

# Portugal TechDays 2008: A report

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Back in March, I agreed to make a brief appearance at Portugal TechDays 2008. My arrival was delayed due to heavy traffic: I had taken the number 15 tram, which was jam packed, and the traffic on the road didn't help either. And then when I found the building labelled Centro de Congressos, I found the doors locked. That's because the big sign facing Rua da Junqueira is not the main entrance. The main entrance faces Travessa da Guarda. But of course, when you're standing on Rua da Junqueira, you don't know that. And right next to the big sign is a door. Which is locked. And there's no sign on the door that says "You idiot, this is the side entrance. The main entrance is around the corner over there." All these problems getting to (and finding the entrance to) the meeting hall meant that I had eaten into my entire scheduling buffer and even gone a few minutes over. Fortunately, we operate on Portuguese Time and people were still settling in when I rushed onto the stage. The conference organizers had sent me a slide deck template. It went roughly like this:

- Cover page – talk title, speaker name
- Pages labelled *Do not remove*
- A template labelled *Agenda*
- A place to insert the bulk of the slides.
- Template pages labelled things like *Other Resources*, *Call to Action*, *Q&A*.
- Pages labelled *Do not remove*

My completed slide deck therefore looked like this:

- Cover page – talk title, speaker name
- Pages labelled *Do not remove*
- Agenda: "Tell stories".
- Other Resources: Michael Kaplan, Larry Osterman.
- Pages labelled *Do not remove*

As a result, my slide deck consisted almost entirely of the *Do not remove* mandatory content. When I was invited, the conference organizers had told me that I had a one-hour time slot and when I arrived, I asked, "So this is one hour, right?" "One and a half hours" was the reply. Oh, okay. Fortunately, I brought about two hours of material, so I had plenty of

content to slip back in, but I had to adjust my pacing so I hit my conclusion at the right time. I also had to be elsewhere after the talk, and extending my talk by another half hour meant that it would be a tight squeeze getting to my next scheduled event on time. At about the one hour mark into my talk, people started leaving. Gosh, I'm sorry my stories sucked. Maybe they were too technical, or they were not technical enough? I don't know, because people who leave early don't leave feedback. I wrapped up at the 90 minute mark, got my polite applause, and packed up my things to leave. Maybe if I rushed, I could catch the 15 tram back to my hotel in time. A conference organizer person asked if I could do a short interview for a Webcast. Okay, we set up the camera and the microphone, and we were rolling. The interviewer then asked questions that I obviously can't answer, like "So tell me when Windows 7 is going to ship." I pointed out to the interviewer, "You know I can't answer that." "Yes, I know but our viewers want to know." As if I'm going to say, "Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't realize. Let me talk about something I'm not authorized to talk about so your viewers won't be disappointed." Fortunately, I have a standard story that I tell whenever an interviewer asks me a question I obviously am not allowed to answer. The interviewer continued by asking questions that I had answered in my talk. I thought this was strange, but afterwards I realized that the people who will watch the Webcast probably didn't see my talk. After all, who wants to see me any more than necessary? Each of the questions after the first two was of the form, "One last question. Blah blah blah blah?" I think there were five "last questions". The interview took about a half hour, and now I had no chance of making it back to my hotel by public transit. I hailed a cab and just my luck, I got an older cabbie whose farsightedness prevented him from reading the address I had written down on a slip of paper. I was forced to try to read it to him by reverse-engineering on the fly the pronunciation rules for the Portuguese language based on what I could remember from how the station names were announced on the subway speaker system. By some miracle, I was successful. What my cabbie lacked in short-distance vision he more than made up for with blood pressure. He drove aggressively through the streets, liberally honking his horn at everything in his way. The pictures I took out the cab window all came out blurry. I arrived at my hotel with plenty of time to spare. I glanced at the conference schedule included in my speaker ID tag. My talk was scheduled for 60 minutes after all. That's why people were leaving. And they must think I'm a jerk for going over my time slot.

And I never did get my speaker shirt.

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