

BOOK REVIEWS

BY JAMES MOHR



Is it Safe? Protecting Your Computer, Your Business, and Yourself Online

Times sure have changed since I got my first letter telling me about a defunct oil company in Nigeria. I now get several of these a week. Although the technology and sophistication of the fraud has changed, the danger is greater than ever. Almost any book on “safe surfing” will improve your chances of survival, but this book guarantees it as much as any book could. The book covers obligatory topics like viruses, spam, spy-

ware, and phishing. However, it also goes into more complex issues like protecting your home network or company’s web server, and even on-the-job surveillance.

Each of the main topics is covered in one of the eight parts of the book, each with three or more chapters. The first chapter of each part is “How Big a Problem,” which provides background information about what the problem and what the scope of the the problem is. The next chapters are about defending yourself against the specific problem or fixing things after the fact.

This book was definitely not written for me or other IT professionals, but that makes it even more useful for the average

user because you do not get bogged down with technical minutiae. Each topic is covered in the detail necessary for you to understand the issues involved well enough to protect yourself against the problems the book addresses. Even topics like “recognizing an in-process attack” on your company’s server or describing the various types of attacks are easily understood and implemented. In some cases, the author *could* have provided more detail, but that is really not the intent of this book.

One aspect especially interesting and useful was that, in many cases, the book went beyond just the computer-related aspects. For example, the first three chapters cover identity and include sections on dealing with collection agencies, monitoring your credit report, and repairing your stolen identity.

For the average home user, the sections related specifically to businesses could be skipped, but they still provide a useful look at what is possible today. If you should ever be required to pass a test to use the Internet, this book would be required reading.

Michael Miller

Paperback, 384 pages

Que, 2008

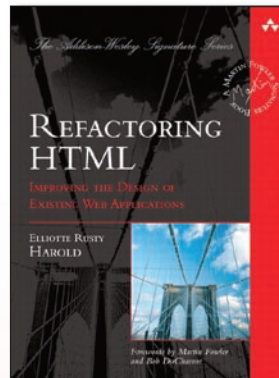
ISBN-13: 978-0789737823

UK£ 9.95, US\$ 18.24, EUR 29.99

Refactoring HTML

In the past couple of years, one of the most frequent buzz words in development circles has been “refactoring.” In a nutshell, this means more or less “cleaning” the code to make it more manageable, readable, or both. Even with your own code, regular house cleaning is a useful process. Besides program code, HTML also needs to be cleaned up, which is where this book comes in handy. *Refactoring HTML* starts with the foundations of refactoring (i.e., the whys, whens, whats, and hows). Despite the “theoretical” aspects of this material, it is filled with a number of concrete examples to solidify your understanding of the basics before jumping in.

The bulk of the book contains specific suggestions for improving your HTML. Each block starts with a description of the change that could be made, why it should be made, what the trade-offs are (e.g., potential problems with older browsers), and the nuts and bolts of the respective change. In some cases, this extends over several pages with specific examples for each issue. The topics range from straightforward issues like the use of one tag over of another or adding attributes to various tags, to “best practices” aspects like using standard names and IDs for forms and other objects. One aspect of the book that was particularly useful was when the author described why some-



thing was not a good idea not only from a technical standpoint but from a usability standpoint. These aspects are emphasized in the chapters “Accessibility” and “Web Applications.” The latter also addresses things like dealing with forms and security.

The book is well written, easy to understand, and covers a range of aspects of HTML, CSS, and more. From my perspective,

this is as perfect a book as I have seen in a while. Naturally, developers who make a living creating websites are going to benefit from this book. However, when I consider how much time I waste with problematic HTML, I would recommend that this be a part of the book collection of anyone working on websites.

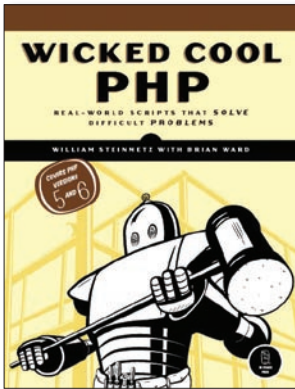
Elliott Rusty Harold

Hardcover, 368 pages

Addison-Wesley Professional, 2008

ISBN-13: 978-0321503633

UK£ 18.84, US\$ 31.99, EUR 39.99



Wicked Cool PHP

The title is deceptive. First, I would not necessarily call the topics discussed “wicked cool.” Second, titles like this typically give me a bad feeling in that they rarely live up to their promise. However, this book was a very pleasant surprise. Although nothing by itself really overwhelmed me, as a whole, the book is definitely “wicked cool.”

Although beginners should have a little previous PHP experience, it is with the PHP beginner that this book really shines. It is filled with everyday issues, as well as some more complex topics that are presented in a way that is easy to understand and easy to implement. A number of examples I personally cannot use (or simply don’t use) in the sites I develop, and yet I wish this book had come out several years ago because it would have saved me a lot of time wasted on trial and error and searching the web.

Some of the examples are so straightforward that nothing more than a code snippet and a brief description appear. With more detailed aspects, the authors often provide multiple examples and present the advantages and disadvantages of a par-

ticular solution. One of my favorite parts is titled “What Can Go Wrong?” These examples include PHP basics (e.g., working with arrays), security, working with HTML, accessing databases, and manipulating data (covering things like reading data out of a MySQL database and user input).

The last chapter, “Intermediate Projects,” provides several example applications that combine many of the aspects discussed in the previous chapters. Once you get through this part, you should have the skills to be a pretty decent PHP programmer.

One possible ding on this book could be its relatively small size, which means that many issues are not addressed. However, for that reason alone, I will rather give it a couple of plus points because now you won’t have to dig through things you will never use. Instead, you have an easy-to-use reference that provides quick access to useful solutions for common problems. Even for specific problems that were not addressed, it is very easy to adapt the material to your application.

This book is definitely worth the price and I recommended it.

William Steinmetz , Brian Ward
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