linux.conf.au

Post event report

LCA By the Bay – Geelong, Australia
1 – 5 February 2016

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Executive summary

Linux.conf.au 2016 – LCA By the Bay, was held from 1 – 5 February 2016 at Deakin University's Waterfront Campus. Calls for Presentations were issued on June 1st 2015, with CfP closing on 2nd August 2015. Registrations opened on October 9th 2015 and the conference sold out in mid January 2016.

The event attracted approximately 600 registrations in total, being;

- Around 80 Speaker and Miniconf Organiser registrations
- 2 Fairy Penguin Sponsors
- 99 Earlybird Professional Registrations
- 200 Professional Registrations
- 63 Earlybird Hobbyist Registrations
- 64 Hobbyist Registrations
- 32 Student Registrations
- 43 Miniconf-Only tickets
- 3 Media Registrations
- 38 Volunteer Registrations

Financially, the conference made a modest profit, in line with expectations set by the Linux Australia Council.

Based on the conference survey available to Delegates, Speakers and Volunteers, the key strengths of the conference were;

- The overall organisation and logistical execution of the event
- Provision of food and beverage during breaks, and variety of food options during lunch
- Professionalism and rapport of Volunteers
- Conference dinner venues, ambience and execution
- Communication leading up to and during the conference, including social media
- Execution of keynote questions in curated form
- Selection of Keynote Speakers and overall Schedule selection
- Centrality of Waterfront campus to leisure activities, accommodation and eateries

Some weaknesses were highlighted based on both the administered survey and anecdotal feedback.

- Location of student accommodation on different campus and requirement to use buses for transport to and from accommodation
- The distance that Wool Museum was from other conference venues that were central to the Deakin University Waterfront Campus
- The number of delegates during the conference made some conference venues overcrowded, while the keynote venue Costa Hall had significant spare seating for non-keynote events.
- Miniconf schedules were not synchronised, making it difficult for Delegates to see talks in different Miniconfs.

A net promoter score was calculated during the event survey and the results are shown below. This demonstrates an overall strongly positive outcome for the event.

How likely would you be to recommend linux.conf.au to a colleague or friend?

#1	1	1.37%
#2	0	0.00%
#3	2	2.74%
#4	10	13.70%
#5	60	82.19%
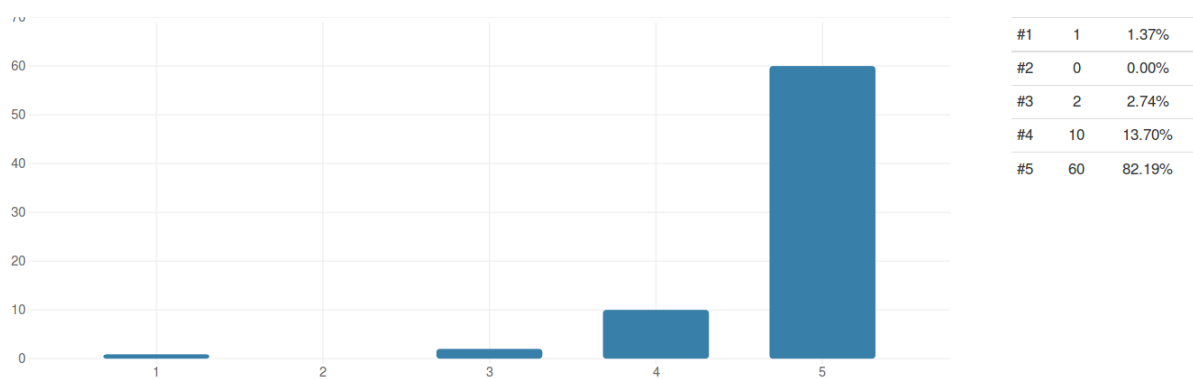
Figure – Net promoter score

Key links

- Youtube - https://www.youtube.com/user/linuxconfau2016
- Twitter archive for #lca2016 - https://twitter.com/search?q=%23lca2016&src=typd
- Chat list - http://lists.lca2016.linux.org.au/pipermail/chat/
- Post event survey - http://opinahq.com/app/c/64422

Methodology

Feedback was gathered through two key methods;

- Via anonymous survey sent to the Chat mailing list, Speakers mailing list and Volunteers mailing list
- Anecdotal evidence from conversations, informal debriefs and similar held during and immediately after the conference

Pre-conference experience

Summary

Pre-conference experience deals with elements of the event up to and including registration of Delegates, such as;

- promotion of the event and updates
- early bird registration
- the registration process
- payment for registration
- use of the conference Wiki for pre-conference information

Overall, the conference was found to have been very well organised, with excellent pre-conference communication. Usability issues experienced with the linux.conf.au site and concomitant Wiki were not as apparent in 2016.

Delegate queries were handled rapidly and with a positive engagement style. Pre-conference communications were handled very well and with an appropriate tone of voice.

Key recommendations

- Using a **jQuery-based Theme for the ZooKeepr-based website was a well received move,** and if possible this should be replicated in future conferences. Further attention to user experience (UX) and user interface (UI) design in ZooKeepr would return additional benefits.

- That the **Invoicing functionality within ZooKeepr be made easier,** more intuitive to use, and better facilitate modification of Invoices after initial payment.

- That the **information architecture structure** adopted for the Wiki (with information presented in both a 'life-cycle' and by 'delegate type' categorisation) be repeated in future years. The team has exported their Wiki structure and can make it available for this purpose.

- That instead of having separate Facebook pages for each year's linux.conf.au, **a single Facebook page for 'linux.conf.au' should be created** / curated

Event marketing, promotion and awareness

The high level of existing event awareness within the domestic and international community made the need for significant marketing and promotion less paramount. However, being a regional conference, ticket sales were expected to be less than a capital-city based event, and so some marketing efforts were continued right up until December 2015.

SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE

Social media was used extensively to promote the conference. Twitter and Facebook were the key digital properties used, with key posts being promoted on Facebook. Reasonable engagement occurred on posts promoted on Facebook, with the conference spending just under $AUD 300 on Facebook advertising, with a reach of over 26,000 people, targeted to those interested in free and open source software and Linux variants.
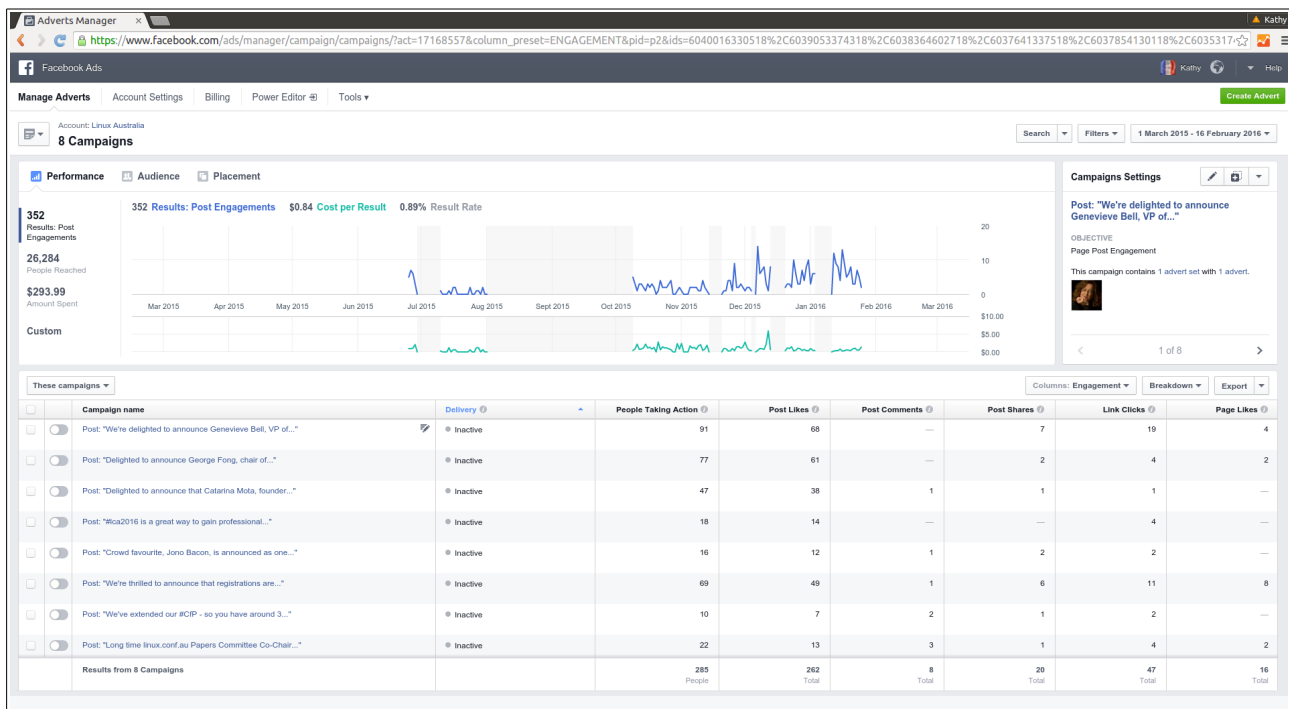

Figure – Facebook promotional metrics

In total, the Facebook page for LCA By the Bay received 167 likes, aided by cross-posting from previous years' conference Facebook pages. In order to keep a continual presence, and ensure a wider promotional base, future years may wish to consider having a single Facebook page for linux.conf.au. Ownership of this would be transferred between conference teams year to year. This strategy would mean that traditional followers of the conference would not need to "like" a new page every year.

Twitter was also used as another strong social media channel. A deliberate decision was made to use the #lca2016 hashtag, even though an Adult Awards programme had also chosen to use the same hashtag. Delegates were informed of the conflict and advised on how to filter appropriately. Twitter alternatives such as Identi.ca were not used this year, due to the project's abandonment, and GnuSocial was not adopted as the effort required would not have yielded a return given the (current) low penetration rate of this service.

The conference chose not to use paid Adwords advertising this year, largely because sales were initially strong, and continued to be strong throughout the life-cycle of the event.

Google Plus was also used as a promotional channel given that our community often uses Google Plus in preference to other social media channels.

The linux.conf.au LinkedIn group was also used for promotional content, but this content was chosen sparingly to reduce 'information overload' for subscribers to the linux.conf.au group.

Established mailing lists such as linux-aus and lca-announce were also used for promotional and informational communications.

LISTING OF CONFERENCE SOCIAL MEDIA PROPERTIES
- Website: http://lcabythebay.org.au
- Twitter: @linuxconfau, hashtag #lca2016
- Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/lcabythebay
- Google+: https://www.google.com/+LcabythebayOrgAu
- Lanyrd: http://lanyrd.com/2016/linuxconfau/
- IRC: #linux.conf.au on freenode.net
- Announce mailing list: http://lists.linux.org.au/mailman/listinfo/lca-announce

Registration and payments

Registration and payment for linux.conf.au is a traditionally difficult task, in large part due to the design of both ZooKeepr and the payment gateway. The key issue this year was the changeover in payment gateways for SecurePay in mid-November; with many thanks to Josh Stewart and other ZooKeepr maintainers (David Tulloh, James Iseppi and Joshua Hesketh in particular), this went very smoothly.

Some Delegates were provided with banking details and were able to do direct banking deposits, which proceeded smoothly.

As per previous years, amending invoices after initial payment was laborious and non-intuitive, and incurred high administrative overhead on the part of the team. Future conferences who use ZooKeepr would be well advised to expend effort on making the Invoicing functionality within this product easier to use and more intuitive.

Provision of accommodation information

Due to offloading accommodation as a conference-managed activity, Delegates were provided with referrals to a number of providers in the region, including hotels and motels and the student accommodation. Thus, Delegates were dependent on

these service providers for information about accommodation. All reports were that information provided was accurate and helpful. There are no accommodation providers that we provided referrals for that we would be uncomfortable referring Delegates to in the future.

Transport information

Given that the venue was a regional one, the conference hired buses for both airport runs and to take Delegates between the Residences and conference venue. The transport details were summarised on the conference site, but Delegates wanted more detailed transport information, which was provided a week out from the conference itself.

Website

The conference website was originally built in WordPress and transitioned to ZooKeepr in June 2015, in readiness for CfP opening. As expected, it was heavily hit during CfP, in the lead up to the conference, and during the conference itself.
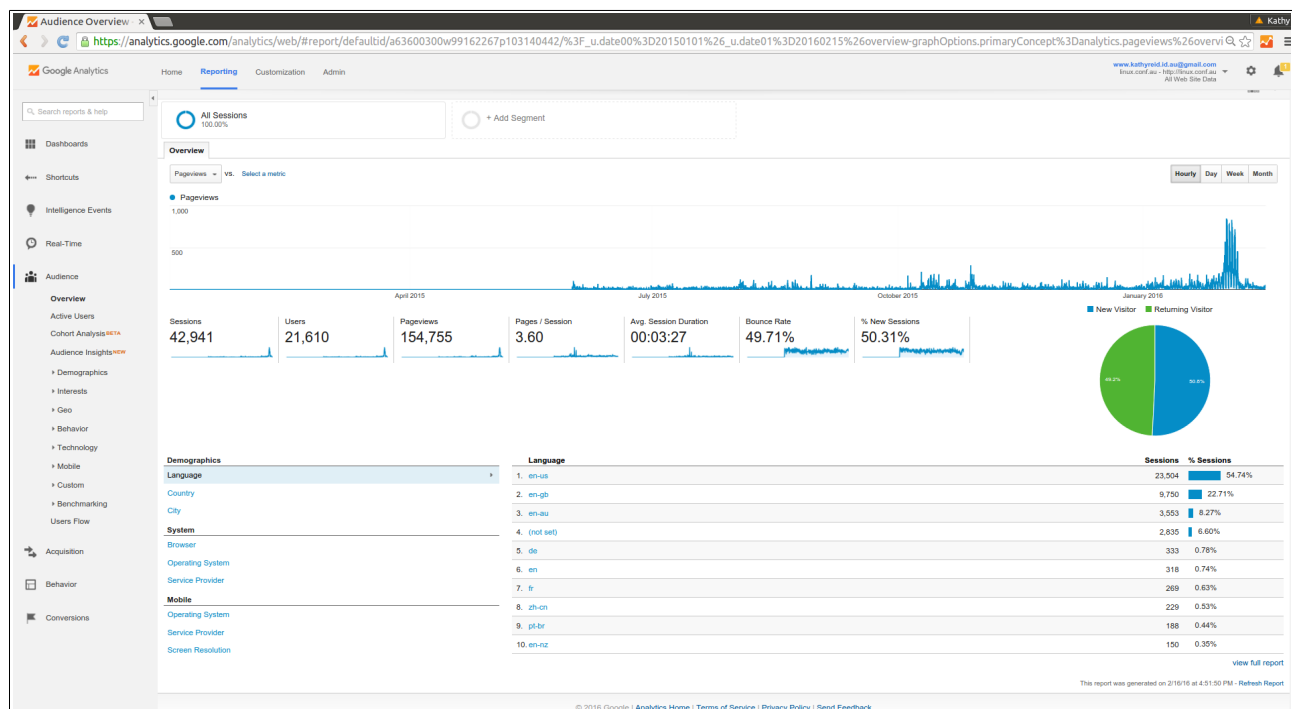
Figure - Key website performance measures

Key findings from the website metrics (Google Analytics) include;

- A significant proportion of visits from mobile devices (30% mobile phone and tablet combined), indicating that the linux.conf.au website should be mobile responsive

- Diversity in the user agent used to view the site, with significant representation from Linux, Macintosh, Android, Windows and iOS devices, indicating that the linux.conf.au should be cross-browser compatible

- Social media channels were key referrers to the linux.conf.au website, in particular Twitter, YouTube and Facebook. Linux Weekly News (LWN) was also a key referrer.
- The average page load time for the home page of linux.conf.au was over 4 seconds. Performance improvements to ZooKeepr would assist in reducing the page load time.
- Around 35% of the visits to the conference website were from international sites, mirroring the general attendance at the conference.

Wiki

The Wiki was up and ready with most conference information by early October 2015. This helped Delegates with their pre-conference experience enormously, and reduced the number of questions fielded in the Delegate Service application, RT, in the lead up to the conference. The Wiki used two different information architectures, and significantly used Templates within MediaWiki to present information in a well-structured and easy to use way. It is recommended that future conferences adopt a similar information architecture.

The most viewed pages on the Wiki were as follows, to provide an indication to future conference teams on what to focus on.

MOST VIEWED WIKI PAGES

[Main Page](#)	15,646
[Airport Arrivals and Departures](#)	3,863
[Transport](#)	3,368
[Birds of a Feather sessions (BoFs)](#)	2,420
[Information for Delegates](#)	1,607
[What to expect at linux.conf.au](#)	1,381
[Unprofessional Delegates Networking Session (UnPDNS)](#)	1,309
[Miniconf Info](#)	1,282
[Opensearch desc.php](#)	1,260
[Information for Speakers](#)	1,192

Delegate service requests

The conference team used the RT ticketing system to handle incoming queries, and place them into queues for appropriate triage and action. This system worked well, with different team members handling the different queues. The team handled 682 RT requests.

Conference experience

Summary

Conference experience deals with all elements of the conference while Delegates were physically present, such as transport, food and beverages, comfort and accommodation.
NOTE: Speakers and Presentations are dealt with in the next section

Positive feedback was received around the general organisation of the conference, the quality of food and beverage options during the conference, the location, ambience and food and beverage provision at all conference dinner locations, and the overall conference experience.

Negative feedback was received around the distance of the Wool Museum from other conference venues, and the distance of the student accommodation from the main conference venue.

Key recommendations

- That future conferences attempt to house all conference venues centrally to minimise distance that Delegates need to travel between sessions
- That future conferences consider catering Volunteer and Core Team lunches by in-house caterers to save time and free up resources for higher value activities
- That future conferences strongly promote an On Call Number and the Code of Conduct to promote a climate of safety and security
- That future conferences look at ways of making ZooKeepr more robust for the eventuality that conferences sell out.
- That a conference companion mobile application be repeated in future years

Conference social experience

PENGUIN DINNER

The Penguin Dinner was held at The Pier restaurant in central Geelong and consisted of two courses – a main and dessert. While feedback indicated the venue was delightful, thermal comfort was an issue for several guests, as it was too hot inside the venue. Food and beverages were received well, and the decision to not provide entertainment was received well.

PROFESSIONAL DELEGATES' NETWORKING SESSION

Held at Little Creatures Brewery, around a 10 minute bus ride from the conference venue, significant positive feedback was received around the choice of venue, and provision of food and beverages. The venue was the perfect size for PDNS, the

staff were delightful and it was a wonderful evening. The decision to invite VIP guests turned out to be a strong one, and one that would work well for future conferences.

Again, significant positive feedback was received on the venue, food and beverage service and entertainment, setting the tone for a delightful evening. A key highlight of the event were the string trio performing requests for guests.

Transport

Provision of transport met with mixed reviews. On one hand, some Delegates were appreciative that buses were provided to and from the airport, and to and from conference dinners, and between student accommodation and conference venues in the morning and evenings. However, others reported that the long duration (25-30 minutes) of the bus ride between the student accommodation and conference venue detracted from their overall experience.

Venue

Significant positive feedback was received about the comfort, layout and facilities available at Deakin University's Waterfront Campus, including amenities, proximity to shopping, leisure and entertainment precincts and proximity to transport options.

Significant breakout and 'hallway track' facilities were available, including the large courtyard, Waterfront Cafe and related spaces. This added significantly to the ambience of the event and the ability of Delegates to network.

Food and beverage

Significant positive feedback was received about the food and beverage options made available during the conference. The Core Team worked closely with Waterfront Kitchen to ensure that several and varied lunch options were available, and that dietary requirements were catered to. This was handled exceptionally by Waterfront Kitchen.

The Core Team made the decision to have Core Team and Volunteer lunches catered for, and this was an excellent decision, saving significant time and freeing up resources for higher value activities.

Delegate comfort

Positive feedback was received overall regarding delegate comfort. However, in some cases, rooms were crowded due to the popularity of the presentation.

Thermal comfort was well handled for most conference venues, although the NOC was very warm in the days during bump-in, and fans needed to be brought in to keep it cool enough.

Two experienced Registered Nurses volunteered to provide first aid during the conference, and undertook proactive checking of Delegates to ensure health and hydration. This worked very well. A designated first aid area was established, allowing issues to be handled in privacy.

Care and attention was taken to ensure a climate of safety, security and collaboration, diversity and inclusion at the conference, with the on-call number heavily promoted, and the Code of Conduct promoted throughout Delegate communications. The success of this measure was reflected in feedback, with several Delegates commenting on the great atmosphere of the conference.

Registration

The Registration of Delegates proceeded smoothly, with an experienced and enthusiastic crew undertaking Registration tasks.

Because the conference sold out early – unexpectedly – a number of issues were encountered in ZooKeepr in facilitating sales after the conference technically sold out.

Boarding passes were issued this year and they sped up Registration. Testing was undertaken to ensue that Boarding Passes were scannable from a wide range of mobile devices. It is strongly recommended that Boarding Passes are used in future years.

Schwag and T-shirts

Positive feedback was received on the choice of Ecosilk Schwag Bags that are easily reusable. Positive feedback was received on the choice of KeepCups as a Professional Schwag item.

Geelong and Bellarine Tourism provided a map and Visitor Guide for all Delegates. Little feedback was received on whether this was appreciated by Delegates; no negative feedback was received.

T-shirts were deliberately kept simple in style and colour to meet a wide variety of needs; this appears to have been well accepted by Delegates. Due to selling out the conference, stocks of many sizes were lower than anticipated.

Delegate communication

Delegate communication occurred through a variety of mechanisms, including mailing list announcements, Twitter, Facebook and individual communications. A communications plan was prepared early in the conference planning, and then executed. The use of separate lists for Speakers, Miniconf Organisers, Parents and Partners was a strong move and allowed niche communications to be sent to a target audience easily.

Signage

Concerto signage was established by Thursday of the conference, and a script was written to consume the ZooKeepr schedule to present the Schedule on digital signage. This worked well to guide Delegates. Future conferences should consider prioritising digital signage from the very start of the conference.

Conference network

AARNet provided the conference network, and ran over 230 metres of additional fibre to connect the Wool Museum venue. The conference network was stable, reliable, fast and secure and met the high capacity requirements of the conference.

Mobile application

The conference worked with a local mobile development firm, Codeacious, to produce a mobile application to provide key location information as well as the schedule. The mobile application was well received.

Childcare

The provision of Childcare was very well received by even those Delegates who didn't use the service. The arrangement with Belmont Toy Library was very well received and was a great example of the conference working well with local businesses.

Partners' Programme

The conference team decided against running a Partners' Programme this year and instead included significant information about Geelong and key highlights both in the Schwag Bag and Wiki. Given the large amount of effort expended for a small number of Partners, we recommend that future conferences also decline to run a Partners' Programme.

Diversity

Diversity measures were very well received by Delegates, and were mentioned frequently in positive terms in the conference survey. The conference did not record formal diversity statistics, but estimates 15-20% female attendance based on observation.

Birds of a Feather Sessions (BoFs)

Some feedback indicated a desire to see more direct support for BoFs by conference organisers, however this is unrealistic at scale.

Conference charity – Give Where You Live

The chosen conference charity this year was Give Where You Live – a Geelong based multi-sector community benefit organisation. Delegates raised over $4900 from raffle ticket sales, and this amount was matched by Linux Australia, resulting in a donation of $9860 to Give Where You Live. A drone was raffled, and the very

generous Paul Fenwick donated a piece of headwear coveted by his fans.

Benefit to local economy

Enterprise Geelong, the City of Greater Geelong's business development arm, has estimated that the conference has resulted in an economic benefit to Geelong of $AUD 1.64 million.

Media coverage

IT Invasion prompts convention centre calls, Geelong Advertiser, February 3, 2016 http://www.geelongadvertiser.com.au/news/geelong/linux-conference-brings-560-delegates-to-geelong-prompting-calls-for-convention-centre/news-story/ee63babbff0ba6af0fea9017acafc927

Blog coverage

- Elizabeth Krumbach Joseph
  http://princessleia.com/journal/2016/02/highlights-from-lca-2016-in-geelong/

- Kathy Reid - http://blog.kathyreid.id.au/2016/03/19/linux-conf-au-2016-geelong-lca-by-the-bay/

- Ewen McNeil - http://ewen.mcneill.gen.nz/blog/entry/2016-02-08-lca2016-days-two-and-three/

- Craige McWhirter -
  https://mcwhirter.com.au/craige/blog/2016/LCA2016_Revisited_-_Using_Linux_features_to_make_a_hackers_life_hard/

- Dan Hawke - http://www.oss.co.nz/blog/lca-by-the-bay-linuxconf-au-2016-conference-report/

Speakers, schedule and presentations

Summary

This section of the report deals with Call for Presentations, selection process, scheduling, and quality and execution of presentations.

Key recommendations

- That future conferences continue to keep Prototypes in the Schedule

- That CfP be scheduled around other major open source conferences to provide maximum opportunity for Speakers to make a submission.

- It is strongly recommended that Miniconference sessions are synchronised at future conferences.

- It is recommended that changes are made to ZooKeepr to better facilitate role management of Miniconference presenters so that they are better distinguished from Speakers in the system.

- If the HDMI2USB solution is to be used at future conferences then Linux Australia may wish to consider funding development and/or advancement of this platform via the Audio Visual Team.

- Having a dedicated Speaker Liaison was well received and this is a practice that should be repeated for future conferences.

- It is recommended that Keynote question curation continues for future conferences.

Call for Presentations

The Call for Presentations opened in June 2015 and was promoted heavily through mailing lists and social media channels. Just shy of 300 CfP submissions were received, making it the largest number of submissions received since linux.conf.au Canberra 2013. CfP was extended for a short period of time, largely because of the timing of OSCON – and expected submissions from a number of people who were Speaking there.

Papers Committee met in late August and were able to recommend acceptance of a full Schedule. As is often the case, Papers Committee had a difficult task choosing amongst Papers given the overall high calibre of presentations. Several members of Papers Committee travelled to Sydney to meet from their own pockets and for this we are very grateful.

The conference this year introduced a new type of presentation called a 'Prototype'. Several Prototype presentations were rated highly by Papers Committee, and received significant positive feedback from Delegates. It is recommended that future conferences consider including Prototypes in their Schedule.

There were a number of Speakers who after acceptance were unable to attend linux.conf.au for various reasons. The Papers Committee flagged a number of talks as backup talks. Backup talks were promoted to the main Schedule after consideration of topic, Speaker experience and other attributes.

Pre-conference

In the lead up to the conference it was difficult to get Speakers to Register via the conference software, ZooKeepr, and significant follow up was required. There's no easy solution to this other than to continue to chase Speakers.

A Speaker Information Pack was produced which provided a strong basis for Speakers to undertake pre-conference planning and presentation development. This generally worked well, in particular for Speakers who had not spoken at linux.conf.au previously. This was supported by a Speaker and Miniconf Organiser Briefing Session provided on the Sunday of the conference. This was however poorly attended, but the slide deck was provided to Speakers and Miniconf Organisers. It is recommended that this practice continue, so that Speakers who want the introduction can avail themselves of it, and importantly, orient themselves to the conference venue.

Speakers' Dinner

Please refer to the section on Conference Social Experience

Schedule

The Schedule was deliberately designed to accommodate the most popular talks in the largest conference venues, and to ensure that where possible 'streams' were accommodated in the same venue to prevent Delegates having to shift venues.

This was made more difficult due to venue complications as a result of floods the week before conference, with an entire room being shifted. A three-way room shift was also done for three Miniconferences so that the spaces better suited their presentation style.

Consideration was given during Schedule preparation for having a longer than one hour lunch break, however the Core Team decided on keeping the one hour lunch break so that the afternoon sessions didn't go too late into the evening.

Miniconferences

The independently-organised nature of Miniconferences presented a number of challenges for the Schedule. Firstly, the Miniconference presentations varied significantly by timeslot and duration. This caused significant additional work for scheduling in ZooKeepr. Moreover, this practice received negative feedback from Delegates, who expressed a strong preference to be able to easily move between Miniconference sessions. It is therefore strongly recommended that Miniconference

sessions are synchronised at future conferences.

A corollary issue is that the conference mobile phone application was manually updated with Scheduling information, meaning that a change to a Miniconference schedule on the Miniconference site then needed to be reflected both in the ZooKeepr Schedule and in the mobile phone app – i.e. two additional workloads.

Another complication with ZooKeepr was that by putting Miniconference sessions on the Schedule, each Miniconference presenter was defined in ZooKeepr as a Speaker, making reporting more difficult. It is recommended that changes be made to ZooKeepr to better facilitate this use case.

Videos and streaming

Positive feedback was received about the quality and the speed to publication of the conference videos. Significant effort was expended to ensure that Miniconf talks were added to the ZooKeepr Schedule, and this effort made the recording and publication of videos much easier.

This was the first year the HDMI2USB hardware was used, and it generally worked very well. The key issue it presented was the need for all laptops / devices to be able to output to HDMI, which necessitated purchase of some additional adapters. It was also identified reasonably late in the piece, which caused some anxiety for Speakers who did not have HDMI out on their laptops. If this solution is to be used at future conferences then Linux Australia may wish to consider funding development and/or advancement of this platform via the Audio Visual Team.

Streaming was active by Tuesday and worked very well, with over 250 unique viewers.

Code of conduct

Clear communication of the Code of Conduct and content expectations met with general acceptance from Speakers. A small number of Speakers made contact with the Speaker Liaison to seek advice that their slide content was appropriate, and in each case it was.

Quality of Speakers and Miniconference presenters

In general, the quality of Speakers and Miniconf presenters was high, with a small number of exceptions. Assessments will be provided to the Papers Committee in due course to help aid future selection activities.

Keynotes

Significant positive feedback was received about the calibre, delivery and content approach of all four Keynotes.

For the first time this year, Keynote questions were curated via email. This generally

met with Delegate approval, as it significantly raised the calibre of questions asked. Some Delegates expressed disappointment however at email delays, and disappointment at not having their questions asked. The Core Team recommends curation of Keynote questions at future conferences.

Speakers' Room

The conference decided to provide a dedicated Speakers' Room away from the main conference area, and this was very well received by Speakers. Future conferences are encouraged to repeat this measure.

Lightning Talks

Lightning Talks for the conference received some negative feedback due to the available slots filling up even before the conference had started due to the announcement of the sign up sheet being before conference open.

However, the actual execution of Lightning Talks was smoothly run and garnered positive feedback. Much of this was due to the decision to have slides sent in via email and then compiled into one PDF to ensure good flow. Several slides 'went missing' or were not received into the Lightning Talk queue.

Sprints and hack sessions

Some feedback indicated a desire to have dedicated sprints and hack sessions at the conference. Future conferences may wish to consider this, if the issue of an already-full schedule can be overcome.

Rating of Speakers

Some feedback indicated a desire to have the ability to rate Speakers. This would need to be opt-in for Speakers, and a feature request has been raised in ZooKeepr to facilitate this.

Speaker Gifts

Keynote Speakers were presented with a coffee table photographic book of Geelong and the Bellarine, courtesy of Geelong and Bellarine Tourism.

Speakers and Miniconf Organisers were presented with Bollard replicas. Anecdotal feedback was received that the cultural significance of the Bollards to Geelong was not understood early in the conference, and their significance was covered in a morning briefing.

END REPORT