

**YAPC::NA 2010
Columbus, OH, USA
Feedback & Suggestions**



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**a joint production by
Columbus Perl Mongers
& YAPC Conference Surveys**

YAPC::NA 2010 Columbus, OH, USA Feedback & Suggestions



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An Introduction

This document includes fragments from comments that were submitted by attendees of the 2010 YAPC::NA 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 2010 event.

Following each set of fragments we have responded so you can hopefully understand the reasons behind decisions that were made. These are our own personal thoughts, and merely stated to hopefully explain why some things happened the way they did.

One thing to bear in mind while reading this report, is that everyone's time and effort in putting on the conference was given freely. We did it because we enjoy programming Perl and wanted to have the chance to give something back to the community. All the organisers have full time jobs and were fortunate enough to have partners and family who were willing to put up with losing us for several nights over the last year, in order to bring the conference to Columbus. So a big thanks to them for letting us do it :)

Not everything goes according to plan, and the trials of hosting a conference for several hundred people are not without frustration on the part of the organisers. Hopefully what follows provides a glimpse of the effort involved in organising a conference. To those who submitted their feedback, many thanks for doing so, as it really is very much appreciated. This was the 12th YAPC::NA and this feedback will hopefully help to improve the event for the future. Long may it continue.

The 2010 organisers of YAPC::NA

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Rating The Conference

After asking attendees to rate the conference, the survey then asked the attendee whether there were any strong views.

- * more/better/larger signs labeling the talk rooms
- * a per-room schedule posted on/near each room's entrance
- * better or more prominent directions to each room
- * a large, public, visible BOF board! (like the departures board on the last day)
- * Had trouble finding Cartoon 2
- * Scheduling 20 minute talks + empty against 40 minute talks is pretty bad. Such holes in the schedule hurt the 20 minute talks.
- 1. Shower areas in dorms are not cleaned on a daily basis.
- 2. Like most YAPC sites, OSU Ohio Union is not yet equipped to accommodate 300+ geeks all of whom want to have power for their laptops and fully unblocked wireless internet access at all time.
- Although it was easy to work around, the block on IRC ports was annoying.
- Apparently this year all submitted talks were accepted. I think it's something new and while I appreciate your efforts to make something new, I don't think it's a good trend we should keep going. Some speakers did 3 or even 4/5 talks, which is totally surprising and obviously lowers the quality of each talk, instead of letting them focus on selected one or two.
- Damian Conway is worth every penny spent on him. I've seen his rates (http://damian.conway.org/About_us/TrainingCost.html), and they are well worth it.
- Directions to the different rooms desperately needed posted at the conference!
- For my second time, YAPC is the most fun and valuable experience of my year (at least, that I don't have to plan myself)
- Great job to all organizers especially Candybar!
- I am a resident of Columbus. My attendance involved walking to my local bus stop for a 10 minute commute.
- I feel like the use of the wiki in documenting things like roommates was a bad idea and that that should have been a field on the registration form.
- I felt that while there were many good talks, but there were also too many talks that were too general or basic. I don't mean to complain, since there is not much that can be done about that unless others like myself step up with more advanced talk proposals, but it was hard to justify staying in a talk that was too watered-down. I found myself walking into many talks and then leaving quickly to find something more worthwhile.
- I found the conference hard to navigate and the mapping somewhat sparse. Additionally, I was let down that the BOFs were often finalized at the last minute. That wasn't the conference's fault though. It does make it hard to plan to go to one though.
- I was mostly very satisfied with YAPC this year. The organizers did a fantastic job. However, compared to other YAPC's I've attended, the food choices for Tuesday dinner were quite limited. This was compounded by the fact that I became vegetarian this year. There was only one entree item available. On the other hand, the daily "breakfast" was very good. I only wish they had set up an omlet station ;-)

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- I wish someone had mentioned at the conference how to connect to irc.perl.org via oddball port, since 6667 was blocked. (I found out about it when I got home.) Newsletter? What newsletter?
- I wish we could have found out about the class schedule for Thursday and Friday a little sooner. Getting approval for the trip from work without exact figures is tricky.
- I would have rated the Social Events and the Food Services higher had the Banquet Dinner been of higher quality. The food line was idiotic - the catering company had no idea what they were doing and had the food oriented in a way where people got to the taco fillings before they got to the tortillas (???), among other design flaws. The host of the banquet was belligerent and insulting in general. Auctioning off the "privilege" of calling Uri and telling him he can't host the banquet next year was mean. The only people that understood the joke of it were about 5% of the attendees, the other 20% that knew Uri seemed genuinely bothered (notice that the guy who won the auction was doing it because Uri is his friend and he thought the whole thing was an insult), and the rest of the attendees had no idea who this Uri guy was.
- I'm not sure what I think about having so many tracks. I think that may be a bit much. However, I think it was nice having a bunch of "out-there" talks for people with weirder tastes. That might not have been possible without an extra track or two.
- In an ideal world, something half way between (expensive) hotel and (cheap as chips) dorms.
- It is not fault of the conference - but I feel the number of BoFs was extremely low this year.
- It was difficult to plug into the social events. Mostly this was apparently going to Varsity Club but I had to learn that through persistent trolling. I have no idea where the non-beer drinkers were going. I never found out where or if there were movies. Was there hacking going on anywhere? The lobby at Morrison tower was nearly always empty when I walked through.
- It's is time to rethink the auction. It is no longer working and has not worked for several years.
- Lunch would have been a bonus :)
- Missed having a snack in the afternoon. I am not sure I like the 20 minute breaks rather than mostly small breaks and a morning and afternoon longer break.
- MORE SNACKAGE!!
- Not enough rooms at the Blackwell, ended up a couple of miles away.
- Parking should be included or free.
- Please tell me where to park before I get to the venue. Mailing the list on Sunday to tell us to park in the faculty lots results in those of us showing up Monday trying to park there. Would it have been so damn hard to put that somewhere on the website? The website lied and said we were using the first and second floors when there were 3 active rooms on the 3rd floor. How hard would it have been to indicate floor 1/2/3 next to room names on the schedule? Learn how to turn off the lights that affect the projection screen and TELL THE SPEAKERS. I asked multiple times and still had to talk in the round room with a somewhat legible projection screen. If you're going to organize a speaker's dinner, screaming about it in the lobby following the talks and telling us to walk a mile is.... not helpful. Please kill the auction Thank you for not making me endure a Town Hall Please never let Todd Olson talk

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- about his Vitamin D enhanced boner ever again.
- Purple. Because ice cream has no bones.
 - Scheduling 20 mins at the end of (most) talks for wrap-up, chit-chat, and moving rooms was a good idea.
 - Some sessions were really too short. The low level networking should have been 90 minutes at least. And other sessions were scheduled too early in the day. They might be best scheduled after lunch.
 - The amount of disorganization was frustrating for a paid-for conference--the uncompleted name badges at 8am monday checkin, the complete lack of signage throughout the entire building, the undercapacity of keynote rooms, etc.
 - The banquet dinner was pretty weak. Not everything can be perfect thought and it happens. I did feel a number of talks should have been skipped. The 'refurbishing and optimizing the perl programmer' talk seemed misrepresentative of the subject matter, was unrelated to Perl or even the Perl community. MST's suggestion that people should look up that info on how to do talks should be spread BEFORE the call for talks. I'm saddened when I see an ill prepared talk. It's not about the money (cause we don't pay much) it's about a lost opportunity.
 - The banquet really needs many stations with multiple lines. Chicago 2008 did this perfectly, for reference. The auction was too freaking loud. I left because I was getting a headache. The venue was great, and I really like the location and the city. There are cool things very close by in walking distance, which is really nice.
 - The lack of towels, while noted on the accommodations page, was odd. The rooms were a little far away from each other and difficult to find the first time. Having to find a way to get onto IRC was annoying.
 - The opening keynotes were held in a room that was too small.
 - The talk schedule (i.e., the logistics and timing of talks and breaks) was outstanding. I hope more conferences adopt the same format.
 - The very late acceptance of talks left nearly all of us scrambling to get them written. It showed in many of the talks.
 - The website was largely helpful in preparing for the conference. The personal schedule was a high point. The roommate preferences were handled on a wiki page, which got moved/abandoned and I had to confirm my roommate choice via email. Also, as a first time YAPC attendee, I couldn't find any info on what the dress code was. After being at the conference, I know now that IRC is probably best for that, but going in I just guessed what to wear.
 - The website was missing a lot of essential information. Such as shuttles/travel to and from the airport. The emails after registering had absolutely no information other than a simple confirmation. I also got no information about what dorm I was in, or where to go to check-in for the dorms. Really frustrating.
 - vegan food was somewhat lacking this year
 - Website was (is), like most conference sites, rather difficult to wrangle, it wasn't entirely clear how to sign up for sessions (or if it was even desired). Registration had large lines and they were missing tags for many people.

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For The Columbus Organisers

For the final question of the survey, we asked "Do you have any feedback you would like to give specifically to this year's organisers?"

- 1. MORE SNACKAGE!!
- 2. If you say registration at 7 - be there at 7! That's 6am Central time. When you get there at 6am central time and no one shows up for 45 minute...
- 1) Great job to all organizers especially Candybar! Thanks for a GREAT YAPC and fantastic venue!
- 2) Only down for me was not enough power cords/strips in meeting rooms!
- A big thank you to Heath and Yakov particularly, for their vested interest in the conference and the Perl community.
- A map of rooms and a printed schedule in front of the rooms would have helped.
- A/V problems seem to be the one constant through the conference. I'm not sure if it was because it was a new building or if there wasn't enough a/v support. More power strips would have been helpful but I think most people worked around it. It would have been nicer to have the talks more consolidated vertically. I don't mind walking stairs (hell it's about the only cardio I get on a daily basis) but spread over 3 floors is a bit much. The transition for the keynotes/larger talks would nice to be avoided. All of that written, it was an excellent conference. It seemed to me that I spent less of my attention on irc and more on the talk. Also, the irc heckling seemed to be less than I can think of at any other conference or workshop I have been to.
- Awesome job!
- Awsome conference, one of the best YAPCs ever. Incredible venue. Excellent hotel at walking distance. Only negative point from me: the auction. Too much chaos with the various auctioneers (let go of your pride: use a mic). Too much crap to sell. And it took too long.
- Better maps/directions of conference rooms would have been nice. Better management of people within conference rooms would also have been nice. Often, people crowded around entrances in conference rooms, giving the appearance of a packed hall, while there were several vacant seats deeper in the halls. Get the crowd to move into the hall and thus facilitate traffic and maximize occupancy.
- Brilliant conference!
- Brilliant job. Thanks so much - you guys rocked!
- Don't start at 8am. I know it's important to have lots of content, but you're basically dooming anyone with an 8am start time to having a small audience.
- Excellent conference. Water in the rooms for the speakers without having to run up to hospitality would have been good.
- Excellent job, especially on breakfast and choice of venue. Not rejecting a talk made the whole experience wonderful, I learned a lot from speeches I wouldn't normally have considered going to.
- Food service was good.
- Get organized. You know how many people are registered, you know when they're arriving,

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- and you know where talks are. Be better prepared.
- Great job all around!
 - Great job!
 - Great Job! Superb conference.
 - Great job. Only complaint was the nametags.
 - I admire their resourcefulness when problems arose at the last moment. I really like having the lightning talks at the end of each day, not just the last day. I really like the lightning advertisements. It took too long to figure out where all the rooms were. The conference ran remarkably smoothly! Thank you!
 - I cannot believe how such an event could be done by such a small group of people. Thank you for your dedication.
 - I don't know how you could have organized it better, but there were a lot of talks I had to skip because there were conflicts. The range of talks was spectacular and the venue was great.
 - I had a terrific week! OSU Union was an excellent facility for this. Columbus was lovely! Great job everybody!
 - I have never learned Perl, but want to start learning. I realize most of the people that attended were long time users. I felt a little overwhelmed with the technical detail in some of the lectures being I didn't know Perl.
 - I loved that you guys picked every talk. I would have scheduled it differently than before, but this gave us a variety that we didn't have last year.
 - I thought the organizers did a fantastic job. High praise for the tremendous amount of work they did, the good humor they displayed while responding to relentless demands coming at them from all directions. The Perl Foundation might consider providing free psychotherapy for any nervous breakdowns suffered by the organizers ;-)
 - i was not able to book a dorm room using the web site, ended up in a very bad hotel ... would be nice to have a list of recommended hotels (not just blackwell, which was nice, but outside of my budget)
 - I've organized YAPC in the past and I know how hard and painful it is :) Thank you very much for making it happen.
 - It was a HUGE amount of work I know. Thanks for all the effort. We really appreciate your effort. I really appreciated the refreshments to help make it through all the talks.
 - It was an excellent conference at which I learned much, was fired up with lots of plans and ideas, and had a good time chatting about things both frivolous and serious.
 - Kudos, you lived through YAPC::NA 2010. :P I had a great time, learned a lot more about perl, and learned about the future of perl. Wow! I'm glad to be a part of perl, and glad I got the chance to meet so many.
 - Loved it, excellent job by all organizers!
 - Nope. Great job hosting. I was very pleased with this years YAPC.
 - ology> Thank you robkinyon and candybar!
 - Overall, great job. I mentioned a few small things above, and a few others in the "for future organisers" below.
 - Please see my previous views. I was thrilled to be in a modern space like the OS Union, but there were obviously flaws. One I forgot in the previous box, posting 6 menus on a draft

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- wiki page about the conference dinner and serving completely different food isn't so great. We considered ordering from foodler.com after watching the line a while.
- Putting on YAPC is hard. I can't even imagine. Please don't take anything the wrong way. I'm very happy with my experience here and a small group did an extraordinary job with very little resources. Thank you.
 - Really, really excellent conference this year! Any nits I've picked are minor, and probably couldn't be helped due to restrictions made by OSU. Kudos!
 - Rob is loud, but he shouldn't try to yell to loud enough to fill a convention hall.
 - Thank you all! You did an amazing job!
 - Thank you for all your hard work! It was great!
 - Thank you for making me, a first time attendee, welcome. I felt right at home from the moment I walked up to the registration table.
 - Thank you! The conference was great. I've attended the last 3 years in a row and this year I believe we had the best lineup of talks. Also I liked having two days of lightning talks. The location was surprisingly cool, too. Columbus was a lot of fun. The university coffee that was provided in the mornings was really delicious... and I found there were great restaurants in the area... nice weather, central location, and the traffic was a breeze.
 - Thank you!!! I had way more fun than I was expecting.
 - Thank You. I learned a lot, and enjoyed the conference.
 - Thanks for the effort! The amount put into this conference definitely showed.
 - The check-in process was a bit chaotic, but not really a problem. There were A/V problems in nearly every talk/class I attended.
 - The Columbus organizers were great, I've only been to one previous YAPC and it's not to say that the Pittsburgh organizers weren't great too but it seems the Columbus ones went over and above to ensure that every little detail was as perfect as can be.
 - The conference was really put together well. I did not notice any glitches, the venue was great. I did not think that the auction went so well (though I'm not sure it goes much better with Uri either). This year I felt there was much too much pleading for money. It was interesting not having a townhall meeting, but in the past those have not seemed to be that helpful. I think having a keynote each day, focussing on what is going on in the community, was a great idea and worked well. That way we could focus on the positive instead of having a gripe session.
 - The main thing that was lacking from the program materials, or perhaps I just missed it, was directions *within* the Ohio Union: where all the meeting rooms were located. For schedule updates, in addition to updating the calendar, it would be nice to have a list of updates, or have updates posted to the mailing list. A chronic problem with every tech conference I've ever been to: lack of places to plug in a laptop. I never got IRC, SMTP, or my company's VPN working over the on-site wireless.
 - The only part of the conference I didn't like was the auction.
 - The organizers obviously put a lot of time and effort into the organization. Thank you!
 - The registration wasnt smooth, but aside from that, everything seemed ok the 1st day.
 - The room names were difficult. It would have been useful to have schedules posted outside the rooms.
 - This was a great conference. Thank you for putting it on. It was very useful for me. I will

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definitely recommend others to go to this conference in the future because I thought the value was extremely high as far as content went.

- This year's YAPC seemed very well organized and flowed smoothly. This represents a lot of hard, dedicated work on the part of the organizers. Congratulations and thank you.
- Very well done...
- Very well run. As a Columbus native I offer a "well done" to the home team.
- Well put together overall.
- You guys did a great job.
- You people rock!
- You were all amazingly helpful and friendly. I got to bring my wife to the auction dinner and Heath made it so easy to get her in. Plus we got to give a bit to TPF so that's always good! :)

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For Future Organisers

In the final section of the survey, we asked attendees "Do you have any suggestions for improvement (please give examples where possible)?"

- A map of where all the rooms are in the conference guide. Make sure the keynotes are big enough to hold everyone. I was disappointed to miss Monday's keynote because of not enough seats.
- Provide more power cords/strips in meeting rooms next year in Ashville!
- act needs some TLC...
- An A/V person should be on hand in each room for the start of each day to turn on equipment and ensure that the speakers are able to connect, etc.
- Breakfast and break food ... please include some protein. We need to rethink the conference dinner and activities. It did not work very well as a social mixer this year. Organizers should pull in more/other people to help make it work. I wonder if there are conference activities that can be delegated out to people that are not at the hosting site?
- Don't trust the venue. Many things that were supposed to work in Columbus didn't. For instance, the schedule was supposed to be displayed on a screen in front of each room, but they only showed the name of the conference. There were lots of problems with A/V, so testing each room before the conference starts is a good idea. Having a machine that is known to work in each room would be best in case the speaker's machine can't talk to the A/V system. If you there is any distance between the rooms (i.e. you can't see all of them while looking a one of them), add a map to the schedule. IRC is the lifeblood of YAPC and Perl in general, make sure your network allows IRC or setup a proxy. Attendees should not have to spend time finding work arounds.
- Everyone has a laptop, and laptops need power. Please provide as many plug-ins as possible.
- Facilities matter. Having an event in good facility is an important factor to attract people, especially the first time comers. And we look stronger.
- Get rid of the auction, or timebox it to half an hour or so. And at least get Uri back. He may not be perfect, but at least his auctions aren't as chaotic as it was this year.
- Having 20 minutes between sessions was great. When there were A/V, speaker, or other issues, there was enough time for the speaker to recover, for questions afterwards, and time to talk to other people in the room even if you really wanted to make it to a session in the next time slot.
- I attended some mediocre talks. I think having a little bit of vetting of the talks would be good, instead of just accepting everything. OR you could make one of the tracks a "grab bag" track where all the new speakers with no experience and no good-standing would go. Attendees would go to those talks with a "buyers beware" perspective. Then, all the other tracks could be fully vetted and only quality talks would be accepted.
- I know that ranty in-joke geek-culture talks are popular, but I prefer talks with more technical content and useful advice. I prefer to see the theatrics saved for the lightning talks. Also, please consider how you will get the word out about schedule changes. A multi-channel strategy, with wiki updates, emails, and flyers would be a good approach.
- I think having a good venue really helps the feel of the conference. For instance, Toronto

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- and Columbus have both been really good. I liked having the daily keynotes (instead of a townhall meeting).
- I was thinking since everything costs money... I don't use the lanyard, name tag thing after leaving the conference. These should be recycled and used for the next years conference so that new ones need not be purchased. The lanyard can be kept by attendees (because of advertisements) but the pouch thing should be returned at the end of the event in my opinion. The auction should be contained to one room, so that people can't wonder off during or before the auction. Also, I know this sounds a little ridiculous.... but it would be fun to have an ice breaker sometime during the conference so that people are less shy about talking to one another. The beginning of the conference or at the auction/dinner thing would be a good time to get the shy people branching out.
 - It seems most people would like a place to plug in during talks. Make sure there are plenty of power strips in all rooms.
 - It was mentioned that it might not be a bad idea to skip the auction and just add \$20 to the registration price that would go to the Perl Foundation. I like that idea. On the other hand we could just stick with the silent auction if we have stuff that can be auctioned off.
 - Keep the talk schedule format.
 - Make badges double sided with names on them (phone numbers are good, but print them on the inside)
 - Make sure the keynote room is big enough. That was a problem at YAPC2010 on the first morning. Breakfast on the first day should be available before the first talk. Please don't start anything before 9. Better to have less content than exhaust people. Conferences are exhausting enough. Please make sure that the banquet dinner has many stations for the buffet. Chicago 2008 did a great job with that.
 - Make sure your nametags print out right :P And make sure there's enough room for everyone in the welcome presentation room. I couldn't hear the welcome presentation or morning keynote because there wasn't enough room in there.
 - Maybe have a 'What to expect at YAPC' for newcomers? Have folks that have been there before fill the wiki with more information, or have a place for open questions. (Use the WIKI!) I.E. How much is the cab fare from XXX to the airport? Ohio Union to Airport runs between \$20-\$25. Or, if not sure, ask cab company ahead of time and have prices + phone numbers handy. I.E. Places to eat? Five Guys - Burgers, within walking distance. I.E. Internet access? Yes, however odd ports are blocked! (So I won't be able to connect into \$WORK because we use odd port for SSH! GASP!)
 - More and better signage would really have helped for just about everything. See comments made earlier. Also, it would have been good to get more info about the classes (esp. schedules) on the wiki *much* sooner. Also, information about schedules, registration, just about everything, is much better to put on the website/wiki, in addition to the mailing list. The mailing list has a relatively low signal-to-noise ratio, plus a lot of conflicting info. The website can at least have the most recent canonical info.
 - More intermediate level talks geared towards application developers.
 - MORE SNACKAGE!!
 - More talks about anything besides Moose/Catalyst/Poe. Days two and three seemed slightly overloaded with those talks.

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- Perhaps more roundtable / discussion talks.
- Please provide an abundance of information on the website or at least a contact that can answer (with enough questions asked, you have fodder to provide content on the site.)
- Provide and announce ONE PLACE on the YAPC web site for speakers to place followup info, links to their slides, notes, etc. I was disappointed in some cases where I missed web urls due to interruptions, or found that urls I had copied down turned out to be incorrect, etc.
- Provide better maps. The first day no one had any idea where they were going.
- Provide food. ^_^
- Put the conferences somewhere under perl.org (e.g. yapc.perl.org/2011) and clone the site for each conference to avoid the org's having to acquire a domain; open the submission site in July, and start accepting no later than Feb. That gives people time to actually compose something rather than hacking it at the conference.
- Spatial consolidation/nearness of each talk to each other could have been better. More power strips but that's tough for this size of conference. Being able to rate lighting talks (and see a rough schedule) is something to try to replicate.
- Specifically invite people from Windows, Linux, Python, Ruby, PHP, C#, ... groups to give talks on their coolest tools. Give these invited speakers free admission to the rest of the conference, perhaps even a discount on a Master Class.
- Starting at 8am is never cool. Especially when people are traveling from the west coast. Don't schedule short talks and breaks against long talks. One hour for lunch is not quite long enough. Missed the first set of talks after lunch on Monday. Please find a way to keep the dorms/housing open on Thursday night. I really enjoy the Thursday social events and if there are no dorms available, that kills Thursday hackathons. Similarly for Saturday night before the conference. Also Chris is really a cool guy!
- The regular pre-conference email newsletter used by YAPC::EU is an excellent idea and ought to be emulated by YAPC::NA. More use of the 'speakers' mailing list (which this year was speakers@yapc2010.com) for, e.g., notifying speakers of the location of the post-conference dinner.
- The WIFI coverage was excellent, and the network capacity brilliant. But having to re-authenticate constantly is a pita, especially on mobile devices. I realise this is utterly beyond the control of yapc, just fyi. (ps. the ability to change the username/pass to something more memorable would have made life easier)
- There were a lot of talks I had to miss. Not sure that's a complaint it just means there were too many good talks...
- This is the first conference of any kind I have attended where the F-word was so generously and frequently used, so much so that I thought I was in the Ferl conference! Can we talk some sense into the speakers to watch their language? As you can see, I am doing my part to compensate for the overuse of the letter in the universe, by minimizing my own use of it.
- Try to convince the facilities people that this is a tech conference and there should be at least 2 outlets per seat. ;)
- tshirts with a logo on the back and a small one on the front rather than a monstrosity of paint on the front.
- YAPC is inexpensive, but that doesn't mean that the basics of running a conference should

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- be slacked off on.
- You should probably consider getting rid of the 20 minute talks. It's just not enough time to present anything of true value given the set up time, people coming late from a previous talk, etc. It's hard because it reduces the number of possible topics, but it also betters the quality of the topics that then get more time.

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