London Perl Workshop 2013

Feedback & Suggestions

a joint production by

London Perl Workshop

& YAPC Conference Surveys

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An Introduction

This document includes fragments from comments that were submitted by attendees of the 2013 London Perl Workshop 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 2013 event.

Additional organiser comments may appear in response to some of the attendee comments, so that 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 workshop to you. So a big thanks to them for letting us do it :)

Not everything goes according to plan, and the trials of hosting a technical event 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 and will hopefully help to improve the event for the future. Long may it continue.

The 2013 organisers of The London Perl Workshop

Rating The Conference

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

- The website could do with some YLC. I would be willing to help update this if needed and time allows. Also, since most of us were checking the schedule on our mobile devices, I noticed that it wasn't mobile friendly or responsive. :-(

- There was a map ?
- One of the talks was at 16:30, but on the printed schedule it was exactly on the same line as events starting at 17:00. This was confusing and 10 people arrives at 17:00. The speaker was kind enough to re-do their talk for a 2nd time at 17:00.
- Unfortunately I was unable to stay for the social afterwards. Working in London during the week, I'm completely fried by the weekend...and needed to go home and die!
- My only strong view is that it's a fantastic event for which I am extremely grateful to the organisers (and sponsors)
- the sponsors column in the website tended to cover the links column when viewed on a narrow browser. and yes, this is the biggest complaint I have :)
- Schedule: there was one slot (the one with the continuous deployment talk) which had talks that seemed they would have been interesting to the same people. Perhaps scheduling could include a theme element to avoid overlap? Social: we might need a bigger room for the after event!
- The websites powered by ACT are usually badly designed Finding the venue wasn't easy at all, had to look up Westminster University to find the proper address - but I made it
- Website:
  * ACT (the conference website toolkit) isn't as good as some other conference website frameworks I've seen around - the HTML's possibly non-standard, the design's clunky, but more importantly it seems to be missing things like integration to a maps site (for directions), and the event signup has some weirdnesses that I've mentioned below. I appreciate this is mostly an issue with ACT, though, rather than LPW. I'm not sure if the site design style is something that's more common in the Perl web community; for someone coming from looking at Python conference websites, though, it's slightly jarring how much older it looks in terms of web design.
  Signup:
  * Why does the LWP's event booking system ask me for a T-shirt size? Why does it need to know? This came across as kind of weird and intrusive; other events I have been to do not ask me to think about my body size as part of signup, and none of them have made it something I *have* to fill in before I can finish signup. *Please* add a "I do not want a T-shirt" option, at the very least. Oh, and if you keep the T-shirt question, please add a size guide - "small/medium/large" vary between T-shirt manufacturers, after all. (If T-shirts are being offered as prizes by sponsors, have them send them to attendees afterwards if necessary?)
  * Why does the LWP's event booking system list my name as an attendee with no way to remove me from the list of people displayed? I try to keep my real-name internet presence fairly minimal and would really prefer it if there were an option to keep my name off the public attendee list. If you need my data to do larger demographics (e.g. "we have X attendees, who are A male/B female/C other", which can be useful for attendees - I did look to see if I would be the only woman), then that's fine, but my name isn't needed for that.

(From what I could see, changing my name to something else would change my name on my badge, so that's not really an option.) Directions/maps: I don't think there were any, apart from text on the front page saying "Westminster University's New Cavendish Campus". A link to Google Maps or OpenStreetMaps would have been helpful. Also a note that we wouldn't be the only conference at the site that day, so to look for the LPW banners rather than the first queue we could see.
Social events: N/A, as I didn't stay for them; I'm afraid I left at about 1pm.

- I didn't understand most of what was said, it seemed to be aimed for those at the top of their game, and the one beginners workshop I attended was cancelled. Having Dyspraxia I found the signs to be inadequate and even ended up in the wrong room on one occasion and also found the schedule difficult to follow and ended up sitting out in the corridor until I could rearrange myself.
- Amazing experience, I would definitely attend again.
- You are right that time and travel expences aren't free - to be exact it cost my employer 3 working days and £800 to send me here, on the pretext of attending a workshop that got cancelled without any explanation. There is a high probability my request to attend next year's YAPC will be denied because of this.
- I would like to have known times earlier - even estimated start and end times of the event to allow for cheaper booking of transport (trains in my case). I ended up missing later talks because I had to guess when it might end based on the web page for last years event.

For The 2013 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?"

- The address on the website was hard to notice and wasn't really complete. Postcodes are really helpful in London, so a small reference to it might reveal extremely helpful to find the venue in this big city. The website was confusing making the information hard to follow. Other than that, the organisation was good.

- It was great. I enjoyed it. However, I din't get my mug and when I went down to get one, they were all gone. :-(
- It would have been good to have drinks available (for purchase) outside of the planned breaks
- Thanks for organizing a great workshop. Your efforts are greatly appreciated.
- THANK YOU !
- Thank you.
- As a foreigner, it was a bit hard to figure out where the location was. I could not find a wiki post on the website with instructions. Even if it always is in the same venue, it would be great to have directions and a map on the website for newbies.
- Awesome job. Thank you for running such a smooth day.
- Well done.
- My only constructive criticism would be that the name badges weren't necessarily easy to read at a glance. Double-sided badges, with the attendee name more prominent than the event name, would be appreciated. This did not in any way detract from the general awesomeness of the event, though :-)
- I was disappointed that the two debugging topics clashed. I would have liked to go to the Devel::SizeMe talk and the debugging workshop by Andrew Ford.
- Only 2 minor criticisms (nobody ever gets these right, we certainly didn't the one time I've helped as an orga...) Name badges were yet again 1-sided and everyone was called Decadon. Not all the rooms had an orga available for timekeeping / A/V help for speakers. Otherwise congrats again for great workshop!
- It would have been nice to know that there was no WiFi on purpose.
- Good work
- great work
- Thank you!
- Website does not look right on iPhone - should test. Sound quality in L1 for opening talk was not very good - more preparation beforehand required. The handout with timetables of talks was great, but should have a description of each talk on the back to help people decide on which to go to. Directions to L2 not that clear from L1, though I can see the organisers had tried to sort this out.
- Thank-you.
- Many thanks - if it were not for your efforts, we wouldn't have been able to experience how great the Perl community really is.
- keep up the great work, Thank you for an amazing event
- It would be nice if there had been a talk evaluation for the Jobs Panel.
- The major effort and sponsership for boozy evening social events could be a bit more balanced with an organised lunch of some sort for those that can't or don't want to spend the evenings drinking beer

- A note reminding us that lunch would not be provided, *and* that the cafe there wouldn't be open so we'd have to leave the building to eat, would have been helpful. Even better would be a section suggesting places nearby that sold food. Sounds like a very trivial thing, but I left my house at about 7:30am, and after 6 hours without food I'm not thinking clearly or reasonably enough to go get lunch (unless it's right there) without it sending my mood plunging for the rest of the day. It's why I left the conference after lunch. I'm aware this is pretty minor, though.
- Clearer signs, clearer schedule, better / more coffee!
- very well organised.
- Thank you. Awesome event.
- Thank you once again for another great conference
- As I say every year, the three most important points in organizing a conference are wifi, wifi and wifi. This goes doubly when there is no programme handbook, and especially when you print out a favourite schedule two days before only to find out it has been changed at the last minute. This time there actually was a programme, but it totally missed the boat by containing only advertisements and not a single talk description. A PDF downloadable the day before would have been quite sufficient.
- Great day, great people. Couldn't really ask for more.

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)?"

- links to venue, more info for new speakers

- Improve the usability and the arrangement of information on the site and add the complete address to the venue (including postcode)
- The website needs to be mobile friendly. ;-)
- Attended a couple of beginner level talks, but they were all (good) revision for me. I wpould have liked something slightly more advanced. Although I've been an occasioonal Perl programmer for a long time, I still consider mnyself to be little more than a beginner as I've had little exposure to more advanced techniques. I had hoped that the LPW would give me this, but the talks were either too advanced or too simple. How about, next time, putting a flag against each talk, suggesting the level of prior ability needed to understand it.
- * if there are multiple events at the site (and groups gathering in the lobby in the AM), then a sign outside saying "LPW, sign in here (arrow / diagram), then get your booty there (same)". * email presenters ahead of time with info about the projectors available, and encourage presenters to ensure they are ready to cope. I sat in one session where the poor presenter spent 15 of the 20 minutes trying to sort out his laptop, then someone else's, then belted through his talk in 10 minutes.
- A problem arose with my laptop (as speaker) delivering video to the venue's projection system. Having tested it early in the morning, in both rooms I was due to speak in, I'd found video settings that worked perfectly (actually my default settings). When I came to actually deliver my talks, in both cases, the same settings did not work, the projectors only displaying the leftmost 80% of the image I was supplying. The projection system offered no configurable settings that would affect this. This necessitated last-minute frantic reworking of settings, leading (for one of my talks) to a delayed start and a less satisfactory image for the audience. I think on my side I need to make my software more flexible to cope with projectors unpredictably displaying only a partial image. But on the other side, I recommend that (a) workshop organisers should provide someone in each room who is familiar with the venue's gear and can help troubleshoot these issues; and (b) the projection gear should have consistent behaviour throughout the day so that advance compatibility testing by speakers is meaningful. Audio configuration was poor at this LPW. The main room, particularly, suffered feedback if the volume was set high enough to provide useful amplification. As with the video, it was left to the individual speakers (generally not audio experts) to configure the system. As with the video, there should be a workshop staff member in each room who knows the equipment and can troubleshoot. Unlike the video, problems with audio are relatively difficult to spot from the speaker's perspective, so the facilitator should take a more active role in ensuring a satisfactory arrangement. It should be made clear to speakers at what volume range they should be speaking, in particular whether they need to project their voice or should rely on the electronic amplification. As many speakers turn up with Apple laptops that provide no VGA interface, it would be handy if workshop organisers could have a range of X-to-VGA converters immediately available, rather than having to scrounge ad hoc. Advance notice to speakers that they must be able to emit VGA might also help here.
- Clearer name badges would be a welcome improvement.
- Conference badges should be: * double sided * have nick (or name if not supplied) highly

visible from distance * (ideally user could choose name vs nick if that's technically possible) Requesting volunteers to man rooms would be really useful for timekeeping and reassuring nervous speakers.
- maybe a bigger pub for social evenings
- t-shirts are wonderful!
- Mainly changes to the website as mentioned in "please expand on any strong views". Website design is something contributors to ACT can help with (I'm going to see what I can do to help there); I don't know if you can change the event signup but I'd appreciate those two changes above, as they were weird hiccups in the signup process.
- Working internet at venue / workshops , more beginner -> intermediate content, more GUI orientated demos / talks / examples (Perl does run on Windows & Macs!)
- no comments from my side.
- Could there be a guru on hand to held set up the workshops? Sean Tohill was unable to remedy a practical joke played by some students. It spoiled my workshop. There must have been any number of gurus upstairs who could have fixed anything if they had known about the problem.
- See above.
- Persuade a London hotel to do cheap deals for attendees, so I can afford to stop over Friday and Sunday night ;)

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