

CONFERENCE REPORT

No Mickey Mouse Outfit

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Young at heart but increasingly well-developed, and some would venture precocious – the VB conference celebrated its tenth birthday in Orlando, Florida on 28 September 2000. Like most youngsters, this one's continually learning to master the basics – relationships, discipline, language, interaction. Thus, VB2000 navigated the choppy channels of communication, sometimes surprisingly articulate and perceptive, often blatant, occasionally subversive, appreciating when to put up and when to shut up.

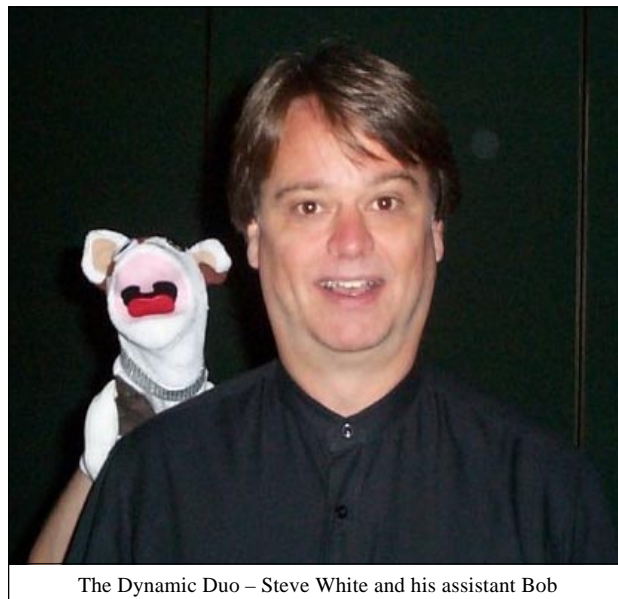
Does Size Matter?

Maybe it's my fault for going barefoot everywhere, but I felt more like a pygmy than ever among the giants of AV and corporate IT security. What do they feed them over there? Despite the fact that I had to climb onto a chair to hold several conversations, I never felt that my horizon was limited by my small stature. Neither is *Virus Bulletin's*. The journal may be relatively little but this was undoubtedly the largest conference yet. And it felt more like an extended family than ever with an unprecedented number of partners and children attending our coming of age. And this family's just like any other – all noise, character and attitude.

Those of you who know me will chuckle to recall how depilation became something of a feature of VB2000. And we're not just talking whiskers here. The Crew happily pulled each other's hair out in their sterling efforts to conjure additional conference merchandise out of the humid air when we realised we had woefully underestimated our popularity this year.

Our keynote speaker's hairloss was more deliberate. It takes a confident man to orchestrate 300 or so double-takes but IBM's Steve White managed to disorientate all the delegates, not to mention his wife, when he shaved off his trademark beard for his hugely popular futuristic retrospective. Pat Nolan from NAI pulled the same stunt – it took a while for everyone to recognize the Bear of Beaverton in his shirt, tie, short back and sides.

Like nearby Disney, VB2000 had something for everyone. And unification was our aim as we opened the conference on Thursday morning with the perils of misinterpretation versus the merits of communication [*I seem to recall that we did that bit a little too realistically!* Ed.]. Credit for the pleasing symmetry in the proceedings must go to our surprise guest, Steve White's little friend Bob, and his intrepid 'trainer' Ian Whalley. They kicked off both the keynote and Graham Cluley and Carole Theriault's entertaining closing paper, which reunited the corporate and technical streams.



The Dynamic Duo – Steve White and his assistant Bob

Ten years' worth of topics seem to have been covered in two days. And what a range! It was a time for looking back and reflecting, like Bruce Burrell and Allan Dyer. It was a time, too, for looking forward like Ian Whalley, Aleksander Czarnowski and Carey Nachenberg.

The breadth of technical knowledge could not have been more diverse. One participant wasn't sure what IRC stood for, while others were unfazed by a complex dissection of Linux ELF formats. Despite these differences, the delegates weren't afraid to face up to brave new threats like those to PDAs and WAP phones, as discussed by Eric Chien and Mikko Hyppönen. In fact, some of the humour during the Q&A sessions revealed an increasingly well-informed and enlightened audience. John Bloodworth won't forget being told 'I don't trust you – nothing personal by the way' by one listener to his 'AV Industry – Smug or Smart?'

The usually controversial suspects were charming in their offensives. Vesselin Bontchev's tackling of the VBA upconversion problem and Nick FitzGerald's damning indictment of AV scanners were positively contemplative compared to recent years. Less lucky was Paul 'Duck' Ducklin, who introduced his boss and deputy speaker Jan Hruska from his hospital bed, following an unforgiving altercation between his bike and an articulated lorry! The subject of his paper – safe virus exchange, was to become one of the main talking points of the conference.

The recurring issues of trust, honesty and open relationships culminated in a public peace treaty between CARO and REVS. Later, a true confession revealed the gulf between AV marketroids and AV 'techies' – the latter faction not afraid to promote open and friendly co-operation and support between rival companies.

Food for Thought

Unlike the daunting Florida portions we were confronted with at meal-times, the sessions this year were organized into bite-sized chunks. Thus, between lunch and tea corporates were served back-to-back, real-life case studies by *Boeing's* Jeannette Jarvis and *Prudential's* Joe Donovan while techies digested two courses on the threats to *Linux* from Jakub Kaminski and Marius Van Oers. Other specially prepared sandwiches included VBA and Win32. One of my fondest memories of the conference is of Péter 'Mr Win32 to you' Ször's beautiful wife standing outside his presentation, eyes raised heavenwards and both fingers crossed! Talk about personal service from tech support!



CNN admires the VB2000 speaker's gift...oh and Sarah Gordon

We couldn't be accused of élitism either. The common PC user found spokesmen in Righard Zwienberg and Joost de Raeymaeker. Familiar faces from anti-virus regulars put a

new spin on everyday subjects like USENET, cryptography and AV engine infrastructure. 'VB virgins' Mark Kennedy, Szilard Stange, Vanja Svajcer and Mark Sunner tackled script-based mobile threats, virus collection management, VBA and ISP scanning. All the speakers were worth their weight in customised Times Atlases. Someone suggested a DVD version to give the airport carriers a break – where's the fun in that?

Thursday night's traditional Gala dinner offered the best in American cuisine, but this year I think we should have put small bottles of Pepto Bismol next to the Mickey Mouse ears at each place setting. The unique award ceremony to honour the individual who contributed the most to the anti-virus industry over the last decade played hell with my digestion – and I knew who the winner was! And while the rest of the audience did not have that foresight, by coffee time the magic, music and games of chance which later characterized the evening faded as a very clear picture came into focus.

In fourth place, the VB2000 delegates had voted for Duck – 'an accessible and passionate guru for the younger AV set'. Jimmy Kuo's popularity ensured that he needed no introduction when the nomination for third place came in; everyone knows his name. A tense joint second place twinned Jakub Kaminski – a man with a reputation for impeccable ethics – and Joe Wells – the founding father of the famous WildList. Way ahead of the crowd though was Vesselin Bontchev, one of the anti-virus industry's most respected and recognisable figures, who fully deserved his engraved plaque and a place in *Virus Bulletin's* history.



Man of the People – and this is before Vesselin Bontchev's opened the bottle!

The Speaker's Panel

Six of the best (plus one, for luck I guess!) summarised what had been gleaned, begged, borrowed and downloaded over the past couple of days. I'll remember this year's speakers' panel as one of the frankest I've heard and the closest to the walls coming down. A particularly brave but nervous presenter had one eye on his boss as he actually admitted 'Maybe I've said too much already'. The veils are certainly being lifted, users and subscribers alike are demanding honesty and straight talking. And the camera never lies – for the first time this year we went global as *CNN* filmed *VB* stalwart Sarah Gordon's participation in the conference – as reliably bang up-to-date, timely and informative as ever.

The communication pot bubbled away nicely as the *WLO* and *CARO* convened to chew what was left of the fat. Which left us to pick the 'men of the match'. This is never an easy task but the delegate assessment forms are indisputable this year. And I should know better, I have to change the epithet to a gender-neutral one! So congratulations to 'Flat Eric' Chien and Jeannette Jarvis for their popular and enthusiastic deliveries.

And that's about it for this year – apart from this. One of my favourite images of the conference has nothing to do with the official programme but it does illustrate what a serious business we're in, and how an international effort and perseverance against the odds can produce spectacular results. One extremely jaded but enlightened ex-reveller confirmed to me on Thursday morning the longheld suspicion that Fins are world-class drinkers [*I just know that Eugene and Dmitry are going to protest! Ed.*]. Apparently, the night before, grown men had paled at the sight of 30 club sandwiches delivered by room service as medicinal aid to a secret drinking location within the hotel. Happily, no casualties were sustained, even when, in mid-juggle, two wayward mayonnaise bottles sailed off the balcony and into the balmy night. Better start practising for next year!