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People Are The Real Value Of Tech Conferences

Drew Conry-Murray

In the age of the Internet, where everything is easy to do online, big tech conferences are an odd relic. They're a hassle to travel to, they disrupt your work and your home life, and they tend to be awful for your sleep schedule and nutritional intake.

The big draw for these events are supposed to be:

- Executive keynotes: Get a glimpse of the vendor's strategy and direction for the coming year
- Training: Take a class, learn a skill, burnish your professional chops
- The Expo: See thousands of vendors in one place!

Executive keynotes are little more than slick marketing exercises with excellent graphics, megawatt sound systems, and fatty, glistening tripe about digital transformation, AI, and IoT.

Did you really need to get on a plane to consume that offal? It's all there on the vendor's homepage.

Training is good. While you're at a conference you can attend a class or a course and come away with some useful knowledge. But you could just as easily get the same thing online, at a local user group, at a bootcamp, or in a book.

As for **expo halls**, they're rat mazes of prefab booths, free t-shirts, and magicians wearing lapel mics and shiny suits.

Maybe you plan see a few demos to research products for an upcoming deployment, but let's be honest: You probably already have a shortlist in your head, and the companies on that shortlist will come to you—or at the very least they'll give you the same demo online that you'd get on the show floor. You really don't need to be here.

OK, you might score a lightsaber for the kids (or yourself, no judgement), but if you want one that bad, it's ten bucks at Target.

So why do we go?

People Power

The real draw is other people. Humans are social animals, and we thrive when we interact and engage with others. There's [extensive research](#) that shows human interaction has a marked influence on our well-being.

And person-to-person engagement in the physical world has measurable physiological benefits. For example, the psychologist Susan Pinker [says](#) "Face-to-face contact releases a whole cascade of neurotransmitters and, like a vaccine, they protect you now, in the present, and well into the future."

She also notes that physical contact, even something as simple as a handshake or high-five "...is enough to release oxytocin, which increases your level of trust, and it lowers your cortisol levels, so it lowers your stress."

I've experienced this phenomenon myself. The drudgery of a long day schlepping from one drab ballroom to another falls away when I see a familiar face by the coffee urn. My mood lifts when I track a boisterous laugh to its source: an old friend holding court at a reception.

I'm not alone in this. Tweets from the recent Cisco Live US event looked more like a family reunion than a tech conference. People posted about reconnecting with distant colleagues over breakfast or drinks, chance encounters in hallways and corridors with friends, and their delight at meeting someone in person they've only "known" via a blog, book, or LinkedIn profile.

A few tweets extolled an interesting tech session or gawked at big metal boxes, but the majority I saw were about the joys of human interaction.

People need to each other for sanity checks, to swap stories, inquire about health and family, share jokes, commiserate and offer comfort, eat a meal together, and just enjoy one another's company.

The human experience is the real value of a tech conference.

Tech Blogs: How To

IaC/DevOps braindump - Medium

<https://medium.com/@asenci/iac-devops-braindump-b9...>

If you're looking for resources to get started on Infrastructure as Code, Python, network automation, or get your arms around the basics of programming, Andre has put together a helpful list of resources, as well as long lists of people you can follow on Twitter. You might want to bookmark this one. - Drew

The Achilles Heel of the API - Moving Packets

<http://movingpackets.net/2019/06/18/the-achilles-heel-of-the-api/>

John Herbert vents his frustration at the inconsistent, immature state of APIs in the networking world. A good read, especially if you're new to APIs. When things aren't working like you expect, or when you can't find the documentation you're looking for, you'll be among excellent company. Maybe you're not crazy--maybe the API just sucks. - Ethan

Running OSPF in a Single Non-Backbone Area - ipSpace.net

<https://blog.ipSPACE.net/2019/06/running-ospf-in-single-non-backbone-area.html>

Let's say you have a single OSPF area for your entire OSPF routing domain. Does that area have to be area 0? No, it doesn't. You can assign other numbers if you like. Is that a good idea? Hmm. Ivan Pepelnjak offers some thoughts. - Ethan

Quick and Dirty - SQL Server 2008 R2 to SQL Server 2017 Migration - Not Your Dad's IT

<https://www.notyourdadsit.com/blog/2019/6/9/quick-and-dirty-sql-server-2008-r2-to-sql-server-2017-migration>

Nathaniel Avery offers some quick tips for database migration as Microsoft's SQL Server 2008 nears its end of life in July. Note that this post is aimed at databases supporting simple applications, not, as Nathaniel writes, "complicated transnational replication technologies." - Drew

Tech Blogs: Opinion

The New Wilderness - Idle Words

https://idlewords.com/2019/06/the_new_wilderness.htm

This post by Maciej Ceglowski explores the notion of ambient privacy, which the author defines as “the understanding that there is value in having our everyday interactions with one another remain outside the reach of monitoring, and that the small details of our daily lives should pass by unremembered.” Ambient privacy is endangered by a growing surveillance infrastructure, we need to consider the effects of a loss of that ambient privacy. Ceglowski asks “To what extent is living in a surveillance-saturated world compatible with pluralism and democracy? What are the consequences of raising a generation of children whose every action feeds into a corporate database? What does it mean to be manipulated from an early age by machine learning algorithms that adaptively learn to shape our behavior?” These are difficult questions. We need answers. - Drew

Tech and Antitrust -Stratechery

<https://stratechery.com/2019/tech-and-antitrust/>

This post drills into the question of whether United States government agencies--the Justice Department and the Federal Trade Commission--will be able to make successful arguments that four big tech companies--Google, Facebook, Apple, and Amazon--violate anti-trust law. Given the incredible power, scope, and wealth of these companies, it feels like something ought to be done, but Ben Thompson makes compelling arguments for why the government will have a difficult time with anti-trust laws as a mechanism to rein in the power of these corporations. -Drew

160 MHz Wide Channels: Just the Tip of an Iceberg of WLAN Industry Dysfunction - WiredNot

<https://wirednot.wordpress.com/2019/06/13/160-mhz-wide-channels-just-the-tip-of-an-iceberg-of-wlan-industry-dysfunction/>

Lee Badman looks at a variety of decisions he’s seeing in the wireless industry that are “just not a good idea.” Why does he think the wireless industry is getting things wrong? Because the IEEE is creating specs with top-end performance numbers that are hard to reach even under ideal conditions. The vendors don’t want to seem like their gear under-performs, and so...lots of foolishness enabled by default. Like really wide channels that step on adjacent channels, causing interference. - Ethan

Can you fully automate a network? - Constant Pinger

<https://constantpinger.home.blog/2019/06/04/can-you-fully-automate-a-network/>

Ian Nightingale wonders if the future of network configuration is to force an operational shift where automation MUST be used. He’s not convinced this is the way forward. “The temptation when implementing the shiny new toys of this brave new automation world is allow them to take over. To become the one way to make things happen. This will lead to disaster if this is at the cost of understanding and practicing traditional network skills like getting on a CLI and debugging.” He makes an excellent point. - Ethan

The Lulz



IT News

Apple's 'Find My' Feature Uses Some Very Clever Cryptography - Wired

<https://www.wired.com/story/apple-find-my-cryptography-bluetooth/>

From the Wired story:

Apple returns the encrypted location of the laptop to your iPad, which can use its private key to decrypt it and tell you the laptop's last known location. Meanwhile, Apple has never seen the decrypted location, and since hashing functions are designed to be irreversible, it can't even use the hashed public keys to collect any information about where the device has been.

It would seem that Apple has worked hard to maintain privacy and yet make it possible for any Apple device to be found. - Greg

The Ruthless Reality Of Amazon's One-Day Shipping - Gizmodo

<https://gizmodo.com/the-ruthless-reality-of-amazons-one-day-shipping-1835513901>

I'm an Amazon Prime member, and the experience is great: simple, seamless ordering and expedited delivery of just about anything I could want, often within 24 hours of clicking the Buy button. But if you're part of the massive human and logistics infrastructure behind Prime, the experience is much different; Amazon is doing everything it can to shift the costs of that infrastructure to contractors, shipping companies, pilots, and human workers, including longer hours and lower pay. I realize that's how capitalism works, but it also makes me realize that I, as a consumer, bear some culpability here. Do I really need those socks by tomorrow if it means people bringing them to me can't make a living wage? - Drew

We hired three Fiverr workers to write about Fiverr's IPO - Quartz

<https://qz.com/1646134/we-hired-fiverr-workers-to-...>

Please Lord, protect me from falling into the gig economy. I am not kidding. - Drew

Riverbed Siphons Versa for a Stronger SD-WAN Flow - SDxCentral

<https://www.sdxcentral.com/articles/news/riverbed-siphons-versa-for-a-stronger-sd-wan-flow/2019/06/>

Another shift in the continuing saga of Riverbed's SD-WAN solution. "The deal is described as an original equipment manufacturing (OEM) agreement that will see Riverbed offer the Versa SD-WAN technology alongside its SteelConnect platform. Riverbed describes this as expanding its SD-WAN portfolio into the enterprise space using Versa's Secure Cloud IP software platform." Um, wut? They weren't in the enterprise space before with SteelConnect? I've sat through hours of presentations from them on how SteelConnect SD-WAN was EXACTLY that. I give up. - Ethan

Aviatrix CEO Mullaney Challenges Cisco, VMware: 'Carnage Is Coming' - SDxCentral

<https://www.sdxcentral.com/articles/news/aviatrix-ceo-mullaney-challenges-cisco-vmware-carnage-is-coming/2019/06/>

Put your Hyperbole Awareness Hat Of Discernment on before wading through the quotes from Steve Mullaney in this piece. Steve is excited right now, and in his role as the new CEO of Aviatrix, you'd expect that. "The timing is right for Aviatrix because 'the corporate data center is dead,' Mullaney said. What he means is that the cloud is where enterprises will do compute." I grasp the point Steve is making, but the reality is more complex. You know. You're living it. Public cloud is NOT a zero-sum game. I'm not sure what that means for Aviatrix, but crucially, they stand to lose when Cisco, VMware, AWS, Azure, etc. begin to compete with their offerings. Unless someone acquires them... - Ethan

Industry Takes & New Products

Cisco CCNA, CCNP, CCIE Certification MAJOR Update – Changes in 2020 - Flackbox

<https://www.flackbox.com/cisco-ccna-ccnp-ccie-certification-update-2020>

Certification trainer Neil Anderson has a detailed breakdown on all the changes Cisco made to its certification programs, including CCNA and CCIE changes. If you're looking for information to plan your cert efforts, this is a good place to start. - Drew

Even More Cisco Certification Program Change Summaries - So Many Blogs

<http://lostintransit.se/2019/06/17/major-updates-to-cisco-certifications/>

<http://lostintransit.se/2019/06/18/major-updates-to-cisco-certifications-part-ii-ccna/>

<http://lostintransit.se/2019/06/20/major-updates-to-cisco-certifications-part-iii-ccnp/>

<https://vmiss.net/2019/06/10/cisco-certification-updates/>

<https://networkingnerd.net/2019/06/10/the-ccie-times-are-a-changing/>

<https://mrnciew.com/2019/06/11/future-of-cisco-certs/>

In addition to Neil's excellent post Drew spied, my RSS sieve caught a bunch more Cisco certification roundup stories for your reading pleasure. Everyone, continue freaking the bleep out, questioning your life choices, and setting things on fire. - Ethan

Barracuda launches Firewall Insights, extends its leadership in Secure SD-WAN - Barracuda Networks

<https://www.barracuda.com/news/article/783>

If you own a large number of Barracuda CloudGen firewalls, including appliances, virtual firewalls, and public cloud instances, Barracuda would like to interest you in its brand new Firewall Insights product. Firewall Insights pulls data from all your CloudGen firewalls to create centralized dashboards and canned reports. What kind of data are we talking about? According to a Barracuda data sheet, you can get summaries on allowed and blocked sessions; Web usage overviews based on categories, users, browse times, naughty site requests, and so on; security reports on ATPs, viruses, malware, and other categories; and more. -Drew

Share A Tech Tip

We've got a newsletter, you've got a tech tip. Let's get together! What do we mean by a tech tip? It could be:

1. A useful little script
2. A favorite tcpdump command line parameter
3. Screenshot of an underappreciated feature in a GUI for some networking tool
4. A link to, and brief explanation of, a neat open source tool
5. Something else

If you've got something you'd like to share in this newsletter, drop me a line at drew@packetpushers.net. If we like it, and it's suitable for a newsletter format, we'll publish it in an upcoming issue (giving you all due credit, of course). Then you can sit back and bathe in the adulation that's sure* to follow.

*Adulation not guaranteed

The End Bit

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Human Infrastructure is a weekly newsletter with views, perspectives, and opinions. It is edited and published by Greg Ferro and Drew Conry-Murray from PacketPushers.net. If you'd like to contribute, email Drew at drew.conrymurray@packetpushers.net.

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