

Beyond the Front Door: Reimagining Customer Experience with AI

Hemnath Prabhakaran and Jing Zhang

Jing Zhang: I do not encourage a lift-and-shift migration, right? 'Cause a lot of times if you are trying to do the exact same thing with AI, which you did like 20 years ago, you will not get the full value.

Hemnath Prabhakaran: When it comes to migration, right, you have this big spreadsheet of agents. You know, you have to map those agents' skills and all this stuff.

You know, we kind of transform that instantaneously in a couple of days.

Jing Zhang: It's really not human against AI, but it's human and AI working together.

You

Hemnath Prabhakaran: know when I call a contact center, right, uh, do I have to repeat myself? You know, same thing as her, you know. So I want to preserve that context, right? I don't want to repeat myself.

Jing Zhang: Whenever there's a bot come up, I'll say, "Agent, agent. I need an agent." And I start to say thank you to the bot now because it's, uh, very helpful.

Hemnath Prabhakaran: Welcome to Reimagine Conversations, where we explore the latest innovations, uh, product functionalities, and real-life success stories, uh, shaping the future of customer experience. Uh, I'm Himnath Prabakaran, shortly Him, uh, leading the solution consulting team for CX practice. Uh, today we are going to dive into the world of, uh, Amazon Connect, AWS's cloud-native contact center platform, uh, shaping the future of customer experience.

I have with me is, uh, Jing Zhang, who is our partner, uh, developer and Amazon Connect specialist at AWS, who brings in about, uh, twenty-six years of experience in collaboration and, uh, customer experience, uh, technologies. Uh, uh, she's been our go-to-market, uh, GTM, uh, for partners growing Amazon Connect, uh, business, uh, through partner ecosystem.

Uh, so Jing, can you, uh, explain a little bit more about your roles and responsibilities in, in AWS and your experience?

Jing Zhang: Absolutely. Uh, first of all, thank you for having me here at the podcast. Um, so as Hemna said, I'm a partner development specialist. So what does that mean? Is I work with our partners, help them with go-to-market strategy and grow business together, and help them to support our customers to be able to realize the full, um, potential and the business value of customer experience AI.

Hemnath Prabhakaran: For customers, you know, who are, who are listening to this, you know, uh, whether you are evaluating a migration to Amazon Connect or optimizing, uh, CX operations or exploring new AI capabilities, uh, uh, this podcast will give you additional insights, uh, into, uh, into your CX transformation and how Persistent can help with the transformation.

So we are hearing Amazon Connect in, in almost every conversations that we have with the customer, right? It is being recognized as a leader, um, uh, uh, leader in a lot of this, uh, uh, industry analysts, right? And I'm seeing it's been, uh, it's been adopted across, uh, verticals. What's driving this momentum?

Jing Zhang: I think one, one of the key things is, uh, why it makes so much momentum is really about, um, the changes, right?

There are three major forces converging here, right? Firstly, you know, um, Hemna, the customer expectation changes, right? Yeah, customer tolerance has collapsed. Uh, so we ex- everybody like us, we are, we are customer too, right? When we call a customer service, we wanna be understood naturally. I don't have to repeat myself and, or maybe before even I call, I would like to say they already know something about me.

For example, I call into amazon.com, they actually say, "Okay, are you ta- are you calling us, um, about this order you just ordered last week?" "Yes, of course." So easy when you're calling in, you kind of say, "Okay, I really don't have to re- say what I did," and they already understood me. And a lot of times before, a lot of those are really aspirational and, uh, but now it's table stakes, right?

'Cause if your competitor's doing that and you are not doing that, so that means you are gonna lose your loyal customer. And then that's expanded across, uh, across industries and across different use cases. So I really say the customer expectation changes and really helps driving the momentum. Yeah. And the second thing is the market changes too, right?

Um, you see now companies want to offer what the customer prefer, the way that the par- customer prefer to engage with them. And, um, before business just, uh, let's say you bu- you buy a platform, pay the license, and you have the bottom upgrades and when the vendor ships upgrades, right? And then you measure a success.

What do you measure? Okay, how fast you can get a customer off the phone, average handling time.

Hemnath Prabhakaran: Yeah.

Jing Zhang: Right?

Hemnath Prabhakaran: Absolutely.

Jing Zhang: Yeah. You are not measured by the effort that solving customers' problems. So that's a fundamental change for the market. And you know that infrastructure is, is really aging to support all the different AI services.

The old on-prem systems, uh, cannot scale and cannot provide the things and the data we need. Yeah. And, um, because of artificial intelligence right now and the agentic AI, you know, engineering becomes so easy and, um, less effort now too, right? For engineering. So now we can build things much faster and be able to achieve those agentic and automation too.

But I think, um, most important is this third one, is mindset change. Uh, I think maybe a couple years ago when we talked about a agentic AI automation, a lot of people have concerns, right? "No, we are, we cannot do that," right? There's concerns, they're worried about security, there's worry about data privacy, sovereignty, et cetera.

And now the mindset change too, uh, because- Yeah ... all the different capability for guardrails, security enforcement, observability provided in the platform, um, people start... And also the benefit you can get from AI, uh, people starting to, um, able to really think, okay, and using AI is a reality now, whereas it's before it's really just think it's a science project.

So I think overall, all those combined make Amazon Connect customer the perfect choice to be able to help our customers to grow the business and also fully realize, um, Amazon Connect to help them automate, uh, innovate- Yeah ... and also scale and improve the customer experience. Yeah.

Hemnath Prabhakaran: Yeah. Thanks, thanks for that explanation, Jing.

You know, one thing which I see in the, in the mar- in, in, in the, in the market now is, you know, key point is, you know, we are customers, right? Um, and you know, whenever I call any, any customer, any, any co- contact center, right? Do I have to repeat myself? You know, same thing as, you know, so I want to preserve that context, right?

I don't want to repeat myself. Right. I, I want to have a better customer experience, you know, because I don't wanna spend time trying to get, uh, uh, try trying to explain my issue. So you rather identify my issue and be proactive.

Jing Zhang: Yeah. It, it's definitely something that, uh, I do see me, myself as a customer, the behavior changes now, right?

Hemnath Prabhakaran: Yeah.

Jing Zhang: Um, before, whenever there's a boss come up, I'll say, "Agent, agent, I need an agent." Now you know what? Now I know. And I start to say thank you to the boss now because it's, uh, very helpful. Sometimes I was thinking, if I keep asking the agent those so many questions, uh, for a few real human, they might already get impatient now.

But the agentic agent says very nice and very patient to answer all my questions. Yeah.

Hemnath Prabhakaran: Yeah, exactly right. So whenever I call an IVR, I used to press nine or zero, you know, I wanna get to an agent. That's because that's the best way I can get an answer quickly. But now with the context engineering, now, and I can, using agentic AI, I can get the information upfront.

You know, I can s- Yes ... help serve the customer in the IVR itself.

Jing Zhang: And I would definitely say, right, customer loyalty are very key too, right? Indeed, yeah. So if I call a customer experience, I have to push five buttons to get what, where I need. I'm going circles. Definitely I'm gonna lose my patience. Yeah.

I'm, I'm gonna- ... end in it. Yeah.

Hemnath Prabhakaran: Yeah. Yeah. That's, that's great. Hey, uh, I wanna ask you something that a lot of people don't know about Amazon Connect customer. I, I heard that it was built to power, uh, your internal Amazon Connect, Amazon, uh, s-services. Uh, can you take us back to the story?

Jing Zhang: Um, yeah, absolutely.

You know, you know, amazon.com is the re- they retail platform. They scale really fast. They require a lot of, uh, effort for people to support customer 'cause we have so many product and so many vendors on it, right? So we start building our own complex center technology. And then, um, at 2017, right, uh, we're thinking, I mean, 'cause we really think this is a great technology helping us to succeed, why don't we, um, help our other, uh, enterprises to, to, to succeed too on customer experience?

And that's where we launched, uh, Amazon Connect, uh, in, at, uh, 2017. It of course, it starts with, uh, just voice channel with, um, the, the standard contact center functions. But over the year of last, and I will say nine years, it's evolved so much. And just last year alone, 2025, we have shipped more than 200 features, and 40, about 39 of them are all AI features.

So you can see how, how, how big and how, how fast it grow and how much innovation is happening. Um, some data I wanna share here is, and you probably know if you heard re:Invent like broadcast, we have achieved a billion dollar ARR and at, uh, for just 2025, right? And, uh, we have been on the Gartner, uh, Leaders Quadrant for three years now, and, uh, and, and rising as well.

Um, some of data I would like share is also, you know, we saw 2024, only 6 billion minutes are, um, evaluated by AI. In 2025, it doubled. It doubled to 12 billion. Yeah. And I would expect, uh, 2026 will be totally different. It will be even more.

Hemnath Prabhakaran: Let's talk about, uh, AI, right? Uh, because that's where the most exciting innovation is, is, is happening, right?

What AI capabilities in Amazon Connect that you're most excited about?

Jing Zhang: I have been in the industry about 25 years now, right? Um, but I have never seen capability arrive that fast. And, uh, it's really, yeah, and as times goes and you just see more excitement comes on. Um, but if I have to choose several things, uh, um, on the top ones I really, really are excited about Uh, first is of course a generative AI, right?

Now AI is not just give you the answer, it acts, it complete the task. You check your identity and check your refunds and, uh, some schedule appointments, do, do claims, et cetera. So those are can also be automatic, and also we can also easily keep human in the loop. So a lot of times you're removing all those manual work, repetitive work from agents, so we'll-- they will be more productive and you focus on the really the business side, which you need a human there.

I will say is really, uh, yeah, how it help human beings, right? Um, you know, how to make sure that it real agents will get real-time assistance. Yep. Uh, there before they have to, uh, search for six different applications to find the answers- Applications. ... right? Yeah. And now they get The very intelligent suggestion for the next step so they can follow the process, follow the best practice too.

And also, they will be able to also override it if it is needed. Yep. So I will say this is really, really help our agent become more, uh, superhuman, and, uh, it really help your agent to be a happier agent, right?

Hemnath Prabhakaran: Yeah.

Jing Zhang: Now there will be a happy agent, then you have a happy customer too. Uh, that's very important, uh, to be able to give your agent that experience because a lot of times, uh, agent is your best assets too, right?

Hemnath Prabhakaran: Yeah. Yeah.

Jing Zhang: Um, I will say third one is AI-powered proactive outreach. Um, a lot of times legacy system is just, "Hey, uh, we have a problem. We call." You call me, right? But now we say, "Hey," when customer call, uh, we already own it, right? Yeah. The system can predict and, uh, personalize, uh, the messages to customer, giving them notifications and giving them the right, uh, promotions they're looking for, and with the right channels too.

So we- Right ... understand the customer, yeah, uh, before they even reach out to call you for a problem. We can also predict incident happens to avoid the risk.

Hemnath Prabhakaran: Right.

Jing Zhang: So that's another great thing happens now is, is you are not just calling your customer, you are also calling them with personalization with exactly what they're looking for.

I think the, the other one, I mean, uh, this is overall across different use cases, is really the intelligence of the data layer of the, of the, uh, solution that really make compounding benefits, right? Uh, every interaction train the system. Own your own business, right? That's also important, is own your own use case, own your own data, and then you will be able to predict and you can personalize.

So data, uh, end-to-end data, uh, across all interactions make your solution more, uh, more smarter, right? You can improve your self-service, you can improve your knowledge base, you can improve agent performance using all the data, and it, data goes both ways. So I really think this data layer, um, help our, uh, solution to become much intelligent is, and very exciting.

That means your s- your system will be smarter than last month. Every, every day it getting smarter. Yeah.

Hemnath Prabhakaran: Yeah. I mean, that's, that's a great insight, right? You know, uh, if I, if I'm evaluating a CX platform, right, that, that, uh, comes up the follow-up question, right? If I'm evaluating a CX platform, what should I look for?

Because there are a lot of these functionalities, features available, right? What should I be looking for, and where does Amazon Connect fit, uh, for a customer?

Jing Zhang: Of course, Amazon Connect fits Small, medium, and large. All the use cases. Um, but of course, um, I know every customer is, is different, right? There are a total, um, it's about, mm, seven or six characters that normally, um, can help you with the best practice, right?

Uh, first of all, as I said, the business value is always the first thing you have to consider even when you, when you plan it, right? So, um, and it, it also it grows too. It grows and changes too. So when your goal, it does not matter your goal is, uh, retention customer or increase sales or improve, uh, customer satisfaction, you wanna prove it fast, right?

You can wanna prove it is, uh, 30, 30 days or 60 days. Um, a lot of times I would recommend don't use a UA, um, you know, like a demo environment or pilot. You... Real-- It needs real data to prove, right? You need a real outcome, a real customer. But you can start small, right? So, and hopefully in month six, you will be able to also measure the graduate, um, the, the improvement month over month too.

So you can starting small with the internal IT help desk or, uh, some smaller teams that are very manageable but easy to prove your, uh- Yeah ... business value. Then you can expand later on. I think that's very important. Um, second thing is continuous optimization. A lot of times, uh, customer thinks, "Oh, we deploy AI, we're done."

Right. "And then we can use it to get a value." That's not true. It's not true. Yeah. Every month you gotta ask yourself what failed, what worked, and what do we can automate next, and what pattern are emerging. That's where you can using those data to improve, uh, all your customer experience. Remember, your system's learning every day, you are learning every day.

Hemnath Prabhakaran: Yeah.

Jing Zhang: And, uh, change is constant, right? So continuous m- m- optimization- And that's

Hemnath Prabhakaran: where partners like us help us, right? Exactly. Exactly. To provide a continuous engineering capability to help fine-tune this, right? Yeah, absolutely. And

Jing Zhang: I often had customers, uh, ask me, “Ah, Jean, I, I just, uh, I didn’t know this feature was announced.”

Okay. ‘Cause they’re not lying. As I said, if we are shipping more than 200 or e- even more- I know, right? ... features every year, I don’t think customer can catch up, right? Catch up to it, yes. And there’s a lot of things and, and a lot of noises out there too. So I think partner will be a great, uh, great, um, a way to have a great way to help our customers adopting those latest features and be able to...

A lot of times those feature already included in Connect customer. Yeah. And it’s really not about pricing, it’s really about do you know it and how do you, do you know how to use it to get your full business value? Yeah.

Hemnath Prabhakaran: Yeah. Absolutely.

Jing Zhang: That’s very important.

Hemnath Prabhakaran: Yeah.

Jing Zhang: Yeah. Um, I will say the third thing, uh, about what you’re looking for, ask yourself is, um, okay, does it include, uh, does it improve your customer and employee experience?

In both, right? Yeah. A lot of times we very focused on customer CSAT, et cetera, but you also want to make sure employee get the benefits because they’re the ones engaging with customer in person. They provide values, and so you wanna make sure, uh, that they will get better experience as well. Um, other one is, uh, process, right?

Processes. I know, yeah, a lot of customers... If you take it as a technology project, um, you might will not get the full value, right? Mm-hmm. ‘Cause a lot of times it’s really about the process change, right? Let’s say if I get perfect self-service in the front, the boss can answer any question, but the backend process didn’t change.

You’re still asking the agent copy-pasting things around and manually creating cases and the follow-ups, those type of things. You’re not transforming. You’re just- Yeah ... decorating the front door, not the back office, right? And third one, of course, everybody, um, the next one will, will be guardrails and observability, right?

That’s, uh, especially very important because now if AI’s helping making decisions, you probably wanna know why the reason-- what’s the reason they make that decision or reject that decision or, uh, one way or the other. So every decision need to be traceable and reasonable, and you will have the guardrails to protect the boundaries between your different teams, right?

And the different data sets. So those are very critical. It should not be a afterthought. And then of last thing is the security, right? So- Yeah ... or no security should not be a just approval gate. It’s the design decisions too, and built in the architecture. So that’s where, uh, you wanna be able to have security in day one and without, um, concerns when you go production.

Yeah.

Hemnath Prabhakaran: Yeah.

Jing Zhang: So I think all this, uh, all ties together. Um, so business define why and but, uh, for the how, those best practice might help you to go

Hemnath Prabhakaran: faster. Yeah, absolutely. Yep.

Jing Zhang: Yeah. And also getting the full value. A lot of times you don't have, have all the things built ready to go. As I said, start small, but you plan big.

Plan big- Plan

Hemnath Prabhakaran: big ...

Jing Zhang: but start small. You, you have seen a lot of, uh, deployment with customers already, right? So, um, maybe you could, uh, share your insights of, uh, what are, what, what the characteristics of the common successful implementation versus the ones that had, uh, challenges.

Hemnath Prabhakaran: Yeah. So I think, I think the partners, uh, the choice of partners is, is as much as important as y- as much as the platform is, right?

And it, I think, uh, I think the scale behind what our persistent badge is, is what matters here, right? So we have about, uh, 2,800, uh, uh, cl- uh, AWS delivery per, uh, professionals, about 1,700 certifications across professional, uh, uh, cloud skills, right? And we have about 150 plus AWS engagements. I mean, as we speak today, I mean, maybe that has increased.

Uh, and not just, uh, Amazon Connect delivery capability. Uh, we have expertise across all Amazon services, right? For AWS services, right? For example, from cloud, uh, to cloud SaaS model, uh, migration and data analytics. We have, we have, uh, experience across all AWS services. That brings-- That adds value to our Amazon Connect delivery capability.

And one important thing which, which I wanted to point out is, you know, we have our own accelerators when it comes to migration, okay? Uh, our accel- we have our own automation. And what it does, it connects to a target system, uh, transforms all the contact center metrics and data, and all those agents and skill groups and other information, and transforms that data into the target system, which is in this case is Amazon Connect, right?

So that actually helps them to streamline the migration and actually fast-track, right?

Jing Zhang: Yeah.

Hemnath Prabhakaran: So as you know, when it comes to migration, right, you have this big spreadsheet of agents. You know, you have to map those agents, skills, and all this stuff. You know, we kind of transform that instantaneously in couple of days.

Okay. And on top-- yeah. And on top of that, we have a call flow assist, uh, accelerator. What it does is, I know these call flows were developed over a long period of time. Probably some of the call flows don't even have any documentation. You, you, you know it. You have been in this space for so long, right? So we have our call flow assist tool where it goes and pulls the information and, and we can analyze the call flows, how it is set up, right?

And transform those c- those flows, the customer experience flows, into Amazon Connect's AI agentic flows, right? That actually helps to streamline the overall business transformation, and that's where persistent comes in, right? And also the, uh, the other key accelerator that we bring in is our automation platform, right?

Okay. We, we, we did the migration. After migration where you need to automate the onboarding of agents, you know- Mm-hmm ... reskilling. So we have our own accelerator tools that helps them post-migration, which is, uh, k- the key thing that you mentioned, uh, right? You know- Migration ... start small, right? And then grow, right?

Yeah. So we have tools to cover from migration to post-migration.

Jing Zhang: Yeah. So I've been watched, uh, observed, uh, helped with many migrations too. What you touched to is very definitely some of the key, uh, factors for success. So first of all is you need to understand the old system, right? Whatever- Yeah ... they were doing before.

Yeah. But, um, I do not encourage a shift, a lift and shift migration, right? 'Cause, um, a lot of times if you are trying to do the exact same thing with AI, which you did like 20 years ago, uh, you will not get the full value. So but you have to understand what they were doing, uh, before, and now you can transform to the new, uh, process, a more optimized process with AI.

So you gotta understand both sides. That's first thing. And second thing is, as you said, user adoption will probably be the toughest or the longest to whole take, uh, now deployment, right? Everything else could be automated or configured, right, very quickly, but having the user to be able to use the tool in the right ways, get the efficiency, right?

That's really most important thing, and I'm glad you guys offer those accelerators- Yeah ... to be able to help.

Hemnath Prabhakaran: Yeah. Yeah. We have, we have lot of success stories as well when it comes to migration and using, using these tools. Uh, so we are, we are seeing lot of, uh, value add that we bring when it comes to the migration, right?

So, uh, and I know we work closely with you, so you see our expertise in terms of when it, uh, in terms of the migrating our contact center, you know.

Jing Zhang: The most, uh, the most, uh, uh, feature... The, the feature I love the most in your demos, I guess. Uh, thanks for the demos- Yeah. ... for, for the accelerators, right, is really about, uh, after you understand the customer's workflow, you use AI to recommend optimization of it, right?

So that's a, that's... It's such a great tool to, for help our customers to transform-

Hemnath Prabhakaran: Yeah. Yeah ...

Jing Zhang: and get the, um, yeah, be able to leverage AI to really optimize the, uh, call flows and workflows. So, um, let's talk about, uh, things beyond just contact center migration, right? So how could partners like Persistent can help us get the most value beyond, beyond initial go live?

As I said, like, like after phase one.

Hemnath Prabhakaran: I think, I think CX transformation, I mean, not just CX transformation, right? Any project for that matter, it's, it's complex. I mean, it's, uh, I mean, I won't pretend, right? What we do from a, uh, from a migration perspective is, you know, we assess, we design, uh, we migrate, and then we optimize, right?

These are the four pillars. You said, you know, it's a starting line, right? We, we also treat the same way. Any migration is a starting line, and we evolve as the business outcome, uh, grows, right? Now, that's where we come in and we help, and we provide managed services on top of it, right? We provide managed services, uh, 24/7 support, L1, L2, L3, right?

To keep your s- systems on, keep the lights on. The other key thing what we do, we provide a continuous engineering capability. Uh, what, what does it provide is, you know, we have, we have dedicated engineers supporting, uh, supporting the customer where, where we can enhance, add additional use cases as the business evolves, you know, which is the key factor, right?

Uh, you mentioned about all, all those Amazon Connect, uh, shipping new product features, right? Um, uh, uh, customer is not going to keep up to, up to date, right? That's where our, uh, our, our CSMs, our engineers, you know, keep up to date and, and work with the customers and, and, uh, and implement these new features and functionalities, you know, according to their business outcomes, right?

That's where we come in and help. And also, uh, human in the loop, right? Uh, the IVA fine-tuning, you know. When you start with a migration project, your start line is, you know, get, get the calls in, you know, uh, answer basic questions and route to an agent, right? It takes lot, it ta- uh, uh, it takes a lot of effort after the migration, right, where we fine-tune and improve your intent accuracy and, and, and, and all those great stuff that, uh, that is associated with the IV and also the agent assist, right?

You need to have someone fine-tune those responses, make sure it's all, it's all working, right? So, so we provide that continuous engineering capability, not just the managed services, right, 24/7. We add, we add this functionality as well. And I mean, that's how you run a platform into a business outcome, right?

Uh, that's, that's very key, right? Uh, you, you buy a platform, you know, you have, you have a great partner, you know, you migrated it, but what do you do after that, right? You, you got, you got to bring in real value, and that's where Persistent helps.

Jing Zhang: Yeah, that's what I've seen. Um, even customers are monitoring what's new with Amazon, right?

'Cause a lot of times you do get those emails on or, um, uh, web posts on what's new with Amazon Connect, right? A customer, and you get the new feature announcement. I do see, notice that, uh, a lot of times those announcement does really not give customer the right information or context to be able to act and say, "How would that benefit me?"

How would that relevant to me?" So I n- I think partners are the ones that help them to bring the context to it, right? A lot of times a feature announcement is just a feature announcement, but how can you use that into your own process and to get the full benefits is where a partner can translate that to our customers.

And I think one more thing after I, I talked with Loga, right? One of your leaders too, is also you have verticalized your- Yes. You guys are also vertical- Absolutely.

Hemnath Prabhakaran: Yeah ...

Jing Zhang: so you do have a vertical expertise, so you can really translate those general CX AI use cases- Yeah ... and with vertical needs, right?

'Cause every as, um-- now I'm aligned with vertical too. Yeah, every verticals, uh, totally have a different use cases, right? Like auto manufacturing, you-- Some have B2C, but some- Yeah ... have also have B2B, and then, right, you're dealing with your vendors and the channels and distributors. So how those cut comes in, in a specific, a specific use case for financial services or travel hospitality.

So I'm hoping that's some of the things you guys can also build with verticalized CX AI solutions and help us customers to get a real life, uh, benefits.

Hemnath Prabhakaran: Right. Thanks, Jing, for providing, you know, your valuable insights, uh, in Amazon Connect customer and the practical experiences. Thank you for joining this, uh, podcast.

Jing Zhang: Thank you. I really enjoyed the conversation with you, Hem.

Hemnath Prabhakaran: Likewise. We talk m- a lot on the customer transformation, uh, nowadays, you know. Uh, some of the insights that, that you have provided, uh, re- really adds a lot of value to customers who are listening to this podcast. And, and, and, uh, if you have any questions around, you know, how Persistent can help with this transformation, uh, please reach out to us or visit our website.

We certainly can, uh, uh, help you in, in the CX transformation.

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About Persistent

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