

CLIENTEK presents the

Upsize
Minnesota

Growth Challenge

2006

WORKSHOP TWO & WRAP-UP EVENT

FINISH LINE

THREE WINNING COMPANIES REACH GOALS IN DIFFERENT WAYS

“I KNOW A LOT OF PEOPLE

that want that quick million, but that’s not how it works,” says **Craig Kruckeberg**, CEO of **Spray Control Systems Inc.** in Blooming Prairie.

“Growth has to come. I’ve learned you’ve got to be patient.”

Those are words of wisdom from the overall champion of this year’s Upsize Growth Challenge. His company, one of three winning companies selected by judges in February, was so named by audience vote during the Upsize Growth Challenge Seminar & Celebration on June 13.

Kruckeberg got the crowd laughing several times during his eight-minute speech, during which he and the two other winners presented each company’s growth goal and the steps taken to achieve it. Spray Control Systems makes plastic truck parts and accessories.

In the past, he recalled, he was the one “slapping the horse on the ass” to get the company to grow faster, and his father was the one pulling back on the reins. Now that he’s in charge he’s working hard to manage growth, “and I’ve got seven guys slapping the horse.”

ABOUT THE EXPERTS

Experts at the breakfast event and at the two workshops represented each of the six sponsoring companies of the Upsize Growth Challenge, presented by Clientek.

Kirk Hoaglund, Craig Vosper and Nathan Johnston, technology experts, **Clientek**: 612.379.1440; kirk.hoaglund@clientek.com; www.clientek.com.

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Tom Imdieke, president of **Line Drive Sports** in Lino Lakes and an Upsize Growth Challenge 2006 winner, said it was a relief to get his financial books in order. He’s a CPA, but had let those details slip while buying and building his sports training facility.

Imdieke said he had paid off thousands of dollars in debt this year, because of strong usage of his facility. For those creditors he can’t pay yet, he swallowed hard and told them they’d have to wait. That, too, was a relief.

Now he can focus on adding new services to his facility, such as weight-training, ice hockey training, and tanning beds for the adults who are sitting around waiting for their kids to finish.

Doug Adamek, founder of **Midwest EAP Solutions**, the St. Cloud-based employee assistance program, and an Upsize Growth Challenge winner, said he and his family were living the American dream — something he didn’t realize when he started the company two decades ago. “Then you just think about feeding your family,” he said.

With his wife, daughter, son-in-law and newest granddaughter, Ruby, in the audi-

ence, Adamek said he's working on creating the next phase of the dream. Through the Upsize Growth Challenge he's developed a formal succession plan for the management team, delineating job titles and responsibilities.

He also learned that an estate plan is not the same as a business succession plan. He had an estate plan in place, complete with wills and trusts and so on. But then he was asked, "Well, what are you going to do with the company if you're still alive?"

The Upsize Growth Challenge is a unique contest that selects three winners in February from nominations, based on the ambition and complexity of their growth goal. In two half-day workshops, they meet with experts to gain advice to meet their goal, and present their stories live at the wrap-up event.

Coverage follows of the second workshop and event. Nominations will open in December for the Upsize Growth Challenge 2007. Visit www.upsizemag.com for a form.

— Beth Ewen

SPRAY CONTROL SYSTEMS

Freed from some daily duties, CEO learns how to 'get strategic'

By Beth Ewen

Craig Kruckeberg, president of Spray Control Systems Inc. in Bloomington Prairie, came to the second Upsize Growth Challenge workshop with a list of concrete accomplishments. Chief among them: He had passed some key day-to-day responsibilities to employees.

"I turned payroll to the HR department completely. All I do is look at the check report. And AP is completely out of my hands now," he says, referring to accounts payable.

Given his tight control over such functions for years, he's a little at a loss: "I'm kind of like twiddling my thumbs now," Kruckeberg says, half-joking. Just what is a CEO supposed to do, he asks, if he's not managing every aspect of day-to-day operations?



The answer, urge the Upsize Growth Challenge experts, is to move up to a higher level. A CEO's job varies depending on the company and the industry, says Rick Wall, CEO of Highland Bank and a finance expert. "A CEO's job is strategic. It's PR-oriented. It is looking at the broadest financial picture. It is a liaison with the board.

"You have the time to do executive level thinking, deciding on the strategic direction. You're not concerned with the work that comes in and goes out. You have operating people that keep the work going," Wall says.

For example, Kruckeberg is consid-

Now that he's passed day-to-day responsibilities to others, CEO Craig Kruckeberg gets ready to think strategically at the company founded by his father, Spray Control Systems Inc.

[Lessons I learned]

CRAIG KRUCKEBERG, CEO, Spray Control Systems Inc.

In '99-2000 I became CEO, taking over from my father. I think we just broke a million at that point. **My father didn't teach.** He didn't sit me down and say, here's what to do. I had to keep one eye on him and one eye on my job.

We used to have some serious fisticuffs. There would be a million times when I'd walk out. I'd say, I'm done. My mother, she'd get in between us and tell us to work it out.

One thing I learned from my father was the work ethic. He'd be down here on Saturday and Sunday. I started doing that. Last night I got home at 5:30, and everybody looked at me saying, are you sick?

At first I would just buy advertising on the sly. Now I spend \$22,000 a month on advertising, but my father was old school. That first ad was \$400, and we got calls. I kept telling him, people won't just wake up with our phone number in their head.

He slowly brought me into it...he and mom would go to Arizona and leave me in charge, first two weeks, then three weeks, then six weeks. It was do or die.

He said, don't be spending a lot of money to buy equipment, because **if someone goes out of business we'll get the equipment cheaper.** We'd buy spray paint and paint our own brackets, not powder-coat them like we do now.

I had an office equipment vendor in here the other day, and I picked out a chair I wanted. He said he remembers coming to talk to my father, and said, **'I had to break a 12-pack of pencils down and give him two.'** I still hold to that today.

If you're good to me, I'll be steadfast and loyal. I have vendors that go back for 22 years.

If you keep your books in order you're so much better off. **There are times you don't want to look at your books because you're sick to your stomach.** But it's better to know.

No matter what the size of the business, it's all the same problems, just one more zero. I can't look at the dollars because I'd be in the bathroom throwing up. **You just have to look at it as one more zero.**

We've just slowly grown, 20 to 22 percent a year. **Now it's a snowball rolling downhill.** You do 20 percent growth, and then 20 percent again, and then you hit 40 percent, like we're at now, and it gets kind of hazy.

I read about companies that are going to grow 256 percent, and I say OK, I want to talk to you, because **how can you control that?**

We're up 40 percent this year over last year. We have a great product, and it just takes time. We're getting notoriety. **Customers don't want to talk to you when you're small, because they need parts from you for 50 years.**

Now I do it, because I ask vendors if they'll be around for years. I'm understanding; **I see why they were so hands-off with us, because we were a small company.** This year we're hoping for \$7 million in sales.

Everybody dreams of selling the huge sale. That's not going to happen. **Take your time. It will come.**

I know a lot of people that want that quick million, but that's not how it works. You don't want that kind of growth. Growth has to come. **I've learned you've got to be patient.**

[what the experts say]

...on marketing



Because Spray Control is moving into more general truck accessories, beyond its specialized “minimizer” fender system that made the company, it should move toward a more generic Web address. “I would change the URL to anticipate the future of the company,” says **Elin Raymond**, president of **The Sage Group**. “Ask customers, ‘When you go online, what do you type in?’ If you are selling truck accessories, you want to pop up on search engines if you type that in.”

...on advisers



Growing companies “need the infrastructure” if they’re going to get to the next level, says **Michele Vaillancourt**, **Winthrop & Weinstine**. “You need somebody in finance to give you financial discipline, and strategic direction from a board.”

...on financial controls



“Always have some type of controls, especially if you start delegating financial duties, says **Duane Thompson**, **EideBaily**. “A classic example is to break up the duties to as many people as possible. One person receives mail, someone else opens it, someone else prepares deposits, someone else posts deposits.”

...on what CEOs do



“You have the time to do executive level work, strategic direction,” says **Rick Wall**, **Highland Bank**. “You’re not concerned with the work that comes in and goes out. You have operating people that keep the work going.”

ering pursuing an acquisition strategy, in which he would purchase some of the small job shops that also make accessories for the trucking industry. “There’s only one person in the company to make that idea happen,” Wall points out, and that’s Kruckeberg.

Duane Thompson, a CPA with Bloomington accounting firm Eide-Baily, praises Kruckeberg for getting

to this point, acknowledging that it can be very difficult for people who grew up in a business to let go of daily tasks.

“You’re moving in the direction that Rick is talking about. It sounds like you’re willing to let go,” Thompson says.

He cautions Kruckeberg to put controls in place, systems that will allow the company to grow without the CEO’s eye on every detail. One idea: Spread the different financial systems to as many employees as possible, so that one person opens the mail, another person prepares invoices, still another signs checks, and so on. Institute annual audits by an outside firm. And beware of trusting long-time employees without imposing checkpoints.

Kruckeberg is starting a retail accessories shop at his company, where his employees can research and develop new products and interact with truck drivers to see what they like to buy.

Thompson calls the idea “ingenious,” and says Kruckeberg should turn his energies in those new directions. “Your forte is the creativity,” he says.

Reach out to advisers

Michele Vaillancourt, attorney with Winthrop & Weinstine and the Upsize Growth Challenge legal expert, says Kruckeberg should step up his actions to form a board of directors, bringing on people with C-level experience: CEO, CFO or COO.

This will be particularly important midyear, when Kruckeberg’s parents transfer their remaining shares to him and he becomes 100 percent owner.

“You’ve got a big business. It’s worth a lot.” Once companies reach the \$5 million to \$6 million range, as Spray Control has, succession planning becomes even more crucial.

“It would be good to have strategic direction from the board,” she says. Kruckeberg acknowledges that there was a reason he achieved a long list of accomplishments since the Upsize Growth Challenge workshop one, in May: He knew he had a deadline and had to report back to the group.

How to find such people? First, identify your objectives in having a

[what the experts say]

...on using vendors



Mary Korthour, Eschelon Telecom, says business owners should use the services of their vendors, such as phone service providers. "You're paying additional for a top of the line product," she says, referring to Spray Control's phone system. "Call them. Ask them how they can help you. Ask them, how is what I bought going to help me?"

...on CRM systems



Customer relationship management systems are expensive, \$30,000 to \$40,000 for the software licenses, and another \$30,000 to \$40,000 for integration, says Kirk Hoaglund, Clientek. "And then there's the annual maintenance. It's kind of frustrating. On the other hand, if you use it religiously, you can have a good impact."

board. Why do you want one? Then, identify the types of backgrounds that your company needs. Do you need someone with a manufacturing background? Marketing? Finance? Technology?

Then, start asking everyone you know for ideas. Ask your banker, attorney, accountant, because all of those people have wide networks. Join peer networks, such as CEO roundtables or support groups, and ask all the members for referrals. Call people up and ask them to lunch, to sound them out about a board seat.

Many people are willing to serve, for a modest fee each time, because they find it interesting and it's a way to give back to the wider business community, the experts say.

Elin Raymond, president of The Sage Group in Minneapolis and a marketing and communications expert, points out that communicating the success of the business in Bloomington and surrounding areas, as well as in the Twin Cities, is important for attracting board members and potential employees, especially the high level financial person that Kruckeberg seeks.

Right now, Kruckeberg spends several thousand dollars a month on advertising his company's products in trade publications read by truck drivers. He doesn't spend much time on public relations or advertising in local papers, because his customers aren't his neighbors.

That's a mistake, Raymond says, because Spray Control has interested stakeholders beyond customers alone. She recommends adding community publications to its press release list.

She adds that Kruckeberg should consider an open house to show off his new retail shop, and urges him to make a big splash over the fact that the company is rolling out a new trademarked fender, made of plastic but with the look of expensive chrome.

"You have to assume your customers read all kinds of different things," Raymond says.

She ends with a compliment for Kruckeberg. "You have just done an amazing amount of work," she says.

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MIDWEST EAP SOLUTIONS

Founder taps advisers, sets concrete steps to smooth transition

By Elizabeth Martin

Inspired by his first workshop with the Upsize Growth Challenge experts in March, Doug Adamek, CEO of Midwest EAP Solutions in St. Cloud, took his banker and his attorney to a two-hour lunch.

The trio discussed the company's current state and Adamek's succession plan, something they had never done before. They complimented Midwest's achievement of debt-free status (something new since the first workshop) and provided him with

additional resources for his succession planning.

"I have a pretty good estate plan in place, but it's more of a disaster plan," admits Adamek. Midwest EAP Solutions provides confidential employee support services to the employees of its client companies.

Midwest's executive team, including Mitch Best, newly promoted to vice president, and Wanda Piegras, director of marketing and operations, say that succession planning has been an emotional undertaking for the group.

But Adamek continued to pursue the formalization of a plan, and planned to meet with a consultant who specializes in succession planning.

"I am delighted that you're meeting with a succession planner," says Michele Vaillancourt, an attorney with Winthrop & Weinstine in Minneapolis and the Upsize Growth Challenge legal expert. "It sounds like you have an estate plan, but not a succession plan, and you need to mesh the two."

Documenting the plan

Midwest has taken several concrete steps to document the succession plan, Adamek reports at the second workshop, in May. Since the first meeting, the company has developed job descriptions for the executive team and promoted Mitch Best to vice president of the company.

Under the plan, a president position will be created once the company's revenue reaches \$4 million.

Midwest's current transition plan is based on revenue milestones, but Rick Wall urges the company to use timeframes as well.

"The revenue targets are a good idea, but I think you need dates as well," says Wall, CEO of St. Paul-based Highland Bank and the Upsize Growth Challenge finance expert. "Time marches on. Everybody gets older," whether you meet those revenue goals or not.

Although Adamek never intends to fully remove himself from the business, he does eventually plan to step back from the day-to-day operations. Wall and Duane Thompson, a tax

accountant with EideBailly in Bloomington, urge him to begin the transition sooner rather than later.

"As your business grows, that transition cost gets higher," says Wall, noting that the tax implications of the transition can be spread out over several years with proper planning.

Vertical markets

Midwest also realized since the first Upsize Growth Challenge workshop that nearly 33 percent of their clients are in the health-care field. Based on this, the company has developed a stress-management program specifically for physicians. In addition, they have developed an intervention team to deal with physician burnout.

There are few resources to assist physicians with stress and burnout issues, says Adamek. However, a physician's negative behavior can have far-reaching consequences within a health-care organization for patients, nurses and fellow doctors.

Physician assistance would make a great subject for a national Webcast, suggests Elin Raymond, president of

The Sage Group in Minneapolis and the Upsize Growth Challenge marketing expert.

"Take this and run with it and make it your product," she encourages.

Talk also returned to Midwest's Web site and using it to promote the company.

"What I'd like to see more on your Web site is articles that are outside of your geographic area," Raymond says, noting that national articles would help the company appear larger.

Midwest is redesigning its Web presence and brought mockups for the panelists to review. The new site attempts to provide entry points for the various types of visitors, including Midwest's partners and members. It also includes a log in feature so the company can begin capturing visitor information for its marketing efforts.

Raymond also encourages Midwest to request reciprocal links on their partners' sites and to investigate search engine optimization on sites such as Google, Yahoo and Ask.

Who's calling, please?

Midwest also found a new telecommunications vendor since the first Upsize Growth Challenge meeting and tried its first Webinar for its staff, which is spread throughout Minnesota.

Adamek is concerned that his staff feels isolated, and wanted to use the Webinar as a way to help the team feel more connected to one another. He wondered if videoconferencing might be another option.

Neither Mary Korthour, Eschelon Telecom, nor Craig Vosper, Clientek, felt that videoconferencing was the right technology for those purposes. Korthour points out that Eschelon has employees scattered throughout eight states and doesn't use videoconferencing for internal communication. The two serve as the Upsize Growth Challenge technology and telecommunications experts.

Midwest recently selected a vendor for all its telecom needs, including voice-over-IP and teleconferencing, as well as including all its employees throughout the state on a single phone



Midwest EAP Solutions is growing through acquisitions, and founder Doug Adamek was worried that new staff felt isolated. Its first Webinar for staff was a hit in connecting them, he says.

system. In fact, the company made the deal with one of its own clients that initially had bid higher than its competitors.

This client also had a relatively loose contract with Midwest for three years, which put Midwest in a position to negotiate. After further discussion, the client lowered its bid and agreed to a firmer contract with Midwest.

Piegras also wondered whether

Midwest should use an internal or external Webcasting system, as it prepared to provide more of its content in this medium.

Clientek's Vosper noted that having a single point of contact and an integrated Web and phone system will be worth the money.

Eschelon's Korthour asks if their network vendor had provided them with a service level agreement, indicating how much "up time" they could expect.

"Think about what would happen to your business if your network went down. You'd be incapacitated," she says. "What's the backup plan and

what type of compensation are they willing to give you if the network goes down?"

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[what the experts say]

...on transition plans

An estate plan and a transition plan are two different things, says **Michele Vaillancourt, Winthrop & Weinstine**. They need to be integrated, but don't mistake one for the other.

...on Web content

Be very careful when putting pictures on your Web site, says **Elin Raymond, The Sage Group**. Pictures can limit you by characterizing your business in a way that may not be applicable to all your clients.

...on service contracts

Ask your technology vendors for a written service level agreement, says **Mary Korthour, Eschelon Telecom**. They should be able to tell you how much "up time" you can expect, and what the backup plan is if the network goes down.

...on measuring profit

Revenue milestones are a great way to measure your progress, says **Duane Thompson, EideBailly**, but don't forget about measuring profit too. Revenues don't mean a thing if your bottom line goes to pot.

...on taxes

Plan to implement your ownership transition over time, says **Rick Wall, Highland Bank**. Doing the transition all at once can have major tax consequences.

LINE DRIVE SPORTS

Financials completed and creditors called, owner can look ahead

By Sarah Brouillard

At the first Upsize Growth Challenge workshop in March, experts advised Line Drive Sports owner Tom Imdieke, first and foremost, to organize his financial statements.

He did that, reporting to the second workshop, in May, with complete statements. And seeing his company's fiscal picture in black and white — and red — helped him make some important decisions, he says.

Imdieke and his wife, JoAnn, paid off three of their five highest interest-rate credit cards, and asked most of his individual creditors — many who are friends and family members — for a temporary reprieve.

“Rather than sit there in my little world, wondering where am I going to get the cash from to pay these people, I just called them upfront and said I don't have it right now,” he says. “I'm not saying I won't try continuing to work on it and get it for you. But this Friday, I won't have \$30,000 for you; I won't have \$10,000 for you.”

Their reaction — “Get back to us when you can,” says Imdieke — has freed him from some of his immediate cash-flow concerns so he can turn his mind toward improving his business.

He's continued to mitigate the seasonality of his batting cage and sports-instruction company, in Lino Lakes. By installing a weight room and contracting with a football trainer, he's opened up his facility to a whole new audience. And the recent closing of Fridley-based Columbia Arena — home to several nearby high school and college hockey teams — gives Imdieke an opportunity to market his half-sheet of ice, he says.

Since Imdieke doesn't have the cash to carry the inventory he'd like on his own, he's partnered up with two other metro-area sports-equipment and -apparel companies. He purchases items from them at their cost plus between 10 percent and 15 percent.

Though still “chasing cash,” as he says, Imdieke hasn't been chasing customers: Traffic this spring was up 25 percent to 30 percent at the training school, probably due to word of mouth and an out-of-business competitor.

Up-to-date statements

Imdieke “has a good foundation started by having statements brought up to date,” says Duane Thompson, senior tax adviser and CPA with Bloomington-based EideBailly, and the Upsize Growth Challenge accounting and operations expert.

The next step, he says, is to build some financial forecasts. He suggests Imdieke play with two or three different scenarios, to help manage cash and pinpoint expenses. “You start to see the trends fairly quickly,” says Thompson.

Rick Wall, CEO of Highland Bank in St. Paul and the Upsize Growth Challenge finance expert, suggests “balling up” his creditors, and handing them off as a group to a professional finance company or a bank — “somebody's who's paid to figure out how to repay them,” he says.

His creditors could also be brought together to brainstorm ideas on how to drive revenue. “They're stakeholders in the business,” he says. “They have as much of an interest in you succeeding because they're investors.”

Besides, transparency about the business builds good relations, and heads off potential misunderstandings down the road. “If you let the sunshine in and you're open, that opportunity is a lot less for them to get upset.”

A second company?

Launching a second company, majority-owned by JoAnn, is another alternative the Imdiekes have considered for handling their large debts. Woman-owned companies can get special government-backed loans, and using JoAnn's good credit means the couple would start with a clean slate, financially speaking, they say. Then, “I can try working my way out of the mess I'm in,” says Tom.

Imdieke has always fancied the business names “Total Athlete” and

“Peak Performance,” either of which he’d consider for the potential new company. He believes those names are now available, given that the companies that originally used them no longer exist, he says.

But it’s possible that someone still owns the trademarks, says Michele Vaillancourt, an attorney with Winthrop & Weinstine in Minneapolis, and the Upsize Growth Challenge legal expert. The Imdiekes should check the United States Patent and Trademark Office Web site

[what the experts say]

...on protecting data

Be careful not to place clients’ personal information, such as full names, on a Web site, says **Kirk Hoaglund, Clientek**. Use a log-in and password-protected function, or assign each client a special ID number that won’t give away who clients are to others.

...on remote access

For companies that contract outsiders, use a voice mail system that allows them to check their messages remotely. That way, owners and employees need not take written notes, or give out private phone numbers. Contractors “would have the ability to go in and own that part of the business,” says **Mary Korthour, Escheion Telecom**.

...on company names

Choose business names wisely, advises **Elin Raymond, The Sage Group**. Make sure they’re not too generic: “Peak Performance,” for example, could be used by a business coach, as well as a sports-instruction company. Tweak the company name to identify more clearly what your company does, such as “Peak Performance Athletics.”

...on financial forecasts

Financial statements should be used to forecast the company’s future. Put together two or three scenarios — ideally, one conservative, one middle-of-the-road and one ambitious — and play with them to identify trends, says **Duane Thompson, EideBailly**.



(www.uspto.gov) to find out. Trademark owners often want an agreement where they’re paid royalties in exchange for use of a name.

Two companies, however, means double the marketing effort, says Elin Raymond, president of The Sage Group in Minneapolis and the Upsize Growth Challenge marketing expert. “It could become a little confusing,” she says. And Imdieke would need two Web sites.

Imdieke says he’s still working on his current Web site, which marketing

“Rather than sit there in my little world, wondering where am I going to get the cash from to pay these people, I just called them upfront and said I don’t have it right now,” says Tom Imdieke, owner of Line Drive Sports, with JoAnn Imdieke. That freed him from immediate cash-flow concerns so he could improve his business.

and technology experts at the first workshop said should be easier to navigate and read, and could be more interactive.

Adding video to his Web site is one

solution he's mulled, says Imdieke. At a recent baseball game between Forest Lake and Mounds View, 16 out of the 18 players on the field were Line Drive students, he says. Playing a snippet of that online would entertain clients, as well as educate potential ones.

Imdieke also wants to add his customers' training calendar onto the site, so that young clients can check when they or their friends are scheduled to be at the facility. But Kirk Hoaglund, Upsize Growth Challenge technology expert and CEO of Clientek, a Minneapolis-based IT firm, says uploading too much personal information could lead to safety concerns — especially since there are children involved.

It's important not to use full names on Web sites, for privacy reasons, says Hoaglund. Instead, he suggests the use of a log-in and password-protected mechanism, so that strangers can't learn about kids' whereabouts.

Imdieke has also considered adding Web access to the waiting areas where parents and other bystanders hang

[what the experts say]

...on trademarks

Just because a company name isn't used commercially doesn't mean it's up for grabs. The names could be owned as trademarks. Check the United States Patent and Trademark Office at www.uspto.gov to find out if a name is available. If not, trademark owners typically are willing to work out an agreement where users pay royalties, says **Michele Vaillancourt, Winthrop & Weinstine**

...on finding help

When dealing with numerous creditors, take advantage of the services offered by financial institutions, such as banks. Instead of doing the mental gymnastics on your own, use professionals to figure out the best ways to pay these people back, says **Rick Wall, Highland Bank**

out. Right now, they're an untapped, captive audience, says JoAnn Imdieke.

Mary Korthour, senior manager of product marketing at telecommunications provider Eschelon Telecom in Minneapolis, says the only costs would be capital ones, for extra computers and the additional Internet hookups.

Imdieke says he'd prefer the homepage to be a Line Drive Sports customized catalog, so users could order merchandise online.

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