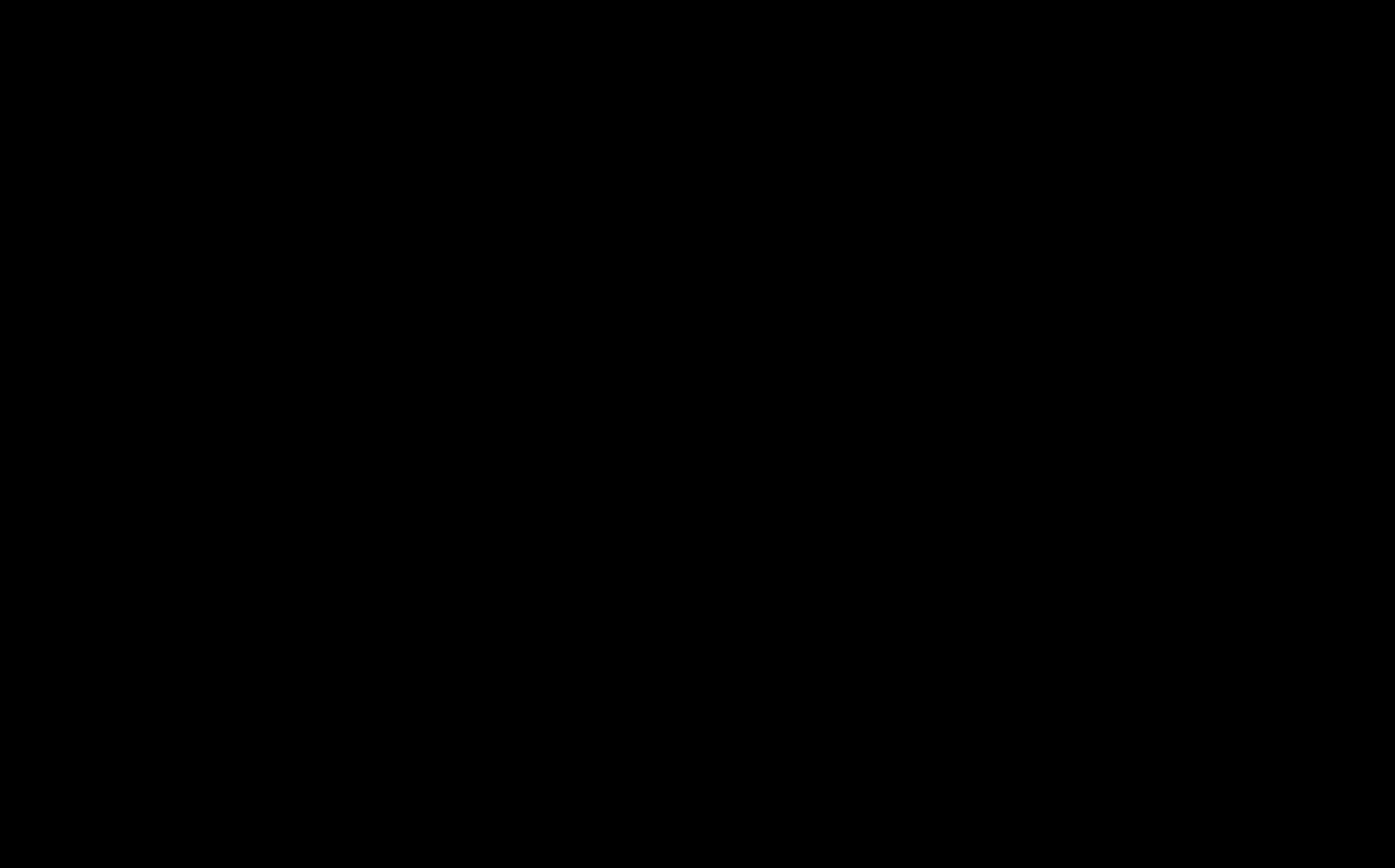


Built with Velo

Lessons from Building a COVID-19 Volunteer App With Velo

Thu Mar 31 2022



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Speed, flexibility, and problem solving - what we learned by building the "Golden Guard" app to help seniors during the COVID-19 crisis.

Jonah Balfour · 4 min read

This is part two of a series on our experience building a volunteer app during the COVID-19 crisis. [Part one is available here.](#)

It started with a series of phone calls. Representatives from the Israeli ministries of Welfare and Finance reached out to contacts at Wix and explained their need for an app that could support their efforts to aid Israel's elderly population during the COVID-19 crisis.

The idea was simple: connect volunteers with elderly citizens to see if they needed help. It could be help receiving medicine, food, or other basic supplies. And yet, in that simplicity there was nevertheless a maze of complexity that could push the limits of what Wix is capable of as a platform.

The app required not only stringent privacy protection for the citizens receiving support, but also needed to integrate with proprietary Israeli government systems. That meant our team needed to build a robust system that could privately and securely connect volunteers with those in need, and it needed to meet the regulatory requirements of the government. In addition, save for a simple outline, there were no designs, wire frames, or even a basic flow of how the app would work. And the cherry on top was that the whole system needed to be built at the speed that the crisis was unfolding - meaning days preferably and a few weeks at the most.

And yet, even with all of those challenges in hand, when the project landed with the Velo team, the initial reaction of Chief Architect and Head of Velo, Yoav Abrahami, was that this was just the project he had been looking for.

"To be honest, when I first heard about the idea of the app, I was pretty sure that we could use Velo to do everything they needed," he said. "There are a few reasons. First, Velo makes deployment a no brainer. So things that would normally take days with other systems, like deployment or maintenance, are kind of just gone with our system. That's one key factor that makes us able to stand up to this short timeline. The other is that Velo is very flexible. We didn't get a specific brief that said the app has to work exactly in a specific way. We had the basic outline for an app. In the first week of development we had a change in the app every *hour*."

Fortunately, the team was able to help and the "Golden Guard" app launched earlier this month. The blog [previously featured a post](#) detailing the technical challenges that needed to be overcome and the solutions we found for those challenges. **Around 125K calls have been made and 60K citizens have been contacted since launch. The app has reached a rate of around 4k citizens contacted a day with around 300 active callers a day.**

But beyond the technical requirements of the app, the project also shed a unique light on the experience of working with Velo and how teams can adapt to the rapid pace of development it enables. Once the Velo team accepted the challenge of building the app, Abrahami, along with the Head of Product - Wix Code, Jacob Kimchi, quickly assembled a team of eight to tackle the challenge.

"We did the product work ourselves, creating wireframes, and developing an understanding of how the app needed to work. In total, it took us two weeks of development with constantly changing realities and needs of the system," Kimchi said. "In that time, we built the system to recruit and screen the volunteers and the call center app. It was one big team effort."

Much like the rapidly shifting landscape of the unfolding COVID-19 crisis, the project demanded speed, flexibility and adaptability, and the ability to find novel solutions to unexpected problems. One of the aspects of Velo that emerged as a key factor in the team's ability to build a robust solution is the way Velo can integrate with external 3rd party services and technologies. As the team built the app, it had to first integrate with a proprietary government portal that authenticated the identity of the volunteers. A second integration emerged due to strict privacy requirements.

"One of the challenges we encountered was that due to privacy concerns, we couldn't expose the citizens phone number to the volunteer," Kimchi said. "So that very quickly eliminated a lot of ways to operate the app. Our solution was to integrate with an external call service from Twilio that initiates two unidentified calls to both the volunteer and the citizen in need of support ensuring that private information stayed private."

While the team went into the project knowing that speed was one of the key demands of the project, the pace of development that Velo enabled crystalised the impression that team had of Velo rapid development capabilities.

"What I learned from this is that Velo enables incredible velocity in developing an app," Kimchi said. "Now, we did encounter certain drawbacks that we wouldn't have encountered with other development platforms. But I think what we gained in velocity of development with Velo made all the difference."

Beyond the technical lessons and the way the experience informed how teams can use Velo, the project was also an incredible opportunity to help people during one of the most challenging periods in recent years.

"One of the interesting aspects of this project was that at the beginning, we saw it as an opportunity to push the limits of Velo and to take on a challenging project," Abrahami said. "However, right after we started, it dawned on us that this was an incredible opportunity to help people and it gave us a tremendous amount of motivation to push it forward. I think there are a number of lessons that we can learn from this project. But one takeaway that sits with me is the power that 10 people can have to make a real impact given the right tools, the right focus, and the right direction. It's amazing."

Kimchi added, "one of the biggest factors of us not only being able to deliver fast but in high quality, was that we were all motivated and enthusiastic about our ability to make an impact. But beyond that we felt lucky to have an opportunity to have this kind of impact. So we felt really thankful."

The team also hopes that interested governments from around the world will reach out for assistance in building similar systems in their countries. Please contact us if we can be of service in your region.

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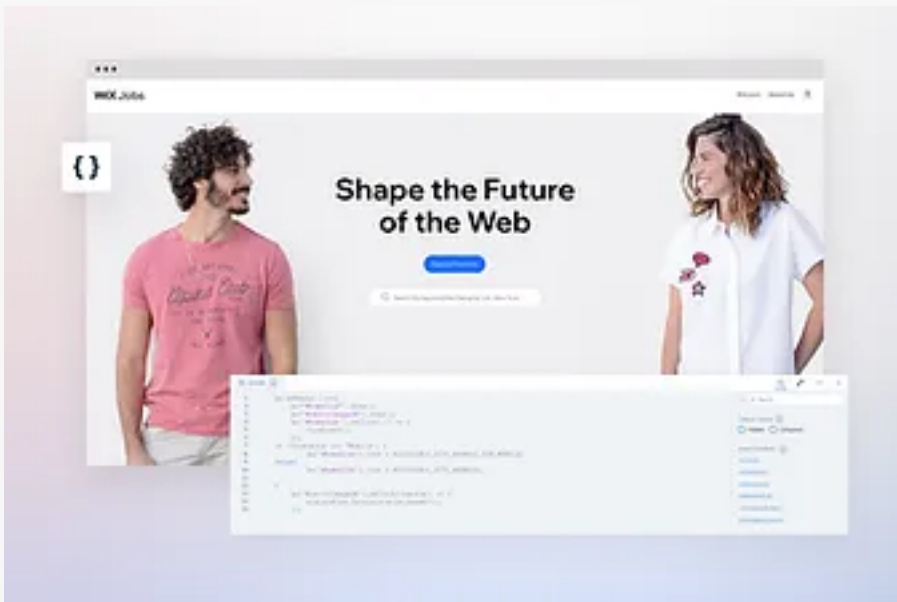
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