

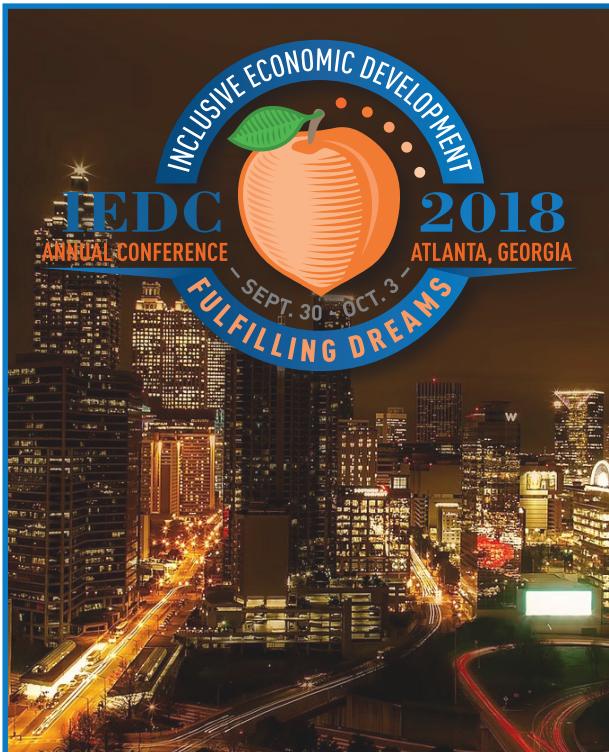
## Modern ED Marketing – Social Media

By Peter Tokar III, MBA

### USE IT OR LOSE IT

If you do not have a presence on the internet, you do not exist. Sadly, that is the simple truth about our modern society and how we seek to be heard, understood, and be relevant. So in a sea of millions, how does one person, one community, one initiative rise to the top to be seen and more importantly, be relevant? For the city of Alpharetta, Georgia, Metro Atlanta's tech hub and quality of life centerpiece, the answer became immediately obvious: show rather than tell. The city has crafted an innovative video marketing campaign using all the latest technology and social media strategies to transform how they promote the city.

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# modern ed marketing –

## SOCIAL MEDIA

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That was the question we started with at the city of Alpharetta when we were launching our new marketing initiative for the “Technology City of the South.”

### ABOUT THE CITY OF ALPHARETTA

Alpharetta is the tech hub of Metro Atlanta. Located 20 miles north of downtown Atlanta, we are home to over 640 tech-based industries. With a residential population of just over 64,000, we are the opposite of what would normally be classified as a “suburb” as we more than double in size during the day with over 90,000 workers commuting daily IN to Alpharetta.

Home to well-known tech companies like Microsoft, HP Enterprise, Fiserv, McKesson, ADP, Equifax, Siemens, LG and a host of mid-cap corporations, the city also is known for its superior quality of life, top tier school system, and experience-based dining, retail, and entertainment amenities.

The city is on a mission to introduce itself to the world – not to its own inhabitants, but to outsiders who aren’t as familiar with what the city has become.



*Smokey and the Bandit* screenshot – on GA400

Residents, while young with an average age of 37, are in the top tiers of earning and educational attainment with median income just north of \$100,000 and 64 percent of the population holding a bachelor’s degree or higher. However, the city was not always this way. Just 25 years ago all you would find in it was a small 3,000-person community with rolling farm lands.

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### FROM FARMS TO FIBER

Starting in the late 90s, Alpharetta began to develop from an agricultural town with 3,000 residents to the booming tech hub of Metro Atlanta with 640+ technology-based industries. How did we do it?

It began with a road. Apart from the early pioneers, you need a road if you are going somewhere. That is what the Georgia Department of Transportation thought. GA Highway 400 was a two-lane road that brought you from Buckhead, Atlanta, to the rolling hills and farms of Alpharetta. Much of the classic film “Smokey and the Bandit” was actually filmed on GA 400 back when it was the “road less traveled.” With the growing population in Atlanta, I-75 and I-85 needed relief so the decision

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With all the growth and success that Alpharetta has seen in the last 25 years, you might ask, “Then why have I never heard of it”? The answer is simple. We didn’t tell anyone.

to expand GA400 into a major eight-lane highway was made and construction began. Alpharetta was the terminus of the expansion and benefited from four exits off the highway.

So now we have a road. But to what? The first major development in Alpharetta was the Lake Windward residential subdivision. Wealthy Atlanta CEOs wanted a retreat from the downtown hustle but easy access to and from. The expansion provided that and more. After the creation of the subdivision, the next key to Alpharetta’s “boom” was initiative. Installing the most expansive and redundant fiber optic cable and redundant power network in the region is still one of the core strengths of the city.

Our superior infrastructure was the initial draw for our industry base. Looking at the time period, the mid 90s, fiber optic cable was the most sought-after tech infrastructure there was. This new technology was and is to this day a magnet for high tech industries such as Fin-tech, Data centers and MedTech which depend on reliable and fast transmission speeds.

The result? Twenty years later, the city’s 21 million-square-foot class-A office market and quality of life make us one of the premier business and lifestyle destinations in the Southeast. In the past four years alone, the addition of the \$1 billion AVALON development, Georgia’s first “Fiberhood,” the new campus of Gwinnett Technical College, and our \$30 million Alpharetta City Center are continuing to turn heads all over the country.

### IF YOU DON’T TELL, NOBODY KNOWS

With all the growth and success that Alpharetta has seen in the last 25 years, you might ask, “Then why have I never heard of it”? The answer is simple. We didn’t tell anyone.

During the construction boom of the late 90s in Alpharetta, the city was approving the construction of over 2 million square feet of class A office buildings a year. Up until the recession in 2006, the city was literally trying to keep up with the growth. The staff of the city grew with the demand for development and it was not until 2011 that the city even created the position for an economic development director.

As the economy was rebounding from the recession, it gave the city the chance to do an internal evaluation of what had been built in the past 10 years, and it was not until then that Alpharetta really came to know WHO they were. Once they found that voice, that’s when we realized that voice needed to be heard. Alpharetta had become “The Technology City of the South”

### THE CHALLENGE

“It is just absolutely exploding right now.”

That’s what Hans Appen, a resident of Alpharetta, has to say about the city he lives and works in.

Hans has a point. The city has been singled out by Forbes as the #1 Place to Move in America, with particular praise directed toward economic growth and its proximity to Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport and the city of Atlanta.

The city has been enjoying this growth for years, but it recently made a decidedly aggressive push to get the word out about the great place that it has become. Particular focus is around **branding the city as a cutting-edge innovation center**.

For those in the know, Alpharetta is far more than a suburb of Atlanta. It is its own economic development powerhouse. But how best to communicate this message to continue to fuel the city’s technological and cultural growth?

The city is on a mission to introduce itself to the world – not to its own inhabitants, but to outsiders who aren’t as familiar with what the city has become. Suburbs aren’t traditionally viewed as hip hubs for tech companies, cultural events, nightlife and more; those distinctions are generally relegated to their urban counterparts. In Alpharetta’s case, however, this distinction couldn’t be further from the truth. With 600 technology companies and over 100 restaurants, breweries, shopping centers, music venues and events that are unique to the city, Alpharetta “ain’t no sleepy suburb,” as one tagline puts it.

But how could Alpharetta establish itself as more than just a commuter suburb for Georgia’s capital city? What would be the best way to communicate the energy and feel of the city while simultaneously connecting professionals with the area, its people, and its booming tech trade? For a community that’s as inviting to the technology sector and a creative culture as Alpharetta is, the answer became immediately obvious: show rather than tell.

### THE STRATEGY

We decided upon video as the medium and social media blitz to represent Alpharetta’s growth initiative, quality of life, and changing landscape: Alpharetta 360. But just one video wouldn’t cut it.

ALPHARETTA360.com is a video marketing campaign with one simple value proposition: Seeing is believing. You can visit the website or our YouTube channel Grow Alpharetta to see a host of short, 90 second videos that show Alpharetta rather than just reading about it.

There are 900 technology companies in the Alpharetta area, with over 600 of them residing within the city’s borders. These tech brands include Microsoft, Verizon Wire-

As an economic development initiative, they also wanted the content to resonate with commercial real estate brokers and corporate site selectors to showcase the deal flow in Alpharetta and all the economic activity happening in the city. The Alpharetta 360 strategy focused on three key types of videos.

less, Hi-Rez Studios, Jackson Healthcare, Priority Payment Systems, and more.

Each company chose to locate in the city and has made its own unique contribution to the local technological ecosystem. As such, it made sense to produce a series of videos with each video highlighting a different brand or aspect of the community.

The strategy is mutually beneficial. It not only is a business retention outreach program, but it also provides marketing content as each business gets a chance to showcase its unique offering and contribution to the community. In return, the city receives praise from the organizations and businesses that it has helped foster.

However, the landscape and appeal of Alpharetta are more than just the business community. Alpharetta wanted this initiative to showcase the quality of life elements and unique attributes that make the city one of the best places to be in the country.

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- 1. Unique Identifiers:** Videos showcasing unique offerings only found in the city. Events, boutiques, restaurants, and venues that both residents and visitors could experience.
- 2. CEO Testimonials:** Videos communicating the trust that local business owners have in their community through one-on-one interviews. These are great platforms for cutting-edge businesses to promote their organizations and their success as well as to provide potential prospects with valuable information on the community via word-of-mouth that Alpharetta is a choice destination for business and industry.
- 3. Deal Flow Content:** Videos showcasing corporate project wins for attraction and/or relocation – grand openings for offices, restaurants, retail, and any positive growth in economic development. This is one of the most important aspects. Site selectors across the country have identified “deal-flow” as a crucial element they look at in evaluating a location.

To execute this strategy, the city in partnership with the Alpharetta Convention and Visitors Bureau partnered with Crisp Video Group to develop and execute the

video marketing campaign, Alpharetta 360. Crisp had a unique offering: an **ongoing, year-long organic video marketing strategy** incorporating keyword research data, targeted reach, social media boosting, and a steady rotation of high quality in-house produced video content to showcase the city, its brands, and its people. By organic video content, we are referring to video content that is unscripted. We don’t use models or staged settings; we film all material live on the scene to show the true nature of what is happening rather than a fictitious setting that we want people to think is happening in the city.

In order to achieve Alpharetta360’s goals, the company produced video content to showcase Alpharetta not only as a cutting edge technology community, but as an ideal community in which to succeed economically and to raise a family socially.

New video content would be released consistently for the duration of a year in order to create a steady buzz around the community. Beginning the process with an in-depth discovery call with representatives from Grow Alpharetta, the organization’s marketing goals were identified, solidified, and used to form the basis of the campaign’s messaging. With slogans like “this ain’t your pap-pap’s city” and a hip, young vibe, it was immediately apparent that the city’s first target demographic (technology workers) is a younger, tech-oriented crowd.



Corresponding with the cultural strategy, the second approach to attract tech companies to the area began to take shape. In order to encourage these companies to move to the area, Crisp devised a plan to highlight the city’s business environment through Alpharetta’s current business owners and CEOs. In order to create an authentic feel that appealed directly to the second target audience (tech CEOs and business owners), this video marketing strategy centered on CEO profiles from the city’s current technology companies.

**There’s no better way to tell a story than through the lens of those who currently live it.** The Alpharetta CEO profile series showcases not only the companies that have headquartered in the area, but also the reasons for doing so and the success stories of companies that have relocated there.

Video content was displayed across a variety of channels and pages including Grow Alpharetta, The City of

Alpharetta, and Alpharetta Convention and Visitors Bureau's websites, social media pages like Facebook and Twitter, and YouTube channels.

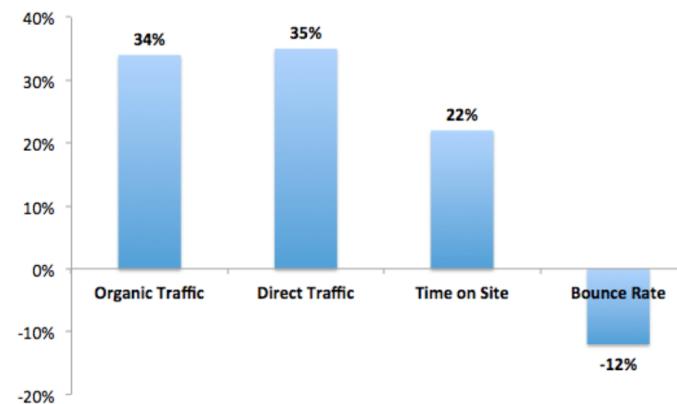
Schema markup (code placed on your website to help search engines return more informative results for users) was included within video embeds to help search engines properly index and rank videos from the campaign. In order to drive action, calls to action were placed at the end of each video and in the YouTube descriptions for video uploads to direct viewers to Grow Alpharetta's website.

Utilizing digital and social media as the primary medium for sharing video content is the differentiator for Alpharetta's marketing initiative, making it both disruptive and innovative when compared to traditional economic development marketing initiatives. Giving the campaign the ability to reach and to target highly-specified demographics, social media has been a major driver of Grow Alpharetta success.

## THE RESULTS

While organic video strategies based on long-tail keywords (keywords imbedded in the video that trigger results based on words used in online searches) and SEO metrics (Search Engine Optimization) generally take time to produce results, the city's video marketing campaign has really caught on since its launch. Driving online engagement via the city of Alpharetta's website as well as their social channels, the following presents a snapshot of the organization's metrics before and after the video campaign release.

## GROW ALPHARETTA WEBSITE (2 MONTHS BEFORE VS. 2 MONTHS AFTER LAUNCH)



As a direct result of our keywords and SEO efforts, our organic traffic to the site increased by 34 percent. The organic traffic is the web traffic that you earn through keywords and SEO optimization; this is earned traffic rather than paid advertisement traffic. Our direct traffic increased 35 percent. Direct traffic to your site are those that physically type in your URL and do not come from a referral from another website, meaning people saw our post and decided to type in Alpharetta360.com directly in their browser! When visitors got to one of our video portals, they stayed on the page longer! We saw a 22 percent increase in our time on site. (See Grow Alpharetta website graph)

Negative numbers are not typically what you want to see in your analytics. Unless that negative number is de-

**Grow Alpharetta - YouTube**

The YouTube channel page for 'City of Alpharetta - Grow Alpharetta' shows a banner image of a modern building, a 'Subscribe' button with 82 subscribers, and a video grid. The grid includes videos like 'The NEW Golf Club of Georgia | City of Alpharetta, GA' (323 views, 1 week ago), 'Alpharetta Foodie | City of Alpharetta GA' (175 views, 4 weeks ago), and 'Alpharetta Parks and Trails | City of Alpharetta GA' (562 views, 1 month ago).

**Grow Alpharetta - Website**

The website homepage features a large banner with the text 'ALPHARETTA {Technology City of the South}' and a 'Play Video' button. The navigation menu includes 'ALPHARETTA 360°', 'VIDEOS', and 'PHOTOS'.

**Alpharetta CVB - Facebook Page**

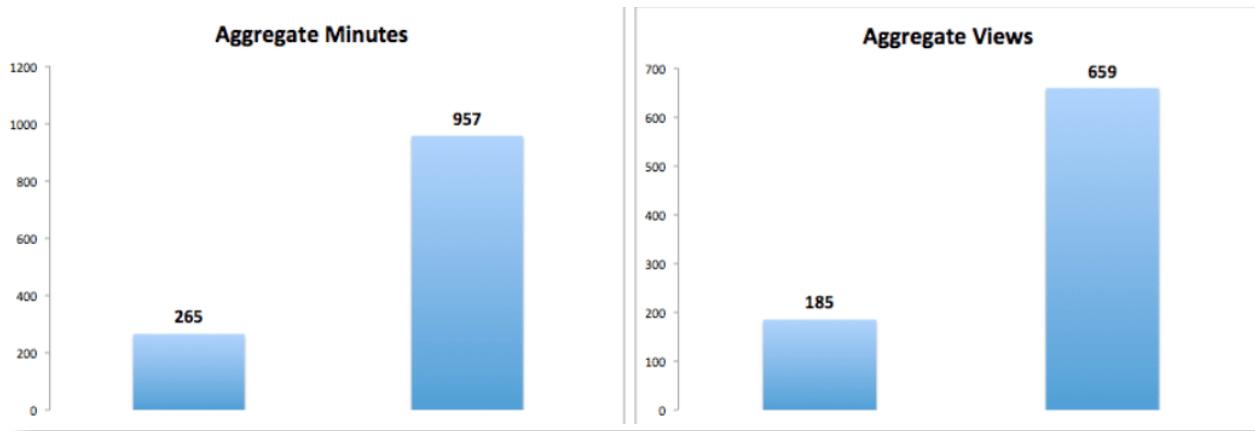
The Facebook page for 'Alpharetta, Georgia – Alpharetta Convention and Visitors Bureau @AwesomeAlpharetta' features a banner for a 'Chef's Table Experience' contest, a 'Like' button, and a 'Watch Video' button. The page also shows a grid of recent posts.

**Alpharetta360.com**

The website homepage for 'ALPHARETTA 360°' shows a grid of video thumbnails for various events like the 'Wire and Wand Cannibilia Festival', 'ALPHARETTA 360°', 'Alpharetta Canvia', 'Alpharetta Parks and Trails', and 'Taste of Alpharetta 2016'.

Top left: Grow Alpharetta – YouTube ; Top right: Alpharetta CVB – Facebook Page; Bottom left: [www.GrowAlpharetta.com](http://www.GrowAlpharetta.com); Bottom right: [www.Alpharetta360.com](http://www.Alpharetta360.com)

## GROW ALPHARETTA YOUTUBE CHANNEL – AGGREGATE VIEWERSHIP (1 MONTH BEFORE VS. 1 MONTH AFTER LAUNCH)

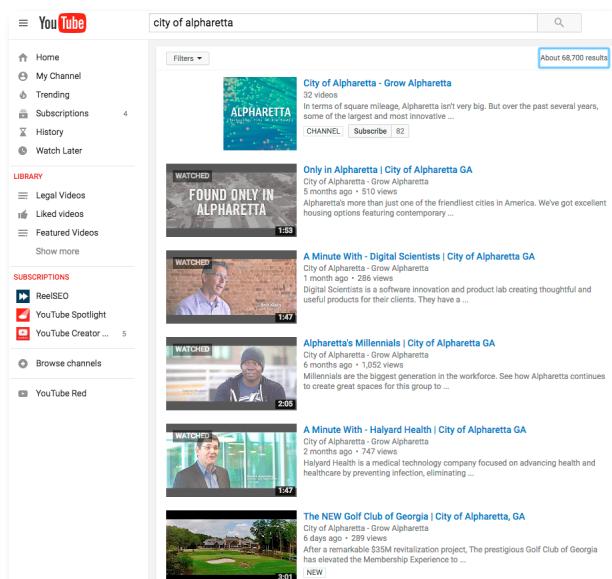


fining your bounce rate. Bounce rate is the moment that a viewer or visitor clicks that red X button, leaves your site, or stops viewing your video. A 12 percent reduction in our bounce rate means that visitors were staying 12 percent longer on our site or viewing our video until they moved on to the next one.

After six months, the city of **Alpharetta's YouTube exposure grew nearly 10x from 189 to 1,390 video views per month** while their Facebook presence has more than tripled, currently reaching 6,237 people per month through organic views and shares alone. Alpharetta's videos have also been extremely successful on social media (a key outlet for their tech-savvy target demographic), with the top results for their Facebook videos currently as follows:

- **Taste of Alpharetta 2016:** 33,000 views
- **Alpharetta's Parks and Trails:** 14,000 views
- **Only in Alpharetta:** 5,000 views

From a branding standpoint, the ripples are easily felt for the city's image. A quick YouTube search for "City of Alpharetta" yields the following results (all campaign videos):



## 3 MONTHS BEFORE VS. 3 MONTHS AFTER LAUNCH OF YOUTUBE CHANNEL

**Watch Time:** 648 percent increase

**Views:** 1,595 percent increase

**Likes:** 29,500 percent increase

**Comments:** 800 percent increase

**Shares:** 500 percent increase

Alpharetta 360, the digital media arm of the Grow Alpharetta campaign, has also seen **site traffic increase by 136 percent** in the same six-month time frame.

With the goal of branding the city to engage and attract new workers and businesses, it's safe to say that the strategy is working the way we intended. With current video and web metrics pointing toward a staggering exposure increase, we have concluded that using social media and video content as our primary means of marketing is providing the highest return on investment we have seen.

As the strategy continues, Alpharetta's video strategy shows that high-quality video marketing strategy can not only serve to brand a company or organization, but cities as well. And, as Grow Alpharetta continues its high-quality video marketing campaign, it will continue to drive engagement and spread word of the "technology capital of the south" to its target demographics.

## KEYS TO SUCCESS IN YOUR ORGANIZATION

### 1. Don't be afraid to change

Throw your brochures and one-pagers in the trash. Your money is better spent on video and social media. The total cost for our 26-video program was \$100,000. However, that cost was split with the Alpharetta CVB and when you really look at what you're spending on print materials and other promotional items, the money seems to be there to begin with.

## 2. Find a quality video production company for content

Uncle Joe may own a video camera, but that is not the person you want creating your content. Atlanta based Crisp Video Group not only provided us with professional video content, unlike other strictly media companies, they do all the technical back-end SEO optimization, boosting and tech related things mentioned above that help get your media found and viewed as well as help set up our social media accounts to post the videos. Look for cutting edge companies that offer more than just video recording and that offer bulk discounts for multiple videos.

## 3. Consistent Release of Content

You have to be committed to making those deadlines for content release. That is how you gain subscribers and make a large impact. We release a new video every 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday of the month – 26 videos a year. Releasing content irregularly will not gain followers or influence.

## 4. HAVE FUN

Be Creative. If you're not creative, give this project to someone on your team who is. Don't create stuffy too serious content that is boring. Remember, on a social media feed, you're competing with cat videos, people doing dumb stuff, and all sorts of randomness. Make your content fun and engaging while still staying on topic.

## 5. SHORT AND SWEET

Ninety to 120 seconds is all you have. Videos that are five minutes long, unless instructional, hardly anybody watches them and many don't make it past the 90 second mark. Be precise in your message and to the point. Sixty seconds is the best case, but try to keep it fewer than 90 seconds to avoid the pitfall of high bounce rates.

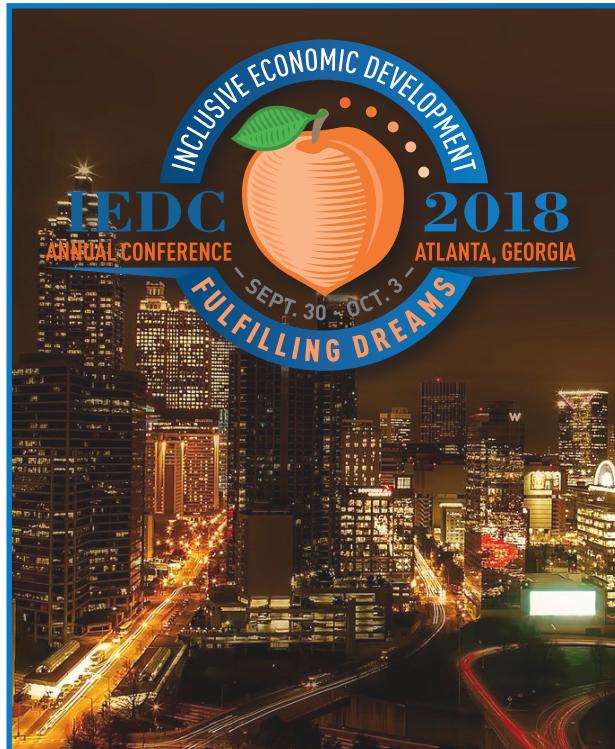
## CONCLUSION

Best selling author Seth Godin said it best.

*“Our job is to connect to people, to interact with them in a way that leaves them better than we found them, more able to get where they'd like to go.”*

– Seth Godin

We as economic developers are connectors. We connect industry to place, workers to industry, and people to place. How we do that is what differentiates us. The strategy for economic development in Alpharetta is always to try to look through a different lens to see opportunities and new ways of innovating our profession to stay relevant in the time we live in. We need to utilize the tools and technology that run our ecosystem in our everyday life in our profession. Unless we adapt, we will only stand still while the world moves ahead. ☺



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