

What Does Twilio Do?

We all interact with our phones every day. You can't go anywhere without them. And there's a good chance that in one way or another you've interacted with a phone system that is powered by Twilio. However, since Twilio works in the background to bridge the gap between web-based applications and telephones, it can be hard to understand just how Twilio fits in the flow of customer communications.

What does Twilio actually do? And how does it do it? To answer those questions, we'll first need a little bit of background on the world of telephony.

We'll keep this discussion at a high level, but there are links to more in-depth information on some key concepts at the end of this article.

The telecom world

There's an old network out there. Older than the internet. One that enables voice and SMS communications as we know it. This is the telephony network. While it is critical to world wide connectivity, this network runs in a relatively closed, slow-moving, and expensive ecosystem.

The telephony network is connected by carriers. Carriers are responsible for the flow of voice, text, and data all around the world. Carriers sell connections into their networks.

For you and me, that connection is simple: a cell phone or a home internet connection. Consumers are hidden from the complex world of languages, protocols, and hardware that goes into providing a global telephone network.

But for businesses, it's not so simple. To build custom functionality on top of that connection, like a company phone system (PBX) or call center, many different additional pieces are required. Specialized servers and software are needed to do the work. Specialized facilities are needed to house and run the equipment. A specialized workforce is needed to install and maintain the equipment as well.

Imagine investing years of time and millions of dollars just to get set up. And if you want to change it? Prepare to invest even more time and money as you move to a new system.