Feedback & Suggestions

from attendees of the

YAPC::Europe 2012 Perl Conference

Introduction

This document includes many fragments from comments that were received from attendees of the YAPC::Europe 2012 Perl Conference during a survey taken after the conference had completed. Each survey provided the attendee with the ability to provide suggestions for future events and feedback on the 2012 event.

It should be borne in mind while reading this report, that everyone's time and effort in putting on the conference was given freely. All the organisers have full time jobs and we are fortunate enough that they have partners and family who were willing to put up with losing them for several days and nights over the previous year, while they organised the conference for the benefit of the Perl community. A big thank you to everyone involved.

Suggestions and Feedback

Rating the Conference

Would you like to expand on any strong views?

- - more communication up front (maybe not as excessive as JT..) would have been fine
  - I'd really like to see a detailed post-mortem
- A very well organised conference and a lot of praise for the volunteers who kept us fed and watered in the intense heat.
- Because the weather was SO HOT, the venue lacked the proper ventilation system for that bunch of sweaty and smelly geeks. Some air fans would have been appreciated. Also, as often happens in this kind of conferences, the wifi connection was very poor and most of the times non-existent at all, which was a bit of disappointment.
- Communication was fairly poor until right before the conference, too much of it was last minute.
- Excuse me, what is BOF?
- I have actually no idea what BOFs are... :)
- I would have liked to see more BOFs.
- I would prefer to see the list of talks earlier.
- It was definitely to warm at the venue, you need more meeting rooms with air condition!
- Make the air conditioner mandatory for venues / organizers. I don't want to sweat like a pig all the time.
- Mandatory flossing is an important national initiative to preserve our precious dental health. Or did you mean about the conference?
- Really? *All* of the t-shirts say "Perl 5" on them? It seemed at times as though the organizers were trying to make subtle digs against Perl 6.
- Social events: the "Beers & Engineers" was disappointing as the Extrablatt Cafe was not able to serve the attendees in proper way. Not the fault of organizers nor of Booking.com team.
- That many people at a conference at that time of year needed a venue with better ventilation/aircon. Alerting the surrounding eateries to the upcoming influx of customers during what would normally be a quiet time for them would have allowed them to staff accordingly - e.g. the closest restaurant only had one waitress and she was run ragged on Monday! Also, when lunch is provided at the venue, you get much more chance to mingle with the other guests than when you all scatter to surrounding restaurants.
- The airconditioning in the venue was lacking severely. Other than that I have no complaints about the venue location itself. Numerous speakers seemed inexperienced at giving talks. I don't expect professional speakers at a YAPC but some of them could really use some practice.
- the auditorium was all right but not very comfortable
- The next YAPC site needs a usability guy to comb over it. Frankfurt.pm did a great job otherwise (not their fault it was 40 degrees).
- The service at Extrablat was terrible and rude. Hot, hotter, hottet....
- The venue was much too hot. It was very hard to enjoy the conference and the hallway track suffered because of the heat. The registration process should have started sooner and there could have been a pre-registration the night before. It was unclear from the schedule when it was actually going to start and given the heat in the venue it was fairly unpleasant to stand around in long queues. There was also not enough communication regarding the venue and how to get there. Communication before the conference could have been much better.

- There was a shortage of both power outlets and (working) internet access at the venue; this impeded collaboration with other Perl hackers on community projects. It would have been helpful to offer early registration at the pre-conference social: the registration queues on the first morning were ridiculously long. (In this case, that problem was exacerbated by the temperature, but I'm not blaming the organisers for that, of course. :-) As a speaker, I was very unhappy with the way the call for papers and talk acceptance were handled. I submitted my talk proposal just over a week before the CFP deadline. Some talks had already been accepted at that point. The organisers then appeared to go silent for an extended period, to the extent that I genuinely had no idea whether they intended to accept any additional talks. A large batch of talks (including mine) was finally accepted about three weeks before the conference itself. I consider that an unacceptably short amount of time given that (a) speakers may well have to make international travel arrangements, and (b) speakers may choose to delay actually writing the talk until they know it's been accepted. The latter was certainly true for me; it's impossible to justify spending several days on writing a talk until I know that the result is actually desired. Further, this short lead time was not in line with previous YAPCs; for example, acceptances in both 2010 and 2011 came roughly six weeks before the conference. I appreciate that organising an event like YAPC::EU is an enormous task, and there are always going to be unanticipated situations which can wreak havoc with existing plans. But it would have been much better for the organisers to say what was going on. I count at least four reasonable means of communication: the conferences mailing list, the YAPC::EU Twitter account, the YAPC::EU blogs.perl.org blog, and even direct email to speakers whose talks hadn't yet been accepted or rejected. None of these were used for this purpose, as far as I can tell. To add insult to injury, I finally received my talk acceptance email on July 31st, but on August 2nd, I received an email about papers for the printed proceedings. This email was, frankly, insulting. First, the subject was "Your talk -> proceedings reminder". The word "reminder" suggests that I'd previously been asked to provide a paper for the proceedings; while I knew that papers would in general be sought from speakers, this was the first specific request I'd received. Second, the tools linked from the email made it clear that speakers would be expected to provide their paper formatted to specifications they weren't necessarily familiar with, and to do so extremely quickly. Third, the deadline for submission was given as August 8th, only six days from that point. To labour the point: no, I hadn't had chance to write a paper and a talk in the two days since my proposal was accepted. Nor would I have chance to do so within the following week. This felt like a peremptory instruction to drop everything else I might be working on, purely to provide something for conference organisers who hadn't even been able to apologise for their unusual delay in accepting talks! This entire experience left an unpleasant taste in my mouth, and it was only by following other attendees' blogs and Twitter accounts, vicariously absorbing their excitement, that I was able to drum up any enthusiasm to actually attend. I must point out that the conference itself went very well, and I congratulate and thank the organisers for the work they did. But these events in the run-up to YAPC very nearly soured me on the entire prospect, and I'm sure that wasn't what the organisers intended.
- There weren't very many updates on the main website about what was going on.. (Maybe it was all so smooth there was nothing to say?)
- we all know that it was way too hot ;(
- Website could have looked nicer and been clearer. Such as, the social event after the first day of talks was only listed on the wiki. Seems like it should of been on the main site with a google map or something.
- Where were the BOFs? It would have been nice to have seen some effort to accommodate small get togethers, even just having a board at the registration desk, and some advertisement in the announcements would have been good.
- Wifi AC

Feedback

For the Frankfurt organisers

Do you have any feedback you would like to give specifically to this year's organisers?

- - more communication up front (maybe not as excessive as JT..) would have been fine
  - I'd really like to see a detailed post-mortem
- A/C required :) The web should contain more details (e.g. map how to get to each venue), more details about the social events...
- Advertising how to get to the venue could have been a little better, the photo guide helped, but we found the venue by accident rather than following the maps. Also the food hall wasn't well advertised, although thankfully there were lots of places to eat nearby. AirCon was dreadful, I know this is was a problem with the venue, not the organisers, but it didn't reflect well on the conference as a whole. Lights in the smaller rooms was awful. Speakers had to turn off all the lights just to see the slides. It wasn't all bad, the rooms were close by, the refreshments were very much appreciated, and the staff help was brilliant. It was also nice to see a slightly later start time, giving people a chance to mingle before it all began in the morning. Most seemed to turn from 9am anyway :) The proceedings I didn't read until afterwards, and although a nice touch, it would have been even nicer to have at least a mention for the talks that didn't have entries in the book. As a speaker, I didn't submit slides, as I didn't want to reveal my talk beforehand, and the talk wasn't a technical paper type presentation, so a write up wasn't appropriate either. Still a great souvenir from the event though.
- Air conditioners!
- air conditioning
- As organizer of French Perl Workshop, I know a little bit of what it is to organize a conference. You did a great job, ladies and guys! I really appreciate how you took care of us by having beverages and snacks, keeping the tracks on schedule... and everything. Great great job!
- Awesome event and excellent work! Enjoyed it very much! Event was great!
- Communicate
- Danke schoen!
- Did a great job on handing out water and drinks most likely cost a lot but it saved the day as the heat would of taken a few people out if it was not available.
- Excellent job!
- Good job guys! :-)
- Great job but some aircon would have been nice.
- Great job on the organization of the event spite the lack of "fresh air"
- Great job. A big thank you. It was obvious every one working at the conference worked so hard. Given the intense heat your constant supply of water was a god send.
- Great thanks!
- Great work! especially with the supply of drinks and food! Hulde!
- huge thanks!
- I think some talks may have been grouped in better way, but overall, the schedule was packed with quality talks :) Also, the organisers were probably a bit too quiet this year. Obviously, a note about the insanely hot weather, even though the organisers have no control over it. I don't know if it's usual for Frankfurt, but if it is, they should probably have taken this into account. Nonetheless, they took good measures by distributing thousands of bottles, but adding fans in the equation, like they did on the second or third day, could have made earlier. Oh well, that's really nitpicking.

- I thought it was very well organised - particularly the food and drinks provided during the day; thank you!
- It was definitely to warm at the venue, you need more meeting rooms with air condition!
- It was good to have announcements everyday as I felt that the communication during the conference was clear. It would have been good to have had more communication before the conference.
- It was great!
- Missing fans (ventilator) and improve sanitary installations ;)
- More air-conditioning ;)
- No, they made this a great YAPC.
- Not all people know german language, so were difficult found a place for food ... maybe a brief notes about food names translated would have been useful on the conference bag.
- provide more updates on the conference website
- Really appreciated the 10:00 start! Thank you! Looking forward to the video recordings of the talks I missed. Combining VGA recording of the slides with live video of the presenter is a great idea. Great to have availability of free water / drinks / snacks I thought the technical focus of the talks was just right (i.e. core focus on Perl 5, minimal mention of Perl 6). No auction! At last, someone got rid of it!
- Should all be proud to have held such a good conference!
- Some indication on whether speakers were supposed to pay for their tickets would have been nice. As it was I paid the ticket even though I was a speaker.
- Some ventilators might have helped ;--)
- Thank you
- Thank you for everything you did to make this happen. This was a great achievement.
- Thank you very much.
- Thank you!
- Thanks for everything. You guys did great. :-)
- Thanks!
- The free water/tea/coffee/sandwiches was much appreciated
- The steady stream of food and beverages was great. The lecture halls were large and well suited to talks with good acoustics and visibility, if a bit murderous in the heat. But you don't control the weather... or do you?
- This was my first YAPC, and I definitely liked it. The venue was not ideal though, but I think I mostly have to blame the weather for this ;), and the things I saw certainly make up for it.
- Very good job. Thank you.
- Well done, a difficult job in the sweltering heat.
- Well done, clearly experienced organizers!
- Well done, loved the pro-active, non-bureaucratic, agile "let's get ice-cream and water" attitude!
- Well organized conference. Thank you Nice idea to have proceedings ice cream and drinks in bottles was great, since it was so hot in some rooms e.g. in CPanel the session chairs did a great job, but in other rooms no one from the organizer team was available
- Well organized, thank you!
- Yes, I do: You did a great job.
- You did really well. Thank you!
- You were fantastic and the talks (and rooms) were hot. Ihr ward großartig und wir brauchten nicht zu frieren!

For future organisers

Do you have any suggestions for improvement (please give examples where possible)?

- * Find a venue that is less sensitive to the weather ;).
  * It would be nice if the recordings of the talks would be published soon after the conference, or at least a rough date and where one could find them once published.
- - Set up a speakers mailing list for last-minute changes etc - bring back the speakers room (with chairs, desks, power & wireless)
- 1) It would be really good if the more or less complete list of accepted talks were available *before* the early bird registration was over. Or perhaps a ranking of submitted talks. Something like: We are going to accept 50 talks but have these 100 submitted talks. Here is a ranking list. The first 50 will probably make it. Perhaps you could even offer a voting system to have the audience influence the ranking.
  2) A 4th category of attendees with a separate rate would be good: online over the Internet. This of course requires a more sophisticated technical infrastructure. But it could allow people to attend who otherwise would not (total costs incl. transportation and hotel too high; time-related problems).
- Air conditioning? I'm kidding. At the registration, we had to go there for the badge, there for the T-shirt, there for the bag... a little "fuzzy", especially or newcomers.
- Air-conditioned venue would be needed in future. For new attendees, its quite difficult to meet people and break into the already standing close knit circles of regular attendees/friends.
- Aircondition would be fine ;-}
- As a speaker, I appreciate having some private place where to practice a talk. The Riga venue had a couple of small rooms and in Frankfurt there was at least the basement, even though this was not as private.
- Be prepared for hot days and ensure proper sanitary installations.
- Better signage on entry AND encouragement for local populace/students to join on the first day.
- Bring the usual O'Reilly stand!
- Cleaner and prettier toilettes! Air conditioning
- For the supper, maybe seek out a venue/setting where it's possible to talk to a maximum of peoples during the meal (YAPC::NA of last year was good for that with round tables). Also, maybe keep rooms available during the evenings for BOFs?
- I'd love to see a beginners track again
- If you are able to maintain the standard achieved by FRA organisers, that will be freakin' awesome!
- It was definitely to warm at the venue, you need more meeting rooms with air condition!
- It would be more useful if we could encourage the speakers to state what level their talks are aimed at (in the subject itself)
- it would be nice to have a better overview for places to socialise after the event. Like good bars in the area and good restaurants that can cater to large or smaller groups.
- Larger schedules on the walls, a mobile app for the event, a venue with good air conditioning in case of a heat wave
- Look at signage, information to attendees well in advance of the event.
- Make Streaming recordings of talks available, a visitor cannot attend because of parallelism in tracks. The recordings must not be public, maybe a DVD or something to give an appropriate value for the high conference fee.
- make sure we are not running out of water
- Make the schedule available as soon as possible so people can decide if they want to come. YAPC::NA 2012 had their schedule way ahead which was excellent, YAPC::EU 2012 on the

other hand didn't have its schedule until 3-4 weeks before it started.

- more healthy food/drinks
- Next website should be better. Some examples: In the markup, use real HTML headings (h1, h2, h3) instead of p's with b's inside. Better markup makes sites more accessible to various users and software. Instead of waiting for someone to click Log In to show ticket stuff, have in the main menu or front page a big link stating "Buy Ticket!" taking us to a page that explains the prices etc up front, and offers the log in or new member buttons to go further (could be radio buttons like at Amazon.com (new or returning customer?)). Especially handy for when people are considering multiple conferences and want to use price as their main comparison. When you log in, you should be brought back to the page you were on before you logged in, but now with clear signals that you are logged in as userX (permanent utility menu at top of site works well for this... what ye2012 had was "ok" but I had missed the login link for several pages at first). If a login was necessary to reach a page link that was clicked (and yes please show these links so we know they exist), the result of the login should bring the user to the page they were trying to reach. The back button should continue to work while doing this if possible. If a link goes to a PDF or a download, mention that on the link like ("name of link" (PDF, sizeOfPDF) (optional PDF icon) etc). Similarly, good idea to make external links marked as such. Lastly, while I don't mind functional sites and ye2012 was not the most hideous site ever, it probably wouldn't hurt to get one of those graphics weenies working over with the Ruby folks to whip up a design that screams "modern!" I think the Python guys got a designer: https://ep2012.europython.eu/ notice their obvious Buy Tickets "button" with the price. Awesome. Wow and expensive :)
- Not sure we can suggest anything to Andrew and his fellow organisers, given they have more experience in making conferences than most of us :) Riga was pleasantly great, so I guess Kiev have all the chances to be equally great.
- One person from the organizer team should be chin each talk. synchronizing the start of talks by using the gong (like it was in Riga) is a good idea. This year, many people (including me) often dropped in after a talk started. Star speakers are more important than video recordings
- Only on the final day, printed schedules were handed out. These would have come very handy on any day, especially since WIFI was so unstable. My talk was not accompanied by a staff member. As a speaker, I feel more at ease when somebody is there to help with technical issues and with keeping track of the time. I also would have appreciated having a microphone and better lighting.
- Please ensure there are plenty of extension leads in all rooms. And not just at the front of the room! Try and choose a venue that has climate control in every rooms, and please try and keep rooms very close. If you can, make sure you describe how to get to the venue (preferably with a photo guide), and try and put up direction signs around the local area, particularly from a subway station, so attendees know where they're going. Make clear direction signs round the building to rooms, toilets, registration, etc. Hand written signs on scraps of paper doesn't present a good image. Remember attendees will photograph everything, especially the bad stuff, and it doesn't look good to prospective sponsors in the future.
- Registration needs to be improved. This could be done by having more than one or two lines, there could be registration the night before the conference at the meet-up. Clear instructions should be provided on how to get to the venue from the airport and by public transport. Small details should be included such as whether you have to pay in cash for a bus or train ticket.
- Teach all speakers to repeat the question from the audience before replying. Ask all speakers to check if the audience is following what they say.
- The content and quality of some of the talks could be better (30 % of the talks I attended approx.) - presenters didn't know their subject and / or material / presentation was poor. If it

is possible, I would conduct a pre-review of the talk as part of the selection process. It definitely feels like an area that could be improved. I realise that this would require a substantial overhead and may not be practical - in this case, perhaps first-time speakers and speakers with poor feedback should be reviewed before being allowed to present. That said 70% of the talks I attended were excellent.

- This year organisation worked really well, the weather is not easy to controller :P not even with all the modules on CPAN

- While it was a very enjoyable conference, there are a few areas which I thought could have been improved: The quality of the venue this year was poor. The building itself was in a bad state of repair, peeling paintwork, toilets not cleaned, lots of graffiti, etc. The general impression was "we don't care about our environment". Unfortunately there was no lunch provided, as at the previous two YAPC::EUs. Signage around the venue was poor. If it means increasing the admission price to resolve these issues then please do - YAPC::EU has been at around the EUR100 mark for too long while everything else has gone up in price. A few small things: Please print the badges on both sides Didn't see the point in printed proceedings - use a CD-ROM or USB stick instead. Or a website. The instructions for speakers on how to prepare a submission for the proceedings were far too complicated, which is why I didn't bother to send anything in. The website design should be a bit more up to date. If you don't have the skills in the organising committee, that's not a problem at all - just ask the rest of the community, we have talented designers who I'm sure would be willing to help.

Summation

Thank you to all the attendees who completed their surveys. These comments and suggestions have been passed to the organisers, both to the current and next year's hosts. They are also used to help supplement thoughts and suggestions for the book "Perl Jam – how to organise a conference and live to tell the tale" (http://perljam.info).

Thank you too, to all the organisers and their staff for putting on the event. Without their efforts the conference wouldn't have taken place.

While there are always common factors that receive complaints within the surveys, it is worth noting that while the organisers may have taken great pains to negotiate sponsorship or technical support, it is sometimes beyond their resources to provide everything that you expect of a conference.

At its heart the conference is about bring people together to discuss a common interest. In our case this is Perl and all the many projects that it has inspired. It is also about bringing new people into the community and providing a supportive and inspirational event to which they will return and/or encourage others to attend. Anything additional that organisers can provide for attendees is a bonus.

If you are interested in running a YAPC::Europe event in the future, read the book to get a feel what is involved, talk to previous organisers or read previous proposals online. See if you can possibly organise a small technical event or even a Perl Workshop to give you some experience. If you do submit a proposal to host a future YAPC, don't feel too disheartened if you don't get the chance to host straight away, you can always submit again the following year.