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# When free is not enough: what the International Librarians Network managed to achieve with zero budget, and what we did when we hit the limits

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# When free is not enough: what the International Librarians Network managed to achieve with zero budget, and what we did when we hit the limits

## **Abstract**

The International Librarians Network (ILN) began as a way to help librarians develop an international professional network without having to travel overseas. Focusing on openness and relying entirely on freely available technology and volunteer time, the program was designed to reinforce the idea that ideas can cross borders and make us better at what we do. The ILN launched in 2013, free and open to anyone in the profession, and has facilitated connections for over 1500 people in 103 countries. Unfunded and completely independent, the ILN was established using a suite of freely available technology to create and maintain an online profile. This included Gmail, Google Drive, Google Forms, Dropbox, Wordpress, Twitter, Facebook and AnyMeeting. In the development stage of the program these tools were sufficient, and their ease of use allowed the ILN founders to focus on the content and rapid development of the program, rather than requiring advanced technical skills. Combined with a network of volunteers, the ILN was able to have a positive impact on librarians around the world. By early 2014, with the rapid growth of the program, the no-cost model that had served the ILN well started to hinder the growth of the program. As additional time was being spent to find and implement work-arounds to technical limitations, the ILN realised that free was no longer enough. The program needed to move beyond the limitation of free web-based tools and an informal business structure, but there was still no budget to do so. Early efforts to identify pathways forward were hampered by financial restrictions, a lack of transparency by service providers, and a confusing abundance of small scale commercial providers of services. This paper will outline how the ILN used freely available technology to establish and grow, and what was achieved from this base. The paper will then explore the steps the ILN took to identify planning and development strategies for small organisations and projects that need to 'do more with less'. It will pragmatically explore the limitations of 'free' and what to do when free is not enough, and show the role that small-scale strategic planning can play in helping small organisations or projects manage growth in a scalable and sustainable way.

## **Keywords**

free, not, enough, international, librarians, when, network, achieve, managed, limits, hit, did, we, budget, zero

## **Disciplines**

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This paper will outline how the ILN used freely available technology to establish and grow, and what was achieved from this base. The paper will then explore the steps the ILN took to identify planning and development strategies for small organisations and projects that need to 'do more with less'. It will pragmatically explore the limitations of 'free' and what to do when free is not enough, and show the role that small-scale strategic planning can play in helping small organisations or projects manage growth in a scalable and sustainable way.

## **Relevance: The edge of thinking and planning**

The ILN is a new professional development model, created by re-thinking how to build and support networks. This paper will explore the all too common challenge of running programs on tight, or even non-existent budgets. It will show organisations how much can be achieved using free tools but also demonstrate pathways organisations can use when they reach the limitations of those tools.

## Introduction

The International Librarians Network (ILN) began with an idea: that the benefits of international networking should and could be made available to those that can't afford luxuries like international travel. Created and run in Australia by four librarians with a history of active volunteering, the ILN has had a positive impact on librarians' professional networking across the globe. Rather than relying on existing frameworks, the founders created something new, embedding values of egalitarianism, entrepreneurialism and agile development into the program.

This new program struck a chord with the international library community and it grew rapidly. In just six months the program's popularity began to test the limits of the initial framework and force the coordinators to rethink what was possible. This paper explores the tools and techniques used to create and manage the ILN, and examines what happens when the limits of freely available tools are reached.

## The ILN story

Libraries around the world are facing a multitude of challenges. Many are facing shrinking budgets whilst the demand for digital resources and tools grows. The ways libraries connect with patrons are changing, as are the ways that data is organised and exposed. Emerging fields of librarianship offer exciting new career paths, but relying on old methods of communicating risks missing out on these opportunities.

Having a professional network is about three things: knowing people to help solve problems and share new ideas; gaining a broader perspective on the information profession; and learning about career opportunities through the experiences of others. Investing in building an international professional network means embracing these things on a global scale. It used to be that to develop an international network people had to travel internationally, attending conferences or visiting libraries. This can be expensive and out of reach to many librarians. The International Librarians Network (ILN) was created to change that.

## Program overview

The ILN is a facilitated peer mentoring program aimed at helping librarians develop international networks. Participants in the program are matched with others outside their country, based on the information they provide in their application. Partnerships are made for a fixed term, and during this period the partnerships are supported by regular contact and discussion topics. Supported partnerships have an end date; however individuals are welcome to maintain relationships beyond that date. The vision is that participants would develop a widening network of ongoing, independent professional relationships. The ILN is run by volunteers all around the world and was founded by Kate Byrne, Alyson Dalby and Clare McKenzie in August 2012. Amy Barker joined as program coordinator in June 2013.

## Program structure

The initial program structure was developed with several constraints in mind:

- Individuals are more likely to participate if they know what they are committing to; thus, clear expectations and a defined duration were required.
- Introducing strangers to each other is difficult, more so in an online environment. A certain amount of support would be required to help the development of relationships. This had to be balanced with the amount of volunteer time available.
- Not all partnerships would thrive. A graceful way to end a partnership was necessary.

The solution was a program of defined length, with discussion topics that gave participants conversation starters for their partnership. Low barriers to both entry and exit were combined to make the program accessible (Thompson, Strickland & Gamble, 2010), particularly during a pilot phase.

Although framed as a mentoring program, the founders were keen to use peer mentoring rather than traditional mentoring. In peer mentoring two colleagues with shared interests are partnered to share information and give professional support (Level & Mach 2005). The ILN is based on principles of mutuality – that all participants have something to both contribute and gain from each other (Angelique, Kyle, and Taylor 2002). By using semi-structured peer mentoring relationships, the program seeks to go beyond standalone web tools like forums and social media to facilitate a deeper level of communication and network building between participants.

## Program roles

Several roles were defined in the development stage. These were:

- Program coordinators: responsible for overseeing the program, matching participants, maintaining the website and running online discussions. Strategic development and marketing are managed at this level. The founders became program coordinators.
- Country coordinators: in-country contacts for participants and others interested in the program. They conduct local marketing, contribute content to the ILN website, and advise the program coordinators about the library profession in their country.
- Participants: people who take part in the peer mentoring program. Participation is open to anyone working or studying in the library and information management profession. Participants are matched into pairs to create partnerships.

As there was no seed funding for the ILN, all roles were and have remained volunteer roles.

## Participant matching

A significant challenge for any mentoring program is the matching of participants. To facilitate this, applicants to the program are asked for the following information:

- Information about themselves, comprising:
  - Name and contact information
  - Country of residence
  - Employment sector
  - Career stage
  - Professional interests
- Information on what they are looking for in a partner, comprising:
  - Desired sector
  - Desired career stage

The ILN is founded on the idea that there is more that unites than divides the profession across both sector and career stage groupings; thus the program is designed to encourage applicants to be open-minded. Application form selections about their potential partner default to “Any”, but also allow applicants to make more specific requests. 55% of applicants do not specify a desired sector.

Traditional mentoring assumes that junior participants wish to be matched with senior participants. Allowing applicants to specify the desired career stage of their partner demonstrated the weakness of that assumption in this context: 70% of applicants do not specify a desired career stage for their partner and only 10% indicated that they wanted to be matched with someone with more experience than themselves.

A very small number of applicants have been very specific in their application, such as asking to be connected to someone working for a particular institution. In these cases the applicant has been contacted and had the nature of the program explained to them to avoid disappointment.

## Early implementation

The ILN launched in late January 2013 using four pieces of free technology:

1. Google account, including Gmail and Drive, used to manage communication and create an application form.
2. Wordpress website, [ilnetwork.wordpress.com](http://ilnetwork.wordpress.com). Website content and website management was written and undertaken by the program coordinators.
3. Twitter account, used to promote the program to an international audience.
4. Dropbox folder shared by the program coordinators for document management.

This basic combination of freely available tools allowed the program coordinators to provide information about the program, promote the program, accept applications and manage internal documentation.

A schedule of monthly discussion topics was created. Discussion topics comprised a written piece on the ILN website, with follow up questions on that topic to prompt discussions between participants. Topics were also emailed directly to participants. While participants were encouraged to discuss the questions with each other, they were also encouraged to

post responses on the website, a public forum. Topics were devised by program coordinators, and planned around the idea that icebreakers would be needed in the early stages. Meatier discussions could be held as the program developed, but effort and cultural sensitivity was required to ensure that topics crossed geographic and sectoral divides. The final topic for the pilot round encouraged participants to reflect on their experiences in the program.

Evaluation was built into the program from the beginning, with approval sought from an appropriate ethics panel to allow program coordinators to conduct formal research into participant experiences.

### **Growth of the ILN 2013-2014**

From the pilot round in early 2013, the ILN grew quickly and beyond expectations. The following section outlines this growth, examining participant numbers, countries represented, and website traffic.

#### *Participation*

The table below demonstrates the growth of the program through the first four rounds:

Round	Timeframe	Participants	Countries
Pilot	March-August 2013	92	18
Round 1	September 2013-February 2014	391	39
Round 2	March-June 2014	764	76
Round 3	September-December 2014	572	73

Some individuals participated in more than one round of the program; at the time of writing a total of 1508 individuals had completed at least one round, with 271 (18%) completing multiple rounds. A total of 103 countries have been represented in the program.

#### *Country coordinators*

The first call for country coordinators was released in April 2013, focusing on the volunteer nature of the role. A strong response was received. Coordinators for Australia and New Zealand were the first appointed. By the end of the pilot round (August 2013) 15 countries had representatives appointed.

At the time of writing there are a total of 28 active country coordinators. Some early appointees have resigned – in some cases they have been replaced.

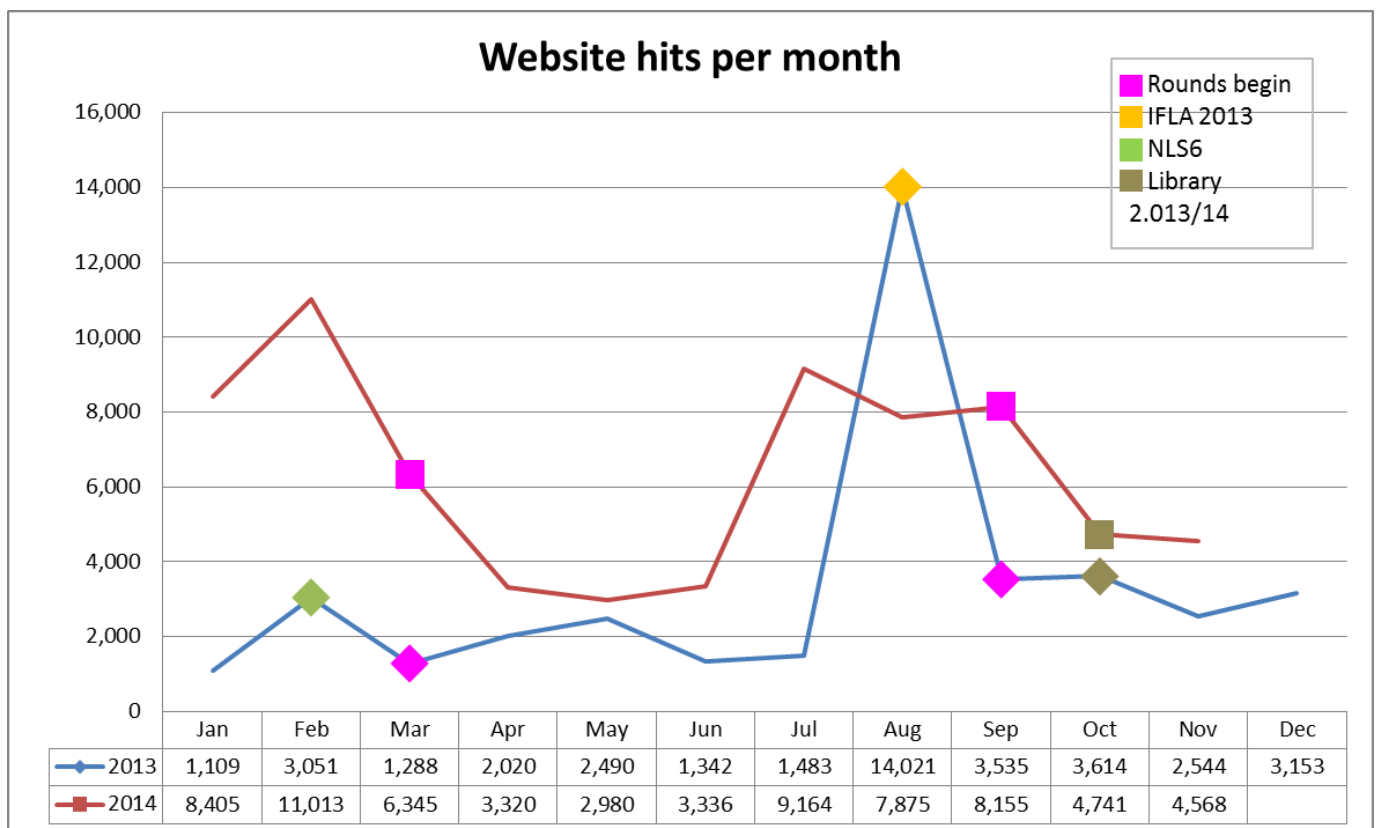
Country coordinators demonstrate the increasingly international nature of the program.

## Website traffic

At the time of writing, the ILN website has received over 100,000 website visits, averaging approximately 200 visits per day. The graph below shows the pattern of these visits and their relationship to the following events:

- NLS6 (New Librarians Symposium 6), where the ILN idea was officially launched
- IFLA World Library and Information Congress 2013, which included a poster presentation by the ILN founders
- Library 2.013 and Library 2.014 virtual online conferences, both including presentations by ILN program coordinators
- Start points of each round of the ILN.

The graph demonstrates the overall increase in website traffic in the ILN's second year of operation, as well as spikes in traffic in the lead up to new rounds as promotion is increased. The graph also demonstrates the positive effect of ILN presence at the IFLA Congress.



## Changes to the program

At the time of writing the ILN has been active for two years, four rounds of the program. During this time several changes were made to the program. For the most part these changes were brought about by the program's growth as tools, structures and practices that made sense for a small program became impractical as the program grew.

## Facebook

Due to demand from participants, a Facebook page was set up in July 2013. This complemented the existing Twitter presence, and allowed ILN marketing to reach wider



communities. Several country coordinators noted that Facebook was the primary social media tool used by librarians in their country. The content on the ILN Facebook page aligns closely with the content on the Twitter feed.

### *Program length and discussion topic frequency*

Concerns that communication was difficult to maintain for a full six months drove a review of the program length. It was felt that a shorter program would make full participation more accessible, that maintaining communication for a shorter period may in fact increase the success of the program. Given the unique nature of the program, no guidelines could be found on an appropriate length. Intuition and experimentation led the coordinators to settle on a four month program; long enough for in-depth discussions, but not too long to commit to. A secondary benefit of a four month program was that it allowed program coordinators two months between each round of the program to focus on reviewing participant feedback and make changes in advance of the next round, and to focus on promoting the upcoming round. This reinforced the agile implementation sought by the program coordinators.

Subsequent debates were held about discussion topic frequency. Participant feedback suggested that communication once a fortnight or more often led to higher satisfaction with the program, so discussion topic frequency was increased to fortnightly in the hopes of driving that frequent communication.

A four month program, with fortnightly discussion topics, was implemented for round 2 of the program, launched in March 2014, and has been repeated in each round since.

### *Automated matching*

In the early rounds of the program, participant matching was done by hand. Applicants completed an online form and data was imported into an Excel spreadsheet, which was used by program coordinators to identify participants' matching requirements and professional interests. The process was time consuming and intensive. Round 1 demonstrated the impracticality of this method and automated matching was developed for round 2 of the program. Preparing for this required changes to the application form; rather than ask a free-text question about professional interests, analysis was completed on previous responses to this question to generate a list of 13 pre-defined categories.

A script was developed in Windows PowerShell, which calculates a percentage-based 'match score' between every applicant to the program based on a decision hierarchy defined by program coordinators. The script then selects the best partnerships based on combined match scores, and generates output files that show the details of this matching. This allows program coordinators to check the script, as well as to adjust for special requests if needed.

Automated matching allowed the program to grow beyond a small number of applicants. While time is still required to check and adjust matches, this is unlikely to expand significantly while controls are maintained on the application form. The majority of matches are now made using the automated matching script. This tool was developed by a volunteer IT programmer; without access to this expertise at no cost, the program numbers could not have grown as they did.

### *Google Apps*

With over 700 applicants to round 2, the program coordinators discovered an unexpected limitation to Gmail sending limits. Free Gmail accounts permit a daily maximum of 500 emails, well below the total number of participants in round 2. In early 2014 an account was set up with Google Apps for Business, which promised a daily limit of 2000 emails (Google 2014). This service costs \$50 per annum, a cost shared by the program coordinators.

### *Social media coordinator*

Management of the ILN social media channels was identified early as an area for potential delegation, however this required preparation. Having spent 18 months developing a substantial audience for both channels, program coordinators created social media guidelines that allowed flexibility in approach, but supported a continuation of the existing ILN communication style. In July 2014 an open call was sent to the ILN community inviting expressions of interest in the position of volunteer social media coordinator. Several responses were received and a period of vetting was conducted. In September 2014, aligned with the start of a new round of the program, the first social media coordinator was appointed: an Australian librarian on the Gold Coast, Lisa Miller.

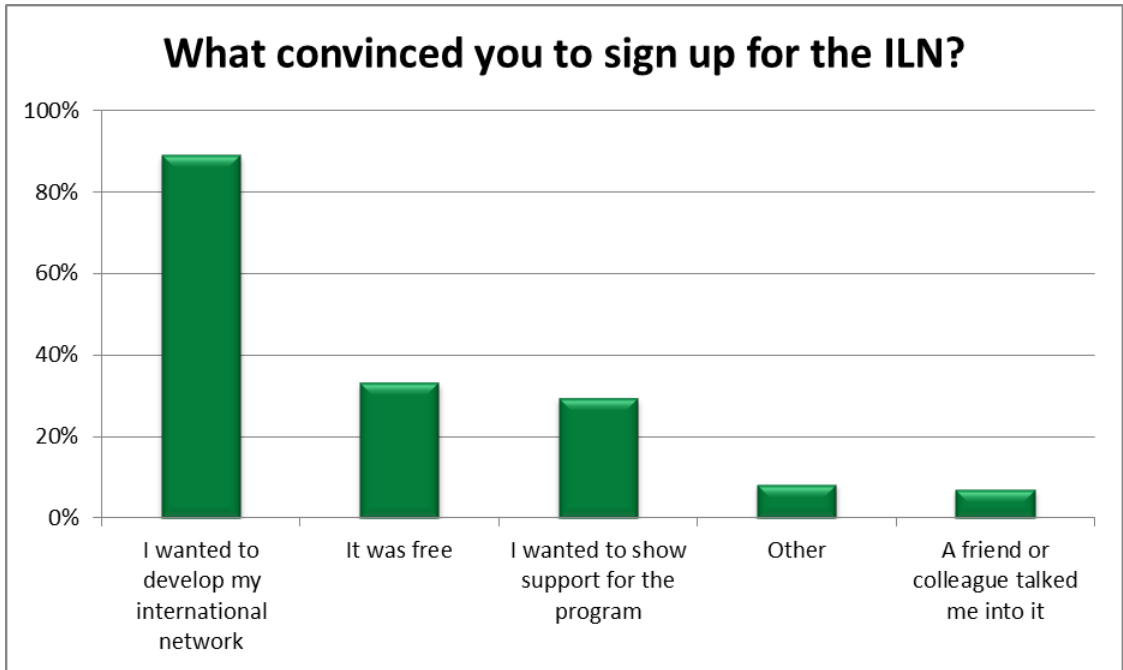
### **The impact of the International Librarians Network**

Evaluation of the ILN program has been conducted regularly since the pilot. In each round, participants are invited to complete a mid- and end-program survey. The mid-program survey focuses on participant expectations; the end-program survey examines satisfaction with various aspects of the program. Both surveys track communication frequency and overall satisfaction levels.

At the time of writing data was available for the first three rounds of the program.

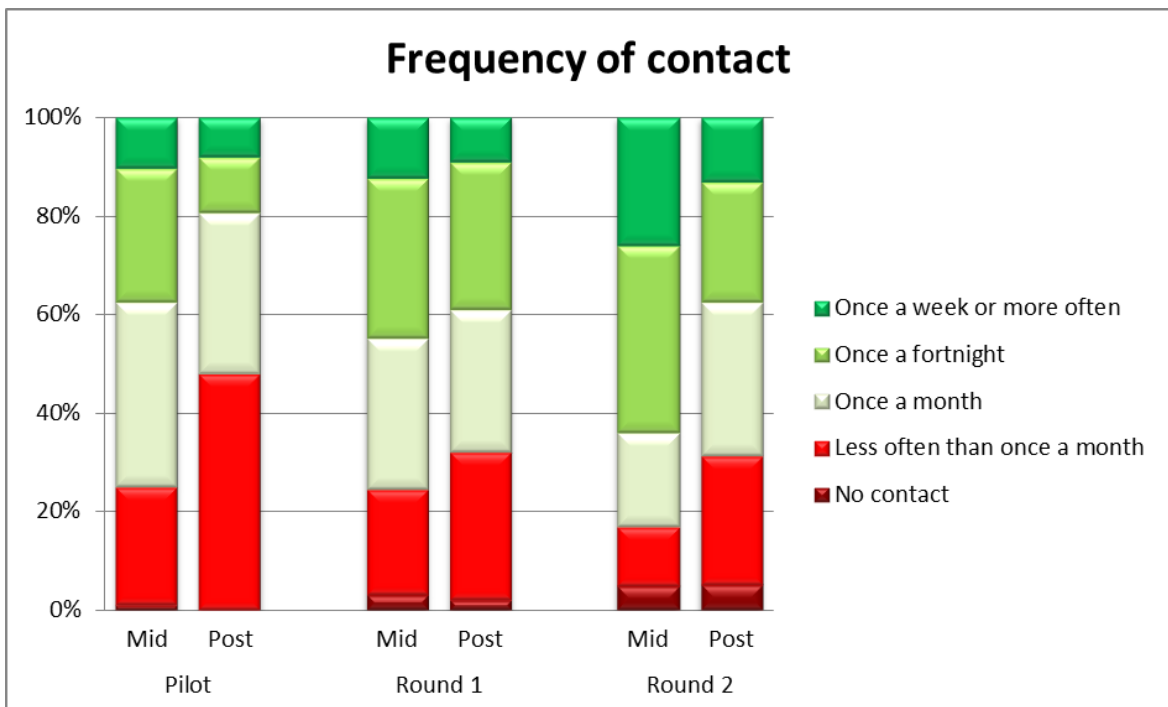
### *Why do participants join the ILN?*

The majority of participants join the ILN to expand their professional network. Secondary reasons were free participation and a desire to show support for the program. Respondents could give multiple answers to this question.



*What does participation look like?*

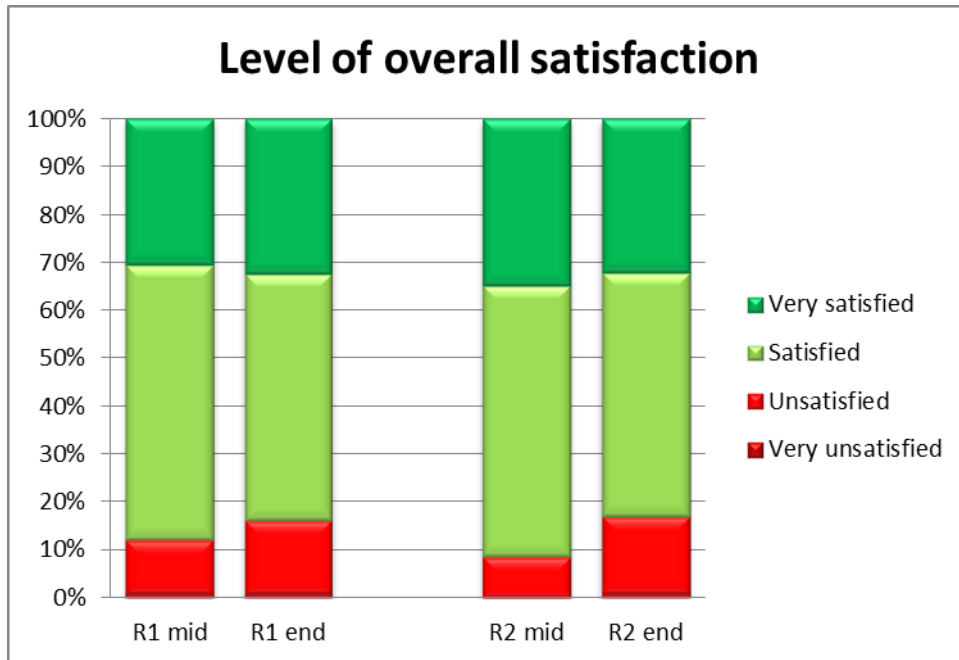
Most participants have at least monthly contact with their partner, with a substantial portion having fortnightly or weekly contact. Overall contact between participants has increased with each round of the program, but contact decreases as the round progresses.



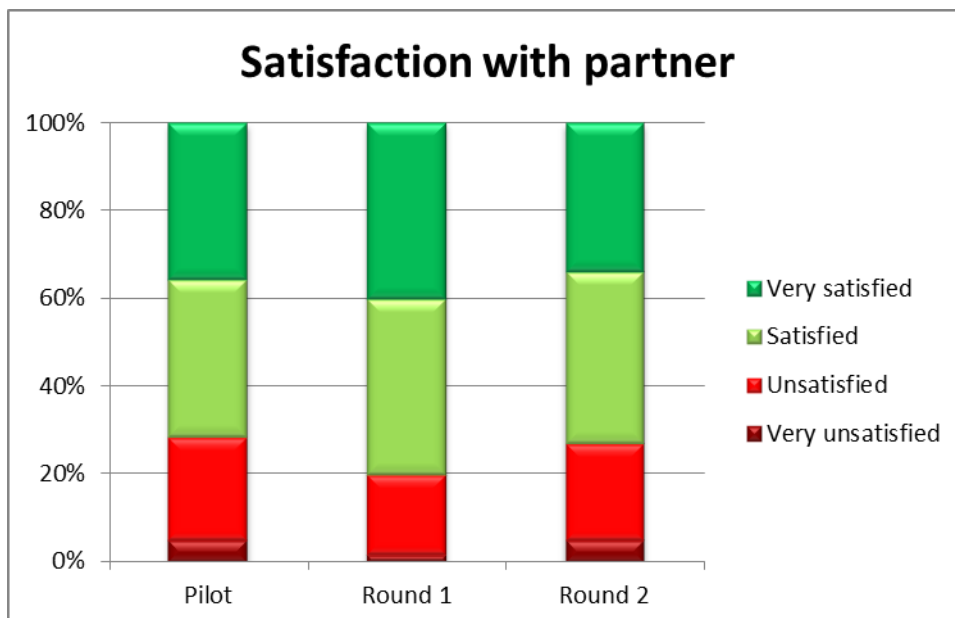
Discussion topics are heavily used by participants, and this too has increased since the ILN commenced. While the use of discussion topics decreases within each round of the program, feedback indicates that this is due to other conversations being held and the topics no longer being required to maintain conversations.

### Satisfaction with the ILN

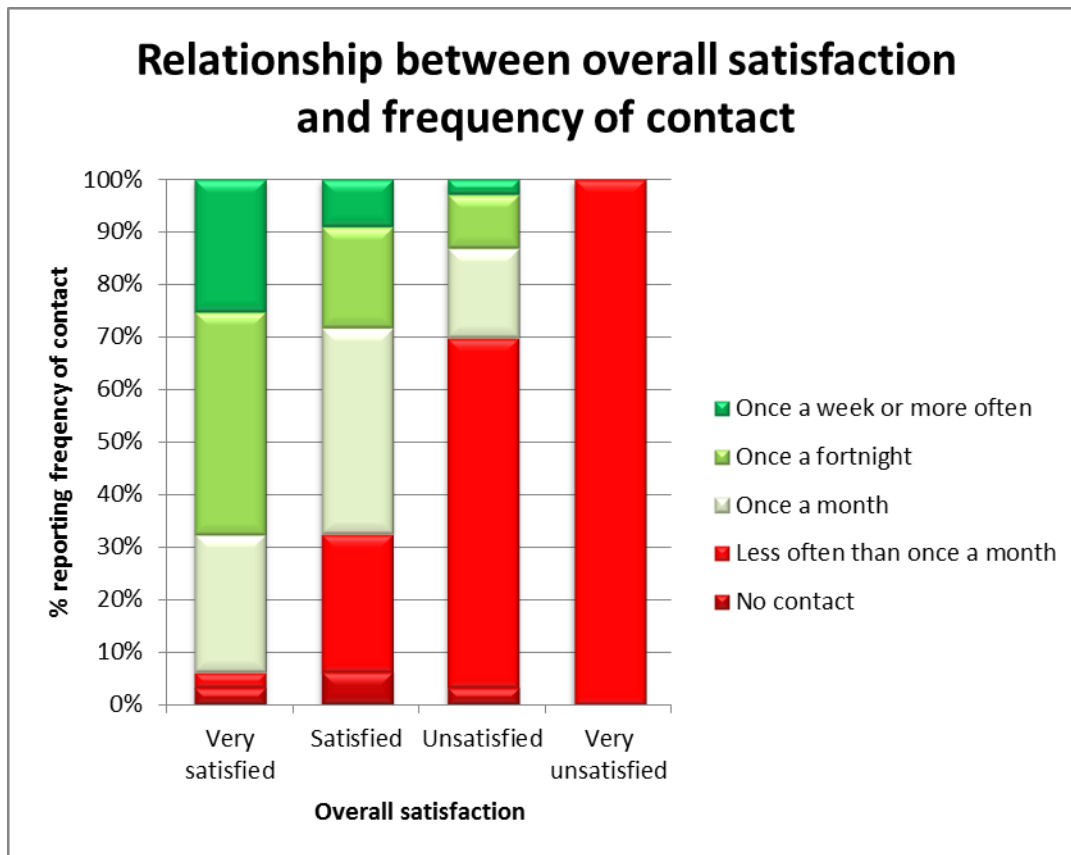
Overall program satisfaction has consistently remained above 80%, however decreases within each round of the program. The majority of participants who report dissatisfaction with the program state this is due to a lack of response from their partner.



Over 70% of participants are satisfied with the partner they have been assigned. Similar to overall satisfaction ratings, the majority of participants who report dissatisfaction with their partner state this is due to a lack of response.



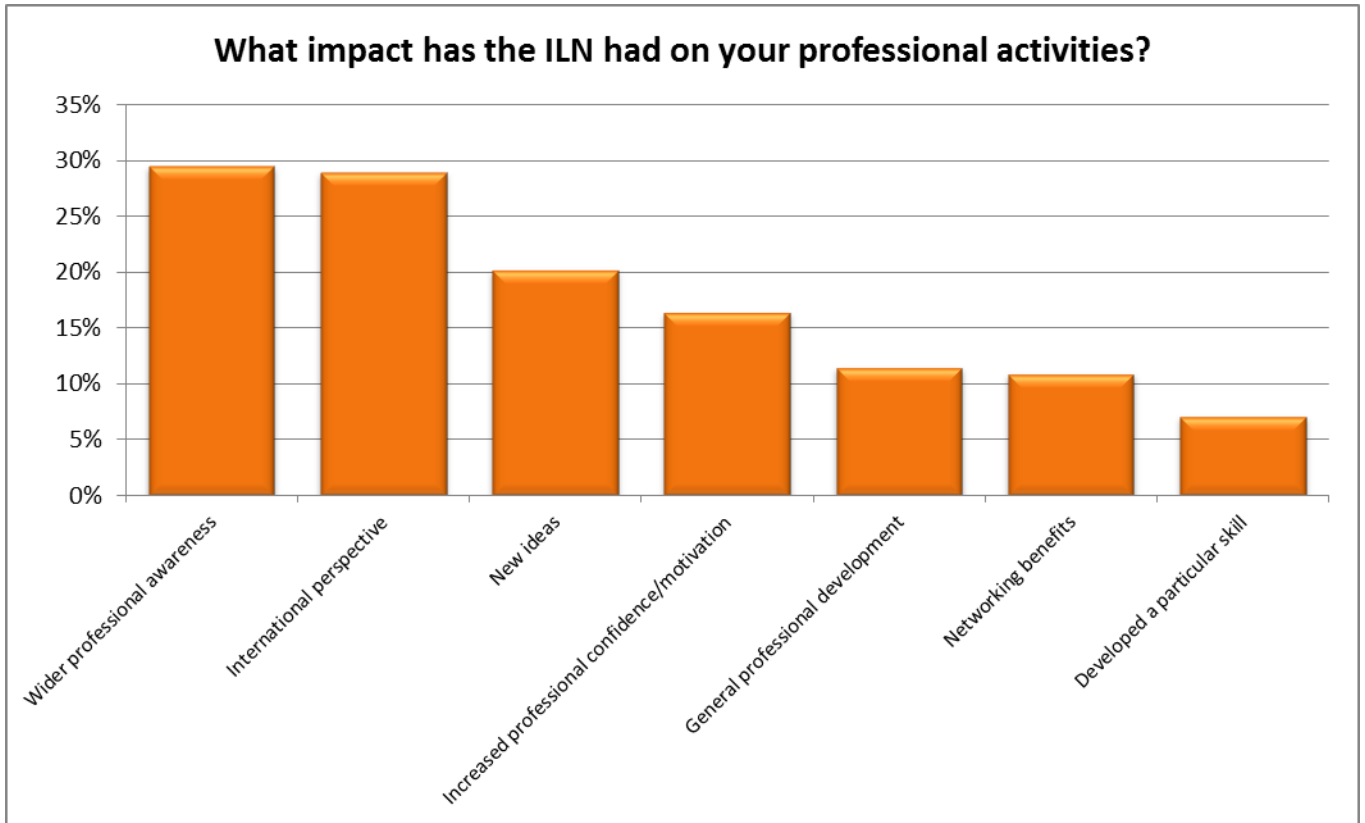
By analysing both participant feedback and survey responses, it is clear that a strong correlation exists between satisfaction and frequency of contact. The graph below demonstrates this relationship. Those participants that have frequent contact with their partner are significantly more likely to report overall program satisfaction.



*What impact does the ILN have on participants?*

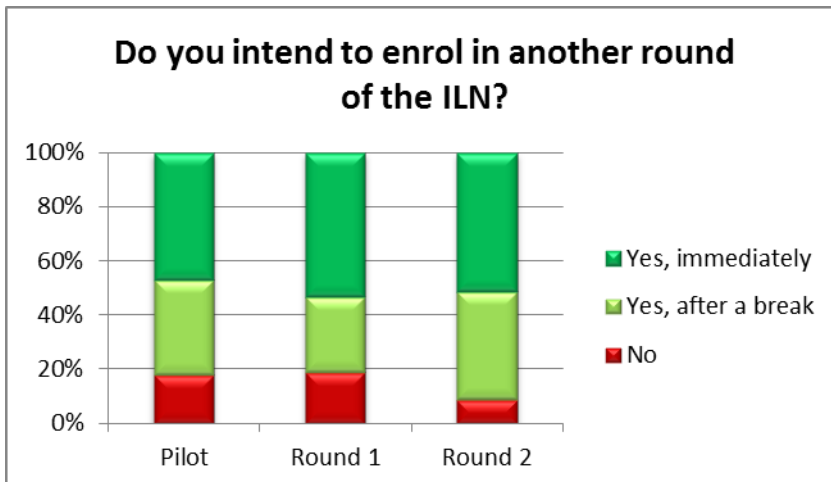
Participants in the ILN gain a wider and more international perspective on their profession. The program gives participants access to new ideas and information about other countries, sectors and libraries. This aligns with participants' reasons for joining the ILN, which centred on a wish to expand their professional network. At a secondary level, participants report an increase in professional confidence and motivation, general professional development benefits and networking benefits. Participants value the opportunity to connect with those at different professional levels. A smaller number of participants reported that participation helped them develop a particular skill (such as developing an information literacy course or improving their English).

Respondents could give multiple answers to this question.

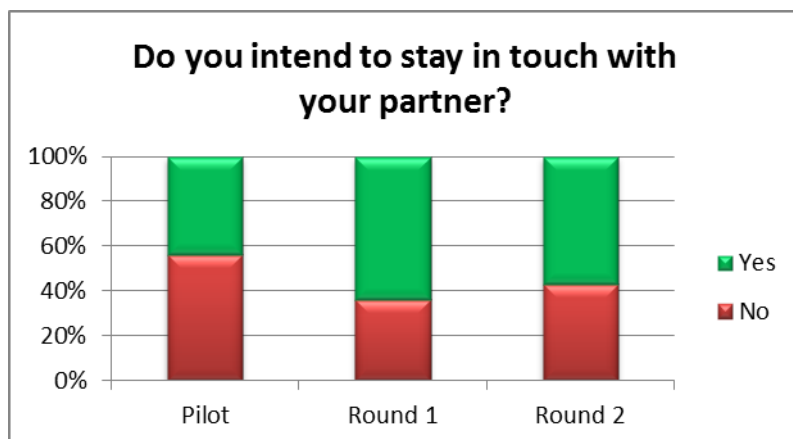


#### Future intentions

A large percentage of respondents state they will enrol in another round of the ILN, and this figure is increasing. Many respondents are planning on taking a break, which may reflect recognition of the effort required to fully participate in the program.



A majority of respondents indicate that they intend to stay in touch with their partner, although actual ongoing contact has not been measured.



### What the ILN has achieved to date

With free or mostly free tools, the ILN connected 1508 individuals with library and information professionals across 103 countries. Participants reported a high level of satisfaction with the program, and wider professional awareness and international perspective gained through their participation.

The ILN model demonstrates the possibilities of both peer mentoring and an international volunteer model. Peer mentoring allows for an equal sharing of ideas based on principles of mutuality, and makes the program accessible to a wide range of individuals. A strong response to each call for additional volunteers demonstrates the validity of the volunteer model, particularly when paired with an innovative approach.

While the success of the ILN is a demonstration of what can be achieved without funding, several limitations have been identified. These include limits on the program's sustainability and growth presented by the technology used.

### The ILN toolkit – strengths and limitations

The ILN uses a variety of technology. Some of these have continued to work well and support the development of the program; others haven't worked as hoped, or worked well only while the program remained small. The following section presents an analysis of the technology used, the value they bring to the ILN, and their limitations.

*Website: Wordpress*

<http://interlibnet.org>

The ILN website was hosted on the Wordpress platform using a free account. The website includes static informational pages about the program, as well as a blog component used for discussion topics and news items. Wordpress offers a wide range of functionality on a free account. Template designs allowed program coordinators to focus on content rather than coding. Widgets and plugins for Google Forms, Twitter and Facebook allow for integration with other ILN tools. Detailed analytics are provided, and multiple authority levels can be defined (allowing, for example, a read-only account for the social media coordinator). Blog

posts can be scheduled for future publication. The website's built in archiving serves as a record of the ILN's work.

The greatest limitation of the Wordpress free account is that websites with the domain name 'wordpress.com' are blocked in several countries, notably China (GreatFire 2014), inhibiting the international growth of the ILN. Premium Wordpress accounts overcome this, give greater design flexibility, and provide access to a wider range of widgets including maps, charts and graphs. Sharing analytics data can only be performed with a premium account. In November 2014 the ILN website moved to a premium Wordpress account to take advantage of these features, with the cost again shared amongst the program coordinators.

### *Communication: Google products*

<http://www.google.com.au/about/products/>

A free Google account was set up before the ILN was launched, primarily to use Gmail for communication. Gmail allows for the free creation of accounts that are simple and easy to use, have a large amount of storage and filing structures. It also allows for multiple concurrent users on the same account. This made Gmail a practical choice for country coordinators as each country with a coordinator has an account (e.g. australia.ilnetwork@gmail.com) to manage ILN emails. As the program grew it was discovered that Gmail has a sending limit of 500 emails per day, so the ILN moved to the paid Google Apps for Business service for the primary email addresses.

Despite moving to Google Apps in early 2014, a limit of 500 emails per day continued to be applied. Initial attempts to seek assistance from Google were unsuccessful; local support is not available, and global support is difficult to identify. Once support was obtained, program coordinators were informed that Google applies 'trial-like limits' to single paid accounts for the first six months. This information was not available prior to payment, and was not warmly received.

This restriction led to Google Groups being set up as an alternative method of communicating with participants. Initial configuration for Google Groups was complex, and help information is unclear. Substantial technical support was required. Each Group also requires a significant time commitment to set up, as new members can only be added to the Group in blocks of 10 with a maximum of 100 per day (rather than importing all participant email addresses in one go). However once initial set up is completed, mass communication with participants is easier using Groups than email.

Google Forms (an element of Drive) is used to produce and collect data from application forms and surveys. In both cases a variety of question types are used, including single response, multiple response, drop-down selections and free text responses. The forms can be sent by email and made available online, and can be embedded into the Wordpress-hosted website. Data from forms is collated into a Google Spreadsheet and automatically summarised. Spreadsheets are easily exported to Excel, although summaries cannot be exported. Google Forms has proved a sound solution to managing applications, though it lacks the data validation and editing features of other offerings.



### *Administration: Dropbox*

<https://www.dropbox.com/>

Dropbox is used as the primary document storage and sharing tool for the ILN. Each program coordinator has a personal Dropbox account, with access to a shared ILN folder. Cloud storage is the only viable option for a program designed for international implementation. Multiple concurrent users can access files, although problems arise when concurrent users attempt to save files. Dropbox allows any file type to be saved and shared. While the free Dropbox service has been sufficient thus far, concerns exist about the long term viability of the service. Storage requirements may exceed what is available, and Dropbox Pro (their premium version) is an expensive service. Cloud storage raises concerns about security and ownership of information that continue to be reviewed.

### *Social media: Twitter and Facebook*

<https://twitter.com/InterLibNet>

<https://www.facebook.com/InterLibNet>

Social media has been used as the primary marketing channel of the ILN. Social media offers opportunities to connect with the wider library community and provides feedback and analytics. The ILN's participation in social media has grown over time, starting with Twitter and encompassing Facebook and, recently, LinkedIn.

Integrating social media into the ILN's marketing and communication streams has highlighted a number of limitations to these services. Twitter and Facebook are frequently blocked in Turkey, Iran, China and North Korea (Liebelson 2014). Constructing social media campaigns that have impact in a range of markets requires time and expertise. Some automation has been used, by integrating Wordpress with Twitter and Facebook to allow for auto-publication of new content, and expertise is contributed by the ILN social media coordinator. In order to reach an international audience, the ILN must use multiple social media channels. For example, librarians in Australia, the UK and US use Twitter heavily; whilst according to country coordinators in Poland and Nigeria, Facebook is the channel of choice.

### *Synchronous communication: Twitter and AnyMeeting*

<https://twitter.com/InterLibNet>

<http://www.anymeeting.com/>

In order to encourage active engagement with the program, a number of live online events are held. These are not mandatory, and have had varying levels of success. Scheduling live events for an international program introduces significant time zone challenges. Alternate times are presented, and recordings kept and published where possible.

Twitter chats are live, online discussions held using an identified hashtag (#interlibnet) to link conversations. The chats are based on discussion topics and allow international participation beyond program partnerships. Tweets are harvested and published after the event. While chat participants have been enthusiastic, each chat attracts only around 15-20 participants.

AnyMeeting is freely available videoconferencing software, and has been used to deliver 'welcome webinars' for participants at the start of the program round. Video or presentation slides can be used, and invitations can be sent by email, allowing for easy responses and attendee management. Participation requires a computer with web access and audio functions, and the service can be sluggish in areas without high speed internet access, particularly as participant numbers increase. Recordings cannot be made on a free account.

### **Business planning techniques**

Several business planning techniques were used to assist program coordinators with developing strategic and growth plans for the ILN, identifying a renewed vision for the ILN and tackling the limits of 'free'. The techniques chosen were those that were scalable and accessible, and encouraged creative thinking on the part of program coordinators.

### *Scenario planning*

Scenario planning is a technique whereby trends, driving forces and strategies are selected and played out to their extremes, in order to identify hidden weaknesses or responses (Wikipedia (2) 2014). The ability of scenario planning to assist in thinking beyond the immediate situation (Roxburgh 2009) was vital to its use with the ILN. Two scenarios were developed and, following the advice of McKinsey & Co (Roxburgh 2009), assigned catchy names. "Big is beautiful" explored the results of a strategy that focused entirely on the growth of the program, with success measured by an increasing number of applications to each round. "Looking for a relationship" explored a strategy of depth, one that accepted smaller participant numbers but aimed for higher engagement and satisfaction results. Both scenarios considered appropriate business structures, the role of program and country coordinators, the importance and role of funding, and how such a strategy would be marketed.

While the expectation was always that a middle ground would be found between the two, the exercise revealed the risks and opportunities of the program's growth. Scenario planning helped develop a strategic plan that identified targets for participant numbers, satisfaction levels and non-responders. The exercise also led to the creation of a technology plan and establishment of a Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial licence on the ILN material.

### *Effort/impact analysis*

Using semi-structured focus groups, program coordinators analysed various aspects of the program along the axes of effort and impact. The former encompassed the amount of time and skill required to perform the task; the latter measured the level of positive impact that the task had on the experience of participants. This analysis allowed program coordinators to identify tasks that were working well (high impact/ low effort and low impact/low effort) and those that needed review (high impact/high effort and low impact/high effort). New tools or methodologies will be explored to reduce the effort of these tasks, and consideration given to discontinuation.

## *Critical friends*

A series of critical friend workshops were planned for late 2014. These involve working with an individual that, while generally supportive of the ILN, is independent of the program and has different areas of expertise to the program coordinators (Wikipedia 2013). The workshops are designed to bring a different perspective to the current performance of the ILN and opportunities for future growth. At the time of writing one of these had been completed, with positive results.

## **Conclusion**

The ILN has made a positive contribution to the international professional development space for individuals working in libraries and information management. For the first time, individuals from any country can participate in a free program that will connect them across borders with others that share their professional interests. In addition to formal partnerships, participants are able to join discussions with the wider ILN community. That this was achieved entirely by volunteers using mostly freely available tools is an acknowledgement not just of the skill and effort contributed, but also of the range and accessibility of free technology tools. A program of this nature would not have been possible ten or even five years ago. The intersection between social media, website management tools, cloud computing, and increasing internet connectivity across the developed and developing world allowed the program to be created and run without specialist technical expertise.

The ILN has limitations. Some of these are defined by the tools used: geoblocking prevents access to some ILN communications in some countries, and matches between participants can only take controlled information into account. Other limitations are defined by the fact that the program is run in English and online, which puts it out of reach of the majority of the world's population. As a volunteer program, the ILN will always walk the line between what the ILN community would like, and what can be realistically delivered. Future plans continue to actively seek to increase engagement and streamline administration.

There is much that can be learned from the ILN experience. While the ILN values the plethora of freely available technology tools, each comes with limitations that may or may not be explicitly stated, and transitioning from free to paid services, and between different tools, is not always a smooth process. Evaluation should be included from the beginning to measure the impact of any program, whilst ensuring that volunteer commitment is explicit and expectations are clear improves the experience for all volunteers, including participants.

Finally, the professional development experienced by program coordinators has been extraordinary. While all were experienced volunteers, none had been involved in the creation of an entirely new service, nor in the delivery of an international program. The opportunity to learn from each other and from the experimental and agile development techniques used has been invaluable and has brought an entrepreneurial element into professional practice.

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