

BOOK REVIEWS

BY JAMES MOHR

Linux Email Server

When you consider that the vast majority of traffic on the Internet is because of email, and misconfigured email servers are the reason viruses spread so quickly and spam is so hard to control, it is clearly very important to configure your email server correctly. However, even on systems with a dedicated administrator, email is often misconfigured. Thus, a book like *Linux Email* is very welcome.

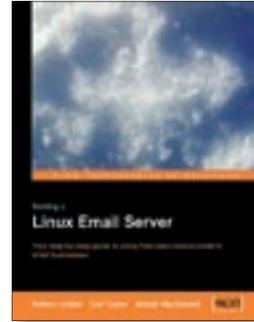
The target audience of the book is not the seasoned administrator, but rather less experienced people who neither have the time nor the background to go into the details of every aspect of their system. While this means the book does not go into as much depth as it could, there are enough books and other resources to fill in the missing pieces.

One thing that I really like is that the book makes almost no assumptions

about what you “ought” to know. It starts with a chapter on the basics of email, without overloading you with a lot of unnecessary technical details. Starting with the second chapter, the authors jump right into configuring your email system.

Although the book is about configuring a Linux email server, the authors do go into some detail on configuring Windows-based email clients (such as Outlook Express). Considering how common Windows is on the desktop, I felt this was a very nice touch.

A key aspect of running a good email server is protecting users against both spam and viruses, something that this book addresses in detail. These aspects are also addressed using open source software (e.g., SpamAssassin and



ClamAV). Here too, the authors provide enough technical details to help you really understand what you are doing without overwhelming you. I *might* be tempted to say the section on “busting

spam” was a little thin. However, considering that this is a very complex issue and entire books are written on the subject, I won’t hold it against the authors.

Alistair McDonald, Carl Taylor, Magnus Back, David Rusenko, Ralf Hildebrandt, and Patrick Ben Koetter

295 pages

**Packt Publishing, 1-904811-37-X
£ 24.99, US\$ 39.99, EUR 33.29**

Operating System Concepts

Many people might be put off because *Operating System Concepts* is a text book intended for college and university courses. In fact, I used an earlier edition of this book in a course I took while I was getting my computer science degree. It was a great book then and an even better one now.

If all you think about when working with computers is how to bid on Ebay, this is probably not the book for you. As the name says, this book covers operating system concepts and goes into a deep level of detail.

The book is very logically structured and easy to read, despite the fact that it deals with traditionally “dry” topics like



operating system internals. You’ll find a number of exercises at the end of each chapter, as well as many more on the accompanying web site. Even without an instructor handy, I found reviewing these exercises to be very helpful.

The book starts off with a fairly high level introduction to the basic operations and functions of an operating system. It then moves on to the aspects of the operating system that people are most familiar with (e.g., processes, memory, storage, and security) and then continues with less common topics.

Although there are places where code segments are used to help understand the concepts, they are all short and straight forward. Even so, if you had to skip these parts, you would not lose

much, as the text does a good job of explaining the topic.

One very nice thing about this book is that the authors discuss many concepts within the context of specific operating systems. Here you find both contrasts and comparisons, which I personally find very useful. The last part of the book contains chapters with case studies on Linux and Windows XP, as well as a brief overview of other “influential” operating systems.

Even for computer “experts,” this book is definitely worth getting. It provides an excellent foundation.

Abraham Silverschatz, Greg Gagne and Peter Baer Galvin

921 Pages

**John Wiley and Sons 0-471-69466-5
£ 36.95, US\$ 97.95, EUR 55.50**

RT Essentials

This is a book about the open source ticketing system Request Tracker (affectionately called RT). Unfortunately, I am truly sorry to say that this book was a disappointment. The writing is not bad, the material is easy to understand, and I am a very big fan of RT. The reason I was disappointed was simply the amount of material presented.

Simply put, this book tells you how to set up and configure RT, as well as how to use the browser-based front-end. It even goes into how RT works internally and shows how to use the RT API. So, it does a good job as a reference for using and administering RT.

What is missing is how to really *implement* RT. One might be tempted to say that, based on the title, all you are getting is the “essentials” of how to use RT. However, these “essentials” are discussed in the online documentation, the FAQ, and the RT Wiki. So you might question the need for this book. Still, I often prefer hard copy documentation, so it might be worth the price to not only have a hard copy, but also make an indirect contribution to the RT project.

To be fair, the book does go into a little more than just basic configuration and usage. There is a small chapter on implementing RT within a fictitious company, where the authors discuss specific implemen-

tation issues. However, as with the book as a whole, I was disappointed with the lack of depth. Certainly, with the number of authors who worked on the book, I would expect much more in-depth content.

I was also disappointed because, in many cases, it seemed the information was little more than a listing of the various options, with few details of what the option was used for. In a number of cases, I was also left with the feeling that something was missing in the explanation.

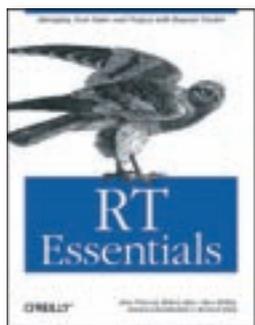
That is, I was told how a particular feature worked, but I felt that, unless you have a lot of experience running a help desk or hotline, you wouldn't really know how useful the feature was.

Although this review may seem generally negative, I think this is a good reference, particularly if you are already familiar with the concepts.

Darren Chamberlain, Richard Foley, Dave Rolsky, Robert Spier, and Jesse Vincent
200 pages

O'Reilly Media, Inc.,
0-596-00668-3

£ 24.95, US\$ 34.95, EUR 33.50



THE AUTHOR

James Mohr is responsible for the monitoring of several datacenters for a business solutions provider in Coburg, Germany. In addition to running the Linux Tutorial web site <http://www.linux-tutorial.info>, James is the author of several books and dozens of articles on a wide range of topics.

