

BCE Inc. (BCE)

\$42.04 (As of 07/30/20)

Price Target (6-12 Months): **\$44.00**

Long Term: 6-12 Months

Zacks Recommendation:

Neutral

(Since: 02/06/19)

Prior Recommendation: Underperform

Short Term: 1-3 Months

Zacks Rank: (1-5)

3-Hold

Zacks Style Scores:

VGM:C

Value: B

Growth: C

Momentum: F

Summary

BCE's wireless segment is expected to benefit from postpaid business as it continues to enjoy solid subscriber additions. As part of its mobile 5G strategy, BCE's Bell announced its first 5G network equipment supplier agreement with Nokia. It aims to deliver initial 5G service in urban centers across Canada as 5G smartphones come to the market in 2020. Bell is also bringing direct fiber links in the City of Hamilton and continues to expand the reach of its fiber network in smaller centers. However, its local lines for traditional telephony service continue to witness lower traction among large customers. The successful implementation of BCE's core goals is the most critical factor in determining its profitability. The execution requires enhanced employee skills and more capital investments, which put pressure on margins.

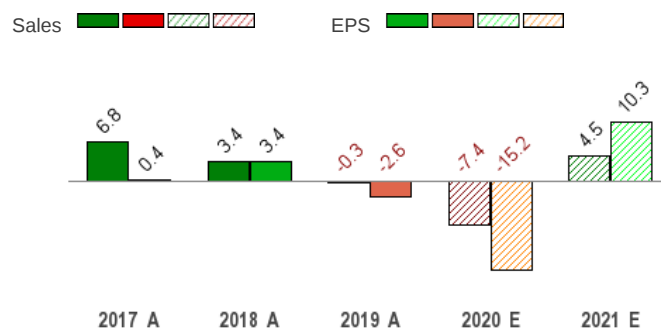
Price, Consensus & Surprise



Data Overview

52 Week High-Low	\$49.58 - \$31.66
20 Day Average Volume (sh)	991,824
Market Cap	\$38.0 B
YTD Price Change	-9.3%
Beta	0.38
Dividend / Div Yld	\$2.45 / 5.8%
Industry	Diversified Communication Services
Zacks Industry Rank	Top 25% (64 out of 253)

Sales and EPS Growth Rates (Y/Y %)



Last EPS Surprise	3.6%
Last Sales Surprise	-0.2%
EPS F1 Est- 4 week change	-1.8%
Expected Report Date	08/06/2020
Earnings ESP	-1.6%
P/E TTM	15.9
P/E F1	18.8
PEG F1	4.1
P/S TTM	2.1

Sales Estimates (millions of \$)

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Annual*
2021					17,466 E
2020	4,187 A	4,063 E	4,183 E	4,466 E	16,720 E
2019	4,313 A	4,433 A	4,533 A	4,785 A	18,059 A

EPS Estimates

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Annual*
2021	\$0.59 E	\$0.64 E	\$0.64 E	\$0.58 E	\$2.47 E
2020	\$0.58 A	\$0.53 E	\$0.57 E	\$0.55 E	\$2.24 E
2019	\$0.58 A	\$0.70 A	\$0.69 A	\$0.67 A	\$2.64 A

*Quarterly figures may not add up to annual.

The data in the charts and tables, including the Zacks Consensus EPS and Sales estimates, is as of 07/30/2020. The reports text is as of 07/31/2020.

Overview

BCE Inc. is Canada's largest communications service provider and serves as the holding company for Bell Canada. The company provides local and long-distance phone service to approximately 70% of the Canadian population, primarily in Ontario and Québec.

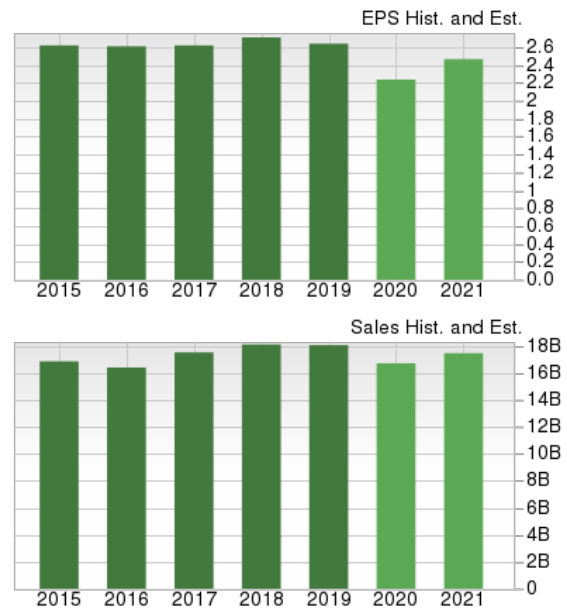
BCE's wholly-owned subsidiary Bell Canada operates the company's wireline (Bell Wireline) and wireless (Bell Wireless) businesses, Bell Media as well as the satellite TV operation, known as ExpressVu. Bell Canada is the largest local exchange carrier in Ontario and Quebec. The company provides wireless service, data communications, telephone, high-speed Internet, direct-to-home (DTH) satellite television and Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) services. Bell Canada also offers integrated information and communications technology (ICT) services to businesses and governments, and is the virtual chief information officer (VCIO) to small and medium businesses (SMBs).

BCE reports operating results in three segments, namely, Bell Wireline, Bell Wireless and Bell Media. The following is a snapshot of the company's operating segments:

Bell Wireline (52.5% of total operating revenues in first-quarter 2020): Provides local telephone, long distance, data, video and other communications services to residential, business and large enterprise customers primarily in the urban areas of Ontario and Quebec.

Bell Wireless (34.7%): Offers wireless voice and data communications products and services to residential, small and medium businesses and large enterprise customers across Canada.

Bell Media (12.8%): Offers a package of mobile content featuring the most popular news, entertainment and sports programming in Canada, including live or on-demand programming from TSN, RDS, BNN, MTV and The Comedy Network as well as Bell's popular Sympatico.ca portal.



Reasons To Buy:

- ▲ As part of its mobile 5G strategy, Bell has announced its first 5G network equipment supplier agreement with long-time partner Nokia. Bell aims to deliver initial 5G service in urban centers across Canada as 5G smartphones come to market in 2020, and will continue to enhance 5G access speeds, capacity and coverage as additional 5G wireless spectrum, including in the 3.5 GHz band, becomes available this year through the federal government's spectrum auction process. As part of its fiber to the premises (FTTP) expansion into the populous 905 region surrounding Toronto, Bell is bringing direct fiber links to more than 200,000 residential and business locations in the City of Hamilton. The company also continues to expand the reach of its fiber network in smaller centers, including Northern Manitoba to about 2,800 locations in the City of Flin Flon.
- ▲ BCE's wireless segment is expected to benefit from postpaid business as it continues to enjoy solid subscriber additions as well as higher revenue contribution from prepaid services. Significant investments in network coverage, customer retention, lucrative data plans and launch of new handsets are likely to drive subscriber base expansion. Of late, it is witnessing operating profitability growth across its wireless, wireline, and media segments. Bell Media's Crave is currently a bilingual TV and streaming service offering more than 6,000 hours of exclusive francophone content from Crave and Super Écran as well as French-language versions of Showtime and HBO programming.
- ▲ On the wireline front, the Canadian telecommunications company expects financial results to improve in 2020 as it continues to gain from an increase in net revenue generation units. The EBITDA growth trend in the segment is expected to stay. BCE continues to benefit from FibeTV and FibreOP TV growth, price hike and an improved business market stemming from a steady economy. The company is likely to benefit from robust activities in the wireless business, strong subscriber additions, drop in churn rates and its focus on technology upgrades. The company continues to focus on six strategic areas, investment in broadband network and services, accelerating wireless services, leveraging wireline momentum, expanding media coverage, improving customer service and achieving a competitive cost structure. These initiatives are expected to generate higher revenue per user and attract new customers in the coming days.
- ▲ The company's underlying business fundamentals are strong. Its strong liquidity position, underpinned by a healthy balance sheet, substantial free cash flow generation and access to the debt and bank capital markets, is expected to provide financial flexibility to execute on its planned capital expenditures for 2020. As of Mar 31, 2020, the company had \$1,998 million in cash and cash equivalents with \$19,025 million of long-term debt compared with the respective tallies of \$109 million and \$16,892 million at the end of the prior quarter. BCE currently has a debt-to-capital ratio of 0.52 compared with 0.67 of the sub-industry. Although the times interest earned has declined over the past few quarters to 4.8 at present compared with 1.6 of the sub-industry, BCE has a dividend payout rate of 90.5% compared with 60.6% of the sub-industry. The rate has increased over the past several quarters, indicating that the company is sharing more of its earnings with stockholders. It is to be seen whether BCE can maintain the momentum in the coming days despite disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

BCE continues to benefit from robust activities in the wireless business, strong subscriber additions, drop in churn rates and focus on technology upgrades. Margins are expected to improve gradually.

Reasons To Sell:

- ▼ Due to the uncertainties related to the COVID-19 pandemic, BCE has withdrawn all of its 2020 financial guidance. The successful implementation of BCE's six core goals is the most critical factor in determining its future profitability. The execution requires enhanced employee skills, more capital investments and targeted cost reductions. Failure of any of these changes might have an adverse impact on the company's financials and growth prospects, thereby leading to lower revenues and profitability.
- ▼ The price cap rules introduced by the Canadian regulators are limiting rate increase and reducing the amount that incumbent carriers can charge competitors for accessing their network. While BCE attempts to offset inter-carrier price caps by raising the fees of its own end-users, the market dynamics and dictating elasticity have reduced overall demand as customers switch to lower-priced carriers. Moreover, the company's local line access for traditional telephony service continues to face a decline among large customers due to higher wireless substitution and migration to IP-based services. This is reflected by persistent erosion in overall network access services on a year-over-year basis, hurting revenues of the local and long distance operations.
- ▼ With rapid growth in video and other bandwidth-intensive applications on the Internet and on mobile devices, BCE continues to invest substantially in LTE, broadband and fiber in order to provide additional capacity on Internet and wireless networks. The company may be unable to recover these costs from customers due to competitors' short-term pricing of comparable services. Also, a major portion of BCE's employees are represented by unions and covered by collective bargaining agreements. Renegotiating collective bargaining agreements could result in higher labor costs and work disruptions, including work stoppages or work slowdown. Moreover, satellites used by Bell TV are subject to significant operational risks. Satellites that are not yet built are subject to construction and launch delays that could have an adverse effect on Bell TV's business and financial health.

BCE continues to struggle with stringent regulatory norms, losses in network access service lines, price competition and labor union issues. Operational risks related to satellites remain headwinds.

Last Earnings Report

BCE Beats Q1 Earnings Estimates, Withdraws 2020 Guidance

BCE reported mixed first-quarter 2020 results, with the bottom line beating the Zacks Consensus Estimate and the top line missing the same. Despite the impact of COVID-19, the company delivered positive service revenues and adjusted EBITDA growth in the first quarter. The performance was supported by ongoing broadband wireless, Internet and IPTV subscriber base expansion and a 2.6% reduction in total operating costs.

Quarter Ending **03/2020**

Report Date	May 07, 2020
Sales Surprise	-0.22%
EPS Surprise	3.57%
Quarterly EPS	0.58
Annual EPS (TTM)	2.64

Net Income

Net earnings in the March quarter declined 8.1% year over year to C\$680 million or C\$0.75 per share. The deterioration was caused by higher other expenses stemming from net mark-to-market losses on derivatives used to economically hedge equity-settled share-based compensation plans, partially offset by higher adjusted EBITDA and lower income taxes. First-quarter adjusted net earnings came in at C\$720 million (\$536.8 million) or C\$0.80 (58 cents) per share compared with C\$692 million or C\$0.77 per share in the prior-year quarter. The bottom line beat the Zacks Consensus Estimate by 2 cents.

Revenues

The Canada-based telecommunications company's quarterly total operating revenues dropped 0.9% year over year to C\$5,680 million (\$4,187 million). The downtick was due to reduced commercial activity as a result of COVID-19 that affected financial results for all Bell operating segments. The top line marginally lagged the consensus estimate of \$4,196 million. Service revenues inched up 0.3% to C\$5,058 million on higher year-over-year wireless service and media revenues. Product revenues fell 9.7% to C\$622 million, reflecting reduced wireless transactions due to COVID-19 and lower business wireline data equipment sales.

Segment Results

Revenues in **Bell Wireless** fell 2% year over year to C\$2,035 million (\$1,517.1 million) due to lower product revenues, partially offset by higher service revenues. Service revenues improved 0.5% to C\$1,547 million, driven by postpaid and prepaid subscriber base growth over the past year. Product revenues declined 9.1% to C\$488 million due to a reduction in customer transactions attributable to retail channel disruptions because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Revenues in **Bell Wireline** fell 0.7% year over year to C\$3,076 million (\$2,293.2 million). Service revenues were almost stable at C\$2,941 million, as voice revenue-erosion from traditional NAS, long-distance and satellite TV services was primarily offset by higher data revenues from retail Internet and IPTV subscriber growth. Product revenues declined 11.8% to C\$135 million due to fall in low-margin data equipment sales to large business enterprise customers and delays in customer spending, considering the current economic environment.

Bell Media generated revenues of C\$752 million (\$560.6 million), up 0.9% year over year on higher subscriber revenues from Crave growth in the past year and contract renewals with TV distributors. Advertising revenues declined year over year primarily due to the impact of COVID-19 on customer spending across all advertising platforms as the commercial activity has been curtailed and major sports leagues suspended.

Other Details

Overall, adjusted EBITDA was C\$2,442 million, up 1.4%. The upside was driven by increases of 4% at Bell Wireless and 0.5% at Bell Wireline. Bell Media's adjusted EBITDA declined 6.1% due to the impact on advertising sales attributable to COVID-19. Adjusted EBITDA margin improved to 43% from 42%, reflecting a 2.6% reduction in operating costs from lower variable costs of subscriber acquisition and year-over-year decline in low-margin wireline product sales.

Cash Flow & Liquidity

In the first quarter, BCE generated C\$1,451 million of cash from operating activities compared with C\$1,516 million in first-quarter 2019. The downtick was caused by higher interest paid and lower cash from working capital. Free cash flow for the same period was C\$627 million compared with C\$642 million in the prior-year quarter, thanks to lower cash flows from operating activities. As of Mar 31, the company had C\$2,679 million (\$1,890.2 million) in cash and equivalents with C\$25,513 million (\$18,001 million) of long-term debt compared with the respective tallies of C\$145 million and C\$22,415 million at the end of the prior quarter.

2020 Outlook

Due to uncertainties related to COVID-19, BCE has withdrawn all of its 2020 financial guidance that was announced on Feb 6. That said, the company's underlying business fundamentals remain strong. Its strong liquidity position, underpinned by a healthy balance sheet, substantial free cash flow generation and access to the debt and bank capital markets, is expected to provide financial flexibility to execute on its planned capital expenditures for 2020.

Conversion rate used:

C\$1 = \$0.745525 (period average from Jan 1, 2020 to Mar 31, 2020)

C\$1 = \$0.705574 (as of Mar 31, 2020)

Recent News

On Jul 23, 2020, Bell announced that its Wireless Home Internet service for rural Canada will increase Internet download speeds to up to 50 Megabits per second and uploads to 10 Mbps this fall. The company is also expanding its service to rural communities throughout Atlantic Canada.

On Jun 11, Bell, which is wholly-owned by BCE, announced that it has launched Canada's largest 5G wireless network. With more than 22 million connections, Bell provides broadband wireless, TV, Internet and business communication services across the country. Currently available in Montreal, the Greater Toronto Area, Calgary, Edmonton and Vancouver, the company's initial 5G service will expand to more centers. As a result, customers will have access to enhanced mobile data speeds and faster response times as well as seamless connections to Bell's LTE network which covers 99% of the country's population. Bell offers Canada's broadest selection of 5G-enabled smartphones, including the Samsung Galaxy S20 5G series, LG V60 ThinQ 5G Dual Screen and Motorola Edge+.

On May 21, Bell, which is wholly-owned by BCE, announced that it is planning to bring high-speed Internet to the underserved regions of Quebec. The company will form a partnership with the Quebec government under the Regions branches program. The project is aimed at providing all-fiber Internet connections to nearly 7,000 households and enterprises in 18 communities across Quebec.

On May 15, BCE's operating segment, Bell Media, announced that it has completed the acquisitions of French-language TV network V and ad-supported Video On Demand service Noovo.ca from Groupe V Media. In another development, Bell MTS — a subsidiary of BCE that operates telecommunications services in the Canadian province of Manitoba — announced an investment to bring its all-fiber network to around 3,300 residences and business locations throughout the City of Morden. The network expansion will provide fast consumer Internet speeds in Canada to the Pembina Valley community.

On Apr 3, Bell Media, the mass media subsidiary of BCE, announced that it has received the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission's (CRTC) approval for its agreement to acquire conventional TV network V along with its related digital assets, including the ad-supported VOD service Noovo.ca from Groupe V Média.

Valuation

BCE shares are down 8.5% over the trailing 12-month period. Stocks in the Zacks sub-industry and the Zacks Utilities sector are down 17.2% and 8.1% over the past year, respectively.

The S&P 500 Index is up 10.8% in the past year.

The stock is currently trading at 7.68X trailing 12-month EV/EBITDA, which compares to 12.78X for the Zacks sub-industry, 18.6X for the Zacks sector and 12.11X for the S&P 500 Index.

Over the past five years, the stock has traded as high as 9.68X and as low as 6.51X, with a 5-year median of 8.15X. Our Neutral recommendation indicates that the stock will perform in line with the market. Our \$44 price target reflects 16.73X trailing 12-month book value.

The table below shows summary valuation data for BCE

Valuation Multiples - BCE					
		Stock	Sub-Industry	Sector	S&P 500
EV/EBITDA TTM	Current	7.68	12.78	18.6	12.11
	5-Year High	9.68	14.34	20.87	12.85
	5-Year Low	6.51	6.88	10.59	8.25
	5-Year Median	8.15	11.18	13.81	10.89
P/B TTM	Current	2.63	2.96	3.75	4.46
	5-Year High	4.41	4.66	4.17	4.56
	5-Year Low	2.2	1.75	2.01	2.83
	5-Year Median	3.39	2.4	2.62	3.72
P/E F12M	Current	17.73	12.06	13.16	22.69
	5-Year High	18.48	17.46	15.32	22.69
	5-Year Low	11.72	10.04	11.4	15.25
	5-Year Median	16.59	14.82	13.78	17.52

As of 07/30/2020

Industry Analysis Zacks Industry Rank: Top 25% (64 out of 253)



Top Peers

Company (Ticker)	Rec	Rank
Deutsche Telekom AG (DTEGY)	Outperform	1
Swisscom AG (SCMWY)	Outperform	2
Telenor ASA (TELNY)	Neutral	3
Telecom Italia S.P.A. (TIAY)	Neutral	3
Telstra Corp. (TLSYY)	Neutral	3
TELUS Corporation (TU)	Neutral	2
VEON Ltd. (VEON)	Neutral	2
Vivendi SA (VIVHY)	Neutral	3

Industry Comparison Industry: Diversified Communication Services				Industry Peers		
	BCE	X Industry	S&P 500	TIAY	TLSYY	VIVHY
Zacks Recommendation (Long Term)	Neutral	-	-	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
Zacks Rank (Short Term)	3	-	-	3	3	3
VGM Score	C	-	-	A	B	A
Market Cap	38.02 B	10.20 B	22.57 B	8.62 B	28.59 B	31.44 B
# of Analysts	7	3	14	2	2	3
Dividend Yield	5.82%	2.13%	1.83%	7.67%	3.71%	1.85%
Value Score	B	-	-	A	B	B
Cash/Price	0.05	0.09	0.07	0.51	NA	0.09
EV/EBITDA	7.77	6.32	12.96	3.15	NA	21.06
PEG Ratio	4.05	2.78	3.04	NA	5.24	5.23
Price/Book (P/B)	2.63	2.19	3.13	0.35	2.75	1.93
Price/Cash Flow (P/CF)	6.55	5.74	12.61	1.32	18.95	17.24
P/E (F1)	18.63	18.78	22.06	6.39	19.39	22.73
Price/Sales (P/S)	2.12	1.37	2.42	NA	NA	NA
Earnings Yield	5.33%	5.33%	4.31%	15.65%	5.16%	4.41%
Debt/Equity	1.31	1.24	0.75	1.15	NA	0.41
Cash Flow (\$/share)	6.42	2.32	6.94	3.10	0.63	1.54
Growth Score	C	-	-	A	A	B
Hist. EPS Growth (3-5 yrs)	0.21%	1.05%	10.85%	NA	NA	NA
Proj. EPS Growth (F1/F0)	-15.20%	0.54%	-7.75%	16.36%	0.54%	-26.16%
Curr. Cash Flow Growth	5.00%	0.87%	5.39%	94.31%	-45.40%	42.72%
Hist. Cash Flow Growth (3-5 yrs)	2.41%	0.12%	8.55%	-2.51%	-28.17%	22.45%
Current Ratio	0.88	0.88	1.31	0.88	NA	0.78
Debt/Capital	52.13%	53.92%	44.32%	53.57%	NA	29.07%
Net Margin	12.63%	7.57%	10.44%	NA	NA	NA
Return on Equity	18.24%	13.07%	14.73%	NA	NA	NA
Sales/Assets	0.39	0.43	0.52	NA	NA	NA
Proj. Sales Growth (F1/F0)	-7.44%	-0.05%	-1.95%	-8.64%	-2.20%	2.25%
Momentum Score	F	-	-	B	D	A
Daily Price Chg	-0.21%	0.00%	-0.92%	-3.76%	-0.33%	0.45%
1 Week Price Chg	-1.93%	0.00%	0.37%	-1.13%	-2.49%	-2.69%
4 Week Price Chg	1.08%	1.04%	4.14%	4.07%	7.13%	0.53%
12 Week Price Chg	4.09%	10.54%	12.21%	10.54%	21.66%	26.47%
52 Week Price Chg	-8.45%	-3.79%	-1.73%	-27.48%	-10.43%	-3.44%
20 Day Average Volume	991,824	66,892	1,887,986	60,062	21,267	43,813
(F1) EPS Est 1 week change	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	1.45%
(F1) EPS Est 4 week change	-1.76%	0.00%	0.38%	-2.54%	-1.06%	1.45%
(F1) EPS Est 12 week change	-7.50%	0.00%	-0.07%	5.49%	-1.59%	0.14%
(Q1) EPS Est Mthly Chg	-1.16%	0.00%	0.16%	NA	NA	NA

Zacks Stock Rating System

We offer two rating systems that take into account investors' holding horizons: Zacks Rank and Zacks Recommendation. Each provides valuable insights into the future profitability of the stock and can be used separately or in combination with each other depending on your investment style.

Zacks Recommendation

The Zacks Recommendation aims to predict performance over the next 6 to 12 months. The foundation for the quantitatively determined Zacks Recommendation is trends in the company's estimate revisions and earnings outlook. The Zacks Recommendation is broken down into 3 Levels; Outperform, Neutral and Underperform. Unlike many Wall Street firms, we have an excellent balance between the number of Outperform and Neutral recommendations. Our team of 70 analysts are fully versed in the benefits of earnings estimate revisions and how that is harnessed through the Zacks quantitative rating system. But we have given our analysts the ability to override the Zacks Recommendation for the 1200 stocks that they follow. The reason for the analyst over-rides is that there are often factors such as valuation, industry conditions and management effectiveness that a trained investment professional can spot better than a quantitative model.

Zacks Rank

The Zacks Rank is our short-term rating system that is most effective over the one- to three-month holding horizon. The underlying driver for the quantitatively-determined Zacks Rank is the same as the Zacks Recommendation, and reflects trends in earnings estimate revisions.

Zacks Style Scores

The Zacks Style Score is as a complementary indicator to the Zacks rating system, giving investors a way to focus on the highest rated stocks that best fit their own stock picking preferences.

Academic research has proven that stocks with the best Value, Growth and Momentum characteristics outperform the market. The Zacks Style Scores rate stocks on each of these individual styles and assigns a rating of A, B, C, D and F. We also produce the VGM Score (V for Value, G for Growth and M for Momentum), which combines the weighted average of the individual Style Scores into one score. This is perfectly suited for those who want their stocks to have the best scores across the board.

Value Score	B
Growth Score	C
Momentum Score	F
VGM Score	C

As an investor, you want to buy stocks with the highest probability of success. That means buying stocks with a Zacks Recommendation of Outperform, which also has a Style Score of an A or a B.

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