Wiki: Web Collaboration

Anja Ebersbach, Markus Glaser, Richard Heigl, Springer, 2005, \$64.95, ISBN: 3540259953

A wiki is an innovative Web-based content authoring system that encourages (perhaps even requires) unfettered collaboration among those who happen to find a Web page that hosts a wiki. A wiki allows anyone to revise and add to a Web page's content by using standard Web browser forms.

This book covers two of the more sophisticated open source wiki systems: MediaWiki, developed for and popularized by the Wikipedia family of Web pages; and TWiki, used in many large organizations and corporations.

The authors organize the book into five sections. The first section offers a quick introduction to wiki history and gives an overview of the distinguishing features of wiki collaboration. The second section explains how to install, customize, and administer MediaWiki. It provides detailed installation steps, including the base software needed to host MediaWiki. After installing the Apache Web server software and MediaWiki itself, the authors step us through the ubiquitous "Hello, World!" example, and then advance to layout, multipage organization, ancillary functions such as searching and navigation, and administration.

The third section covers the same topics for TWiki. The fourth section explains how to use TWiki to manage a project—sharing ideas, keeping logs of project progress, documenting plans, and coordinating conferences.

The last section covers the future directions and innovations to expect in wikis in the next few years. Included with the book is a CD-ROM that contains all the software you need to deploy MediaWiki and TWiki, short of the Linux or Windows operating systems.

Many books that cover open source software seem to regurgitate information that is already available with the open source software itself. The authors of *Wiki: Web Collaboration* succeed in avoiding this frustrating problem. The sections on using MediaWiki and TWiki are organized intelligently, with many clear examples. They are excellent reference materials. The section on using TWiki as a project management system adds great value to the book.—*Marc Paquette*

Pro Perl

Peter Wainwright, Apress, 2005, \$59.99, ISBN: 159059438X

This is not a textbook. The introduction suggests that it is "aimed at intermediate-to-experienced programmers who have a good, basic understanding of programming concepts, but little or no previous knowledge of Perl itself." As a Perl professional and a lecturer on Perl and Python,

I certainly do not fit this profile, yet I found this book interesting and informative.

I expect that beginners will be intimidated by the sheer size of the book (more than 1,000 pages). My other Perl bible, *Perl in a Nutshell* (O'Reilly, 1999), has approximately the same number of pages, but has a much more succinct description of the core language.

Pro Perl is a wonderful reference for Perl programmers, in particular those who know the language but who are always looking for ways to improve their code. The first three quarters (18 chapters) focus on the language itself—all those built-in functions and features that so confuse beginners and delight Perl experts. The author includes helpful modules that extend, enhance, or interpret the core functionality.

Given the prevalence of object-oriented dogma in today's languages, I found it interesting that this topic is addressed only in chapter 19. The discussion is typically detailed and complete, but the author treats this part of Perl as an optional extension.

This book is not a compendium of module descriptions. The CPAN (Comprehensive Perl Archive Network) repository is mentioned occasionally as a way to publish and retrieve modules. While *Perl in a Nutshell* spends more than half of its pages describing CPAN modules, *Pro Perl* focuses on getting the most out of the language. As such, *Pro Perl* represents a more valuable reference manual. Modules come and go, but the core language forms the foundation on which everything else is built.

If you are looking for a textbook or introductory Perl text, then look elsewhere. There are no exercises or self-tests in this book. If you want to improve your Perl skills, get the most out of the language, and impress your colleagues with your esoteric knowledge of Perl, then this is the book for you.—*Elliot Jaffe*

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