

BOOK REVIEWS

BY JAMES MOHR

Security and Usability

I enjoyed this book immensely, but it is not an easy read. The problem is not that I had trouble understanding the book. It just that the book is filled with a lot of conceptual information. There are places where completely new concepts are introduced, so you need to get a handle on these ideas before you can appreciate what the book is trying to say.

As its name implies, the book talks about security and usability, and how they interrelate to each other. Many people believe that a truly secure system cannot be easy to use, but throughout the book, the authors demonstrate that this is not the case. Although security often means extra steps to access the system, these steps do not have to be difficult or cumbersome.

Each chapter is written by a different author, so the reader must contend with

different writing styles. All of the authors are competent, but whenever I became accustomed to a particular style, I needed time to switch gears. The obvious advantage of this approach is that the book is written from a wide range of experience and viewpoints, which I feel increases the value.

This book has a lot to offer to people at all levels of expertise. The end-user can begin to appreciate the problems involved with making systems secure, programmers get a better feeling for the perceptions and attitudes of users, and managers get the understanding that programmers cannot just pull secure systems out of a hat.

Working in a secure environment (online banks and brokers), I am con-



fronted with a great many of these issues every day. I understand and appreciate the tradeoffs. Still, this book provided a great deal of insight into a very complex topic.

Perhaps the most important thing one can get from this book is the fact that security and usability are not mutually exclusive. It's possible to design a secure system that is easy to use. After all, users are not the enemy.

**Lorrie Faith Cranor and
Simson Garfinkel (Editors)**

714 pages

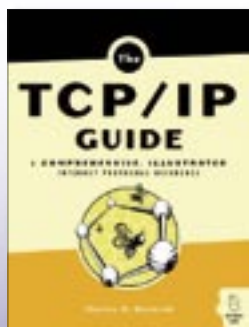
O'Reilly Media, Inc., 0-596-00827-9

£ 31.95, US\$ 44.99, EUR 41.50

The TCP/IP Guide: A Comprehensive, Illustrated Internet Protocols Reference

The key thing to keep in mind about *The TCP/IP Guide* is the word "reference." This is not a book that you read curled up on the couch on a rainy Sunday afternoon. (At least, I wouldn't.) Instead, the book is an encyclopedic reference that covers everything you ever need to know about TCP/IP.

I *might* be tempted to say that it was too much of a good thing, but you can simply skip those sections that don't interest you. I *might also* be tempted to say that the author does not go into enough details in some places. However, those places are really a matter of my personal interest and not a shortcoming of the book. This is basically a "how does it work?"



book from the perspective of users, administrators, and **not** programmers. As a result, you won't find a detailed discussion of algorithms.

However, to be clear, this is not purely a book that you use to look up particular facts. Instead, the author does a great job of discussing the significance of the information he is presenting. So, even if you can't relate the information to your everyday experience when you first start reading, you probably will once you get done. The author has a very easy going style, which definitely helps you keep going through potentially dry material.

I found the authors use of illustrations and diagrams particularly enjoy-

able. Whereas some books seem to throw illustrations in simply to break up the text, this book adds just the right amount in the right places to make sure you understand.

Anyone who has spent time digging through the details of TCP/IP knows that there are a lot of complex issues. To be honest, I think I would do the book an injustice by starting to describe all of the topics, as I wouldn't be able to say much else. Some readers might be put off that their favorite protocol is not addressed in the level of detail they want, but for me, this book has already become **the** TCP/IP Guide.

Charles M. Kozierok

1,539 pages

No Starch Press, 1-59327-047-X

£ 44.91, US\$ 79.95, EUR 74.501

Moving to Linux: Kiss the Blue Screen of Death Goodbye

Simply put, this is the *perfect* book for non-geeks making or even thinking about making the move to Linux. In essence, this book lays to rest all of the myths that claim Linux is difficult to use and has no useful applications. This book proves that Linux is just as powerful and easy to use as Windows.

One might be tempted to say that this is just an overview of the more common or well-known Linux software. In most cases, the author spends just a few pages addressing some of the key features of each application. Obviously, many of the products he discusses (such as OpenOffice and The Gimp) can and do fill entire books. This naturally means he is limited in what he can say. The result is a superficial look at the product.

However, that's not a bad thing. The goal of the book is not to make you an expert in either Linux or any of the software products. The goal is, as its title implies, to show you that you don't need to run Windows anymore. The features

and functionality that the vast majority of people use are available for *free* and the author shows where to find them.

The book starts out with an introduction to Linux that is very much from the end user's perspective. It would actually be better to say it is an introduction as to just why Linux can replace Windows. This continues on with a little hand-holding to get your feet wet, before proceeding on to using and configuring the KDE. Once this foundation is in place, the author moves on to the various packages.

One very important aspect of the book is the author's style and approach. The book is not simply a list of features. Instead, the author typically starts each section by addressing a particular task you probably want to accomplish, and then describes how the product being discussed helps you complete that task. Throughout the book, you get feeling as if an old buddy of yours is explaining something cool he found and wants to



share with you.

The book comes with a slightly modified version of Knoppix. *Most* (emphasis by the author) of the things discussed in the

book can be done using the CD.

Marcel Gagné

480 pages

Addison-Wesley Professional,

0-321-35640-3

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