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Meet our Heroes: Twilio Champions



It's no secret that at Twilio we love developers.

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Hey Developers, we ❤ you.

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Developers look at complex problems or challenges and solve them with code. They are brilliant problem-solvers, and when you present them with a challenge, and give them autonomy, they will rise to the occasion.

In our 10 years as a company, we've seen millions of developers build incredible things on the Twilio platform. From helping businesses engage with their customers to connecting people in crisis with life-saving communications, every day we are inspired by what they build.

Last year we created the Twilio Champions program to celebrate developers using their talent to fuel the future of communications one line of code at a time.

Twilio Champions build better communities knowing that every developer's environment is different. Champions inspire others by doing their thing with confidence. They merge diverse branches of people, educate new developers, and build new projects that push communications forward. Twilio Champions not only make the most of the Twilio platform, they make it their own.

Today, we'd like to take a moment to introduce to you some of our Twilio Champions and let you get to know them and what motivates them to build. We hope their stories will inspire you to keep building.

Nicolas Grenie



What's your name and where are you located?

Nicolas Grenié, I am from France but I live in San Francisco, California.

Where do you work and what's your role?

I am a Developer Advocate at Typeform, helping developers build crazy things and be creative with our APIs.

How did you get started in coding?

When I was 10 I was part of an "emoticon league". Sounds like a strange idea right? We will be just hanging out in Caramail webchat (a French IRC-like chat) and know all the combinations to create fancy emoji.

I had to create a website for our league to recruit new members. So I went on Microsoft Word, designed my pages (with a different background color for each 🤮) and save them as HTML to finally upload them via FTP. That was it, I made a website, and it was live! I was hooked and never stopped. Moving on to Dreamweaver, discovering Javascript and DHTML, making desktop apps with RealBasic....

What's one thing you've built that you're proud of?

In summer 2017, there was a total solar eclipse visible across the whole United States. It was once in a lifetime opportunity, next one in those conditions will happen in 2045.

NASA had a website with a bunch of pins on a google map to show you events that were happening for the Eclipse. But it was not the most convenient UI. So I made a website (🌑🌞.ws) based on that data, to make it easier to search and find events around you. A simple field asking for your location and we would display results.

It was my first app built in Vue, my first app that could have a bit more users that just my mom, and my first app with an OK design. The app went live on ProductHunt and got some great feedback, it was then featured on cNet, FastCompany, LifeHacker and in the San Louis Obispo Tribune. For once I felt I made something useful.

What motivates you to build?

I build because I am not afraid. Not afraid of spending time to make it work. Not afraid of just do it for me and have no users. Not afraid to fail multiple times, but learn something on the way. Not afraid of what people think, I do it because I feel it's right.

I build because I can, and I should take this opportunity to try new things.

What advice would you give to someone starting out in their careers or curious about coding?

Go explore! Coding is not a definite thing, they are so many ways to code. It does not have to be shiny and glamourous, it does not have to be boring because people say so.

Find your own fun and your own motivation to do things. For example, right now we are in need for COBOL programmers. It might not sound fun or sexy to the vast majority of "modern" developers. But, if that's your jam, don't get discouraged, you will have an impact and help sustain those systems built with this technology.

Your one line of code in COBOL into the unemployment app has way more impact than mine in React on my failed startup project, don't you think?

What's your favorite Twilio product and why?

I am still a fan of the most basic thing: SMS and Voice. Mainly for its wow effect on people that get introduced to it for the first time. Like What you mean, I click here and I receive an SMS on my phone?! 🤯

Where can people find you and connect with you online?

I am picsoung in most places on the internet: Twitter, Github, Glitch, and LinkedIn

Anything else you'd like to share?

Stay safe folks :) And it's ok if you come out for this quarantine/lockdown situation without 20 new skills, this is not a normal time, it's harder for all of us to be focus and find motivation. Being healthy is more important :)

Taylor Facen



What's your name and where are you located?

My name is Taylor Facen, and I currently live in New York City.

Where do you work and what's your role?

In the past 4 years, I've worked at AllianceBernstein as a technical business analyst and now within data strategy. I like to help people make data driven decisions through building automation tools, updating our data infrastructure, and managing our internal projects. I'll be taking a month off in May before heading up to MIT to start as an MBA and Masters of Engineering student in June.

How did you get into coding?

In the summer after my sophomore year of college, I attended a summer research program at UC San Diego. This was my first time working on a data science project, so I had to start from scratch with Python. I spent the entire first weekend, completing almost every tutorial I could find online. My presentation ended up being very successful, and I left completely in awe of how I could use coding to answer complex data problems and make predictions. Ever since then, I've been hooked!

What's one thing you've built that you're proud of?

Last October, I completed the "WomenMake Just F*ing Ship It" challenge by building an Interview Coach using Twilio Autopilot. Before then, i was stuck in a coding rut and didn't feel inspired to start AND complete a project. Doing this challenge forced me to finally turn an idea into a finished product. I wrote about it in my blog here.

What advice would you give to someone starting out in their careers or curious about coding?

The only way to prove to yourself that you know something is by doing it. While you're learning to code by watching videos, reading articles, and following tutorials, don't be afraid to use what you learned to build something. It doesn't have to be a massive project either. My confidence as a developer didn't come in until I was able to point at something - big or small - and say "Hey, I created that.".

What's your favorite Twilio product and why?

I love, love, LOVE Autopilot. It's so easy to create a bot to do almost anything you'd want. I've built my own bot that called me every morning as an alarm and forced me to say an affirmation in order to turn off the alarm. I also use it to power my Interview Coach bot.

Where can people find you and connect with you online?

I'm usually always on Twitter (@ItsTayFay). You can also visit my website.

Griffin Solot-Kehl



What's your name and where are you located?

My name is Griffin Solot-Kehl, and I am based in San Francisco, California.

Where do you work and what's your role?

I just started working at Datadog as a Solutions Engineer!

How did you get started in coding?

I actually started coding by going to a tech camp as a kid to learn how to make video games! Originally it was very drag and drop, but eventually I began to learn C++, Unity and C#, Python, and decided to continue to study Computer Science in university.

What's one thing you've built that you're proud of?

Can I say my hardware like my computers and my keyboards? I love to get in touch with the physical hardware that we use every day to code and develop software, as I feel like many software engineers these days have lost touch with the silicon that powers our lives.

What motivates you to build?

The fact that I am able to encourage and help other people begin building. As one person, I can do so much. But if I can help other people build things as a community, we can accomplish so much more.

What advice would you give to someone starting out in their careers or curious about coding?

Break things. Ask questions. Take breaks if you need to. Most people don't have a lexicon of knowledge over every subject, but instead have found out how to start learning new things efficiently and effectively.

What's your favorite Twilio product and why?

I am partial to the Messaging API, as it's such a good gateway to get people to use your app with zero installation needed. Nearly everybody has SMS these days, so allowing people to chat with a bot, or interact with a product instantly is a very good way to get people using your app.

Where can people find you and connect with you online?

@WingofaGriffin on Twitter!

Anything else you'd like to share?

Hit me up for skincare advice! I feel like it's slowly becoming my brand now and I'm unsure how to pair it with all the tech I use.

Joe Previte



What's your name and where are you located?

Joe Previte in Seattle, Washington.

Where do you work and what's your role?

I work at Facebook as a Developer Advocate on the Open Source Team!

How did you get started in coding?

I didn't think grad school in Italian linguistics would pan out so I turned to freeCodeCamp! I fell in love doing #100DaysOfCode and decided to pursue programming full time. It's one of the best decisions I've ever made!

What's one thing you've built that you're proud of?

Probably the thing I'm most proud of that I built is mentored.dev It's a gamified learning experience that teaches about the command line.

What motivates you to build?

Making people's lives easier. Technology can help us in so many ways. I try to build things that get people excited to learn or help them in some way.

What advice would you give to someone starting out in their careers or curious about coding?

Create a plan for yourself and try to stick to it. Don't try to learn everything at once. Also, look for patterns when you're learning! It will help down the road.

What's your favorite Twilio product and why?

The SMS API. We send text messages everyday so building something with it and showing someone, they immediately understand. Plus, the docs are amazing!

Where can people find you and connect with you online?

I spend most of my time on Twitter. Find me @jsjoeio

Anything else you'd like to share?

Have fun! We're so fortunate to be in an industry that moves fast. It can be overwhelming, but make the best of it by building things that bring you joy!

Do you think you have what it takes to be a Twilio Champion?

To be accepted into the Champions program, you must demonstrate the following:

- Show expertise in your area of focus, and a drive to share that knowledge.
- Use your empathy to push your developer community's projects forward — even when there's no roadmap.
- Demonstrate commitment to the software and tools you use to build things with Twilio.
- Take care to reinvest your skills into your community, whether that's in-person or online.
- Try to be approachable, so others feel comfortable asking for help becoming the developer they aim to be.

Learn more and apply or nominate someone today.

We can't wait to see what you build.

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