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APROPOS

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apropos

What's New?

"What's new?" is a common greeting between friends, usually exchanged in addition to an opening "How ya doin'?" if you haven't seen the person for awhile. At the USENIX Annual Technical Conference in Monterey in June, there was plenty of opportunity to find out "What's new?" There were new attendees to meet, old friends to catch up with, and a wealth of cutting edge technical topics to learn about. For me, personally, I started my two-year stint as a new board member at the board meeting held during the conference, which turned out to be a new feeling, as do most new things.

I've attended USENIX board meetings before. I've always found them interesting and felt that I learned from them. I'd go away from those meetings feeling informed, educated, entertained, and often energized by what I'd heard. This one was different. I still feel informed and educated, but the entertainment and energy levels are way down. This may be partly due to the marathon meeting, from 9 a.m. to well after 7 p.m., but I think, more likely, it was because of an unspoken change in status. I think the reality of the new responsibility took a bite out of the previous entertainment and energy value I'd experienced.

USENIX is also dealing with new issues. To be expected, the attendance at our conferences is down. Since conference venues of this size are booked years in advance, we have financial obligations to the conference site, regardless of our attendance figures, or even whether we hold the conference at all. The bottom line is that if we don't meet an expected level of attendance, we lose money. That's been the case since September 11 and is a significant concern for the organization until things turn around.

Probably the other top topic is on the SAGE front. The new position of SAGE Executive Director, filled by Rob Kolstad, and the ongoing certification backing represent an unprecedented level of financial commitment to SAGE on behalf of USENIX. I'm optimistic that this stepped-up support will enable SAGE to develop some programs that will both enhance and diversify our services and offerings such that the community will benefit and our organizations will be less dependent on a single type of income. On a personal note, I know how pivotal the Executive Director position is, and I can't think of a better person to fill the position of SAGE Executive Director, since Rob is the co-founder of the LISA conference and was instrumental in the early success of the SANS conferences as well.

Certainly not new is the desire of board members for input and feedback from the membership regarding any of the issues facing the organization. I know I'd personally love to hear from you if you have thoughts about what we're doing right, what we're doing wrong, or what we're not doing! Even if you've never contacted a board member before, go ahead, try something new!

by Tina
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