BOOK REVIEWS

BY JAMES MOHR

Information Visualization: Design for Interaction

I expected this book to be about the *software* used to display or manage data, but it actually addresses the *concepts* of displaying and presenting data and includes a DVD with dozens of videos illustrating the topics.

The book first looks at what is actually meant by "visualization" and then covers a brief history of data visualization and its value.

The author then takes an in-depth look at some of the key aspects of data visualization, such as dealing with multiple attributes, space limitations, filtering, and so forth.

Following chapters look at representing the data, emphasizing that this means *re*-presenting it. For example, you might have tabular data with two values and you need to present it in a way that is more easily interpreted, such as a bar graph. A chapter on presenting the data with a simple wall-chart, for example, is next, and then the author gets into the details of presenting data using computer technology such as applications or web browsers.

The next chapter covers interaction, an area that is more complex than I realized. This chapter made me think about my own site and what I could do to improve the interaction.

The book concludes with case studies of specific types of data, their presentation, and their usability.
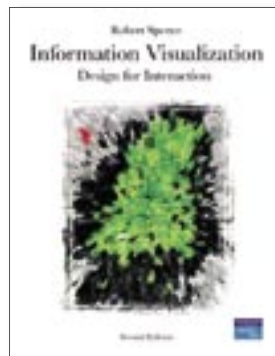
What interested me most is that the type of data and the manner in which it is being visualized is not what most people consider when thinking about data, like anything from the layout of the London underground to calendar entries.

Each chapter ends with exercises, and a companion website offers information for students and instructors. Even if it is intended as a text book, *Information Visualization* is a fascinating read in an easy-to-understand style.

Robert Spence
Hardcover, 282 pages
Pearson Education, 2007
978-0-132-0655-05
£ 41.39, US$ 104, EUR 73.95

Service Oriented Architecture for Dummies

I run into the problems caused by non-service-oriented architecture every day. My primary responsibility is monitoring thousands of pieces of hardware, software components, and everything else that goes into the services my company provides. Unfortunately, a great deal of what my company provides is monolithic, so it is often only possible to determine that something is wrong, but not know exactly what is wrong until someone analyzes logs files.

This is where a service-oriented architecture (SOA) comes in. The book introduces the basics of SOA and then goes into its specific elements and which technologies can be used to implement SOA (for example, XML and SOAP).

The authors address specific aspects of applications and the development process, policies to consider in your company, and offer more details about the "insides" of service oriented architecture.

The authors are aware that most of the existing software and systems are not based on SOA principles, and you cannot simply throw out everything and start from scratch. Instead, the authors provide useful information to help readers eventually move toward SOA, even if a complete transition is impossible.

The authors do a nice job of explaining SOA. However, I felt that the book was a little dry in a few places, and several of the chapter and section headings were overly "cute."

In any case, these small dings still do not stop me from recommending *Service Oriented Architecture for Dummies*.
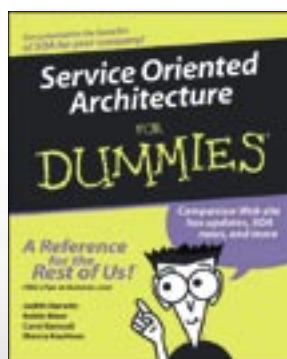
Judith Hurwitz, Robin Bloor, Carol Baroudi, and Marcia Kaufman
Paperback, 359 pages
Wiley & Sons, 2006
978-0-470-054352
£ 12.99, US$ 19.79, EUR 22.45

Security Metrics

It is purely coincidental that I reviewed this title along with *Information Visualization*. However, the combination is appropriate because – believe it or not – a lot of analyzing and increasing the security of your computer system is presenting/visualizing the data.

In fact, *Security Metrics* even includes a "Visualization" chapter that discusses how to visualize and interpret security-related data.

I thought *Security Metrics* might offer a dry, sterile look at a complex topic. Although the material is indeed complex, the author presents it in an understandable, approachable style.

Security Metrics does not tell you to "change this file" or "implement that software" or present a bunch of "hardening" checklists. Instead, the author offers a methodology to help determine the relative security of a system and whether it even needs to be increased.

Jaquith emphasizes that you need to make decisions based on your unique environment instead of using a checklist of known security issues.

In one company, my colleagues and I spent several hours each day analyzing firewall logs. The firewall was directly on the Internet, so a large number of drops was expected. However, we were expected to check every single drop for potential security problems. The boss was more concerned with the metric of firewall *drops* than the metric of security breaches. The concept of good metrics is also something the author addresses, and it is a shame that my boss never read this book.

Another point the author makes is that security is a *process* and not a state of your system. Many managers demand yes or no answers to the question of whether a system is secure; however, computer systems will never be totally secure.
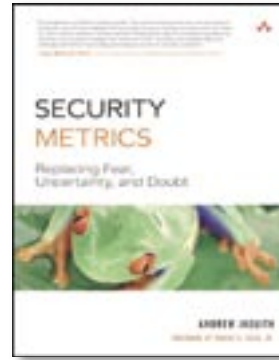
The author points out that with the *appropriate* metrics, a system that is not 100 % secure can still be acceptable.

Security Metrics is a good fit for system administrators, but it should also be read by decision makers. Managers, whose only understanding of security comes from what they read in advertisements for security products often determine security procedures.

Security Metrics does not get into the technical aspects of securing your systems, but this book may help managers develop a better understanding of the right steps to take.

Andrew Jaquith
Paperback, 306 pages
Addison Wesley, 2007
978-0-321-34998-9
£ 34.19, US$ 32.99, EUR 43.95