My journey to shift the mindset of interactive users to the power of batch computing

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This presentation in no way reflects my employers stance on anything at all...
Err....who is this guy?

- Graduated Texas Tech in computer science
- One of the best parts for me was the High Performance Computing Center
- It has been 10 years since I fell in love with HPC
- Next week I will have been at my current job for 2 years.
Problem 1

The user base is incredibly intelligent...

but not very computer savvy...
Problem 2

The work flow.

Application on Desktop -> Log in node -> Interactive Shell -> Application
How do I fix this?
My architecture checklist

- Need a scheduler.
- Need to simplify the process.
- The user shouldn't know or care about what host they are on.
- Any distance between cluster complexity and the user is probably a good thing.
Round Robin DNS

Users go to one web page for everything.
If one log in node is down, they never notice.
The scheduler and user interaction

* Tried several. Ended up with Sun Grid Engine / Open Grid Scheduler
* Allows me to load balance users and their jobs
* Schedule users desktops, jobs, everything!
User → Cluster Interface → Whatever is available

* Job wall time!
I have a cluster and scheduler, now what?

Cluster <--------Big Gap--------> Users

Me <--------Big Gap--------> Users

(Computer Science) (Experts in their Field)
(Loves computers) (Barely tolerates ipad)

Expecting the users to bridge this gap has been the bane of every cluster admin I have known. Expecting me to bridge this gap will require lifetimes of study in fields I barely understand.
What do I know?
The cluster.
My goal:
The users should focus on their work, not fighting my cluster.
The journey begins

- First product: EnginFrame from Nice Software.
  - Tons of options | Lots of complexity
  - Very talented Engineering Support
  - Way more complex than we needed; things I didn't care about caused me grief
  - Gave me an excellent idea of where I wanted to go.
A challenger appears...

- eQUEUE from Advanced Clustering
  - Wraps together several products we were previously bundling individually.
  - Simple to understand
  - Simple to manage
    (Key=value style programming)
  - Simple way to interact with the cluster
  - BUILT IN HELP!!!!!
How does this help me reach my goal?

- We personally walk through the cluster with every new user. An introduction. We expect users to ask follow up questions, but a personal introduction saves time and effort for both admins and users.

- We can now craft interfaces to simplify their interaction with the cluster. We do this by seeing their workflow and adapting the interface to match and automate their needs.
“Amy” Then

- Lots of code.
- Code walks through thousands of start points to see where algorithm converges.
- Converge points are seeds for next iteration.
- Some took minutes; others took hours.
- Whole process took weeks single threaded.
“Amy” Now

- Simple interface for her to use
- Simple interface for us to manage
- Uses full cluster resources through scheduler
- And most importantly, she can now run bigger data sets over FAR more iterations because the “easy” parallelization given through the “easy” interface afford her the time to do so.
- What would have been /weeks/ is now a day.
Does Amy fit the goal?

- She spends more time making sense of the data and writing papers on her findings than she does waiting for her job to finish on the cluster by a WIDE margin.

I think so.
“Bill” Then

- Small code. Short run time.
- MUST have dedicated 2GB of memory or app crashes.
- Gets frustrated when his favorite node is being used by someone else and his app crashes.
- All development done on his local laptop via network mount share. No code control; bug regressions and dev errors are frequent.
“Bill” Now

- Simple web interface.
- Pulls latest code from Git repo. Reads the configuration and compiles appropriately.
- Doesn't care where his job runs as it is handled via the scheduler.
Does Bill fit the goal?

- Jobs runs with proper allocation of resources
- Code is stored in a Git repo; not a $(date).zip file
- Code parameters are a part of the project adding the portability his co-authors need.

I think so.
Whose next?
Questions?