

LISA '10

Indiana Jones might be onto something. This year's LISA conference was held in San Jose, California.

And, although I traveled a long way, other attendees came from distances that dwarfed mine.

This year's conference theme was "Uncovering the Secrets of System Administration" [1], and the décor throughout the conference was reminiscent of an Indiana Jones movie, complete with fedora-wearing conference organizers!

LISA (Large Installation System Administration) began in 1986 as a USENIX workshop dedicated to "large" sites, which at that time were considered to have more than 100 users or 100MB of storage. Although the acronym is used, administrators from infrastructures of all sizes are welcomed, and LISA 2010 even held a Small Infrastructure (a.k.a. MicroLISA) "Birds of a Feather" session that was extremely well attended.

A perennial concern I have at LISA is how best to spend my time. I frequently have to weigh the value of several concurrent sessions to decide which to attend. Although the training goes on for six days, the conference itself allows only three days to cover more than 40 technical sessions, dozens of Birds of a Feather (BoF) and poster sessions, and an exhibition hall with nearly 60 vendors – not counting the 48 training sessions that went on throughout the week.

The most valuable track to me, however, was the so-called hallway track – the time between sessions that is spent meeting, hanging out, and discussing all things technical (or not) with more than 1,200 other system administrators.

If LISA had one overarching theme this year, it was that we, as system administrators, are dealing with a plethora of data. The days of merely 100MB of storage are long gone.

Tony Cass, leader of the database services group at CERN, delivered the conference keynote. CERN is best known for constructing the Large Hadron Collider (LHC), the world's largest and most powerful particle accelerator. The databases that Tony administers record the

sensor output from this accelerator, and CERN finds itself dealing with upward of 15TB of daily data.

Although this data is written to tape in its entirety, it is also sent to other physicists around the world as soon as it is collected. Tony displayed several visuals during his keynote that showed data traveling live from the LHC (on the border of France and Switzerland) around the world.

Other presentations and training sessions showed that CERN is far from the only organization drowning in data. Weta Digital is the New Zealand-based graphics powerhouse behind the visuals in *Lord of the Rings* and *Avatar*, among others. Matt Provost, the systems manager in charge of servers, networks, and storage, showed up to talk about the company's NFS solution that provides a global namespace, heterogeneous file servers, and directory schema, which includes one directory for each frame.

Stephen Foscett from Gestalt IT discussed methods of connectivity to this sea of data. He suggested that the future of storage technology was bound to Ethernet, given the growth of the available bandwidth and the unifying method of access.

Although storage was a major focus of this year's event, it was definitely not the only topic of discussion. The training took three major tracks: Virtualization Technologies and Techniques, Linux Administration, and Super SysAdmin, which focused on non-technical yet extremely important topics such as interpersonal communication and professional growth.

This year's LISA conference offered something for everyone. The only complaint I heard mirrored my own: "How am I supposed to get to a dozen sessions in one day?"

If history is any indicator, this problem won't be solved next year. LISA '11 is scheduled for Boston, Massachusetts, December 4-9. So, mark your calendar now, because if you miss this, you belong in a museum! ■■■



"It's not the years, honey, it's the mileage." – Indiana Jones to Marion Ravenwood in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*.

By Matt Simmons

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[1] LISA '10:

<http://www.usenix.org/event/lisa10/>