Practical Subversion, Second Edition

Daniel Berlin, Garrett Rooney, Apress, 2006, \$34.99,
ISBN: 1590597532

Subversion is one of the hottest tools to appear recently in configuration management, at least to the extent that anything in this critical field can be considered “hot.” I have not yet worked on a team using Subversion and thus was excited about reviewing *Practical Subversion*. After reading the

book, I find myself disappointed, yet uncertain if it is this book on Subversion or Subversion itself that is the source of my disappointment.

The book is well organized and easy to consume, particularly for the software practitioner with no prior Subversion knowledge. Chapter 1 provides an excellent overview, while chapter 2 provides a primer for using Subversion in software development. The next three chapters provide critical information on the administration side of Subversion. There is great complexity in these sections; although it might be possible to simplify the descriptions, this complexity seems to originate from the tool itself.

Chapter 6, which covers best practices, is probably the most useful part of the book. It provides helpful descriptions of how one can use Subversion’s features in the software development process. This chapter also contains the greatest disappointments. It exposes the fact that merging is best done with add-on tools. Branching is a facility that is critical to all but the smallest modern software development efforts, and merging is probably the key to the successful use of branching. This book and the tool it describes leave us wanting in this area, a critical failing for each.

Chapter 7, on integrating Subversion with other tools, intends to suggest that the wealth of such integrations is a positive reflection on Subversion, yet, in reality, it seems more an indication of just how incomplete the product is. This largest chapter describes how to use the Subversion APIs. The book finishes with two appendices. Appendix A provides a good reference for the Subversion commands, and Appendix B offers cursory comparisons with other version-control tools.

Practical Subversion has some definite bright spots, particularly for the novice, who probably should keep a copy close at hand as an excellent reference. The book

has also made me look forward to new developments that address the limitations in Subversion itself, or to the next, more complete, open source configuration-management system.
—Marc S. Gibian

Pro Drupal Development

John VanDyk, Matt Westgate, Apress 2007, \$44.99,
ISBN: 1590597559

When I initially picked up this book, I was not aware of the existence of Drupal, which I now know to be an open source content-management system and a very powerful and flexible tool for creating interactive Web sites. A few weeks later, I have been able to build two very different operational

Web sites. This is an acknowledgment of the good quality of not only the software product, but also this book. I must mention, however, that *Pro Drupal Development* is in no way an introduction to the product: it is for readers who already know the tool and who have at least begun to build a Web site using it, or who need to change and improve an existing site.

The book investigates in detail the inner workings of Drupal. It teaches readers how to add new functionality and features to their sites and how to customize or improve existing ones. The book’s organization follows that of Drupal. Although it is better to read the chapters in order, especially for those who are new to Drupal, readers can also benefit from reading only the chapter they need at the moment. The structure of each chapter is clear and simple, with a summary at the end, some tips and notes in frames, many pictures and schemas, and generally thorough explanations. The authors provide all the information needed for completing the task at hand.

The chapters address the main concepts of Drupal: modules, menus, users, nodes, blocks, files, themes, and taxonomy. There are also chapters about more specialized matters—for example, caching or jQuery—and about good practices in writing components for Drupal. The book ends with an index that deserves mention: spanning 38 pages, it is much more complete than what is generally available in technical books. This well-written book is a must-read for anybody dealing with content-management systems, especially Drupal. —O. Lecarme

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