

News and views from the this year's OSCON

OREGON DAYS

OSCON continues to grow in popularity and influence. Our Perlmeister stopped in for the talks, the tutorials, and the latest news from the battle lines of the digital millennium. **BY MICHAEL SCHILLI**



Figure 1: OSCON is known for tutorials, conference sessions, and stimulating discussions on the state of Open Source.

This year's Open Source Conference (OSCON) in Portland, Oregon, continued the trend of increasing popularity and higher attendance. Between July 24th and 28th, more than 2,800 attendees experienced tutorials and conference tracks on Perl, Python, PHP, JavaScript/Ajax, MySQL, and PostgreSQL, Linux, and Apache. Talks on legal topics and industry field reports were also well received. Major industry players like Google, Yahoo, Sun, HP, IBM, Intel, and AMD were present in the exhibition hall, showcasing their Open Source efforts and looking for programming talent.

The traditional Google-O'Reilly Open Source Awards went to outstanding developers Julian Seward (Valgrind) and Peter Lundblad (Subversion), but also to community and legal activists Gervase Markham (Firefox) and Cliff Schmidt. For the best corporate liaison, Stefan Taxhet was recognized for OpenOffice.org. The Perl community's "White Camel Awards" went to Perl podcaster Josh McAdams, to Jay Hannah for running the Perl Mongers, and to long-time Perl contributor Randal Schwartz.

Web 2.0

Tim O'Reilly's commented in his keynote that existing open source licenses

were obsolete because they weren't designed to protect the rights of Web 2.0 contributors. on today's Web, community contributions don't solely consist of source code, but are made by providing data to Web 2.0 services, like blogs, photos, and bookmark lists.

Other speakers reworded this observation more carefully and acknowledged that today's licenses have been working well but need to expand to cover Web 2.0 contexts. Sun's Simon Phipps demanded a new kind of freedom granted by Web 2.0 services: the freedom for a user to leave a service at any time and take their data with them. For this new freedom to happen, web service providers need to use open formats. Unless they provide this fundamental right, users might decide that "Lock-in is the new Lock-out."

Perl News

After the initial euphoria, followed by depression, and lately uncertainty, there seems to be new activity in Perl 6 development. The new VM "Parrot" is making good progress, and the Perl 6 compiler has been pushed forward by parallel implementations.

Since "Parrot" is designed and implemented to run code written in a wide variety of scripting languages, it will be

possible to use tens of thousands of CPAN modules in Ruby, Python, Tcl, or other languages. Larry Wall even made a nebulous comment in his "State of the Onion" talk that, by the end of the year, at least a usable test version of Perl 6 will be available.

Keep the Keys

Eben Moglen, law professor and free software advocate, received standing ovations from a stunned crowd for his eloquent talk on the dire consequences for technical progress caused by current patent law. Moglen pointed out that ideas are popping up not in a single mind, but in many individuals at the same time as a result of shared technology and discussions in the development community. To take a single idea, render it unthinkable for the rest of the community, and protect it for 20 years might be comfortable for the patent holder, but it hinders further technological breakthroughs.

Moglen emphasized that, with today's technology getting very close to humans by competing for their pockets (phones, PDAs) and homes (entertainment systems), it is important for the community to "keep the keys" for these systems and not let them be remote-controlled by proprietary interests. ■