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Rich messages in DialogFlow (API.AI), LUIS and WIT

I was recently asked a question about support for rich messages in the three bot frameworks - API.AI, LUIS and WIT.AI.

Disclaimer: I am most familiar with API.AI, and have a basic understanding of the features in the other two.

It also looks like the documentation for all three bot frameworks could be improved. So please leave a comment if I am not correct about some features in LUIS or WIT, and I will be happy to change it.

Definitions

First of all, let us look at the definition of a bot framework. A bot framework, such as API.AI, is what allows you to build the chatbot. Simply building out a chatbot doesn't do you much good until you deploy your bot, that is allow users to interact with it.

Second, it is probably helpful to decide on the appropriate terminology for the "place where users interact with your bot". Some people use the word "platform" to refer to this place. I prefer to use the word channels, for two reasons

1. The word platform is also occasionally confused to mean the bot framework (see this Quora answer for example)
2. The word platform is anyway too broad and can mean a lot of things.

Henceforth I will just use channel when talking about the different places users can interact with your bot.

With that out of the way, let us look at the list of channels supported by API.AI. This will give you a good idea of the different integrations available on API.AI.
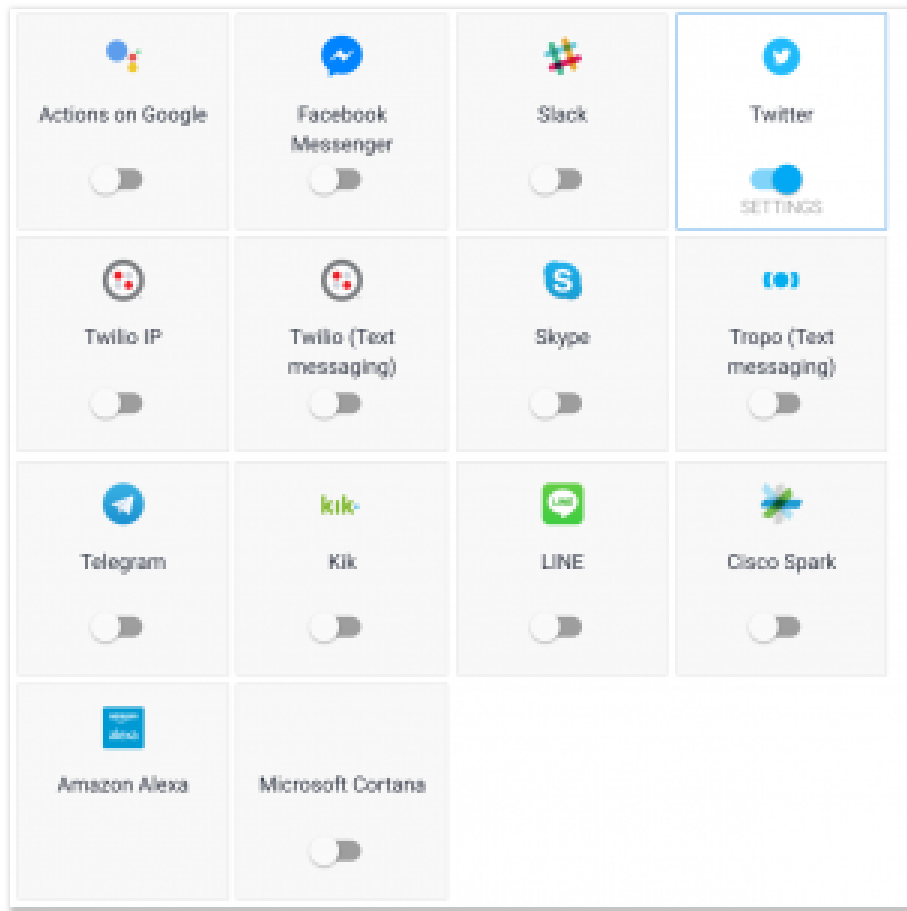
In addition, API.AI also has a very nice feature where you can use your website itself as one of the channels. For example, take a look at my link building advice chatbot where you can ask questions directly into a chat box inside my website and get a response. These are referred to as **web agents** in the documentation.

There is a small problem with the chat box if you notice. The hyperlink which is returned as an answer displays only the text, and it is not clickable. In some cases this can be overcome - for example, on desktop versions of Chrome and other browsers, simply selecting and right clicking allows you to go to that URL. If it could display a hyperlink, the user can just click and go to the specific URL.

Rich messages

We will refer to anything more advanced than plain text as rich messages, including clickable hyperlinks. The messages can in fact be much richer - buttons, images, information cards. See this link for an example of an image which shows different kinds of rich messages (you need to scroll down to the bottom part of the article).

Rich message support

So with those defined, now we can look at the kind of support that is provided for rich messages for the different combinations of framework/channel.

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Bot framework ⬍	Bot channel ⬍	Rich Messages Supported? ⬍
API.AI	Web agent	No
API.AI	Other channels - Facebook, Kik, Telegram etc.	Yes
LUIS	Web agent	Markdown supported
LUIS	Other channels	Full support for rich messages
WIT.AI	Web agent	No?
WIT.AI	Other channels	Yes

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One thing to note: each channel also has its own limitations as to what kind of rich messages it supports. Not all channels support all rich messages, and you might need to look into the

specific channels to find out the exact feature set. In that hierarchy, the web agent seems to be the least feature rich, at the moment.

Article by aravindmc / ChatBots / Leave a Comment

About Aravind Mohanoor

I am a DialogFlow consultant/trainer with a background in Natural Language Processing and Machine Learning.

I help businesses prototype/design/build DialogFlow chatbots. Click here if you are interested in working with me.

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