Episode 30
What's up with Totogi? Achieving Feature Velocity with the Totogi APIs
Released December 6, 2021

Danielle Royston (00:00)
I'm Danielle Royston, and this is Telco in 20.

A lot of people listened to our first *What's Up With Totogi* episode because they were curious about what's going on with my new company. So we decided to do another episode. For this episode, I wanted to talk about the Totogi APIs, and why I think this is a big idea for the telco industry. Telco is notorious for moving slowly. I think CSPs could move 10 times faster with the right tool set. Totogi has a set of APIs for the telco industry that IT departments can use to put their ideas to market so much more quickly. And building functionality in days and weeks – as opposed to months and years – will accelerate a telco's ability to rapidly experiment with new ideas that grow their business. I call it feature velocity. What's so great about this idea is you don't have to rip and replace your current systems. You can use the Totogi APIs with your current BSS to add all those features you want today. So we're going to give you the latest on all things Totogi, and talk about the Totogi APIs. I've invited my buddy David Haselwood to come on the podcast and ask me questions about this new idea that I think is going to totally rock the industry. So cue our little song, and let's kick off an episode of What's Up With Totogi.

So today on the podcast, we're shaking things up. We've invited David Haselwood back to interview me about what's up with Totogi – more specifically the Totogi APIs – and what I call feature velocity. Hi, David! What's up?

David Haselwood (02:00)
Not much, my life is definitely not as exciting as yours is. So I always enjoy these check-ins. And there's always something that's interesting or controversial, or you're generating waves. And speaking of Totogi, I noticed that you had an issue with a video getting pulled, which sounds like something my kids would talk about on YouTube. Was there some sort of content in there that was.. Was this from the TM Forum event? What happened with that?

Danielle Royston (02:20)
Yeah, I know. I love these little videos that we do. We put a lot of effort, and we try to make them really entertaining. And I guess it was too entertaining, that video that we did for the TM Forum Digital Transformation World Series – which is their big event that they do every year. It was a hundred percent virtual. It went live on a Tuesday, and then by Friday, we determined that it had been pulled down. It turned out that – I guess – some of the old legacy dinosaurs called in to TM Forum, and, you know, they have power... so TM Forum was like, 'we don't know what to do,' but Keith Dyer of The Mobile Network, this journalist I know, wrote an article about it. But what was so funny about it, David, is that I think it had the opposite effect.

David Haselwood (03:06)
Yeah. I was going to say – there's nothing they could have done worse than use their muscle, as the big incumbents, to really draw attention to what your message was and what you were trying to say. I wouldn't have known about it. I don't follow the TM Forum – but I heard it was pulled off, so that made me want to go check it out.

Danielle Royston (03:22)
We pulled it off, and we put it out on the internet. And I've gotten thousands of views. And so it kind of reminded me of that story – I know you're like an ex DJ, maybe – when Frankie Goes To Hollywood put out that song 'Relax'. In the UK, it got as high as number six – but then the BBC banned it – and then it went to number one. And stayed number one for weeks. And if they had done nothing, it probably would've just died.

David Haselwood (03:50)

Would've gone away. Exactly. But I think it's interesting that you are ruffling feathers with some of these incumbents. Last time we chatted was MWC, doing a wrap up about that. I get asked all the time 'what's going on with Totogi?' Are you guys going in the BSS space? I looked at a market map, and I think it folded out to like nine pages. And I needed like a micro loop in order to see all the companies on there. (There's a ton.) I would think you know what you're doing as far as jumping in with all these companies. Why this super crowded, established space? Help me understand that. People are really wanting to know where are you going to shoot your bazooka at?

Danielle Royston (04:32)

Maybe people are confused – yeah, I mean – does the world need another BSS? That was a question that we kind of all talked about when we were starting to think about what we were going to go do. And the way Business Support Systems are done in telco is they were all designed in the 90s, maybe early 2000s – but everyone starts from the interface first, from the module, right? They come up with a workflow and invariably, CSPs are like, 'well, I want to change it' or 'there's this new idea I want to try'. Telco's famous for all the customizations and how expensive they are, and how slow we move. And so we're like, 'Can we change that?' Can we change the speed of telco? What's the problem and why does that happen? Right? You know, I'm not really a telco girl. I'm from enterprise software. And there's been these two companies that I've been watching: Twilio and Stripe. Twilio really simplifies the way for any business to put out messages or phone calls to their customers. (Yes, super easy.) Right? And then Stripe really simplified the way for payments to be taken on websites. And it used to be, that you'd have to hire a consultant.

David Haselwood (05:46)

Yeah, that was sort of a whole thing. And now my teenage kids can set up a Stripe account. (Yeah, they I can set up a website.) Like, in two seconds. Exactly.

Danielle Royston (05:54)

It takes you less than five minutes to sign up on Stripe. And it probably takes a day to drop the code. And every time you use their APIs, they charge you. Same with Twilio. And you could put that Stripe code in a mobile app. You can put it on a website, you can put it in an application, wherever you want to take a payment. And I was like, 'could you do that with telco BSS functionality?' And the answer is yes. And so, instead of doing what all the other vendors do, which is (1) they size your business by the number of subscribers you have. (2) You buy a perpetual license and (3) you go through a big install, and (4) upgrade cycles are like three, five years. The pace is so slow. And I'm like, if we started from the API... APIs first – don't start with interface – design the API. What's the functionality? Could we speed up business? And the answer is yes. And so that's the idea. And it's super awesome, and it's totally different. And we have to keep explaining it because people don't really understand. Everyone's like, 'let me see your screens.' And I'm like, there's no screens.

David Haselwood (06:58)

It seems to me like the angle you've got here – If I got it right, if my reptilian brain can process this appropriately – is that you're taking the ability to adapt new features and new functionality. And you're cutting down the time and complexity in a way that telco's never seen before,

Danielle Royston (07:17)

It's a very 'public cloud programming development' kind of thought. You start with an experiment, right? It's pretty cheap. You can fire up a server over at AWS, and it's pennies a day. Then you start to build on it. You're like, 'oh, I'm going to add this service.' 'Let me try to do this piece of functionality.' It's the same idea with the Totogi APIs. You could start with a small experiment. 'Oh, let me just see if this idea works and I'll just test it with my phone and the

buddies on my team.' And then you're like, 'Okay, that worked. Let's do some friendly subscribers.' Right? Maybe that's like a couple of weeks. And you're like, 'Okay, let's roll it out to a small city.' 'Oh, it's working. Let's roll it out to a state or a nation.' And I'm like, that's what is going to bring what I call feature velocity to this industry. You start with experiments that grow into deployments. Instead of our current way of thinking, which is we scope it out and it's like: 'give me hundreds of thousands of dollars and I'll be back in six or 12 months with the answer.' It's like, 'No, no, no, no, no, no. We need to get ideas out and start to fight back against the OTT vendors with these ideas and capabilities that we have. We just need speed.' And I think the APIs really do that.

David Haselwood (08:24)

So I've heard you mentioned this thing before: feature velocity. Obviously, I know what those two words mean, but when you put them together – help me understand specifically what feature velocity is and why this should matter to your customers.

Danielle Royston (08:41)

So.. you know telcos are notoriously slow. And I know there's some telcos out there – some big telcos that really see it as a competitive advantage if they can move much more quickly – and by 'quickly', we're talking minutes, days, weeks – instead of months and years. And so I've been talking with strategy officers around the world. I recently spoke with one of the largest groups in Europe and they're starting to hire people, you know, like a Head of API, that's like a new title. So Vodafone who's planning to hire 7,000 software developers – they want to rip out their 5,000+ BSS systems and rewrite them with microservices. You can do it with the Totogi APIs. Right? It's a real way to get features out to market much more quickly.

David Haselwood (09:34)

So the benefit – ultimate benefit – if I understand this right, of the feature velocity is this super-duper competitive industry. I see all the ads for the different cell phone companies. They're obviously super competitive – and this allows them to kind of stay competitive because they can keep moving stuff out and keeping their customers. (Exactly.) Yeah.

Danielle Royston (09:48)

How fast can you get ideas out so you're like a cool technology company and not slow, boring... (Right.) The telcos need to start acting and being as good as Amazon and Apple and Meta (– I guess we'll say that)... and Netflix. That's the competition. Cause those guys are siphoning our ARPU. Those guys have huge NPS – in the 60s and the 70s. Telco – if you're lucky – 30. And I'm like, we've got a long way to go. We need to be able to just accelerate all these ideas to market. (Get them all out there). I think Totogi APIs really do that.

David Haselwood (10:24)

And so the message, again, to the market map is: you don't need the telcos to pull out their existing vendor. You can work with them. They can start adding you right away. So that helps me, the next time I get asked this question of what's Totogi doing? I now can understand because you're not trying to go after it in the traditional sense. You're like, 'Hey, if you want to stick with that vendor, that's been costing you all this money, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. You can do that.'

Danielle Royston (10:50)

You have a really great point there, which is 'No, we're not telling you to rip out your current BSS spaghetti mess', which it is, right? I mean, it's decades of building. We're not replacing that. We're not saying switch out your Amdocs

system for the Totogi system, or your Nutcracker or CSG. We actually can work with that system. I'll give you a couple of examples, because examples are always really powerful. They're like storytelling. My favorite, my favorite thing to do. Yeah.

Danielle Royston (11:21)

(I love the examples.) So we have this customer that we know uses Ericsson's BSS platform. The system has some issues with provisioning the order once it's submitted. Let's say there's six or eight steps to provision – a new line, or a voicemail box, or whatever it might be. And there's errors somewhere. They don't know where, and the way they're finding it out is when customers call mad into their support center, like, 'Hey, my voicemail, isn't working'. And they know it's happening from order to the call from the customer. And I don't know why Ericsson hasn't fixed it. I don't know if they just don't have budget? It's too long, too expensive? But we can go in there with Totogi APIs. See what the order was. Use AWS Step Functions (a cloud service from AWS), and we can check the order and pretty easily determine 'is there an error in the provisioning?' and 'should we go back?' Now, working with Ericsson that might cost some money to like actually go fix it. But now we can catch it. And this company is losing revenue over it because customers are pissed, right? (Yeah.) So that's like a really very powerful, very palpable example. But like on the other side, this idea I love: we've been talking to Tier 2s and Tier 3s that want to offer in their plans and in their packages, free trials of HBO Max, or Apple TV. And so Totogi, my company, has signed up over a hundred partnerships, literally with four lines of code, will provision the whole thing.

David Haselwood (12:58)

Wait, what? (I know!) Wait wait. So like, if I'm a Tier 2, Tier 3 provider – I decide that it's important for my offering, my roadmap, to offer HBOMax, which I love. And I – fortunately I have so many streaming services. I now have more than I used to pay with cable, which I think I'm not alone in that. I should probably go back to cable – but you're saying they're like, 'I want to add this' – and you can have them do that. And you guys already did that for them?

Danielle Royston (13:24)

Right. They don't need to get the partnership. That's a whole big effort. (Oh yeah.) I talked to a company this morning in Eastern Europe. A small country. You think Apple's like, yeah, 'we want to talk to those guys...'? They're not high on their list. But I'm like, 'No, we have this partnership'. You use our partnership. Go through us and test this idea. Test it. It's four lines of code. Just add it. Let's see if it works. So easy. And so we're getting lots of traction with people who are super excited about that. Another example – we have a customer in the Middle East that's really struggling with keeping talent in their call center. And they have zero automation. They use a combination of Salesforce for CRM, with an Ericsson BSS. And they want to add a WhatsApp channel with some chatbot automation. And we're like, 'let's go do that.' I mean, they're in real pain. They're down 40% headcount-wise on their talent. And they're having a really hard time recruiting people. And we're like, okay, let's start to come up with the best ways to automate some of your tickets away, and save the people that you have for like the harder problems. And they're like, 'Oh my God, this is amazing.' And they don't have to switch out their system. We're not doing this big, huge implementation. We're talking 'We can start to get something up and running probably in 30 days.'

David Haselwood (14:44)

When you're reaching out to customers, do they even believe this is possible? I mean, obviously you're talking to telcos. They're used to vendors doing exactly what you laid out earlier, which is they got some big plan, and they're going to try and install this stuff. Are people like, in disbelief how quickly you were able to do this?

Danielle Royston (14:58)

We did a workshop with TM Forum where we coded live in 25 minutes and we added a feature to a theoretical application. The ability to do video calling. And we've gotten so many calls from people like, 'Wait, that's amazing.' And I think the biggest problem I have is helping people to think in this new way. Because when I say BSS, what pops up into everyone's head, they think of these screens, and breaking into these screens. Ripping out an old system and putting in a new system. And I'm like, 'No, no, no, no, no. Think of them as like hooks.' As long as I can get a hook into your system, whatever it is, you can call out to the public cloud, do some work, and come back. And that thing can be anything. Add a little feature. Add a WhatsApp channel. Check provisioning, run a report. I can move data into the public cloud and do some stuff. And we're not really destroying or disrupting production. (Right.) think once telcos start to get this way of thinking, it's going to just light a fire. I mean, just people are going to be like, 'THIS IS AMAZING.'

David Haselwood (15:59)

You're right. It's a totally different way of thinking. I know that TM Forum, they have a list of APIs. You're just going to do those and just call it a day?

Danielle Royston (16:06)

That's a great question. So that's where we've started because those are industry defined APIs. They weren't necessarily like Totogi-owned. People know them, and people have been coding with them. That's where we started. And our plan is to support all of them. There's like 65, but we don't think that's the total list of APIs in the world. I think there's going to be more. And so we'll just start to discover them and put them out there. Obviously they won't be the industry-defined APIs. They'll be Totogi APIs. But we think people will be like, 'Oh my God, this functionality is amazing. Give me more.' 'Give me network APIs, not just BSS APIs.'

David Haselwood (16:44)

You've got to change the way they're thinking. And then once they start thinking and using it, then they're gonna probably gonna come to you with ideas and say, 'Can you do this?' And you're going to be like, yeah, no problem.

Danielle Royston (16:51)

Just think of all the code in the industry that's doing the same work everywhere. In their website, in your kiosk, in your desktop application, in your mobile app – that you can shrink down and eliminate down to a couple API calls. And now your code is easier to maintain. There's less chance for bugs when you want to make changes. It's just so much less effort. And then you think about the feature velocity – of how much easier it is to get ideas out and tested and experimented with. It is awesome.

David Haselwood (17:21)

Yeah. Yeah, no, that's awesome. So you're trying to tell me that you can get a call from, let's say just some Tier 1, and they'd be like, 'I want to start with one.' And you're like, 'Great.' Is that, I mean, is it that simple?

Danielle Royston (17:33)

It's that simple.

David Haselwood (17:33)

Holy cow. Okay. So say I am a telco provider. How is this priced? How does this work exactly?

Danielle Royston (17:41)

So a lot of times BSS are charged by the number of subscribers. Here, we're charging by the API call. So, a really great example that I think people understand is, let's say you're managing some IoT group and the IoT needs to call and check in. It's a cow. Right. And the cow, you know how they have IoTs like, stapled to their ear? They have these little devices, right? Yeah. 'Where's my cows?' And so, the cow just pings once a day, 'I'm in the field over here' and you're just like, 'Great. The cow is still alive and moving around.' And he would just pay once a day for that call.

David Haselwood (18:14)

Wait, you said, this is for cows?

Danielle Royston (18:16)

Right? You're like 'Check cow.' Right? 'Return.' Right. But then like, let's say a subscriber that's using data or whatever. And they're checking their phone – three, four times an hour. Those are different use patterns. And so for the cow, you're only going to be charged when maybe it's once a day or once an hour. And then the more heavy-use subscriber might be a little bit more active. And so you're just paying by the use and it's just a completely different way to think about functionality. And so it's not a business model built on consulting dollars. I mean, obviously we'll help you code –

David Haselwood (18:48)

Right – and customization and blah, blah, blah.

Danielle Royston (18:50)

We want developers inside telcos, in like Vodafone for example. We want those 7,000 developers to use the APIs, code with them, build whatever you want. We just get paid when you use them. We're happy to help you if you need help. We're happy to train you so that you can do it – but the proliferation of empowering developers to have the speed and velocity around creating new features and new ideas in this industry – that's what we're all about. And so we're on the telco side. Sure, Amdocs will continue to hate me, nothing new there, but...

David Haselwood (19:24)

You know, the last couple of chats, we've been talking about the elephant in the room, which you haven't talked about yet – but now that I'm kind of understanding it, I see how it all comes together. Totogi is all built on the public cloud. So this sort of pay-as-you-go model, there's a lot of overlap with that, right? So not only can they just use an API and then start there, but then it's going to be on the public cloud. So they're just gonna pay for what they use. They don't have to do all this other stuff.

Danielle Royston (19:49)

Well, a lot of times to start experimenting within a telco, you're like, 'Well, I need a machine or a server.' And that takes like fricking forever to go do that. You've got to get approval and all that stuff. By using the public cloud and building on the public cloud, you don't need that. So I have built-in compute databases, resilience, failover, capacity, elasticity... All of it is built-in. And so people can just literally create an account with the Totogi APIs, open up their friendly development environment and start coding. And you have access to compute, access to a database, access to whatever services of AWS, access to the Totogi APIs that you want to use... BOOM. Done. So easy.

David Haselwood (20:34)

So the last question I have for you is that, you know, you talk about flying in on a dragon, and MWC, and you're the public cloud girl. If I were to ask you about getting like a tattoo, about Totogi a few months ago, it would probably be 'Public Cloud'. Now it sounds like, are you going to be 'the API Girl'? And now 'all the public cloud girl', are we going to have two tattoos, to use that analogy?

Danielle Royston (20:53)

These are all ideas around getting this industry caught up with where all the other industries are – which is feature velocity, pay-by-the-use, program with APIs, use the services of the public cloud. So I think it's all still the same idea. I think I still am riding my dragon with my 'come to the public cloud' crown on.

David Haselwood (21:13)

They go together. They go together really well. That much I can see.

Danielle Royston (21:17)

I think it's a really big idea. It's a new idea. I'm going to have to evangelize this idea, because I don't think in general, people in telco are thinking this way. And so off we go with a new cool idea. But I think once people see it and we've seen it in our sales cycles, people start to realize, they have that aha moment. And they're like, 'Holy shit. I want to use this right now.' And I'm like, 'Great.'

David Haselwood (21:38)

The thing you were talking earlier, I was remembering how Twilio got their start, which I believe was in voicemail. And so they started with one thing and got people to think about it differently. And then now they can do pretty much everything. (They can do all sorts of things.) So I think that that's exactly where you are. Once you get people to use one of these and get it going, then they're just going to want more and more and more. And then with the public cloud, it's like infinitely scalable. That's awesome.

Danielle Royston (21:59)

Right. And when you can drop it in, in a matter of hours or days, and you're really skilled – it's just going to change the speed of the industry. And I'm so excited and I'm pumped. Let's go do it!

David Haselwood (22:10)

Well, thank you for explaining this to me. I will now have a much better answer when everyone asks me, 'Why is DR going into BSS?' Now I know, now I have a great answer.

Danielle Royston (22:21)

So David, as always, you're awesome in our chats. Thank you so much for coming onto the podcast.

David Haselwood (22:26)

Thank you. Super happy to be here.

Danielle Royston (22:27)

Stick around because we're ending each podcast with a Telco in 20 takeaway. I have 20 seconds to tell you something you need to know:

Episode 30
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Danielle Royston (22:38)

David Haselwood and I talked briefly about the Totogi Marketplace. It's selling like hotcakes, especially to Tier 2 and Tier 3 telcos looking to expand their product offerings with partnership offers. The reason why it's so popular is because it's so easy to use. Telcos want to offer services like HBO Max or Apple TV to subscribers, but it's hard to roll this out – signing up partners and adding all the code to your system to provision the offers takes telcos months... but our new offering, Totogi Marketplace, can help you do it with just four lines of code.

Simply add one of our offers to your catalog and present it to your subscribers. Then once they order it, call a small snippet of code and Totogi will provision the offer. No months-long negotiations with individual partners, and no waiting for IT to update your systems every time you want to add a new offer. Totogi has over 90 Marketplace partners that you can use today. Just select the offers you want to use and make a tiny change to your system. And in weeks you'll be sending offers to your subscribers and growing your ARPU. To show you just how easy it is, we've put a snippet of code in our show notes, so you can see it for yourself! Check it out and then give us a ringy to see what Totogi Marketplace can do for you.

And ho-ho-ho can you believe it's already December? I'm predicting clouds for 2022. I'll share my forecast at the end of December, both in my newsletter and on the podcast. Got any ideas? Send them my way! And don't forget to sign up for our newsletter@telcodr.com. Follow me on Twitter @TelcoDR and connect with me on LinkedIn. You can also call or WhatsApp me at 925-TELCODR. Later, nerds!