

## Android Skype applications - Skype (Beta) Vs Fring

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I often use the desktop Skype client, its not a bad application, it works and it doesn't have too big a memory footprint. I recently expanded into the arena of mobile Skype, and being an Android user I thought I'd try out the Skype applications for it.

The two big applications for the Android platform are Skype beta, and Fring.

### Skype (Beta)

The name of the application is "Skype Beta". Why is it a Beta? It has been out over a year, have Skype just not finished developing it? Or is that a mild disclaimer in case it doesn't work properly?

My first observation was that there are a lot of negative comments about this application in the Android marketplace, but I'm open minded, so I'm not pre judging.

I initially had problems logging into this application. This was due to the formatting of my telephone number, it is not immediately obvious that you need a country code prefix, and it flags any phone number without one, blocking the login.

The application itself is well thought out. The design is nice, and the interface uncluttered. What that does mean is that all the functionality has been moved to off screen menus, so you have to press another button just to get to the menu with the options. It would have been nice if common options were accessable through the main screen, instead that screen is blank, and pretty much a waste of real estate.

The application only display Skype contacts as well, IE you have to manually add each contact from your phone book by entering their number. There is no interface at all with your existing phone book.

The call quality is of a high enough quality that you couldn't really tell that it was not a regular mobile call, so ticks all round there. Unfortunately the messaging side of the application is a big let down. It was impossible to have a real time conversation. Messages would take a long time to arrive, in one case over three hours later than it was sent. There does not appear to be an notification settings either. I'd quite like the application to play a notification noise when I receive a new message, but this is not an option.

### **Skype conclusion**

Overall this application was disappointing. It looks nice, but there is almost no documentation or help, and often I found myself being stopped from doing something merely because I wasn't entering data correctly. The delay in messaging makes this basically unusable for me.

### **Fring**

Fring is a third party application that piggy backs off the back of other service provider networks. When you first fire it up it prompts for any add-ons you want to install. So after installing the Skype add-on we were up and running.

The first and most obvious difference is that this application connects directly to your existing phone book. It lists your current contacts, and within two clicks you can be dialling them, whether they are Skype numbers or not. (SkypeOut or regular line).

The same can be said for pre existing Skype clients. One click will allow you to select either text or chat, and then you are in the session. The call quality is of a slightly lower quality than the Skype (Beta) application but the messaging is instant. It has about the same responsiveness as the desktop Skype client, so it is very easy to have an actual conversation.

Fring will play a notification tune if you are messaged whilst the application is running in the background, so you don't miss anything.

### **Fring conclusion**

The application can be a little process heavy on my HTC magic, but it hasn't crashed, and could act as a decent text replacement. The interface into your contact is invaluable, and it is generally a lot easier to use than the Skype application.

### **Conclusion**

Fring just bumps the Skype (Beta) application into second place here. Maybe if Skype finished their application it would work slightly better. On the down side it is worth noting that both these application still dip into your contract minutes, even when used over a wireless network. This is quite an issue for a lot of people, and almost voids the point of Skype in the first place. Although this seems to be an issue on the Android platform, not any other.

That being said I would recommend Fring as a messaging client, especially if you are on an unlimited data plan.