with a phone call.

Radio appearances, combined with public readings, however sparsely attended, can be a way of reaching at least one person who may need to hear what you have to offer.

When I was on the road with my translation of Julio Cortázar's selected poems, Save Twilight, Stacey Lewis, the publicist at City Lights, got me a slot on a morning talk show on KPFK in Los Angeles, where for 15 minutes I was sandwiched in between some decidedly nonliterary public-affairs type guests. At eight o'clock in the morning I was barely awake, let alone in a mood to discuss poetry, but I managed not to make a fool of myself in the interview and also read a poem or two before time ran out. The next afternoon, at my

reading at Midnight Special bookstore in Santa Monica, of the whopping dozen people who showed up, one young man came up to me at the end and said he had heard one of the poems while commuting to work the day before and absolutely had to come hear me and buy the book. So even though it seemed (to me) slightly absurd to be reading poetry on the radio in LA at eight in the morning, I had somehow broken through to an individual.

- Stephen Kessler

Particularly with small or university presses, translations don't need to make a splash at once. Rather, they will live over time, giving you a chance to build a promotional (and sales) track record. After you've done a few readings, others will be easier to schedule because those you approach will see that you have experience with this book. Nothing generates interest in a book more than the impression that others find it interesting.

It is an easy matter to check which libraries in the United States (and, indeed, the world) already have a copy of your translation. Any reference librarian can show you how to access the OCLC or WorldCat. Once armed with that information you can see which libraries do not have it. At that point you can probably think of a goodly

number of friends, colleagues, fellow translators. Christmas correspondents. etc.. sprinkled throughout the cities in question. Contact them and ask them to suggest that their local and/or university libraries order your book-many libraries will honor such requests—and assure them that you will be happy to reciprocate. The same list of friends et al. can be used to jog bookstores into ordering your work. And even if your translation from the Mongolian of Twenty-Nine Ways to Prepare Yak Meat is not ordered, you will at least have got some free publicity. Book buyers remember titles even when they do not order them for stock. Again, assure your correspondents that you will reciprocate with pleasure.

- Norman Shapiro

How about writing an article about the process of translating the book? ALTA's *Translation Review* and other journals might be interested. Again, be creative. For example, you might also target magazines and other publications with an interest in the author or subject matter of the book. The more frequently readers see your name and your book title, the more likely they are to remember the book and maybe even buy it.

Without question, promotion is a time-

consuming task. But it can be extremely rewarding. When you are speaking in front of an audience who cares, or being asked to autograph a copy of your work, or reading a review that comments on the high quality of your translation, or participating on a panel about important literature in your field of interest ... the effort will feel worth all the expended energy.

References

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Cole, David. Complete Guide to Marketing. New York: Allworth Press, 1999. ISBN: 1581150288. Practical and effective strategies for reaching the largest possible audience.

Kremer, John. 1001 Ways to Market Your Books. Fairfield, Iowa: Open Horizons, 2000. Fifth edition. ISBN: 0912411481. Useful ideas, examples, tips, and suggestions. Contains a listing of media that publish book reviews, regional newspapers, and book review publications.

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Yudkin, Marcia. Internet Marketing for Less Than \$500/Year. Chicago: Independent Publishers Group, 2001. ISBN: 1885068697; 2nd edition in paperback.

Yudkin, Marcia. 6 Steps to Free Publicity and Dozens of Other Ways to Win Free Media Attention for You or Your Business. New York: Dutton/Plume, 1994. ASIN: 0452271924. The "six steps" refer to the processes involved in writing and distributing a news release.

Useful Websites

American Literary Translators Association (ALTA):

http://www.literarytranslators.org

Book Marketing Update is John Kremer's webpage. Contains weekly tips on marketing your book: http://www.bookmarket.com

Poet & Writers Guide to Readings and Workshops by Jane Ludlam. Online you can download this guide: http://www.pw.org/rw/presguides.htm

The New York Review of Books: http://www.nybooks.com/

Thirty-Five Ways To Make Your Book Signing an Event by Larry James. Offers tips and suggestions to increase sales at a book signing in the January 2000 issue of Writers Write: http://www.writerswrite.com/journal/jan00/james.htm

Kidon Media to locate radio stations: www.kidon.com/media-link/index.shtml

Publishers Marketplace website includes a section for translators under "freelance—other": www.publishersmarketplace.com

Review Publications. This site contains a listing of some publications that review books. It is always best to send an inquiry to the ones that best fit the interest of your publication: http://www.absolute-sway.com/pfp/html/reviews.htm

Already published in the ALTA Guides to Literary Translation series:

Breaking into Print
The Proposal for a Book-length
Translation

Upcoming in the ALTA Guides to Literary Translation series:

The Practice of Literary Translation Editing a Translation Anthology Translation and Tenure

The Guides can be downloaded from the ALTA website: www.literarytranslators.org.

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