

**TRAFFIC**

the wildlife trade monitoring network



THE  
BEHAVIOURAL  
INSIGHTS  
TEAM



June 2019

# REDUCING DEMAND FOR ILLEGAL WILDLIFE

DESIGNING EFFECTIVE MESSAGES

## JOINT REPORT

# REDUCING DEMAND FOR ILLEGAL WILDLIFE

## Designing effective messages

TRAFFIC is a leading non-governmental organisation working globally on trade in wild animals and plants in the context of both biodiversity conservation and sustainable development.

The Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) is a global social purpose company that applies behavioural insights to inform policy, improve services, and help people to make better choices for themselves.

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These Good Practice Guidelines have been prepared following discussion at an “Expert Roundtable on Effective Messengers and Messaging, to Reduce Demand for Illegal Wildlife Products”.

The Expert Roundtable was one of a series convened by TRAFFIC, as part of its work supporting the Social and Behavioural Change Communications (SBCC) Community of Practice, working to reduce the demand for illegal wildlife products. The event was held in Bangkok, Thailand, August 2018 and attended by around 40 representatives of diverse institutions with relevant professional perspectives, experience or a mandate around demand reduction issues. Find out more here: [www.traffic.org/news/mitigating-the-markets-for-illegal-wildlife-products-experts-review-effective-demand-reduction-messengers-and-messaging/](http://www.traffic.org/news/mitigating-the-markets-for-illegal-wildlife-products-experts-review-effective-demand-reduction-messengers-and-messaging/)

These Guidelines aim to synthesise the key elements of Roundtable discussion, and are intended to sit alongside an associated resource, focused on Messengers. Both documents will be made available for all through the Wildlife Consumer Behaviour Change Toolkit: [www.changewildlifeconsumers.org](http://www.changewildlifeconsumers.org)

Further information regarding the SBCC Community of Practice is available from TRAFFIC Behaviour Change Coordinator, Gayle Burgess ([gayle.burgess@traffic.org](mailto:gayle.burgess@traffic.org)).

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# 1 INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

## Advertising campaigns are often more art than science.

Certainly, a large amount of creativity is needed to design an effective, eye-catching, and memorable campaign. However, there is a growing amount of evidence about what works in designing effective communications to change consumer choice, and, as importantly, what doesn't work (and could even backfire). Applying lessons from behavioural science can be useful in informing initiatives aiming to reduce consumer purchase and use of (or "demand" for) illegal wildlife products.

The following features are thus explored in detail in the pages that follow;



### HELP PEOPLE **DO THE RIGHT THING**

- ✓ Make the desired action clear
- ✓ Provide an alternate behaviour



### USE **RELEVANT CONSEQUENCES**

- ✓ Focus on consequences for the individual
- ✓ Highlight short-term consequences



### HARNESS **SOCIAL INFLUENCE**

- ✓ Use social norms
- ✓ Align action with identity



### INCREASE **RESONANCE**

- ✓ Make it personally relevant
- ✓ Highlight personal choice
- ✓ Use narratives when the risk of reactions is high

# Foundations for **Good Message Design**

To implement the suggestions in this Guidance, an initiative first requires two things:

## 1

### A specific and SMART objective for the behaviour it intends to change

A lack of clarity around what the desired behaviour is may increase the chance of mixed messages – or lead to overly ambitious/ optimistic aims. The demand for illegal wildlife products spans many thousands of taxa, and many different behaviours and motivations for consumption – from the illegal pet trade, to gifting and bribes, to inclusion in some types of traditional medicinal treatments to treat illness and promote wellness, to investment, and beyond. Within each of these behaviours exist many different segments of consumers, each with differing motivations and barriers to change. Objectives should be as specific as possible so that messaging can be tailored to these specific factors.

Objectives should also be realistic. For example, a generic initiative to protect tigers may be overly ambitious and span too many forms of consumption. However messaging specifically designed to reduce tourist purchases of tiger bone in local markets among Chinese visitors to Myanmar, or specifically targeting young Viet Nameese men who buy tooth and claw jewellery, can benefit from being tailored to those groups' specific motivations.



## 2

### An understanding of who is currently performing the behaviour

This is more than simply audience segmentation, although that is the first step. Whilst all of us exhibit behavioural biases, their relative strength may differ across individuals and groups. For example, in groups where it is important to conform to group norms, individual behaviours may be more likely to be influenced by those around them than in a group where standing out from the crowd is seen as desirable.<sup>1</sup> The recommendations applied in these Guidelines should be combined with a clear understanding of your audience and how they react to certain messages.

<sup>1</sup> Mori, K., & Arai, M. (2010). No need to fake it: Reproduction of the Asch experiment without confederates. *International Journal of Psychology*, 45(5), 390-397.

The tone and focus of media coverage is an interesting proxy for the way in which messaging can be adapted according to perceived audience interests. A study of English- and Chinese-language news articles showed that “over 75% [of the Chinese articles] highlighted the economic value of rhino horn carvings as collectible and investable assets”, whereas in the English articles, “an overwhelming 84% of international news articles highlighted the medical value when they mentioned rhino horn consumption in China, while only 6% of articles mentioned the investment element.”<sup>2</sup> This emphasises the importance of co-creating a message according to culturally specific, as well as audience specific, interests.

**Fundamentally, the initiative needs to know the audience it is speaking to, and what it wants that audience to do.** This is distinct from communications campaigns which aim to broadly raise awareness and concern over an issue. The case studies below illustrate the benefits of a more targeted and behaviourally-informed approach to messaging.

## Case studies

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### Identifying a target behaviour and related motivations



## Lessons on targeting from public health

The growth of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is one of the major health challenges of our time. The UK’s Review on Antimicrobial Resistance has forecast that AMR will result in 10 million deaths and \$100 trillion in unachieved GDP a year by 2050.<sup>3</sup> There is widespread agreement that the over-prescription of antibiotics is a major contributory factor to this risk.

<sup>2</sup> Gao, Y., Stoner, K. J., Lee, A. T., & Clark, S. G. (2016). Rhino horn trade in China: An analysis of the art and antiques market. *Biological Conservation*, 201, 343-347.

<sup>3</sup> O’Neill, J. (2016). Tackling drug-resistant infections globally: Final report and recommendations. London: Wellcome Trust & HM Government

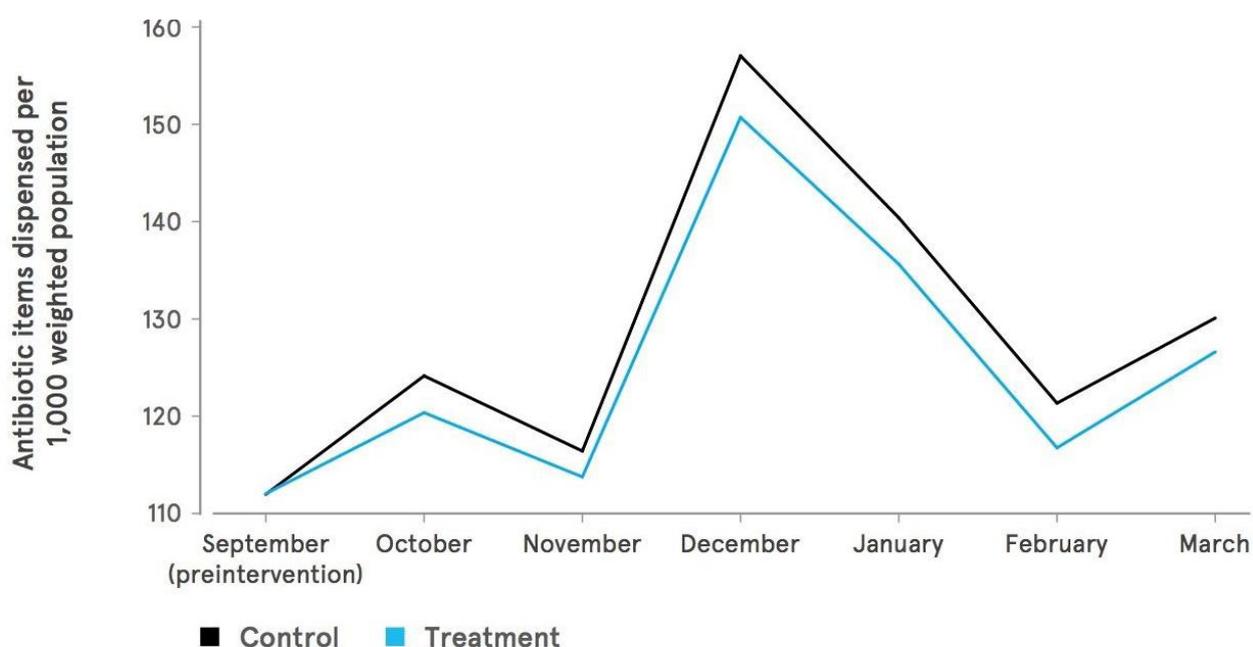
The Behavioural Insights Team, Public Health England, and England's Chief Medical Officer (CMO) collaborated on a project to reduce antibiotic prescription rates. National prescription data was used to identify those General Practitioner (GP) practices prescribing more frequently than local peers.

The top 20%, around 1,600 practices, were included in a "Randomised Controlled Trial" (RCT) where half of them received a letter from the England's Chief Medical Officer stating "the great majority (80 percent) of practices in [the recipient's local area] prescribe fewer antibiotics per head than yours". The letter also contained three simple, and actionable alternatives to immediate prescriptions. This single letter led to 73,406 fewer antibiotic prescriptions over six months.

This single letter intervention cost around £4,000 but caused a 3.3% reduction in prescriptions: the UK 5-Year Antimicrobial Resistance Strategy aimed to reduce prescribing by 4%.<sup>4</sup>

Concurrently, another trial compared the letter to a broader communications campaign. This involved posters and handouts across all practices, to warn of how unnecessary antibiotics contributed to AMR. This general campaign, though far more costly to implement, had no notable impact.<sup>5</sup> In other words, the simple but behaviourally-informed intervention met 75% of national targets at a low cost, whilst the conventional campaign, which cost many millions of pounds in awareness-raising activities, had no impact.

There are many differences between the two approaches, but critically, the letters took an approach which was targeted and tailored to the highest prescribers (rather than seeking to raise sector-wide awareness), and they were specific in the behaviours they sought to address and the ways in which recipients should address them. They also drew upon many of the behavioural principles discussed in this note: the letters were personalised, prompted easy alternate behaviours and strategies, and harnessed social influence or the ability for changes in social norms to influence individual actions.



<sup>4</sup> HM Government. *UK 5-year antimicrobial resistance (AMR) strategy 2013–2018: annual progress report and implementation plan*, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Hallsworth, M., Chadborn, T., Sallis, A., Sanders, M., Berry, D., Greaves, F., ... & Davies, S. C. (2016). Provision of social norm feedback to high prescribers of antibiotics in general practice: a pragmatic national randomised controlled trial. *The Lancet*, 387(10029), 1743-1752.

## section summary

4

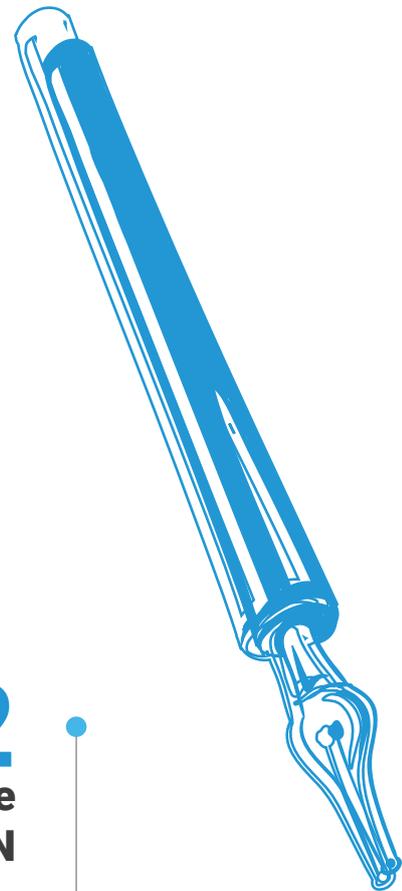
### key RECOMMENDATIONS for designing interventions

- HELP PEOPLE DO THE RIGHT THING
- USE RELEVANT CONSEQUENCES
- HARNESS SOCIAL INFLUENCE
- INCREASE RESONANCE

2

### foundations for message DESIGN

- SPECIFIC SMART OBJECTIVES
- ANALYSIS OF TARGET AUDIENCE





# 2 HELP PEOPLE DO THE RIGHT THING

Often, people intend to do the right thing, but do not always behave accordingly. This is called the intention-behaviour gap<sup>6</sup> (or the attitude-action/ value-action gap) and can be seen, for example, in the difference between the 95% of people in the US who support organ donation as compared to the 54% of people on the organ donor register.<sup>7</sup>

Intention-behaviour gaps are especially likely when it is not clear how one would accomplish the action. People's good intentions may slip their mind, or they may not act on them because of a lack of willpower or too much effort, or the benefits being too distant in the future.

**In order to close this gap, we need to make the 'right behaviour' as easy as possible —**

## Make the desired action clear

Breaking down vague and/ or complicated behaviours into straightforward, actionable steps.

## Provide an alternate behaviour

When asking people to stop performing a behaviour, provide a viable alternative that enables them to achieve their goals without the ill effects of the original behaviour.

## Make the desired action clear

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**We are much more likely to do something when it is easy for us to do.**<sup>8</sup> By making an action explicit and easy to follow, we increase behaviour change by reducing the effort required to complete the action. For example, telling someone to write-down time for an appointment makes them more likely to

<sup>6</sup> Sheeran, P., & Webb, T. L. (2016). The intention-behavior gap. *Social and personality psychology compass*, 10(9), 503-518.

<sup>7</sup> Statistics drawn from here: <https://www.organdonor.gov/statistics-stories/statistics.html>

<sup>5</sup> Wilson, E. J., & Sherrell, D. L. (1993). Source effects in communication and persuasion research: A meta-analysis of effect size. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 21(2), 101.

<sup>8</sup> The Behavioural Insights Team. (2014). *EAST: Four simple ways to apply behavioural insights*.

turn up than if they did not make such plans. This is a simple action that anyone reading the message will be familiar with and can act upon.

In the present context, this means where having more specific messages may reduce the risk of something called "moral licensing" effects. This refers to the phenomenon when people feel more able to perform a subsequent immoral behaviour.<sup>10</sup> For example, participants in one study who purchased environmentally-friendly products were more likely to cheat and steal compared to participants who purchased conventional products.<sup>11</sup>

In the context of the illegal wildlife trade, a more general message such as "Save the animals" may allow the audience room to recall examples of good behaviour that they have previously performed (e.g. making an environmentally friendly / socially conscious purchase on clothes or a household item) to justify purchasing an illegal wildlife product. However, a more specific message reduces moral licensing.

Messages can also be written as specific calls to action. For example: "Stop buying ivory products" may not be easy to follow if the person receiving the message does not know how to identify those items at the time of purchase. Instead, consider providing more specific instructions, such as "Avoid market stalls which sell bone jewellery."<sup>12</sup>

It is worth noting that such specific instructions do not need to (and indeed, should not) be the key message or headline of your campaign or initiative. Rather, consider a shorter and more memorable campaign message but ensure that you are also providing specific calls to action for your audience, with clear instructions. This could range from signing a petition or commitment pledge; to sharing on social media; to avoiding certain suppliers or markets in favour of alternatives. In this way, behaviour change will become more likely and easier to promote.

## Provide an alternate behaviour

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**We are more likely to change our purchasing decisions when we are offered a clear alternative.**<sup>13</sup> The benefits (and risks) of alternatives to products derived from the illegal wildlife trade have been well-discussed elsewhere,<sup>14</sup> but often focus on direct substitutes (for example, synthetic versions of animal products).

However, broader alternatives may be more effective because they change the terms of the comparison. For example, when trying to increase uptake of a vegetarian breakfast, the description "field-grown"

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<sup>10</sup> Blanken, I., van de Ven, N., & Zeelenberg, M. (2015). A meta-analytic review of moral licensing. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 41(4), 540-558.

<sup>11</sup> Mazar, N., & Zhong, C. B. (2010). Do green products make us better people?. *Psychological science*, 21(4), 494-498.

<sup>12</sup> Adapted from recommendations by the WWF: [http://www.wwf.sg/get\\_involved/say\\_no\\_to\\_illegal\\_wildlife\\_products/](http://www.wwf.sg/get_involved/say_no_to_illegal_wildlife_products/)

<sup>13</sup> Huang A, Barzi F, Huxley R, Denyer G, Rohrlach B, et al. (2006) The effects on saturated fat purchases of providing Internet shoppers with purchase-specific dietary advice: A randomised trial. *PLoS Clin Trials* 1(5): e22

<sup>14</sup> Broad, S., & Burgess, G. (2016). Synthetic biology, product substitution and the battle against illegal wildlife trade. *TRAFFIC bulletin*, 28(1), 23.

performed significantly better than “meat-free”, as the former emphasised what the vegetarian option offered rather than what it lacked.<sup>15</sup>

The important feature of effective alternatives is that they satisfy the same fundamental motivations and desires, or in economic terms, carry equivalent product attributes and functionality. This ensures that adopting the alternative is easy and enables the individual to adjust their behaviour. For instance, if we aim to help people stop smoking cigarettes, the most effective alternative is likely to be an e-cigarette, since the desire is one of satisfying an urge for nicotine and the ingrained habit for the physical act of smoking.<sup>16</sup> More distant alternatives are unlikely to be as effective. In the case of the vegetarian breakfast, the motivation is for a delicious meal – making the vegetarian meal sound delicious is therefore key.

Similarly, motivations for gifting of illegal wildlife products are variously rooted in status and exclusivity, currying favour, generosity, artistic value, memorability and so on. As such, sustainable or synthetic versions of the same product may be seen as an inferior alternative.



## Do's

## Action steps

- **Break down the action** that you would like people to take into a discrete behaviour, to make it as easy as possible for them to act

“Avoid market stalls which sell bone jewellery - look instead for traditionally crafted silver”

- **Provide a specific alternative** behaviour that you would like people to do, instead of only saying what they should not do

“Instead of buying an ivory necklace as a luxury gift, you can still purchase a valuable and unique gift by buying a traditional Hmong necklace – available in Laos, China, Thailand and Viet Nam”

<sup>15</sup> The Behavioural Insights Team. (2019). *The Behavioural Insights Team Annual Update Report 2017-18*.

<sup>16</sup> See this report by Public Health England, that underpins their public position on the viability of e-cigarettes as a substitute for traditional cigarettes: McNeill, A., Brose, L. S., Calder, R., Bauld, L., & Robson, D. (2018). *Evidence review of e-cigarettes and heated tobacco products 2018*. A report commissioned by Public Health England. London: Public Health England, 6.

# 3 USE RELEVANT CONSEQUENCES



**Knowing the consequences of a potential action and wanting to avoid them is often a motivating factor for people to change their behaviour.** However, the consequences that will motivate such behaviour change is not always clear.

For example, while many anti-smoking campaigns focus on the negative health risks of smoking (e.g. pictures of diseased gums and lungs on the front of cigarette packs), regular smokers may not want to acknowledge these risks – indeed, some studies have even demonstrated that regular smokers actively avoid looking at the health warnings on cigarette packs.<sup>17</sup> We should think about this in terms of how shock and fear messages affect our audiences: are we simply encouraging consumers to avoid our messages entirely?

In the example of anti-smoking campaigns, a more effective consequence to potentially highlight to smokers may be the impact of smoking on their appearance and presentation (e.g. the smell of smoke on their clothes, staining of their teeth).<sup>18</sup> When designing interventions to reduce demand for illegal wildlife, we need to find the right consequence to change behaviour – which might not always be the obvious or the most significant.

**To identify the consequences that are most likely to motivate behaviour change, we need to:**

## Focus on consequences for the individual

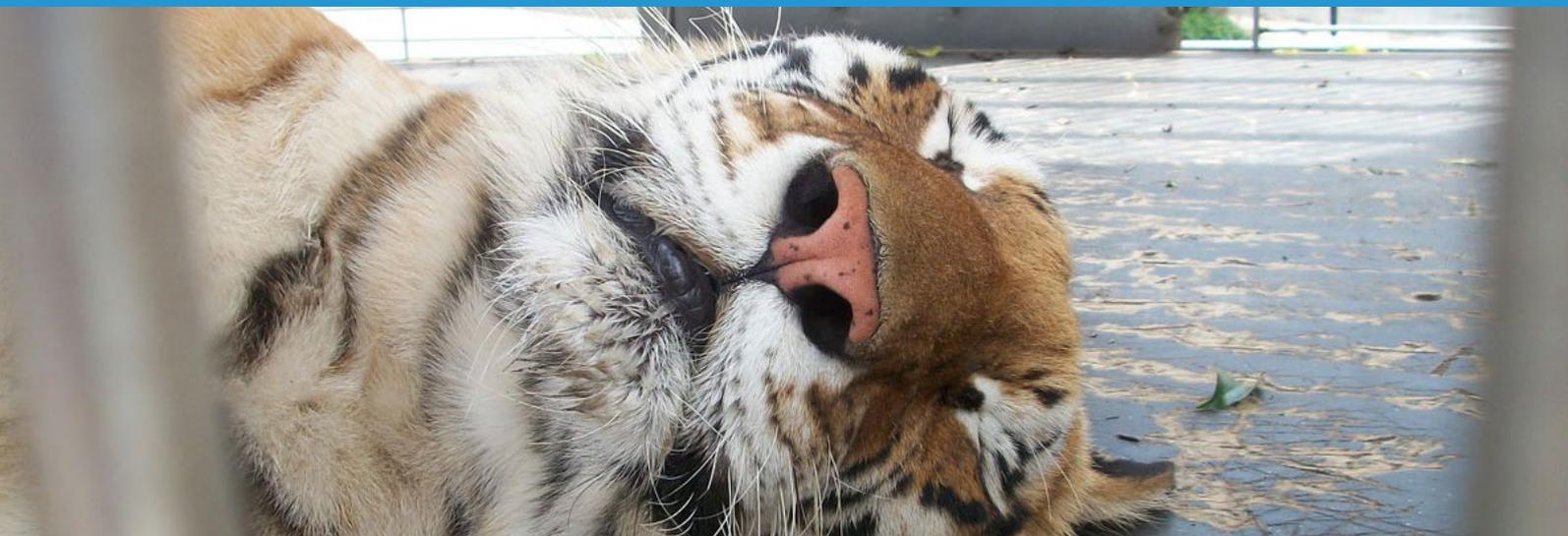
Making the potential consequences of a behaviour directly relevant to the individual.

## Highlight short-term consequences

Focusing on immediate short-term consequences rather than long-term consequences.

<sup>17</sup> Maynard, O. M., Attwood, A., O'Brien, L., Brooks, S., Hedge, C., Leonards, U., & Munafò, M. R. (2014). Avoidance of cigarette pack health warnings among regular cigarette smokers. *Drug and alcohol dependence*, 136, 170-174.

<sup>18</sup> Smith, K. H., & Stutts, M. A. (2003). Effects of short-term cosmetic versus long-term health fear appeals in anti-smoking advertisements on the smoking behaviour of adolescents. *Journal of consumer behaviour: An international research review*, 3(2), 157-177.



## Focus on consequences for the individual

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**Whilst pro-social motivations do affect our behaviour, we often overestimate their impact on our decision-making.**<sup>19,20</sup> In the moment a decision is made, personal consequences are more likely to catch our attention and have a greater impact on our behaviour. Much research shows this to be particularly true with sustainable and pro-animal-welfare behaviours, in which there is a significant intention-behaviour gap.<sup>21</sup> We report having pro-environmental values, but only act on them when it is easy to do so,<sup>22</sup> and we report concern for animal welfare, but variously ignore, downplay, or rationalise our self-interested purchase of animal products.<sup>23</sup>

This may be particularly true for demand reduction initiative target audience, as they are not likely to have pre-existing sustainability or animal welfare priorities. Harnessing and highlighting costs to the individual, rather than wildlife, can therefore be more effective. Note that this may be the case even if market research shows that public responses to wildlife-focused campaigns are positive – such self-reported responses reveal more about a person's outward-facing values and intentions rather than the true determinants of their behaviour.

Highlighting the principle of focusing on costs to the individual, one study aimed at reducing the purchase of exotic pets found that informing potential purchasers about the risk of zoonotic disease or legal consequences of exotic pet ownership reduced their intention to buy one. However, providing information on animal welfare or conservation risks did not similarly reduce intentions to buy.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Ariely, D., Bracha, A., & Meier, S. (2009). Doing good or doing well? Image motivation and monetary incentives in behaving prosocially. *American Economic Review*, 99(1), 544-55

<sup>20</sup> Mazar, N., Amir, O., & Ariely, D. (2008). The dishonesty of honest people: A theory of self-concept maintenance. *Journal of marketing research*, 45(6), 633-644.

<sup>21</sup> Kollmuss, A., & Agyeman, J. (2002). Mind the gap: why do people act environmentally and what are the barriers to pro-environmental behavior?. *Environmental education research*, 8(3), 239-260.

<sup>22</sup> Diekmann, A., & Preisendörfer, P. (2003). Green and greenback: The behavioral effects of environmental attitudes in low-cost and high-cost situations. *Rationality and Society*, 15(4), 441-472.

<sup>23</sup> Ditto, P. H., Pizarro, D. A., & Tannenbaum, D. (2009). Motivated moral reasoning. *Psychology of learning and motivation*, 50, 307-338.

<sup>24</sup> Moorhouse, T. P., Balaskas, M., D'Cruze, N. C., & Macdonald, D. W. (2017). Information could reduce consumer demand for exotic pets. *Conservation Letters*, 10(3), 337-345.

There may be times when you also want to highlight the costs to others – human or animal. In these cases, note that we are more moved to help an individual in need than multiple people,<sup>25</sup> particularly when that individual is identified.<sup>26</sup> If the plight of multiple people is being presented, it is best done by presenting them as a united group. For example, whilst we are less willing to contribute to the cause of eight individuals than for one; when those eight individuals are presented as siblings there is no decline in willingness to help.<sup>27</sup>

It is unclear whether this "identifiable victim" effect translates to animals. One study suggests similar patterns, i.e. that compassion "fades" as victims become more numerous and less identifiable, except among environmentalists (who remain compassionate about statistical victims).<sup>28</sup> However, another recent conservation study suggests that the identifiable victim effect does not translate well to animals,<sup>29</sup> implying that we might be wise to focus more on the human impact (e.g. lost livelihood of community members, or killed rangers). The same study also found that flagship species evoke more support than non-flagship species. More research is needed, particularly in light of anecdotal evidence from recent stories of trophy hunting (such as "Cecil the lion")<sup>30</sup> which have shown that when animals are named and anthropomorphised by the media, a very strong response can be elicited.

## Highlight short-term consequences

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"Present bias" describes the tendency for people to overvalue immediate rewards at the expense of their long-term intentions. For example, people are more likely to choose healthy snacks to eat in the future, but unhealthy ones to eat in the present.<sup>31</sup>

One study of two school-based interventions found that the intervention that emphasised the immediate physiological effects of smoking (e.g. changes in blood pressure, lung capacity) was more effective in decreasing smoking behaviour compared to the intervention that emphasised the long-term health consequences.<sup>32</sup>

Given this tendency towards "present bias", instead we can attempt to make the short-term consequences of someone's actions feel more personal, near, and urgent. For example, although purchasing an illegal wildlife product may lead to the future consequence of penalties and deterrents if found out, given people's tendency to be present biased, it may be more effective to focus on the

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<sup>25</sup> Västfjäll, D., Slovic, P., Mayorga, M., & Peters, E. (2014). Compassion fade: Affect and charity are greatest for a single child in need. *PloS one*, 9(6)

<sup>26</sup> Kogut, T., & Ritov, I. (2005). The "identified victim" effect: An identified group, or just a single individual?. *Journal of Behavioral Decision Making*, 18(3), 157-167.

<sup>27</sup> Västfjäll, D., Slovic, P., Mayorga, M., & Peters, E. (2014). Compassion fade: Affect and charity are greatest for a single child in need. *PloS one*, 9(6)

<sup>28</sup> Markowitz, E., Slovic, P., Västfjäll, D., & Hodges, S. (2013). *Compassion fade and the challenge of environmental conservation*.

<sup>29</sup> Thomas-Walters, L., & J Raihani, N. (2017). Supporting Conservation: The Roles of Flagship Species and Identifiable Victims. *Conservation Letters*, 10(5), 581-587.

<sup>30</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Killing\\_of\\_Cecil\\_the\\_lion](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Killing_of_Cecil_the_lion)

<sup>31</sup> Read, D., & van Leeuwen, B. (1998). Predicting hunger: The effects of appetite and delay on choice. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 76(2), 189-205.

<sup>32</sup> Perry, C., Killen, J., Telch, M., Slinkard, L. A., & Danaher, B. G. (1980). Modifying smoking behavior of teenagers: a school-based intervention. *American journal of public health*, 70(7), 722-725.

more short-term consequences: wasting money on a fake; losing the respect of your family; losing reputation amongst peers keen to present a more modern image. Small, certain risks are generally far more motivating than large, uncertain risks.



## Do's

## Action steps

- **Focus on the consequences** an individual will face as a result of the action

“Consuming illegal wildlife products for medicinal purposes puts you at a higher risk for contracting zoonotic diseases.”

- Highlight **consequences** that will occur in the **short-term**

“By purchasing rhino horn as a gift, you run the risk of losing a lot of money for a product of uncertain quality.”

# 4 HARNESS SOCIAL INFLUENCE

How we behave is determined not only by our private thoughts and beliefs, but also how others speak and act. More often than not, we follow the majority, and are considered to be influenced by how others around us behave, particularly those with whom we share a social identity and are "like us".

**In order to use social influence to encourage desired behaviours through messaging, we can:**

## Use social norms

We comply with what others are doing because we don't want to be the odd one out, and because we succumb to social pressure to act in accordance with norms.

## Align action with identity

We try to behave in ways that are congruent with our social identities.

## Use social norms

---

We tend to do what those around us are already doing and take our cues about social norms from how others behave – particularly how others similar to us behave. There are two types of norms that we can use: descriptive and injunctive norms. Descriptive norms describe the behaviour that other people do, while injunctive norms describe behaviour that others approve of.<sup>33</sup>

Ideally, we would use descriptive norms that signal a positive behaviour and make those norms as specific as possible. When a hotel room contained a sign that asked people to recycle their towels to save the environment, only 35.1% did so when the message focussed on the environment, whilst 44.1% of guests did so when told most guests at the hotel recycled their towels at least once. Even more guests re-used their towels (49.3%) when told that most previous occupants of that particular room had re-used their towels.<sup>34</sup> Well-selected peers help to signal specificity, and thus, relevance.

<sup>33</sup> Cialdini, R. B., & Trost, M. R. (1998). *Social influence: Social norms, conformity and compliance*.

<sup>34</sup> Goldstein, N. J., Cialdini, R. B., & Griskevicius, V. (2008). A room with a viewpoint: Using social norms to motivate environmental conservation in hotels. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 35(3), 472-482.

Similarly, if we want to convince businessmen to stop buying ivory products as business gifts, it may be more helpful to say “50 leading businessmen like you have committed to stop buying ivory products” than simply “100 people have committed to stop buying ivory products”.

Descriptive norms work when the norm corrects the audiences’ prior beliefs in the appropriate direction. As such, it is not always necessary for the behaviour to be particularly prevalent. For example, BIT have used descriptive norms to boost tax compliance in several countries around the world. This has proven effective both where tax compliance levels are high (as in the UK, over 90%), or low (as in Guatemala, although it is still over 60%).<sup>35</sup> In the UK, recipients told that “9 out of 10 people pay their tax on time” recognised they were in the minority. In Guatemala, although non-compliance was relatively common, hearing that “6 out of 10 pay on time” is still much higher than recipients would typically presume to be the case, undermining the belief that “no-one pays their tax on time, so I won’t either”.

This explanation is supported by research that BIT undertook in partnership with Ipsos Mori. Surveying over 1,000 people’s perceptions of tax avoidance in six countries, it was identified that people systematically overestimated tax avoidance.<sup>36</sup> Similar research could look to find differences between the actual rates, and perceived rates, of various behaviours relating to illegal wildlife consumption. In these instances descriptive social norm messages could be put to good effect.

However, we cannot use descriptive norms when the prevalent behaviour is undesirable. For example, visitors were more likely to steal petrified wood from a park when the sign suggested that many people did so (“Many past visitors have removed petrified wood from the Park, changing the natural state of the Petrified Forest”, accompanied by pictures of three visitors taking wood).<sup>37</sup> Thus, if the message is that everyone engages in bad behaviour, the audience may follow suit.

In such cases, we can use injunctive norms instead. For example, in a study where customers received personalised energy bills showing their consumption relative to neighbours, those who were higher than average users used less after receiving the letter (the expected norm effect), while those who were lower than average users started using more (also expected, but an undesirable norming effect). However when an injunctive “ought to” message accompanied this comparison, the desirable reduction in high-users became even stronger, while the unintended “boomerang” effect of low-users disappeared.<sup>38</sup>

Another alternative to consider using when descriptive norms are misaligned with the desired behaviour are dynamic norms. These refer to information about how people’s behaviour are changing over time, and they have also been demonstrated to be effective in influencing behaviour. An example of a dynamic norm might be “In the last five years, 3 in 10 people have changed their behaviour and begun to eat less meat than they otherwise would.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> The Behavioural Insights Team. (2014). *Results from BIT tax trial in Guatemala*. Retrieved from <https://www.bi.team/blogs/results-from-bit-tax-trial-in-guatemala/>

<sup>36</sup> The Behavioural Insights Team & Ipsos Mori (2015). *Major survey shows Britons overestimate the bad behaviour of other people*. Retrieved from <https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/major-survey-shows-britons-overestimate-bad-behaviour-other-people>

<sup>37</sup> Cialdini, R. B. (2003). Crafting normative messages to protect the environment. *Current directions in psychological science*, 12(4), 105-109.

<sup>38</sup> Allcott, H. (2011). Social norms and energy conservation. *Journal of public economics*, 95(9-10), 1082-1095.

<sup>39</sup> Sparkman, G., & Walton, G. M. (2017). Dynamic norms promote sustainable behavior, even if it is counternormative. *Psychological science*, 28(11), 1663-1674.

# Align action with identity

A large part of how we see ourselves is made up of the different groups that we consider ourselves part of – our group identities. These identities can have a substantial impact on how we behave. For example, we will often act in ways that conform to our group identity in order to strengthen our sense of belonging to it, and resist arguments which we see as a threat to our group identity.<sup>40</sup> An individual will hold many identities at one time – for example, they may define themselves as a family member, a colleague, somebody interested in cooking, running, biographies or art. Which identity influences their behaviour at any moment is likely to depend on what is important in the moment.

In terms of the illegal wildlife trade, messages can be aligned with important identities of a particular target audience. For example, an initiative that is targeting professionals could focus on what forward-thinking or outward-looking businessmen would do.

Group identities can also be defined against another (for example, political identities). In these cases, behaviour may also be determined by an effort to distinguish oneself from that group. A series of experiments in healthcare, for example, have shown that portraying certain unhealthy behaviours as associated with a group that participants do not identify with (e.g. in the experiment carried out with undergraduates, this dissociative group was "graduate students") can reduce the behaviour.<sup>41</sup>

It is important to note, however, the distinction between criticising the behaviour and associating it with a dissociative group. Criticising a behaviour that an individual has engaged with is likely to make them defensive and could backfire, whilst associating it with a group identity they do not identify with is less direct.



## Do's

- *Use specific descriptive norms, especially where the message corrects prior beliefs in the desirable direction*
- *If an undesirable behaviour is the prevalent norm, use injunctive or dynamic norms instead*
- *Associate desired behaviours with important and positive identities*

## Action steps

"Hundreds of successful businessmen like you have committed to buying alternative gifts instead of ivory."

"Do the right thing by banning illegal wildlife products in your business."

"More and more businesses like yours are signing up to zero-tolerance policies on wildlife gifting."

"Forward-thinking businessmen do not buy rhino horns as gifts."

<sup>40</sup> Charness, G., Rigotti, L., & Rustichini, A. (2007). Individual behavior and group membership. *American Economic Review*, 97(4), 1340-1352.

<sup>41</sup> Berger, J., & Rand, L. (2008). Shifting signals to help health: Using identity signaling to reduce risky health behaviors. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 35(3), 509-518.

# 5 INCREASE RESONANCE

Researchers from the University of California, San Diego estimate that the average American consumes 34 gigabytes of information on an average day.<sup>42</sup> As producers of such information, it is crucial to increase the likelihood of people engaging with the message that you are trying to communicate to them, amidst the other information that is competing for their attention.

This is especially important if the message that you are communicating has the potential to provoke negative feelings, discourage people from performing the desired behaviour, or even strengthen their stance against you – this is sometimes referred to as "reactance", where the arousal of negative affect creates the motivation to act contrary to what is being asked.<sup>43</sup>

For example, messages of guilt, blame, and "should not" are common in the environmental sector. We are motivated to avoid guilt, and so these messages can be effective where the required behaviour is easy.<sup>44</sup> Where it is costly or difficult, however, we tend to instead resolve the guilt by reacting against the message: denial, defensiveness, or motivated avoidance of the issue. Research shows that eliciting emotions with positive valence, such as pride at what you could do, can be more effective in this situation.<sup>45</sup>

**Amidst the density of information, in order to increase audience engagement with your message and reduce reactance towards it, we need to:**

<sup>42</sup> Bohn, R., & Short, J. (2012). Measuring Consumer Information. *International Journal of Communication*, 6, 980-1000.

<sup>43</sup> Brehm, S. S., & Brehm, J. W. (2013). Psychological reactance: A theory of freedom and control. *Academic Press*.

<sup>44</sup> Baek, T. H., Yoon, S. (2017). Guilt and shame: Environmental message framing effects. *Journal of Advertising* 46(3) 440-453.

<sup>45</sup> Schneider, C. R., Zaval, L., Weber, E. U., & Markowitz, E. M. (2017). The influence of anticipated pride and guilt on pro-environmental decision making. *PLoS one*, 12(11), e0188781.

### **Make it personally relevant**

People should feel that the message is being directed specifically to them, rather than to the general masses.

### **Highlight personal choice**

Ensure that people recognise the impact of their choices and actions, to discourage inaction and passivity.

### **Use narratives when the risk of reactance is high**

Storytelling and narratives may soften a message that would otherwise provoke negative feelings if communicated too directly.

## **Make it personally relevant**

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### **We are more likely to pay attention to content that we feel is tailored or personally relevant to us.**

Adding a person's name to a letter, email, or text, for example, has been shown consistently to improve response rates and engagement even when no other changes have been made.<sup>46</sup>

Whilst using a person's name is a particularly common form of personalisation, messages can be tailored in other ways depending on the information available. For example, researchers conducted a meta-analysis on the impact of different types of tailoring on health messages--based on demographics (e.g. gender or race), past behaviour (e.g. providing feedback on outcomes over the previous week), or on theoretical concepts (e.g. the recipient's level of self-efficacy). The research found that tailored messages were 6% more effective at achieving behavioural change than generic ones, and that the effectiveness increased when multiple forms of tailoring were used in combination.<sup>47</sup>

While it is often easier to personalise direct messages, the same principles can still be applied in mass media campaigns. This can be done based on a presumed audience for the campaign (for example, posters located outside a school could specifically address parents) or on a target audience (for example, personalising to members of a particular association).

For those with the resources to go a step further, online targeting of adverts enables more nuanced targeting. For example, different messages could be shown to those who had previously searched for "luxury ivory gifts" compared to "natural cure for rheumatism", both of which may indicate risk of future purchases. Suggested alternatives (see earlier in note) could also be varied to reflect the browser's location.

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<sup>46</sup> The Behavioural Insights Team. (2014). *EAST: Four simple ways to apply behavioural insights*

<sup>47</sup> Noar, S. M., Benac, C. N., & Harris, M. S. (2007). Does tailoring matter? Meta-analytic review of tailored print health behavior change interventions. *Psychological bulletin*, 133(4), 673.

# Highlight personal choice

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**We find it easier to make passive rather than active choices, even when the active choice is an action that we intend or want to take.** For example, although 9 in 10 people in the UK support organ donation, fewer than 1 in 3 are registered.<sup>48</sup>

Emphasising that an individual has a choice to make highlights that all options are an active choice and makes it harder for them to explain away the negative impacts of their decisions, which can make them behave in more moral ways. For example, several trials have found that highlighting non-payment of bills and taxes as a deliberate choice (rather than an oversight) increases payment rates.<sup>49,50,51</sup>

Highlighting choice and personal responsibility, and associating this with positive emotions such as pride, might also be particularly effective when compared to the alternative of telling someone what to do, which can have backfire effects. For example, a brochure telling readers to stand-up against prejudice increased readers' prejudice towards black people, but a similar brochure emphasising why prejudice reduction is important and a choice we make, significantly reduced prejudice.<sup>52</sup>

In the context of illegal wildlife trade, change agents can consider highlighting to consumers that purchasing wildlife products is an active choice with real consequences, and invite them instead to feel positive about their role in creating change.

# Use narratives when risk of reactance is high

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Persuasive arguments are not without risk. When we encounter an argument that we disagree with, we will often start to generate our own arguments against it. In doing so we engage in "self-persuasion" and often become more convinced of our original viewpoint.<sup>53</sup>

Narratives and storytelling provide an alternative way of getting a view across. Compared to direct arguments, narratives are less likely to provoke and counter-arguments, and they can also help to change perceived norms.<sup>54</sup> The impact of narratives has also been evaluated in numerous settings. For example, a meta-analysis of 74 studies which evaluated the effect of narratives on beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behaviours found a positive impact on all four aspects.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> The Behavioural Insights Team. (2013). *Applying Behavioural Insights to Organ Donation*.

<sup>49</sup> The Behavioural Insights Team. (2016). *The Behavioural Insights Team Annual Update Report 2015-16*.

<sup>50</sup> Hernandez, M., Jamison, J., Korczyk, E., Mazar, N., & Sormani, R. (2017). *Applying Behavioural Insights to Improve Tax Collection: Experimental Evidence from Poland*. The World Bank.

<sup>51</sup> The Behavioural Insights Team. (2014). *Results from BIT tax trial in Guatemala*. Retrieved from <https://www.bi.team/blogs/results-from-bit-tax-trial-in-guatemala/>

<sup>52</sup> Legault, L., Gutsell, J. N., & Inzlicht, M. (2011). Ironic effects of antiprejudice messages: How motivational interventions can reduce (but also increase) prejudice. *Psychological Science*, 22(12), 1472-1477.

<sup>53</sup> Tormala, Z. L., & Petty, R. E. (2002). What doesn't kill me makes me stronger: The effects of resisting persuasion on attitude certainty. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 83(6), 1298.

<sup>54</sup> Moyer-Gusé, E. (2008). Toward a theory of entertainment persuasion: Explaining the persuasive effects of entertainment-education messages. *Communication Theory*, 18, 407-425

<sup>55</sup> Braddock, K., & Dillard, J. P. (2016). Meta-analytic evidence for the persuasive effect of narratives on beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behaviors. *Communication Monographs*, 83(4), 446-467.

This does not mean that narratives are a silver bullet – the evidence on whether they are more or less effective than statistical messages is mixed.<sup>56,57,58</sup> Therefore, they are best used when there is a specific case for their impact, such as when direct arguments are likely to provoke reaction rather than resonance. Narratives have also been found to be more effective at promoting positive behaviours than stopping negative ones.<sup>59</sup>



## Do's

## Action steps

- Identify your target audience and **personalise your message** for them

“Hi Jane, the Business Networking Association has recently pledged to go shark’s fin-free at all our events. As a loyal member of the association, would you like to pledge against illegal wildlife trade too?”

- Highlight that an individual’s **action/inaction is a personal choice**

“By purchasing ivory, you are actively choosing to endanger elephant populations.”

- If the risk of reactance is high, consider using **narratives to promote positive behaviours** instead of direct messages

“John is a successful businessman who is well-regarded amongst his peers. Last year, he bought front-row tickets to the opera for one of his clients, who is a lover of the arts. His client appreciated the gesture and treasured the memorable experience. Since then, John has decided to gift his clients with unique experiences rather than physical items, as they demonstrate his sincerity in finding a gift that is once-in-a-lifetime, meaningful, and tailored to each of his clients.”

<sup>56</sup> Shen, F., Sheer, V. C., & Li, R. (2015). Impact of narratives on persuasion in health communication: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Advertising*, 44(2), 105-113

<sup>57</sup> Braddock, K., & Dillard, J. P. (2016). Meta-analytic evidence for the persuasive effect of narratives on beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behaviors. *Communication Monographs*, 83(4), 446-467.

<sup>58</sup> Allen, M., & Preiss, R. W. (1997). Comparing the persuasiveness of narrative and statistical evidence using meta-analysis. *Communication Research Reports*, 14, 125-131.

<sup>59</sup> Shen, F., Sheer, V. C., & Li, R. (2015). Impact of narratives on persuasion in health communication: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Advertising*, 44(2), 105-113

# Final notes

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These Guidelines have aimed to bring together some of the literature from the field of behavioural science and illustrate how to apply them to designing effective messages aimed at reducing demand for the illegal wildlife trade.

Ideally, messages designed in accordance with the principles laid out in these Guidelines will have utilised some/ all of the following principles -- making the desired behaviour easy for the audience to do, highlighting the short-term costs to the individual that would result from not performing the desired behaviour, harnessing social norms and appeals to audiences' social identities to encourage the desired behaviour, and increasing audience engagement with the message while reducing the likelihood of negative reactions or "reactance".

The scope employed represents the first step in taking a more behaviourally-informed approach in tackling this important but challenging issue. It's important to remember that even with the best behavioural science theory and evidence at our disposal, human behaviour is ultimately context-specific, complex and unpredictable. It is therefore critical that we robustly evaluate the impact of our initiatives. Well-crafted messages and appropriate messengers make the perfect match – see our **CHOOSING THE RIGHT MESSENGER** Guidelines for more details and other material on the Wildlife Consumer Behaviour Change Toolkit [www.changewildlifeconsumers.org](http://www.changewildlifeconsumers.org).

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# EFFECTIVE QUALITIES

Link to Target Audience's Core Values - "quality of life" issues

Understanding the demand key to effective messaging. The different motivation of demand for mino horn in China & Viet Nam is an example.

Principle  
- Show how it impacts them

Guiding Principle  
• Know your TARGET AUDIENCE

Guiding Principle  
• Include Corruption - to help w/ message

Insight Driven Messaging  
Know your target audience.  
↓  
Extract pivotal insight(s)

# GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Legends  
How we are so/very talkative to general pop but specific consumer requests

Message  
depending on knowledge of our target audience

Message  
Concepts of "it's so small - not a big deal"  
Self-efficacy

Message  
• Personalize it  
• Connect back to target audience

Message

TRAFFIC, the wildlife trade monitoring network, is a leading non-governmental organisation working globally on trade in wild animals and plants in the context of both biodiversity conservation and sustainable development.

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