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The Versadex Users Group is 'Different'

Introduction

It's different because it started differently; it was originated by a group of users, not by Versaterm. In 1993, a representative of the New Brunswick PORS consortium thought of it, called other users of Versadex at the time (about a dozen or so people) and hosted the first meeting. Versaterm sent a half dozen people (a van load) along to observe, but that was about it. That User Group origin, being created completely by and for Versadex users, has continued and strengthened over the subsequent 12 years. And the annual Conference has continued to be the "anchor" that stabilizes and gives value to the User Group.

How it works today

Today, the User Group has an executive in the form of a Conference Steering Committee composed of the previous 5 conference chair-persons. They manage the Conference bank account (very healthy), select the next year's host from applicants and guide and assist the next Conference Chairperson to supply the benefit of their collective experience. They essentially also then run the User Group. As the Conferences have traditionally alternated between US and Canadian hosts, the Steering committee has a similar makeup.

Versaterm's role in the User Group and User Conference continues to be far less than our competitors have in theirs. We supply the on-line registration system and assist with creation of the Conference program (built upon the sessions that the host organization wishes to present). The program spans 3 days with general interest plenary sessions in the mornings and 6 or more parallel workshops and mini-courses held each afternoon. The focus throughout is educational, to learn from other users' experiences (stand on each others shoulder rather than toes). Versaterm staff were involved in 2 of the 17 plenary session presentations this year and in about half of the workshops and mini-courses; Versaterm also has 8 or more "tables" at the tutorial sessions (held Thursday evening) where users can get "face to face" with our developers and experts on various aspects of the product line. Other suppliers to the host agency usually have more tutorial tables than Versaterm does (21 at Ogden). That limited involvement of Versaterm (as the "vendor") also makes the Versadex Users Conference "different".

Last, the Conference presents a full schedule of social events every evening and often on the weekend and that allows the customer delegates to really get to know each other and form mutual assistance relationships. As a result, the users get along and generally like each other and that probably also accounts for the ever growing attendance - we had 340 delegates registered for the Ogden UT conference. The Steering committee attempts to move the Conference around, from east to west and from north to south and central to allow more regional customers to attend conferences being held in their area than if they had to travel a long way. That too broadens the base of customer staff who get the benefits of attending a Conference.

Every Conference for the past many years seems to set a new "high" (in attendance, program content, social events and "fun") for the next year's hosts to try to top. And they consistently do. The photos (in the newsletter) that accompany this article should help to elaborate on the points that I have made.

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