YAPC::Europe 2010

Pisa, Italy

Feedback & Suggestions

a joint production by

Perl.it

& YAPC Conference Surveys

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An Introduction

This document includes fragments from comments in the conference survey, that were submitted by attendees of the 2010 YAPC::Europe Perl Conference. Each survey provided the attendee with the ability to provide a snapshot of the Perl community, together with their opinions, feedback and suggestions, which could be used for future events.

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. The organisers put on these events because they enjoy programming Perl and want 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 them for several nights over the last year prior to the event, in order to bring the conference to Pisa. So a big thank you both to the organisers and to everyone who supported them.

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. What follows might be considered negative in some parts, but while they might highlight issues with the event, they can hopefully be used by future organisers to avoid some previously unexpected problems, or even include tasks not previous considered. Not all the feedback is negative, and there are positive comments too, and it is worth bearing in mind that you can't please everyone. It will be a rare occasion when something doesn't go wrong, outside of the organisers control.

To those who submitted their feedback, many thanks for doing so, as it really is very much appreciated. This was the 11th YAPC::Europe, with the first YAPC::Europe in 2000 and this feedback has help to improve the event every year. Long may it continue.

Barbie

Conference Survey Administrator

Rating The Conference

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

- Although the concept of the auction was good it was much too long.
- As usual the conference was insular with many cliques (particularly London.pm, who don't talk to anyone else). That's not entirely the fault of the organisers, but it would have been nice if the conference dinner was more of a community afair. At both YAPCs I have attended, I would have dearly loved to talk to many of the speakers, but they were far too aloof to speak with such a peasant as me. Cathedral and the bazaar? This was the cathedral.
- Even though I couldn't attend the conference (due to a clashing newborn schedule), preparing the remote lightning talk has been an interesting experience, and the otherwise busy organisers made time to help me get in touch with local "proxies". I missed attending this YAPC a lot, but the enthousiam of the organisers and attendees, made the "remote" experience worthwhile.
- I didn't have wifi for the whole duration of the conference, which was very annoying, but I think the problem lay outside what the organisers could do (they gave me a second prepayment card but it didn't help).
- I got confused by the registration and booked an additional dinner ticket by mistake. Not worried about that, consider it a 30e donation to the cause, but if there were limited places at the dinner and my additional unused ticket meant someone else couldn't come then that would be bad.
- I need a field to mark "Very Satisfied"++
- I tried to work out what BOF was but none of http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BoF seem appropriate
- I very much appreciated having the conference in the hotel. It made things very convenient. The wifi was something of a pain, but at least it mostly worked.
- I was afraid that the venue location would be a problem, but in the end it was great. Providing transportation from downtown to the conference hotel helped a lot. Starting the talks at 10am was also a good idea.
- I was forced to choose between equally interesting conferences scheduled at the same time
- I've got partially involved in organization
- In my opinion the food was very bad, especially because we were in Italy!
- It was just awesome. Maybe the quality of the WiFi was a bit unsatisfying, but after all you don't come to the YAPC to use the WiFi, right?
- Many thanks and congratulations on a very successful conference!
- More updates earlier would have been very welcome. Also having the schedule posted earlier would have been very useful to show to the boss :)
- Nice hotel but not enough rooms and too far from the city.
- One thing that really annoys me was the bad schedule efficiency. There were some talks like "Peter Makholm (brother) - Does your code work correctly? " which could take 50 minutes but the schedule was only 20 minutes; And on the other side every break (20min "Coffee break" or 50min Lunch) had 10 minutes ADDITIONAL time before and after. I don't think

that we need 70 minutes for lunch or 40 minutes to grab a coffee.

- Only now that I fill in these values do I realize, quantitatively, how much I enjoyed myself at the conference.
- Promotion, promotion, and promotion. The organisers really need to promote the conference much more heavily, using all available channels, and not just within the Perl community. There was a marked decline in the number of attendees this year, which I may have attributed to the economic situation. However looking at the number of companies which were recruiting (I counted at least 5), even with the economic downturn our sector is clearly expanding. So I would have to assume that the lack of promotion is a very significant factor in the drop in attendee numbers. Compared with last year, the promotion of the conference was really not up to scratch. Messages were only sent out by a single channel, e.g. I would see something on Twitter, someone else would read a message on a mailing list, so collectively our group only knew what was happening when we discussed what we had all read at our Perl Mongers group meetings. Please, can next year's organisers learn from this and get your message out early, often, and everywhere!
- Receiving an e-mail which says "I know some of you are not subscribed to such-and-such and I wanted to remind you about updates" is just scary and leaves a lot open. If I register for a conference, why would I need to register on a newsgroup, too? Food was much better than the fat, usually cold pizzas slices at Yapc::2009. The "value for price" reflects that I did find a couple of talks which sounded good from the abstract, but actually were just bad. So a little bit more due diligence on the side of the conference organisers would be good.
- Stronger network (wifi)
- The auction was long and somewhat annoying this year.
- The conference hotel asked me to email a credit card number, which is pretty bad practice. I ended up going elsewhere, which worked out alright - the bus from Pisa was a good idea. The facilities were fine (well done for the Internet access) though I found the constant flushing noises in the rooms ... amusing.
- The consideration for vegans/vegetarians by the orgas was noticeable, but I wish the restaurant where we had dinner:
    - understood what "vegan" actually meant.
    - understood that we would like to eat with everyone and not AFTER everyone. We always got served when everyone finished eating.
    - provided some good main dishes other than "bread" and "bread with tomato sauce on top". (applies to the venue lunches as well)
- The hotel staff wasn't friendly. The hotel itself could've had better quality rooms, I had torn carpet in my room as well. On the other hand, the rooms were clean.
- The idea of making teams during the auction was good, but the whole thing went a little too long. A hard time limit would have fixed this, but some items deserve more than 5 minutes of auction. Not beer bottles, though. The buses were great.
- The most annoying issues:
    - the hotel had no DIN power sockets in the rooms
    - their wifi wasn't gratis in the rooms
    - air conditioning was too freezing and wouldn't stop
    - lack of power sockets on the conference rooms

- hiccups with the internet connection
- The schedule should have been made public several weeks - if not months – before. The wiki and the mailing list didn't have as much content as in years before. I also think we should go back to the 20 and 40 minute presentations.
- Several points:
  - The website menu has a bug for my browser (Firefox 3.6.8): I can select a menu-item, but cannot select the submenu-items. Weird. Showed it to the orga's and they had no idea how to fix it.
  - The venue hotel is too far from interesting places (I know, something like that made it affordable).
  - The venue hotel staff: some of them were great, some of them were more than blunt / mean / stupid / indifferent.
  - The hotel restaurant did not offer anything for vegetarians. The breakfast hall on the other hand was excellent. The lunches and snacks during the conference were wonderful.
  - The hotel had a lousy internet connection. Which made working during the conference less optimal... swearwords come up when thinking about it. Only wifi in the lobby, or during the conference in the conference area.
- The YAPC::EU organizers go from strength to strength
- There are still too many talks. I would simply cut the worst ones (and I'm sure you know which they are), leaving them for the workshops.
- There was impossible to stop air conditioner on conference hotel rooms. The internet connection only worked for one device and I've never able to use my phone to twit along the talks and submit real time pics. I missed some more vegetables on lunches.
- There was really nothing in particular that was _bad_, though some aspects were better than others.
- There were BOF sessions? proper seating in the hallway is necessary, this seems to be an issue for most YAPCs
- Very well organized - thanks to perl.it
- WLAN was too unreliable, observed correlation with # of people present... only few power plugs

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For The Pisa Organisers

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

- You did a very good job. Mille Grazie ;-) ! Very nice location, liked to stay for some days in Pisa.

- Apart from the initial communication to the outside world, you did a great job on the day. Venue was a good choice, and mostly the rooms were fine. Occasionally talks were a bit full in the smaller rooms, but I never heard any bad complaints about overcrowding. All the conference staff were helpful and friendly, and that goes a long way to keeping people happy.

- Lunch was great and well worth the effort involved. It enabled everyone to mingle and talk Perl instead of splitting up and finding food.

- Well done guys.

- Being able to stay at the hotel where the venue was great.

- The wifi worked quite well, considering the number of attendees.

- I would have liked some fruit (apples, bananas, etc.) instead of all the cakes (although the cakes were really tasty).

- Blame the orgas for such a great conference despite some minor issues. Good work!

- Everything was great. With monor exceptions:

    - The internet connection was not so good.

    - The dinner was too big - it could be smaller and better.

- Excellent work, congratulatinos

- Excellent organization. Thank you!

- Excellent.

- Give osfameron a knighthood or similar!

- Good job!

- Good work so far but please do not sing again ;-)

- Good work, please do another one.

- Grazie mille

- Great job

- Great job guys!

- Great job!

- Great job, everything was clear, venue and events where perfect, organization was a success, no complaints whatsoever. Congratulations!

- Guys, you were awesome and you made a masterpiece. Only the beamers were a bit blurry in small rooms.

- I got diarrhoea after attendees dinner.

- I was a good conference and well organised. Well done :)

- If there are changes in the schedule, can you send a diff ?

- Il ristorante era pessimo. Possibile che non ce n'era uno meglio FUORI dal centro?

- Impressively well organised! Congratulations.

- It was a magnificent event. I truly enjoyed it and it lived up to my expectations.

- It was awesome!

- It was great, that there was always someone available in case of questions.

- Conference Hotel was a bit in the middle of nowhere, but bus shuttles worked.

- It was really good, apart from when my hotel room started to flood when it rained - damn balcony!

- It was well organized

- Learn to sing... :P No, seriously, great job!

- Much better food than in Lisbon, thanks.

- Once again, this years auction lasted way, way too long. As for the quality of the auction - well, during the auction of the second item, quality has already dropped to "if you don't buy this, I'll take my shirt off". Does Perl not want to be taken seriously? I walked away after that.

- Only positive feedback, YAPC::EU 2010 was excellently run by the orgas!

- Organization was very impressive, pretty much flawless. I simply cannot express how grateful I am to the organizers for their excellent work!

- Overall, everybody did a very good job. osfameron++ deserves a special praise for the Florence trip

- Overall, I thought the conference ran very smoothly. Wireless mostly worked, the schedule seemed to work well, and the presentation rooms were good. I really appreciated having the conference venue in a hotel, as it just makes the whole event extremely convenient. Overall, a great job!

- Peppe e Arthas sono stati bravissimi!!!!

- Still water supply was a bit week :)

- Super job - thanks very much.

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THE RENAISSANCE OF PERL

- Thank you for a great conference!

- Thank you guys :-)

- Thank you guys, great job.

- Thank you so much for organising such a smooth and efficient conference, with such a strong social aspect!

- Thank You! Generally and for the great Rocky Horror Picture Show! :-)

- Thank you!

- Thank you, great conference! Regarding the friends and family: I thought it was too costly; Keep this kind of progams low budget too...

- Thank you, stellar work!

- Thank you, thank you!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

- Thanks for a wonderful conference. I think this might have been the best-organized YAPC I've been to so far.

- Thanks for all your work! Within 3 days even the coffee-woman and the attendees got used to each other!

- Thanks for putting on a great conference! I particularly liked the civilised 10:00 starts, the organisation of social events, the provided food, and having the conference in the same hotel as people were staying. My only real negative point is about promotion - see comments above - but apart from that, well done and thank you!

- Thanks!

- Thanks, good job. Excellent food. Just minor points. Breaks between talks were too long. Your coffee break lady was outright crazy, too bad you had to deal with her.

- Thanks, good job.

- The air condition was too strong - it was actually cold in some places at the talks

- The food was very good!

- The Friends and Family activities seemed expensive, particularly if multiple family members are involved. Some cheaper alternatives would have been appreciated. The video recording procedures were not convenient for speakers about to give talks (ie in panic mode).

- The hotel and the hotel staff were awful

- The quality of the hotel rooms in the conference Hotel was bad. The value of the hotel room is below standard.

- They organised a great conference. I really enjoyed it. Great job guys.

- This was my first YAPC and I enjoyed it very very much! There was a lot of care with the talks, helping out with stuff, the venue and everything and it was just awesome! Thank you so much!

- Very well organized!

- Well done overall. Thanks a lot!

- Well done! The organization was so smooth that one hardly noticed there was any organization at all.

- Well done. I attended the Euro Python conference two weeks ago and this was MUCH better organised (but then, I would expect that from the Perl community!) It can't have been easy: you can be proud of yourselves.

- When I told my Italian colleague that the YAPC in Pisa was well organized, he looked at me in a puzzled way and said "Impossible".

- Would have been good to have more print outs of the daily schedule. I only managed to get the first day but was contented with going online or looking at the schedule on the door. But overall a very good job. Thank you.

- YAPC was fantastic. Thanks for organising the conference, the social meetings as well as the trip to Florence. :-)

- You did a great job, thank you very much! I didn't like the hotel too much (middle of nowhere, very expensive restaurant), but I understand it wasn't your first choice either

- You did great work, congratulations.

- You guys handles the bumps just fine. Dakkar, you can relax now :) Great job. Pisa had an excellent YAPC.

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)?"

- ...

  - More communication, early and often.

  - Upload the schedule as early as possible

  - Try and see if you can arrange lunchtime catering at the venue

  - Promote sights to see in and around Riga, as some like to plan sightseeing trips.

- ...

  - More litter boxes. It was often hard to find one.

  - A possible help for speakers: put up a monitor which the speaker can see with only a bar showing the input level of the microphone. That way one can immediately see if one is holding the microphone correctly and people can hear one.

- …

  - See scheduling of talks above

  - Make sure quality of tallks is there

  - Since we can click on each talk we want to attend, why cannot we have a personalised schedule we can print out ?

  - Better communication upfront if something changes

  - Having the conference in a hotel is convenient

  - A bag and a shirt are much appreciated

  - Offering "talk coaching" and having the possibility to test one's talk once before the real talk might be something one want to consider. in particular for all those talk not held before at an *.pm meeting

- …

  - Better network/Internet access

  - Talks/Workshops on more intermediate subjects: Modern perl in general, Deployment options also for OS.X + win32, Introduction to Moose, Introduction/Comparison to established templating systems (Mason, TT), introduction to Catalyst

- …

  - 1) To make the auction shorter but giving a time limit for each item of bidding or it gets pretty boring.

- 2) Need better internet connection during the conference.

- Although the 20 minute slots meant that there were lots of talks, it also meant that most of them weren't terribly in depth, which was quite unsatisfying.

- Being from italy, I know someone would have come just one day, maybe a one-day ticket would help to get more curious?

- Coffee 24 hours per day.

- Consider not holding an auction. And if you must, don't organize it at the end of the conference. Then it will just go on and on and on and on and on and on and on, making that the conference just dies slowly. Start it at 9 AM, so it has to be finished before the 10 AM talks.

- Don't be shy in sending out weekly updates and promoting the event(s) in many channels.

- Five screens are fine for showing slides in big halls, but people with light pointers were a bit lost. Also, it may be a good idea to provide speakers with some presentation guidelines:

  - Please use light colors for letters, dark for background;

  - Show code by small pieces, 20 lines will be just an unreadable noise

  - Same for console output

  - Colors for syntax highlightning must look nice on a beamer, not on your screen.

- Friend's and family program is a good idea but it is important that people on the progam can indentify each other when they turn up to events. There was some confusion at the city tour this year.

- Good luck!

- Having the conference located in a hotel that also served as accommodation turned out to be rather convenient, and is worth copying. As a speaker, in the main room I liked using the radio mike. Mikes are good; mobile mikes are better than static.

- I commented here: http://blog.urth.org/2010/08/random-notes-from-yapceu-2010.html, that I felt that there should be an "advanced-ness" rating for each talk, to avoid the case where I go to a talk on Testing with a generic title and it turns out it's all stuff I knew before. Dave replied saying this already exists in ACT, but it is not widely used, so I suggest this feature become required or more widely used by speakers.

- I didn't open the printed material of the conference. I think if internet connections is ok, you can save that money to use on other things.

- If I'm self-employed and need an invoice for my taxes, I have to pay the double price, that's not fair.

- It will be difficult to do better than Pisa!

- It would be great if organizers could make sure that doors to the presentation rooms were closed once a talk started. That was a particular problem here in Pisa, since the doors didn't

close automatically. I don't hear well when there is background noise, so I often found myself getting up and closing the doors for every talk I was in.

- It would be nice if there was a type of attendance fee with the hotel automatically booked for you.

- Keep friends and family programs cheap; it should be easy and fun to participate.

- Keep the concept of having the venue in a hotel, helps save a lot of time.

- Learn from Pisa, especially for the food quality! Addition: your (already published) ticket prices are just crazy!(http://yapceurope.lv/price/) Especially considering that you offer NO lunch! Furthermore they are extremely confusing: is a business entity entitled for the early bird? Does a business registration cost 499.999 or 1999?!

- Less talks, just good talks.

- Let's get many people to Riga! Make people know how easy it is to get there, and what fun it is to spend some days before and after.

- Make sure there's enough DIN/EU power sockets on the rooms ;)

- Make sure wireless works also with ~300 people connecting at the same time

- More power sockets available to more seats! In Pisa there were always a group of people huddled over what sparse sockets and power boards that were available.

- No more organizers singing ;) Auction was a bit too long, even if the different teams was a good idea to make it a bit less boring.

- Paldies par jūsu darbu. Tas būs liels, lai dotos uz Rīgu

- Please don't have a two hour auction at the end. Do the silent auction or some items, and perhaps a quick 30 minute auction at the end of the first two days. And do a lottery, e.g. you get one lottery ticket for free and can buy more for e.g. 1 euro each. Then at the end of the final day do a drawing of 3-10 items (you could have celebrities doing the drawing, e.g. Larry, Damian, "Camella").

- Please make sure that speakers select the correct experience level required for attending their talks. Also, arrange for a trip on a day after the conference to a nearby place. The trip to Florence was exciting.

- Please make the schedule available at least two months before YAPC takes place. And please, please, please, organize a beginner's track. I tried convincing a beginner into coming and could only point a couple of talks that would be appropriate.

- Please modify the talk schedule more often in response to attendee choices. In Pisa the number of personal scheduling conflicts and disappointments seemed to be unusually high.

- Please please please be considerate of us vegans/vegetarians. I fear going to Latvia and having *nothing* to eat. This, as silly as it might sound to some, is what decides for me whether I will come or not.

- Put clocks on the reception desk and at the wall of the coffee break room.

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- Put language tags on the name tags and mark the native one

- Run a tight ship, even though it is hard.

- See above comments regarding promotion, i.e. please do some! :-)

- Smaller conference dinner.

- Some more generalised topics for speakers - a lot of the content seemed to be "This is my very specific awesome way of doing this one task" which often was interesting but not all useful unless you had that very specific task to do your self.

- Strong network (wifi)

- That there should be a time limit on the auction. That there should be an easy way for people attending on their own to meet up and have dinner or lunch with other attendees.

- The dinner early in the conference was a good idea, but there was no encouragement to socialise outside the group. The organisers could maybe allocate named table seats to split up groups like London.pm. Or maybe a subject theme for each table with an allocated speaker and let attendees indicate a preference?

- The Pisa guys set the bar high for you, but I'm sure you'll manage.

- The Pisa orga's did a good job on vegetarian food. Please don't forget it. The venue hotel was far away from interesting places, like restaurants, bars and monuments. Maybe Riga offers a better venue. The breaks between the presentations this year were too long.

- WiFi schould be working without any problems right away from the first day of the conference ;-)

- Yes, about the auction, but I'll mail the YEF venue committee. (Basically, that it should be run on a tight schedule with the goal of maximal fun. Amount of money raised is purely a side effect).

Editor Notes

- Every now and then there is a request to be able to book conference attendance and the hotel accommodation together. While this is a great idea to ease the organisation on the part of the attendee, it isn't for the organisers of the event itself. This combination package has been discussed and attempted many times over the last 10 years, but it is never financially viable. For organisers to pre-book hotel rooms, hotels often require a substantial deposit up-front (in most cases more than the conference itself costs), with any rooms not taken having to be paid for out of the conference budget. Hopefully, you'll agree that the organisers don't need the additional stress, and the funds are better spent on the conference and Perl. As a consequence, organisers do try and arrange special rates for attendees with a recommended hotel, but this does mean the attendee has to make sure they mention the special rate when booking.

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