ROBERT WALTERS WHITEPAPER

USING SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS

insight
series

ROBERT WALTERS

INTRODUCTION

The social media phenomenon has opened up new paths of engagement and revolutionised the exchange of information. With more people engaging with social media, it is worth investigating its relevance to the recruitment process.

The purpose of this whitepaper is to assess how employers can make best use of social media as part of the recruitment process. It examines which platforms are best suited to hosting job search information, which can help achieve recruitment goals and how they are used by employers and candidates.

We examine a number of key questions. Are companies confident of using social media intelligently to target candidates? How wide should organisations cast their net? Where and how should they provide information about their operations, and which information should they use to evaluate job seekers?

Specifically, this whitepaper examines:

- Membership of social media websites among job seekers and employers;

- Perceived differences between social media websites and their impact on the recruitment process;

- How social media is used as part of the recruitment process: on which sites applicants apply and where they expect to be approached;

- How candidates use social media as a means of researching a company, what information they look for and why this is important;

- Viewing social media profiles of those applying for a role and how the information should be interpreted.

METHODOLOGY

This whitepaper was produced by Robert Walters based on the survey responses of 896 job seekers and 280 hiring managers.

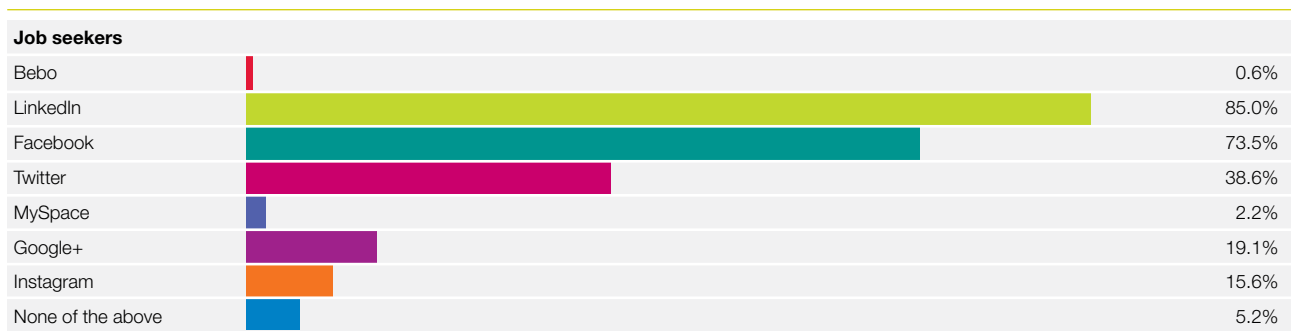## CONTENTS

SOCIAL MEDIA: POPULARITY AND ATTITUDES

The take-up of social media has naturally led some companies to consider its use as a recruitment tool.

By highlighting the popularity and usage of different social media sites it becomes easier to see where employers should target their resources to attract the attention of suitable candidates.

Firstly, we asked a sample of professionals about their membership of social media websites and their thoughts on using these sites to look for new roles.
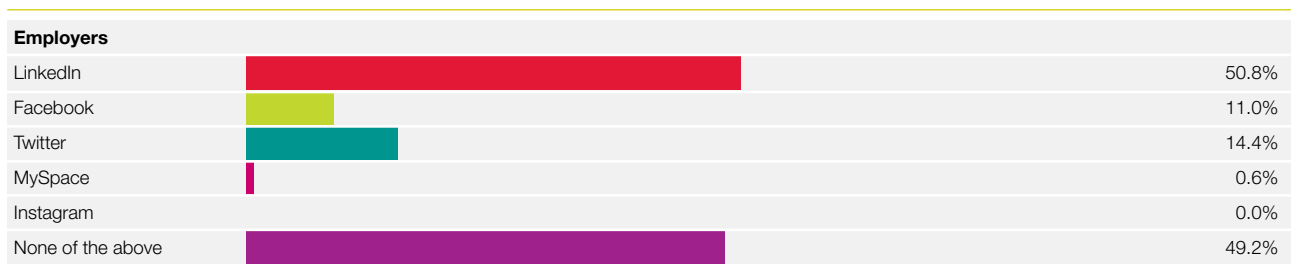
Bar graph 1.0

What social media sites do you have a profile on?

Job seekers	
Bebo	0.6%
LinkedIn	85.0%
Facebook	73.5%
Twitter	38.6%
MySpace	2.2%
Google+	19.1%
Instagram	15.6%
None of the above	5.2%

Bar graph 2.0

What social media sites does your company have a profile on?

Employers	
LinkedIn	50.8%
Facebook	11.0%
Twitter	14.4%
MySpace	0.6%
Instagram	0.0%
None of the above	49.2%

Among job seekers, a LinkedIn profile is perceived as the most important of social media channels, with 85% of survey respondents holding membership of this site. Facebook and Twitter were cited as the second (74%) and third (39%) most popular options. 19% of respondents have a profile with Google+, 16% with Instagram and 2% with MySpace. Only one in every twenty jobseekers do not have any social networking profile.

The same sites lead in popularity among employers: 69% have a profile on professional social media (e.g LinkedIn), 43% on Twitter and 42% on Facebook. 9% of respondent companies have a profile on Google+ and 3% are active on Instagram.

21%

The percentage of employers without any social media presence

The survey suggests, however, that a larger percentage of employers – over one-fifth – do not have any social media presence. While this may be a cause for concern, further analysis indicates that a site's popularity is not always the best measure of its usefulness in the recruitment process.

PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL NETWORKS

Next, our survey asked job seekers and hiring managers on where they see differences arising between various social media websites.

Most striking is the general perception of a divide between sites that are considered suitable for advancing professional goals – including recruitment opportunities – and those perceived as having a primarily personal use.

Facebook, Twitter and Instagram have become popular as a way of interacting with friends and family on an informal basis. A clear majority of both sets of respondents feel that Facebook and Twitter should not be considered an effective or suitable channel for professional activity, a sentiment held by 70% of employers and 85% of job seekers.

The goal of sites such as LinkedIn, on the other hand, is to highlight individual working achievements. It follows that a majority of candidates and hiring managers view these sites as 'professional' and ideally suited to being used in the recruitment process.
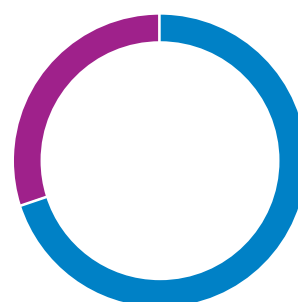
Chart 1.0 Job seekers
Do you agree that Facebook and Twitter should be regarded as personal and not professional?
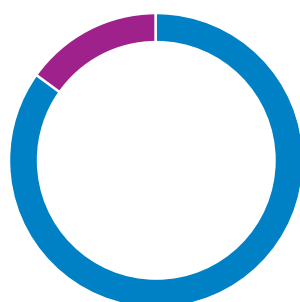
- 84.5% Yes
- 15.5% No

Chart 2.0 Employers
Do you agree that Facebook and Twitter should be regarded as personal and not professional?

- 69.6% Yes
- 30.4% No

On the whole, companies looking to recruit should remain cautious about writing off personal social media platforms to reach out to good candidates, especially those with a strong interest and proficiency in technology.
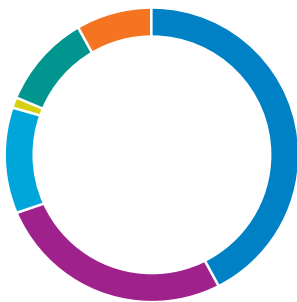
THE APPETITE FOR USING SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS

Having established the existence of distinct personal and professional social media sites, our survey quizzed respondents on where they would typically look to advertise or search for a new role.

Chart 3.0

What would be your preferred method of finding and applying for jobs?

- 42.5% Register with a recruitment consultancy
- 25.6% Using a job board (e.g. Monster, Total Jobs etc)
- 12.3% Job adverts on professional social networking websites (e.g. LinkedIn)
- 0.6% Job adverts on personal social networking websites (e.g. Facebook, Twitter etc)
- 10.9% Through existing professional networks
- 8.1% Directly through employer's website

Methods outside of the social media space are the preferred option for the majority of job seekers, with 43% turning to a recruitment consultancy to secure their next move and 26% first looking at online jobs boards. Just over 10% of job seekers turn first to existing, 'offline' contacts such as friends or colleagues, while 8% search for adverts posted to company websites.

Strikingly, however, while just 12% of job seekers cite professional social media networks as a first port of call for job searches, 94% are happy for recruiters to contact them through these sites.

Recruitment preferences among hiring managers are similarly conservative, with 49% citing a recruitment consultancy as their most favoured option. Only 13% prefer to use professional networking sites such as LinkedIn to advertise vacancies.

Adding job advertisements to the company's website is preferred by 18% of employers, with 12% first turning to jobs boards and 11% to offline networks and word of mouth.

Chart 4.0

What would be your favoured method of advertising a new role?

- 49.3% Engaging a recruitment consultancy
- 11.8% Posting on a job board (e.g. Total Jobs, Monster etc)
- 12.5% Posting job adverts on a professional social networking site (e.g. LinkedIn)
- 1.1% Posting job adverts on personal social media websites (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram)
- 7.9% Accessing existing professional networks
- 17.5% Advertise direct on your organisation's website
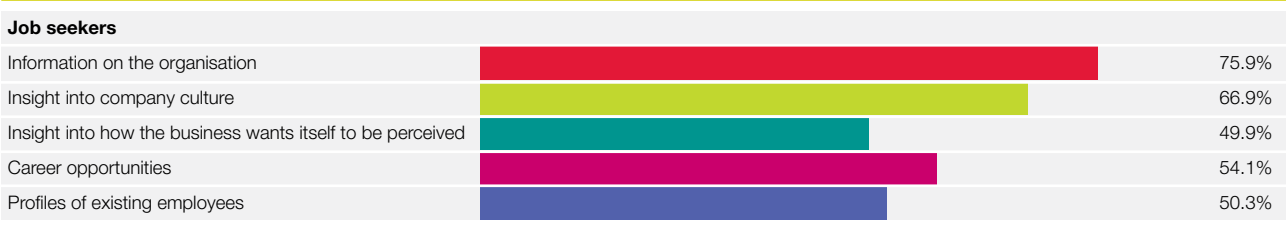
49%

The percentage of employers preferring to use a recruitment consultant to advertise a new role compared to all other methods

USES OF SOCIAL MEDIA BY JOB SEEKERS TO RESEARCH PROSPECTIVE EMPLOYERS

Professional job seekers are already making use of social media to research companies they may wish to work for. Employers must take this into account to position company profiles and news to reach those they most want to hire. The same sites also provide a useful space for showcasing key messages about the brand.

In the next part of our survey, we asked candidates to tell us about the information they typically look for when reviewing employer's social media sites.

Bar graph 5.0

Reasons for checking corporate social media profiles when applying for a job

Job seekers	
Information on the organisation	75.9%
Insight into company culture	66.9%
Insight into how the business wants itself to be perceived	49.9%
Career opportunities	54.1%
Profiles of existing employees	50.3%

The responses reveal that many candidates want corporate social media profiles to provide a range of insights. While 76% of candidates look to discover generic information on the company and its operations, over two-thirds (67%) also look for pointers on cultural values and around half expect details of future strategy. Just over 50% of surveyed job seekers like to view profiles of existing staff members while 54% hope to discover more about the opportunities for career progression.

Partnering with an established recruitment consultancy with a good understanding of professional networks can provide vital intelligence on attracting the job seekers you want. Above all, a well informed professional networking profile projects and reinforces core values and builds awareness of the brand among key audiences.
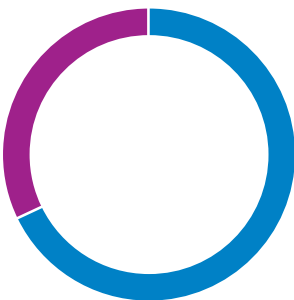
67%

The proportion of job seekers using social media to gain insights into company culture

NETWORKING GROUPS ON PROFESSIONAL SOCIAL MEDIA

Some social media sites offer users the ability to sign up to networks or groups devoted to particular business sectors. Of interest to employers is our finding that over two-thirds (68%) of job seekers feel that signing up to these groups is important to progression in their own career.

Chart 5.0

Do you think it's important to join groups relating specifically to your profession on social media sites?

- ■ 67.6%   Yes
- ■ 32.4%   No

While the most common reason for registering with these groups, cited by 55% of respondents, is to gain intelligence on the market, they are also seen as the ideal platform for discussing trends, interacting with like-minded professionals, job-hunting and ascertaining the identities of key players in the market.

Bar graph 6.0

For which of the following reasons do you think joining profession-specific groups on social media sites is useful?

Job seekers		
General market intelligence		55.3%
To find out about people in your industry		41.7%
To discuss the latest trends and connect with people in your industry		44.0%
To find out about the latest job opportunities/recruitment trends		49.3%

These groups provide the ideal platform for thought leadership and an opportunity to raise awareness of the company and its operations. With membership of these groups increasing all the time, taking the time to properly engage can make all the difference to securing the best candidates.

EMPLOYER SCREENING OF JOB SEEKER SOCIAL MEDIA PROFILES

A number of checks are now conducted during the recruitment process to ensure that candidates are suitable for hire. With such a vast amount of data available through social media websites, employers may be tempted to use some of the information available as part of the screening process. Our survey quizzed employers and job seekers on using social media when making new hires.

What is immediately clear is that some employers have proven their willingness to use at least one form of social media in the recruitment process. Although 39% of hiring managers do not, as a rule, make use of any of these sites when looking to bring in new staff, 64% say they have viewed a job seeker's professional social network profile at some point for this purpose.

Use of personal social media by employers in this context is much rarer, with only one in ten saying they review these profiles as a matter of course during the recruitment process. As mentioned earlier in this whitepaper, 70% of employers also say that Facebook and Twitter are generally the preserve of an individual's personal life, and therefore not a particularly helpful tool in the recruitment process.

However, half of all businesses surveyed admit that they would be willing to run the names of candidates through personal social media websites if they felt it helpful.

Furthermore, among all employers surveyed, 27% admit to having used Facebook to evaluate a prospective employee at some point in time, whilst 15% have used Twitter. Yet employers need to carefully consider the purpose of reviewing personal social media profiles in this way.

Earlier in the whitepaper, we saw that job seekers actively use professional social media to market their personal achievements to prospective employers and peers. Conversely 63% of professionals say it would be inappropriate for a potential employer to use personal social media profiles in the recruitment process.

50%

The percentage of employers prepared to research candidates using social media if they thought it useful

Chart 6.0

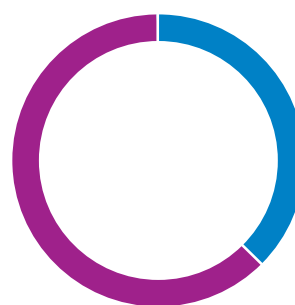**Which of the following viewpoints describes your approach to researching prospective candidates on personal social media (eg Facebook and Twitter)?**
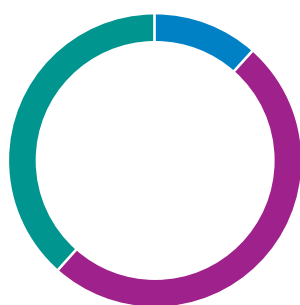
■ 11.4% We routinely check candidates out on personal social networking sites
■ 50.4% We don't routinely use these sites but would if we thought they would provide us with useful information about the candidate
■ 38.2% We do not and would not check social networking sites during the recruitment process

Chart 7.0

Do you think it's appropriate for employers to check your profiles on personal social media sites as part of the recruitment process?

■ 37.3% Yes
■ 62.7% No

And even though there is a reluctant acceptance among job seekers that this does happen, 59% of candidates reveal that they have or would amend the details of personal social media profiles when job hunting to make them more appear more professional.

DRAWBACKS OF USING PERSONAL SOCIAL MEDIA PROFILES IN THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS

Most individuals draw a very clear distinction between their professional capabilities and their personal lives. The likes of Facebook and Twitter may not give an accurate indication of how well an individual may perform in a role.

Employers must ensure that information from individual social media profiles does not detract from securing top talent. As over half of candidates report editing their own profiles to appeal to a potential employer – such as altering visibility settings and removing photos or other information – investing in the research may prove to be a fruitless exercise.

Job seekers expect to be considered for a role according to established processes, and it is within these parameters that businesses should address concerns about values or attitudes that may be held by a prospective employee. Assessment centres, psychometric testing and other interactive exercises are often better placed to answer these questions than personal social media profiles.

Businesses should also be careful to manage the risk associated with violating data protection laws or other legislation when using personal social media in the recruitment process.

59%

The percentage of professionals who do or would amend profiles on personal social media to make them appropriate for employer viewing

APPLICATIONS OF PROFESSIONAL SOCIAL MEDIA TO THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS

Among employers who view professional social media profiles during the recruitment process, 35% are most likely to do this at the application stage. This suggests it is important for a prospective candidate to have an informative profile as well as a strong CV and covering letter.
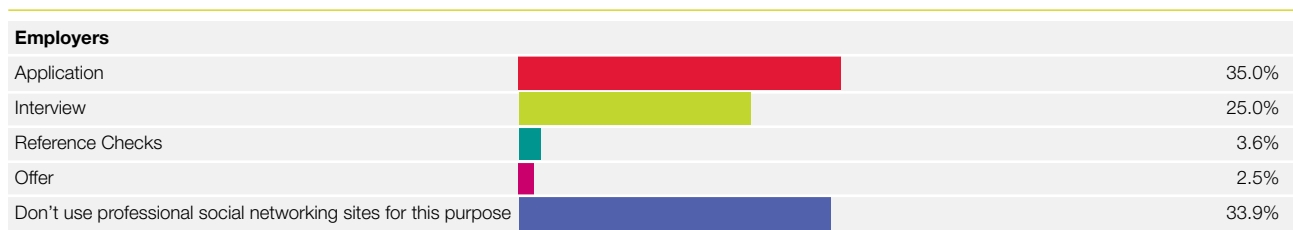
A further 25% of employers say they access professional social networks at the interview stage, indicating they are interested in employment information not gained from speaking directly with the individual concerned, including testimonials or further details of individual achievements. This provides a useful illustration of where professional social media can be of real assistance in the recruitment process.

Similarly, professional social media remains a key research tool among job seekers that have secured an interview, with 80% preferring this method over any personal networking sites. Companies must bear this in mind as a way of informing job seekers about the benefits and opportunities open to company employees.

An experienced recruitment consultant with experience of working with high quality candidates can often provide a good steer on making the most effective use of professional social media.
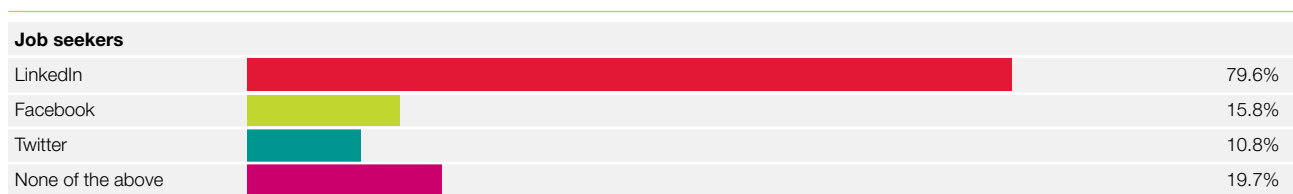
Bar graph 7.0

If you view professional social networking profiles during the recruitment process, at what stage do you do so?

Employers	
Application	35.0%
Interview	25.0%
Reference Checks	3.6%
Offer	2.5%
Don't use professional social networking sites for this purpose	33.9%

Bar graph 8.0

Which of the following sites would you use to research your interviewers prior to attending a job interview?

Job seekers	
LinkedIn	79.6%
Facebook	15.8%
Twitter	10.8%
None of the above	19.7%

KEY FINDINGS

Our research suggests that the recruitment process is increasingly affected by the use of social media, from job seekers researching a role to hiring managers seeking information to inform their screening processes. Feedback from our survey underpins the key findings below.

Key Finding #1

Online social media websites have become popular for different reasons

Social media has become an ingrained phenomenon with mass appeal. Facebook, where 74% of professionals maintain a profile, is seen as an indispensable method for connecting with friends and family. Twitter is also hugely popular, with recently conceived networks such as Google+ and Instagram taking a smaller share of the market.

Sites such as LinkedIn have become a key resource for professional networking, as evidenced by an 85% take-up rate among job seekers. 69% of employers also have a corporate professional social media profile. And although 43% of employers have a Twitter feed, and 42% a Facebook account, these are used principally for marketing and promotional activities rather than to appeal to prospective employees.

The key message to take away is that both candidates and employers see a clear distinction between personal and professional networks, with most social media sites falling into one category or the other.

Key Finding #2

Some social media channels are widely perceived as an acceptable recruitment channel

Although penetration of social media has reached an impressively high level, it is not seen as the most obvious space in which to search for or post vacancies. In the first instance, recruitment consultants remain the leading option for both job seekers (43%) and hiring companies (49%), followed by job boards and company websites.

Among both job seekers (77%) and employers (51%), professional networks lead in searching for jobs compared to other social media sites. For instance, over nine in ten candidates are happy to be solicited for jobs via LinkedIn – and over 80% would apply for a relevant job that appears in their profile feed. Employers need to be careful to advertise vacancies using channels and platforms that will attract the best job seekers.

Key Finding #3

Social media is increasingly important to candidates as a method for researching the market

Our survey indicates that professional social media has a significant impact on job seekers in shaping impressions of a potential employer. Of all social media sources used as a research tool, professional networks beat other sites by a margin of four to one.

Using professional networks simply to post vacancies is not enough. Employers must ensure they maintain high quality, engaging levels of content that relate to questions on company culture, employee opportunities and an indication of future plans. Active participation in online groups specific to a particular sector or industry – now used by nearly 70% of job seekers – is also vital to gaining an advantage over your competitors.

Key Finding #4

Act proportionately in using social media to screen and assess job seeekers

Our survey makes clear that most employers take a sensible approach to the use of social media in the recruitment process. Despite many job applicants believing that prospective employers regularly view personal profiles at this stage, some two-thirds of employers tell us that this does not generally form part of their hiring process.

And while some companies may think this a valid option in the course of hiring new employees, a substantial majority of professionals (63%) do not agree that Facebook updates or tweets should be considered relevant to the recruitment process.

In contrast to this, within the professional social networking space, many employees have purposefully marketed their achievements online to add weight to their paper CV. The evidence from our survey is that this is clearly valued by employers, with around 60% accessing a professional's profile at least once during the hiring process.

However, while social media can be helpful, it should not be seen to replace or override personal contact, interviews and other established recruitment practices that employers use to assess candidates. An excessive reliance on social media could lead to overlooking or deterring leading job seekers to the overall detriment of the business.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

Having set out the core findings of this report, we have formulated a number of recommendations to assist businesses in formulating and applying social media to the recruitment process.

Have a clear understanding of what different social networks can do for your business

Despite its overall popularity, not all forms of social media are likely to serve equally as an effective recruitment channel. Job seekers do not have faith in personal social media in looking for their next move.

Consider a targeted approach

Employers must ensure they follow the paths beaten by job seekers they would most like to recruit. With so many candidates unlikely to take much notice of job offers promoted through personal social media, it is worth asking whether this would be a wasted investment.

Broadly speaking, however, our research strongly suggests that a significant proportion of candidates and hiring managers still favour recruitment consultants over any other hiring channel. Employers must remember that a well-managed professional social media profile is just one route to securing top talent.

Leverage social media to reinforce messages around corporate values

Using social media to investigate a prospective employer is now commonplace for many job seekers. As the information being sought usually relates to business culture and operations, job seekers are most likely to turn to professional social networks for this research.

Employers should ensure that all information displayed on corporate social media profiles is presented in a format that is informative, concise and easy to follow.

Make intelligent use of social media when considering prospective candidates

Personal social media profiles provide a window into only one side of an individual's life and do not often reveal much of relevance to their professional abilities.

The best way of resolving concerns that do arise is usually through established processes, such as interviews and assessment exercises. This also avoids any scenario in which a job seeker feels information is unfairly applied during the recruitment process.

Be selective when using any information obtained from personal social media sites in making a judgement on a job seeker's suitability as an employee.

ABOUT THE ROBERT WALTERS INSIGHT SERIES

This whitepaper is the fifth in the Robert Walters Insight Series. The Insight Series is a range of thought-leading whitepapers aimed at assisting employers in their recruitment strategies and helping them address key talent management issues. To register your interest in future topics, please email **contact@robertwalters.com**.

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