

PCX Evaluation of the HPCC 2002 Conference

Date: 2002 09 23

Authors: Jo Vandale, ...

This report is covering some of the thoughts that crossed my mind after attending the HPCC conference. If useful, this article in its whole or parts of it can be published in one of the next HPCC magazines. Most of the following points do criticize some of the issues I did experience during the conference. I do realize that it is easier to criticize on the hard work of others, however never forget, while reading the comments below, that the whole conference was to me a very positive experience that I would not like to miss for anything in the world. It is really unique in its existence especially for the people who can't attend the meetings in the US. So try to read the comments below as **constructive hints** to improve the overall experience of future conferences.

- To start I do have to congratulate HPCC again with their professional organisation of the conference. It is obvious that they build on knowledge from the past while they probably also got some support from Richard to even improve further.
- In an exercise to reduce the cost HPCC tried to crunch the 2 day event into a 1 day event on Saturday. To me they did however NOT succeed in realising this goal. Too much interesting talks (like the Jornada X25) were still scheduled on Sunday. Despite this, the load on the Saturday was a little bit too high resulting in a sometimes hectic and nervous flow of events. I also missed time for more informal talks ... something that probably did happen on Sunday morning ; -).
- The fact that too much was scheduled on Sunday gave me, as Saturday only visitor, the feeling that I was only hopping in on a much bigger event. I personally missed the "fully satisfied" feeling of earlier HPCC conferences. It is also very difficult to say goodbye when the event is still rising to its climax.
- Of course it should be clear that we (PCX Members) are the ones to blame, HPCC never forced us to go for a one -day trip. We were however a little bit misled by their attempt to compress the 2 day event into 1 day. The fact that some of the PCX members, with whom I was sharing the car (to cut down on transport cost), could not attend the 2 days , made it easier for us to choose the one day solution.
- The fact that we did go for a one -day up/down trip resulted in an active daytime of more than 24 hours for some of the PCX members. Besides the fact that this can result in unpleasant side effects (like car accidents), it also takes us more and more time to recover from such efforts while we are not getting younger ; -)

- The availability of a beamer was reflecting the professional character of the meeting, it also improved the overall quality of the presentations.
- The email reflector was to me one of the best creations in relation to the conference, HPCC should keep it up and running as long as possible to support communication on the topic. It changes the pull behaviour of the Internet into push behaviour. You are triggered day after day to share you knowledge with others having problems or questions. As a result knowledge on new topics is distributed faster and creatively (re)used.
- Despite the fact that the conference schedule was already overbooked Wlodek could still manage to fit in my extra (not planned) presentation. It again reflects the professional control they have over their conference. My personal thank to Wlodek for this effort.
- Concerning the diner and the cost connected to it I do have the following remarks. I personally think that we don't need such good dinner. The cost is rather high compared to the entrance fee of the conference bringing it under discussion. I think that a sort of walking dinner in combination with some "light" presentation or demonstrations (so not the high mathematical stuff presented by Manrique or Philippe ;-)) could be a good solution. It would allow you to stretch the day without overloading it. It would also allow people to move from group to group to have more bilateral contacts. The evening program should also provide room for presentations that do arise out of local discussions. A sort of "grab the mike and tell it to the rest of the group" feeling.

Things I learned:

- During the lunch I learned from Joseph why the English people are indeed driving on the correct side of the road and why the continent did change to driving on the wrong side. I had to search for the correct words in writing this sentence because the original sentence was a little bit confusing "Why the English people are indeed driving on the right side of the road and why the continent did change to driving on the right side of the road". Driving to the left is based on the fact that most people are right handed. As a result shaking hands or fighting (Javelin games) is easier if the counterpart is passing you on the right. Driving on the right however was enforced by Napoleon to show that he was in control of the continent.
- I was really amazed by the talk of Jake. Not the presentation itself, but the pile of work behind it was really hitting me. I even think that Jake found the solution to extend the 24 hour limit of a day ; -). It even proves that people can realise fantastic goals if they just go for it ... instead of talking about it. I should stop talking and start scanning the PCX issues : -).

- Thinking back of the presentation of Manrique I realise that the presented solution could indeed be a very good one as a high -end solution. Making the iPac calculator keyboard is not so simple but should be a piece of cake for the OEM partner of the calculator division. Once the HP iPac compatible keyboard is realised we do have a "High End" solution that is really future proof. I would automatically support the following features:
 - Very close to the all in one device: Calculator, PDA, GSM (as soon as the integration of a PDA and a GSM becomes a fact), ...
 - Use of the processor power and big memory size of an iPac.
 - Inherit the expandability of current PDA platforms.
 - Inherit the connectivity features delivered with the current PDA platforms: RS232, IrDa, Bluetooth, WiFi (802.11b), GSM, GPRS, ...
 - Making two keyboards, one with a big "ENTER" key and one with a big "EQUAL" key, can solve marketing issues for a very low cost, the diversity is only one key!!! Use the label "Student" for the version with the "EQUAL" key and use label "Professional" (in Gold ; -) for the "ENTER" key version. Definitely don't use the label "RPN" for the latter.
 - This solution is not an option for the low-end range. Solution targeted units must cover this low cost range of products.
- We also learned that Richard is still alive and kicking. He is still fighting for his goals and I must admit I love this. In the coming days I will try to resume my thoughts concerning future calculators and send them to him. He can however be sure of the following "The screen will be readable and the form factor will be horizontal ... at least for the HP12C successor".
- Like always Tony could attract the attention of the audience due to his addiction to the presented topic. I think that sooner or later the HP9100 will stop to operate after another disassembly session. Leaving us with only one open question: "Will Tony still be able to repair it?" I can already assure you that we should not have any doubts about it : "He will repair it again!" I also think that we don't have to convert his drawings to more cleaner CAD drawings because that would remove some "mystique" without adding value to the content.

Conclusions:

- To keep the spirit alive such a conference should be organised each year if the resources (human & financial) can be found to do it.
- To help in the latter I'm already offering my help for the next conference.
- We can still try to organise a meeting on the continent if we can re-use organising experience from HPCC and Richard. As an example: A small group like PCX can never compete with the "contacts" knowledge Wlodek & Richard do have, they know where to find the proper people and how to contact them.

On the other hand we are almost sure we can bring down the cost of the conference a lot by organising it in Belgium. It would probably raise the travelling cost for some HPCC members (unless they do share a small coach) but lower it for most of the members from the continent.

- If organised in the UK, doing a one-day up/down trip from the continent is no longer a suitable solution at least not for a big conference. It can still be a solution for a mini-conference because that is starting later in the day.
- Be aware that even if nothing is changed I will still come to all future conferences. This proves that the conferences are well organised and give us value for money. All remarks above can be seen as triggers for possible improvements.

See you all next year,

Jo Vandale (PCX #4, HPCC ??? “waiting for confirmation”)