

# NOTES

## The State of the USENIX



by Casey Henderson,  
*USENIX Executive Director*

I'm writing this just over a year after taking the USENIX helm solo as Executive Director, after 12 years as a USENIX staff member. It's been an exciting time of rapid change and growth, building on the foundation that Anne Dickison and I constructed as Co-Executive Directors. Although I interact with many of you at our events and we provide some snippets in our newsletter, I'd like to take the opportunity that our magazine, *login*., gives us to go into more detail about where USENIX is today. Although it's been a challenging ride following the recession, I'm delighted to report that USENIX is climbing onto solid ground both financially and programmatically.

USENIX's 40th anniversary arrives at a time when our year-end finances for 2014 are in the black for the first time since 2008. USENIX is fortunate to have a reserve fund built on generous donations, which allowed us to survive these past few years. While it has been disheartening for those of us on the staff and on the Board of Directors to withdraw on average half a million dollars a year to stay afloat during the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, we are proud to have stabilized this situation.

Our excellent investment portfolio management team helped minimize losses as the market took deep dives, and we have kept a tight rein on our financial commitments. It's a challenging way to live, although it's a better situation than that of many other non-profit organizations that exist without the cushion of a reserve fund. This position provided the optimal time to question what was truly essential to our mission, what should be jettisoned, and what should be pursued not only in the name of survival, but also in the name of growth. I personally

didn't see much point in USENIX emerging from a financial crisis in a similar position to the way it went in. Thus rather than doing things as we've always done, we are now actively honoring the agility of our own technology-centric community to bend and flex with new ideas and information.

When I began working at USENIX in 2002, we were in the process of establishing some of the conferences for which we're now celebrated—for example, FAST and NSDI—and once again, we are taking similar leaps to build major events for emerging communities. As gratifying as it is to see these well-established conferences celebrate Test of Time Awards to showcase the work that was presented at conferences where I first updated the USENIX Web site, it's been even cooler to begin again to create new events to respond to trends in the field. The inaugural SREcon, focused on Site Reliability Engineering, sold out last year and is set to be even larger this year. We've created a sister event in Europe, and the talk proposals are flooding in. We have more new events in the pipeline that I look forward to sharing with you soon.

USENIX excels at running conferences logistically so that our volunteers can focus on the most important aspect: the programs. We now offer our event services, such as publishing open access proceedings, to other conferences. We've also become a grantee of the National Science Foundation, providing logistics for the Secure and Trustworthy Cyberspace (SaTC) Principal Investigators Meeting in January and the Big Data Regional Innovation Hubs in April. These events fit within the USENIX mission and also serve to broaden the scope of our community.

FAST has celebrated the highest attendance ever for the past two years. Bridging the gap between industry and academia has always been the key to its success, a feature that

we're trying to emulate in other conferences more effectively.

NSDI will have two major co-locations in 2015 and 2016, with the ACM/IEEE Symposium on Architectures for Networking and Communications Systems this May and with the Open Networking Summit and the ACM SIGCOMM Symposium on SDN Research in 2016. These complementary events will enhance the existing programs while maintaining NSDI's focus on addressing research challenges within the networked systems field.

2015 marks the first USENIX Annual Technical Conference that isn't wrapped in a Federated Conferences Week in several years. The FCW concept of gathering multiple events together and allowing attendees to float among them, cross-pollinating in the hallway track, was a great idea but, in practice, it didn't draw enough attendees and drained precious resources. USENIX ATC '15 doesn't stand alone; HotCloud and HotStorage will keep it company and enrich the week.

We received a record-high 430 USENIX Security complete paper submissions for 2015—a significant jump from last year, which was also the highest-ever at that time. The papers portion of the program has grown so much that we now have two tracks of refereed papers and will expand to three tracks in order to keep invited talks as part of the program. We partnered with Facebook to establish the Internet Defense Prize in 2014, driving more interest in participating in the event.

OSDI in 2014 was the largest in history, with 584 attendees. It continued our recent trend of shorter paper presentations, which allows us to accept more papers to publish. It's a good example of our not doing things the way we've always done them—I can't tell you how many programs I've curated with

three papers per 90-minute session—and it's delightful to work with program chairs who approach program construction with creativity.

LISA13 and LISA14 marked our first major restructuring of the conference in a decade. The system administration field is in the midst of a sea change. DevOps and Site Reliability Engineering are emerging while managing systems at scale is now as much about the software and organizational collaboration as it ever was about the hardware. Many conferences serve this segment of our community, but ours is the original, the one created by sysadmins for sysadmins, and it's important to USENIX that LISA serve them well as a must-attend venue. We began to re-focus the content and to weave learning and practice together in 2013. Building on that momentum, LISA14 was the largest and liveliest in many years. LISA15 will build on their success. Help us drive the field and the conference forward: submit a proposal for the program by April 17.

There is much more on our to-do list. USENIX is a membership organization in an era when fewer people join associations. We are a nonprofit that seeks the support of its constituents via its Annual Fund, but

understands that folks are already paying dues and may not even realize that we are a non-profit. We are proud to be the only major computing association to offer truly open access publications, but are challenged by our business model, which is not designed to support the costs associated with free access. We have had to reduce the number of Good Works projects we support and we must determine how to move toward restored funding. We've established our Women in Advanced Computing (WiAC) initiative, but need to hear more from the community about how to be most effective in this arena. We have more students interested in attending our conferences than we have grant money to dispense. We ourselves have a hard time describing everything we do here at USENIX in one breath, which makes it difficult to tell people why we matter. We have come this far, though, and we are finally in a place where we genuinely believe that we will conquer these challenges—and move forward with the support of our members and the broader community.

Thanks to my colleagues on the Board, the staff, and our hundreds of volunteers for partnering with me on what has been

a monumental effort to reinvent USENIX while remaining true to our roots. In particular, I thank past and current USENIX presidents Clem Cole, Margo Seltzer, and Brian Noble for pushing the boundaries of what we thought we could achieve and never giving up on this amazing organization. I look forward to working with all of you in the coming years to help USENIX reach a point of absolute stability and constant growth.

## USENIX Member Benefits

Members of the USENIX Association receive the following benefits:

**Free subscription** to *login*, the Association's magazine, published six times a year, featuring technical articles, system administration articles, tips and techniques, practical columns on such topics as security, Perl, networks, and operating systems, book reviews, and reports of sessions at USENIX conferences.

**Access** to *login*: online from December 1997 to the current month:  
[www.usenix.org/publications/login/](http://www.usenix.org/publications/login/)

**Access** to videos from USENIX events in the first six months after the event:  
[www.usenix.org/publications/multimedia/](http://www.usenix.org/publications/multimedia/)

**Discounts** on registration fees for all USENIX conferences.

**Special discounts** on a variety of products, books, software, and periodicals: [www.usenix.org/member-services/discount-instructions](http://www.usenix.org/member-services/discount-instructions)

**The right to vote** on matters affecting the Association, its bylaws, and election of its directors and officers.

For more information regarding membership or benefits, please see [www.usenix.org/membership/or](http://www.usenix.org/membership/or) contact [office@usenix.org](mailto:office@usenix.org). Phone: 510-528-8649

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