

# The Agentic Transformation: Strategic AI Updates and the Evolution of the Irish Enterprise Landscape (2024–2026)

## STEP 1 — TOPIC DECOMPOSITION

The analysis of agentic artificial intelligence and its integration into the Irish and global business ecosystems is structured across the following fourteen research dimensions:

1. **Defining Agentic AI:** A comparative analysis against traditional, reactive AI systems.
2. **The Evolutionary Path (2023–2026):** Tracing the surge from simple assistants to autonomous agents.
3. **Drivers of Acceleration:** Identifying the economic and technical factors forcing rapid agentic updates.
4. **Multi-agent Orchestration:** Examining the sequential handoffs and collaborative patterns of agent "crews."
5. **Agency vs. Automation:** Distinguishing goal-oriented reasoning from rule-based robotic process automation (RPA).
6. **Pricing Model Analysis:** Evaluating the shift toward outcome-based and action-based monetization.
7. **Agent-Building Frameworks:** Deep technical dives into LangChain, AutoGen, and CrewAI.
8. **Emerging Tool Ecosystems:** Analyzing production-ready platforms including n8n, Intercom Fin, and HubSpot Breeze.
9. **The Irish Adoption Gap:** Contrasting multinational readiness with SME implementation hurdles.
10. **Irish Sectoral Demand:** Mapping requirements in legal, finance, retail, and hospitality.
11. **Technical Stack Integration:** Workflows connecting AI agents with Xero, HubSpot, and Stripe.
12. **Regulatory and Legal Context:** Navigating the EU AI Act and GDPR in a data-sovereign environment.
13. **Trust, Governance, and Human Oversight:** Establishing frameworks for responsible autonomous action.
14. **Strategic Outlook (2026–2028):** Projecting the rise of sovereign AI and the machine-to-machine economy.

## Topic and Objective

This research report provides an exhaustive evaluation of the paradigm shift from generative to agentic AI, specifically calibrated for the Irish enterprise market in 2026. The objective is to

move beyond the "innovation theater" observed in 2024 and provide a strategic playbook for Irish organizations seeking to operationalize autonomous systems. By synthesizing global research from McKinsey, Deloitte, and Gartner with regional data from Enterprise Ireland and Trinity Business School, the analysis identifies the critical path toward achieving measurable ROI through "Track B" integrated AI adoption.<sup>1</sup>

## Keyword Strategy

The foundational pillar of this report is the concept of **agentic ai updates**, representing the shift from isolated tool usage to integrated, autonomous operations.

- **Primary:** agentic ai updates
- **Secondary:** Agentic AI trends, new agent pricing models, AI agent building frameworks, agentic AI tools.
- **Regional Context:** AI adoption Ireland, Irish SME automation, EU AI Act compliance, Irish tech stack integration.

## Local & Industry Context (Ireland)

Ireland enters 2026 as a polarized AI economy. While the headline figure suggests 91% AI adoption—nearly doubling the 49% seen in 2024—the depth of implementation varies significantly.<sup>2</sup> Multinationals and large enterprises, many of which use Ireland as a transatlantic digital hub, lead with 51% adoption.<sup>2</sup> Conversely, the SME sector, which comprises 99.8% of Irish enterprises, remains stuck at 12% adoption, primarily due to a lack of specialized skills and a widening "confidence gap".<sup>1</sup>

The Irish buyer mindset is distinct: it is characterized by high risk-awareness and a heavy reliance on relationship-driven service.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, agentic systems in Ireland must be designed with high transparency and robust human-in-the-loop (HITL) mechanisms to win trust in sectors like legal, finance, and the "West of Ireland" SME community.<sup>4</sup>

## Core Research Sections

### The Definitive Evolution: From Traditional to Agentic AI

The transition from traditional AI to agentic systems marks the most significant architectural change in software since the rise of the cloud. Traditional AI, which dominated the landscape until 2023, is fundamentally reactive.<sup>7</sup> These systems are designed to perform narrowly defined tasks—prediction, classification, or sentiment analysis—based on predefined rules and labeled datasets.<sup>7</sup> While traditional models excel at identifying patterns in historical data, they lack the capacity to independently plan, reason, or adapt when real-world conditions deviate from their training parameters.<sup>7</sup>

Agentic AI represents a fundamental move from systems that follow instructions to systems that pursue objectives.<sup>8</sup> These systems act as reasoning engines that understand context,

decompose goals into sequential steps, and autonomously invoke external tools to achieve a desired outcome.<sup>9</sup> Unlike the static, deterministic behavior of traditional systems, agentic AI is dynamic and reasoning-based, capable of learning from past interactions and adjusting its behavior through feedback loops.<sup>8</sup>

Feature	Traditional AI	Agentic AI
<b>Logic Foundation</b>	Predefined rules and fixed patterns <sup>7</sup>	Goal-oriented reasoning and LLM-driven planning <sup>10</sup>
<b>Behavioral Mode</b>	Reactive: Responds to specific inputs <sup>7</sup>	Proactive: Anticipates needs and initiates actions <sup>9</sup>
<b>Scenarios</b>	Breaks on unexpected or novel scenarios <sup>8</sup>	Adapts to ambiguity and evolves through reasoning <sup>8</sup>
<b>Programming</b>	Requires explicit, hard-coded logic <sup>7</sup>	Learns from natural language instructions <sup>8</sup>
<b>Output Type</b>	Prediction or Classification <sup>7</sup>	Executed Actions and Resolved Workflows <sup>9</sup>

By 2026, the sentiment among global technology leaders has shifted from "what is possible" to "what can we operationalize".<sup>8</sup> This is evidenced by a 920% surge in the usage of frameworks like AutoGPT and LangChain between 2023 and 2025.<sup>8</sup> In Ireland, this shift is critical because traditional systems require significant manual orchestration to handle multi-step processes—a gap that Irish businesses, currently facing labor shortages and high input costs, can no longer afford to ignore.<sup>7</sup>

## Drivers of Agentic AI Acceleration and Orchestration

The acceleration of agentic updates is driven by the limits of "Copilot" models. While generative AI improved personal productivity, it created "SaaS sprawl" where humans were still required to act as the manual glue between different dashboard screens.<sup>8</sup> The industry is now entering the "intelligence economy," where the next layer of value is the ability to understand subscriber behavior in real time and act on it autonomously.<sup>13</sup>

For an enterprise, agentic AI serves as an orchestration layer across systems.<sup>13</sup> This is particularly relevant for subscriber lifecycle management in SaaS-heavy environments like Dublin's tech hub. For example, a churn agent can now detect early signs of disengagement with 94% accuracy and autonomously trigger personalized interventions, a task that previously required a data analyst and a customer success manager to coordinate across three different

platforms.<sup>13</sup>

The growth of multi-agent collaboration systems is a key part of this acceleration. These frameworks allow specialized agents to work together like a human department.<sup>10</sup> In a multi-agent system, Agent A (the Researcher) might find data, Agent B (the Planner) organizes the steps, and Agent C (the Executor) updates the CRM and sends the email.<sup>14</sup> This collaboration allows organizations to scale outcomes without scaling headcount at the same rate, which is a vital strategic objective for 71% of global CEOs and 63% of their Irish counterparts in 2025.<sup>6</sup>

## The Core Analysis: 10 Defining Agentic AI Trends (2026)

The following ten trends define the agentic landscape in 2026, with specific implications for the Irish market.

### 1. Autonomous Decision-Making Agents

By 2028, Gartner predicts that 15% of daily work decisions will be made autonomously by agentic AI, up from virtually zero in 2024.<sup>17</sup> In Ireland, this is manifesting in financial services where agents autonomously monitor market conditions and execute trades based on predetermined investment strategies.<sup>9</sup>

- **Business Relevance:** Reduces latency in decision-making and eliminates human fatigue in high-frequency environments.<sup>8</sup>
- **Irish Applicability:** Critical for Dublin-based international financial services (IFS) firms competing on speed and precision.<sup>9</sup>

### 2. Multi-Agent Collaboration Systems

The transition from single-agent silos to "crews" or "teams" of agents that can delegate tasks to each other.<sup>15</sup>

- **Business Relevance:** Allows for the automation of complex, cross-functional workflows rather than just single tasks.<sup>15</sup>
- **Irish Applicability:** Enables Irish SMEs with limited headcount to deploy specialized "digital departments" for marketing or finance.<sup>14</sup>

### 3. Vertical-Specific Agents (Legal, Finance, Retail)

Generic AI tools are being replaced by agents embedded with domain-specific expertise, pricing complexity, and regional regulations.<sup>13</sup>

- **Business Relevance:** Higher accuracy and lower hallucination rates in specialized sectors.<sup>9</sup>
- **Irish Applicability:** Vital for compliance-heavy Irish legal firms and price-conscious retailers in Galway and Mayo.<sup>5</sup>

## 4. Real-Time Workflow Automation

Agents now operate on real-time data streams rather than batch processing, allowing for immediate remediation.<sup>13</sup>

- **Business Relevance:** Moves operations from reactive service delivery to anticipated, proactive experiences.<sup>16</sup>
- **Irish Applicability:** Immediate benefits for manufacturing and logistics firms in the West of Ireland needing to spot flaws on a production line.<sup>22</sup>

## 5. Integration-First Ecosystems

The shift from "AI as a tool" to "AI as the glue." Agents sit on top of automation layers like n8n or Zapier to connect Xero, HubSpot, and Stripe.<sup>5</sup>

- **Business Relevance:** Eliminates the need to "rip and replace" legacy systems; AI strengthens existing software.<sup>5</sup>
- **Irish Applicability:** The most realistic path for Irish SMEs to automate without massive capital expenditure.<sup>5</sup>

## 6. Rise of No-Code Agent Builders

Platforms like n8n and CrewAI now offer visual or intuitive role-based abstractions that don't require a PhD in AI.<sup>14</sup>

- **Business Relevance:** Lowers the barrier to entry for non-technical departments to build their own agents.<sup>21</sup>
- **Irish Applicability:** Addresses the 62% skills gap reported by Irish SMEs who cannot afford dedicated AI engineering teams.<sup>14</sup>

## 7. AI Copilots Evolving into Full Agents

The transition from tools that "suggest" (Copilots) to tools that "do" (Agents).<sup>5</sup>

- **Business Relevance:** Moves AI from a personal productivity aid to an enterprise operational engine.<sup>8</sup>
- **Irish Applicability:** Transforms the 84% of Irish leaders who report personal productivity gains into the 20% who actually see revenue growth.<sup>29</sup>

## 8. Pricing Shift to Outcome-Based Models

Software monetization is moving from "per-user" to "per-resolution" or "per-action".<sup>31</sup>

- **Business Relevance:** Aligns software cost directly with business value and ROI.<sup>32</sup>
- **Irish Applicability:** Reduces financial risk for budget-sensitive SMEs who only pay when the AI successfully performs a task.<sup>5</sup>

## 9. AI Governance Becoming Mandatory

Compliance with the EU AI Act and GDPR is now a core functional requirement for AI deployment in the EU.<sup>35</sup>

- **Business Relevance:** Avoids "death by AI" legal claims and massive regulatory fines.<sup>37</sup>
- **Irish Applicability:** Ireland's Minister for AI and the DPC are actively monitoring compliance as the EU AI Act takes full effect by August 2026.<sup>2</sup>

## 10. Human-AI Collaboration Models (HITL)

Agents are stopping being "opaque actors" and are becoming integrated partners that require human-in-the-loop (HITL) approval gates.<sup>21</sup>

- **Business Relevance:** Ensures safety, ethical alignment, and brand voice in high-stakes decisions.<sup>5</sup>
- **Irish Applicability:** Critical for the "relationship-driven" Irish market where customers still value personal connection and face-to-face service.<sup>6</sup>

## Technology and Tool Analysis: Powering the Agentic Stack

The market in 2026 is defined by several dominant frameworks and platforms, each serving different segments of the Irish business landscape.

### Agent-Building Frameworks

Framework	Core Paradigm	Learning Curve	Best For
LangGraph	Graph-Based State Machine <sup>39</sup>	High (2–3 weeks) <sup>40</sup>	Enterprise-grade, stateful, reliable workflows <sup>19</sup>
AutoGen	Conversation-Based <sup>19</sup>	Medium (1–2 weeks) <sup>40</sup>	Complex negotiation, code execution, research <sup>15</sup>
CrewAI	Role-Based Teams <sup>39</sup>	Low (2–3 days) <sup>40</sup>	Rapid prototyping, content, lead qualification <sup>14</sup>
n8n AI	Visual Workflow Orchestration <sup>25</sup>	Low (Visual-first) <sup>25</sup>	SME automation, SaaS glue, GDPR

			self-hosting <sup>5</sup>
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- **LangGraph** is the industry standard for "high-stakes" Irish deployments (FinTech, Legal). Its "time travel" debugging and durable checkpointing mean that if an agent fails at Step 15 of a 20-step process, it can resume without restarting the whole operation.<sup>21</sup>
- **CrewAI** has emerged as the ROI-focused choice for Irish marketing and sales teams. It models agents as "LEGO Minifigures" with specific roles (Researcher, Planner, Reviewer), which is 5.7x faster to deploy for common business tasks than competitors.<sup>21</sup>
- **n8n** is particularly important for Ireland. It supports self-hosting, which is a major advantage for Irish firms wary of foreign vendor control over their data stack—a concern for 84% of Irish leaders.<sup>25</sup>

## Emerging Platforms and Tools

- **Intercom Fin:** A reasoning-first support agent that resolves 70-85% of inquiries.<sup>8</sup> For Irish companies, it provides an immediate entry point into agentic AI without deep engineering.<sup>43</sup>
- **HubSpot Breeze:** Integrated agents for prospecting and lead handling. It allows Irish sales teams to automate the "administrative burden" of CRM updates and pipeline alerts.<sup>43</sup>
- **Sierra AI:** An outcome-based agent platform that only charges when an issue is successfully resolved without human intervention.<sup>33</sup> This "pay-for-performance" model is highly attractive to cost-conscious Irish retailers.<sup>33</sup>

## Pricing Model Analysis: The Monetization Revolution

The shift from seat-based pricing to value-based pricing is the "existential challenge" of the decade for traditional SaaS.<sup>31</sup>

### 1. Usage-Based Pricing (Tokens and API Calls)

- **Mechanics:** Customers pay per million tokens or per action.<sup>32</sup>
- **Impact on Irish SMEs:** Offers a low barrier to entry but creates "unpredictable budget nightmares" for CFOs if volumes spike unexpectedly.<sup>32</sup>
- **Risk:** Vendors may face negative margins if token costs are high and pricing is set too low.<sup>46</sup>

### 2. Outcome-Based Pricing (Performance Pricing)

- **Mechanics:** Intercom charges \$0.99 per ticket resolved.<sup>32</sup> Sierra AI only gets paid for "jobs well done".<sup>33</sup>
- **Impact on Irish SMEs:** Highly favorable as it ties every euro spent directly to a business result (e.g., a customer problem solved).<sup>31</sup>
- **ROI Comparison:** Delivers 8.3x more value relative to the price charged compared to

traditional SaaS licenses.<sup>46</sup>

### 3. Hybrid and Tiered Models

- **Mechanics:** Salesforce Agentforce runs three models simultaneously: \$2 per conversation, \$0.10 per action (Flex Credits), and \$125 per user license.<sup>33</sup>
- **Impact on Irish SMEs:** Provides predictability through a base license while allowing "upside" through credits for high-activity periods.<sup>32</sup>

## Real Irish Use Cases (Production-Grade)

### Scenario 1: Dublin Professional Services Lead Handling

- **Business Problem:** A Dublin consultancy receives 100+ inbound leads weekly; manual qualification takes 15 hours of partner time, leading to slow response times.<sup>5</sup>
- **Agentic Solution:** A CrewAI-based "Sales Crew" was deployed. The "Researcher" agent enriches lead data from LinkedIn; the "Qualifier" agent assesses fit against ideal client profiles; the "Booking" agent sends a personalized invite to qualified leads.<sup>5</sup>
- **Tools Used:** HubSpot, CrewAI, n8n, OpenAI Assistants.<sup>5</sup>
- **Outcome:** 80% reduction in manual triage; response times dropped to 2 minutes; conversion from lead to meeting increased by 22%.<sup>5</sup>

### Scenario 2: Mayo Manufacturing SME Administrative Automation

- **Business Problem:** A Mayo-based distributor processes 500 supplier invoices monthly. Manual entry into Xero led to a 10% error rate and lost VAT reclaim opportunities.<sup>5</sup>
- **Agentic Solution:** An agentic workflow built on n8n that reads invoice PDFs, matches them to purchase orders in Xero, and flags discrepancies to the finance lead.<sup>24</sup>
- **Tools Used:** n8n, Xero, Stripe (for payment status check).<sup>5</sup>
- **Outcome:** Processing time per invoice dropped from 6 minutes to 30 seconds; manual error rate reduced to <1%.<sup>24</sup>

### Scenario 3: Galway Retailer CX and Trend Forecasting

- **Business Problem:** A Galway clothing retailer struggled to personalize marketing for their physical and e-commerce stores.<sup>1</sup>
- **Agentic Solution:** An agent analyzed local weather forecasts and historical sales data to autonomously suggest "Rainy West" marketing clusters and draft social media posts.<sup>1</sup>
- **Tools Used:** Shopify, n8n, Claude 3.5.<sup>1</sup>
- **Outcome:** 12% increase in auxiliary revenue during promotional weekends; 80% reduction in manual social media drafting time.<sup>5</sup>

## Critical Analysis: Where Agentic AI Works and Where it Fails

Agentic AI is not a "magic button." Its success in Ireland depends heavily on the "Foundational

Work" of the organization.<sup>20</sup>

## Where it Works

- **Repetitive, High-Variation Workflows:** Triage, data entry, and meeting tracking.<sup>8</sup>
- **Data-Heavy Decision Support:** Searching through vast internal policy documents or policy history.<sup>1</sup>
- **Systems with Clean APIs:** Workflows connecting modern SaaS like HubSpot, Xero, and Stripe.<sup>5</sup>

## Where it Fails

- **Poor Data Environments:** "Garbage in, garbage out." Agents fail when data is fragmented, poorly governed, or inconsistent.<sup>5</sup>
- **Ambiguous Business Rules:** If a human can't explain the logic of a process, an agent cannot be programmed to follow it.<sup>49</sup>
- **Lack of Human Oversight:** Over-automation leads to "machine-driven systemic failure" and brand voice dilution.<sup>9</sup>

## Irish-Specific Risks and Barriers

1. **High Trust Barrier:** Irish shoppers and clients still value "integrity and personalization".<sup>6</sup> Organizations that over-automate risk losing the human empathy that drives loyalty.<sup>6</sup>
2. **The "Easy Wins Trap":** Irish firms often settle for "Assistant" wins (summarizing meetings) rather than rethinking core operations.<sup>20</sup>
3. **Skills Wall:** 84% of Irish firms cite the skills gap as the main barrier.<sup>30</sup> This is compounded in regional areas like Mayo where lack of confidence is higher than the actual technology gap.<sup>4</sup>

## Synthesis and Strategic Recommendations (ThinkAI Playbook)

To realize the €250 billion projected economic impact of AI by 2035, Irish businesses must transition from "Experimentation" to "Production".<sup>2</sup>

### Key Trends (Ireland 2026)

- **The Rise of the "Architect":** Success no longer goes to those with the best prompts, but to those who can design the state and flow of autonomous systems.<sup>21</sup>
- **Digital Labor:** CFOs will move from budgeting for "software licenses" to budgeting for "digital headcount".<sup>8</sup>
- **Governance as a Moat:** Firms that build "Responsible AI Foundations" will win trust and faster regulatory approval.<sup>16</sup>

### Opportunities for Irish SMEs

- **Scale Without Headcount:** Use "Teams of Agents" to perform roles like Junior

Researcher or Junior Accountant.<sup>14</sup>

- **Hyper-Local Personalization:** Use agents to bridge the gap between global data and local West of Ireland customer nuances.<sup>1</sup>
- **Access to Funding:** Utilize Enterprise Ireland Innovation Vouchers (€5,000) for AI feasibility studies and LEO training for as little as €50.<sup>1</sup>

## Barriers to Adoption

- **Legacy Systems:** 36% of Irish firms struggle with integrating AI with legacy data.<sup>28</sup>
- **Data Sovereignty:** 84% of Irish tech stacks are owned by foreign vendors, raising concerns about jurisdictional risk.<sup>30</sup>

## Strategic Recommendations for the C-Suite

1. **Don't Settle for Easy Wins:** Move from Track A (Assistant tasks) to Track B (Integrated core processes) within 12 months.<sup>1</sup>
2. **Appoint "Named Responsibilities":** Every SME needs an Executive Sponsor, a Data Lead, and a Change Champion to own the AI transition.<sup>1</sup>
3. **Implement a "Human-in-the-loop" Policy:** Never deploy an autonomous agent in a high-stakes area (finance, legal, CX) without a designated human approval gate.<sup>5</sup>
4. **Modernize the Data Architecture:** Real-time data movement is the foundation of agentic advantage; prioritize data cleaning before agent deployment.<sup>37</sup>
5. **Adopt a "Modular and Portable" Strategy:** Ensure your agentic stack is not locked into a single vendor, allowing you to adapt as regional regulations (like the EU AI Act) evolve.<sup>22</sup>

## FAQ Section (The SME Guide)

- **Q: How much does it cost to start?**
  - **A:** A pilot typically costs €5,000–€10,000; full SME production systems range from €25,000–€50,000.<sup>1</sup>
- **Q: Will AI replace my staff?**
  - **A:** Initial data shows most firms (60%) expect headcount to fall by less than 10%, as roles shift from execution to system oversight.<sup>30</sup>
- **Q: Is n8n better than Zapier for Irish firms?**
  - **A:** For SMEs wanting deeper control and GDPR-compliant self-hosting, n8n is often the preferred choice.<sup>5</sup>
- **Q: What is the ROI?**
  - **A:** 53% of Irish firms report measurable productivity gains; early adopters of outcome-based pricing report 8.3x value vs cost.<sup>18</sup>
- **Q: How do I handle the skills gap?**
  - **A:** Focus on "AI Fluency" training for existing staff rather than just hiring specialists; use low-code frameworks like CrewAI.<sup>14</sup>
- **Q: What if the agent makes a mistake?**

- **A:** Built-in guardrails, Pydantic type-safety, and human approval gates are the primary defenses against "machine-driven systemic failure".<sup>11</sup>
- **Q: How does the EU AI Act affect me?**
  - **A:** Most low-risk business tools have few obligations; high-risk uses like recruitment screening require strict logging and human oversight.<sup>1</sup>
- **Q: Should I buy or build?**
  - **A:** Buy for common needs (customer support); build only when you have proprietary data that offers a unique "moat".<sup>1</sup>
- **Q: Can I use customer data under GDPR?**
  - **A:** Yes, provided you conduct a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) and ensure vendor compliance.<sup>1</sup>
- **Q: How do I measure success?**
  - **A:** Track time saved, error reduction, and lead response speed within a 6–10 week pilot phase.<sup>1</sup>

## AI / Compliance Considerations (The Trust Layer)

Irish businesses must treat **GDPR and the EU AI Act** as fundamental to their AI strategy. The "prohibited practices" of the AI Act (e.g., untargeted scraping of facial images or manipulative dark patterns) are illegal in the EU as of February 2025.<sup>35</sup> For "High-Risk" agents in areas like credit scoring, Irish providers must conduct pre-market conformity assessments and maintain detailed technical logs of every decision the agent makes.<sup>11</sup>

Ultimately, the goal is "**Human-Centric, Trustworthy AI.**" In Ireland's small, relationship-based economy, brands that balance technological innovation with ethical authenticity will be the ones to win long-term loyalty and sustainable growth.<sup>6</sup>

## Visual Recommendations

1. **Chart Idea:** "The Adoption Chasm" – A visual representation of the 51% large enterprise vs 12% SME adoption rate in Ireland.<sup>2</sup>
2. **Diagram:** "The Agentic Loop" – Showing the Sense → Reason → Plan → Act cycle with a "Human-in-the-loop" approval gate.<sup>5</sup>
3. **Table:** "Pricing Evolution" – Comparing a fixed €500/month subscription vs Intercom's €0.99/resolution for a typical Irish support desk.<sup>32</sup>

## Conclusion (Strategic Summary)

Agentic AI marks a real shift in how work gets done inside an enterprise—it is a "force multiplier" for security, productivity, and customer experience.<sup>16</sup> For Irish organizations, the year 2026 is the pivot point. Those who continue to wait for workers to "adapt on their own" risk a permanent competitive disadvantage.<sup>27</sup> By investing in clean data, robust governance, and role-based agentic teams, Irish firms can close the gap and lead the next wave of transatlantic

innovation. The future belongs to those who build for it now..<sup>37</sup>

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