

Twilio's Launch of Flex Platform Is Turning Heads in the Industry



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Presented By: [Twilio](#)

The introduction of Twilio Flex, the company's first complete contact center platform, was the subject of much speculation before it was unveiled at the 2017 Enterprise Connect conference. The actual announcement generated a tsunami of media coverage during the event, but what was most meaningful to the innovative supplier that pioneered the concept of Communications Platform as a Service was the groundswell reaction from the people who mean most to them. "We've had a phenomenal response from partners, developers looking to build SaaS solutions or integrations either into or on top of Flex as well as directly from enterprise end users," said Al Cook, Director of Product Management and Engineering at Twilio and Head of Twilio Flex. "Within the first 24 hours, we had an astounding number of companies sign up for updates on our website and at the conference itself, we had many serious conversations. Over and over again, companies came up to ask us. 'Hey, I've got 10,000 or 20,000 agents, how quickly can we get access?'"

There was some element of surprise about Twilio bringing an actual contact center product to market; the company had always been considered a supplier focused on APIs. According to Cook, "It's more of an evolution than a departure. We started off providing elements such messaging and voice APIs which offered low level basic control over those types of channels. Over the years, we've added more software logic, whether for doing advanced media

controls, video or conference capabilities; we've had a task router that has been on the market for three years as a skills-based routing engine. This is what's now at the heart of Flex," he said. "Our impetus is to enable businesses to go faster; to get their hands on best practices and simplify the things that are truly hard to accomplish at the scale and reliability that they require. We know it's hard for folks to engineer those types of applications themselves, so we want to give them the engines they need to allow them to apply their own customizations on top."

He stated it was important to note that Twilio does not view Flex as a SaaS-based contact center. "It may offer the same out-of-the box experience, but we see it as a programmable application platform that gives organizations a foundation that they can work with immediately but then customize the heart of it. From that perspective, giving developers control is certainly something that is not a departure for us," he said. "We always look for ways to unlock developer creativity. So when we design a product, we make decisions based on 'how do we build something that allows people to always disagree with us?' Developers can always overwrite something, always change something, and shouldn't have to wait for our roadmap to deliver something."

While Twilio's promotion for Flex states it can be used right out of the box, Cook doesn't see many companies deploying it that way. In fact, he prefers that they don't. "The power we've given businesses to customize their contact center and how easy we've made it to do means that everyone should want to do it. The reality is that no two contact centers are ever alike; when you dig into them, they're always so connected to the business process and back-end systems. But for years, businesses have been forced into either needing to use something that is very cookie cutter in nature or having to spend millions of dollars in professional services to get customized."

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In a time when many organizations have limited IT bandwidth, Flex gives them viable options. "We thought about how companies can customize with limited or no internal development resources; we thought about businesses that only want to do lightweight customization as well as how we can provide companies that really want to dig into it with the absolute control required to enable to change and really rip it apart to suit their needs."

Flex provides its users with numerous options. "Everything it supports, from the channels to the routing to the IVR and workflow capabilities, has the multi-layered, tiered dimension that enables different ways to customize it," said Cook. "But we know many companies don't have internal development resources. We have partners, such as Accenture, who are trained on Flex and know everything about it, to provide the necessary expertise. If a business would prefer to work with a smaller local systems integrator, we have a network of those as well."

The solution is also laser focused on providing true omnichannel capabilities. "In talking to potential customers, we hear that while many suppliers are talking about omnichannel, only a few are really making it viable," said Cook. "There's a lot of hype and vaporware and solutions that claim to be from the same vendor but when you look under the hood, you find a white label version of something else. This makes channel switching or offering a unified customer journey very difficult. When you ask why more companies haven't implemented omnichannel service, the real reason is that the technology has just been too disconnected."

Flex allows agents to give customers the experience they want without being pushed into a channel or having to conduct interactions spread across dozens of tabs. Flex incorporates Customer Frame,

a widget that can be embedded on a website along with an intuitive agent interface that can be logged into by front-line personnel. The channels that Customer Frame brings to the table out of the box are: webchat, VoIP, video calling, callback requests, screen sharing, and co-browsing; agents can effortlessly switch between any of these channels, all from one UI.

Businesses can choose which channel switching options they choose to deploy and offer. "For example, agents can start with a chat then move into a screen share and if the customer needs more guided assistance, they can move the interaction to a co-browse or transition to a voice call," said Cook. He believes that Flex is unique in offering a model that enables companies to also add their own channels, whether it's an email solution or back office tasks.

The solution also offers perhaps the highest level of scalability available. "We have always had a lot of interest in contact centers even before we launched Flex," said Cook. "Perhaps that is because Twilio powers the SaaS solutions for some of the largest contact center operations, such as Amazon Connect, Talkdesk, Serenova, and others. Many large companies have told us that building on Twilio was the only way to get the contact center experience they needed. In the current year, Twilio will do 40 billion interactions."

"Over the past 10 years, we have learned the techniques of building a platform to a serious scale, both in terms of the overall scale, offering elasticity and availability at five 9s level. So while Flex many be new, the components, services, and APIs that it is built on, both the channels of communication and the routing itself, is something that we've been strengthening for years," noted Cook.

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"Today when you look at deploying a contact center, you can go to a cloud-based contact center that typically tops out at 1000 or 2000 agents. Some of the larger contact center vendors can get you up to any level you want by essentially sharing solutions; deploying multiple different contact centers that are effectively siloed from each other and then trying to paper over the cracks with reporting. We wanted to take something that takes into account everything that we have learned; we've tested Flex with up to 50,000 agents, all in one contact center environment, not broken up, not papered over, but all in one team with unified reporting and unified routing. And if someone had a need for more than that, we could go even higher." This exceptional scaling is bringing many of the largest enterprises and BPOs to Twilio's doorstep.

Flex also offers advanced workforce optimization tools such as dashboards and real-time agent feedback. In addition, Twilio also uses its background in AI and machine learning to enable the solution to make intelligent routing choices, create conversational bots, prompt agents with suggested answers, or flag supervisor intervention based on keywords or sentiments detected in real time during a voice call.

Twilio works with its customers to determine what they want to change in Flex and what resources they have available to accomplish these goals. If a company doesn't want to make any changes and simply wants their contact center to work out of the box, they will most likely refer them to one of their partners. Depending on the level of customization required, Twilio will walk a company through the process of deciding whether they need external integrators or can make the changes internally.

"One key point to consider is that the skill set you need to customize Flex is the skill set that 20 million developers on the planet have access to," said Cook. "You just need general web development skills; you don't need to be a contact center expert."