BOOK REVIEWS
BY JAMES MOHR

MediaWiki Administrators' Tutorial Guide

As the name implies, this book is intended for admins of MediaWiki software, which is used by the most well-known and widely used wiki: Wikipedia. The book begins with an intro to wikis in general, but with little discussion of the conceptual aspects of creating and running a wiki. The book briefly discusses what can be done with a wiki, but mostly within the context of a specific feature of MediaWiki. Overall, I found the book to be an excellent resource for both users and administrators.

A large portion of the book deals with using MediaWiki, rather than administering it. MediaWiki basics, such as components and navigation, are introduced, then a chapter called "Advanced Formatting" offers nice details about adding content to a wiki. The next chapter, "Organizing Content," provides details about MediaWiki-specific aspects of organizing your data. These features were addressed within the context of organization, which is useful because you often have problems with differing terminology that makes finding even the right question problematic.
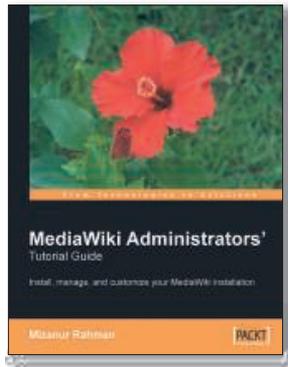
The last part of the book deals with the administration of your MediaWiki site, first addressing issues brought forward when multiple people contribute to your site, which is common for most wikis. Again, the book goes beyond just the basics of what entries to change in which file and addresses processes within the context of administering your site. "Administering MediaWiki," which could have been called "Advanced Configuration," follows.

The final two chapters cover customizing and "hacking" MediaWiki to suit your needs and preferences. Despite the usefulness of these chapters, it would have been nice to have more details on existing features.

Although I did find this book useful, I seldom felt that I was reading a tutorial. In only a few places was I guided through a specific task, and these seem to have been thrown in only to give the book the flavor of a tutorial. However, if you are a MediaWiki user, this book might still be useful.

Mizanur Rahman
284 Pages, Paperback
Packt Publishing, 2007
ISBN: 978-1-904811-59-6
UK£ 24.99, US$ 39.99, EUR 33.95

Understanding MySQL Internals

Understanding MySQL Internals provides an in-depth look into the inner workings of the most popular open source database, and the book is loaded with usefull information.

Unfortunately, unless you are already familiar with the C programming language and databases in general, you probably won't get the most out of this book. The book starts out with a well-done history of MySQL and a relatively high-level overview of the MySQL architecture. The chapter "Nuts and Bolts of Working with the MySQL Source Code" is a high-level discussion of the MySQL source code, but probably unnecessary to the overall goal of learning about MySQL internals. In the chapter on software components (i.e., classes, variables, etc.), the author lists these elements along with a brief (sometimes overly so) description of what each does.

Despite relying too much on interpreting the source code, the chapter covering configuration variables was my favorite. The chapter discussed configuration parameters in an understandable manner and touched on what values to set for each.

Subsequent chapters include details of the storage engine and storage engine interface, table and record locking, the parser and optimizer, and transactions.
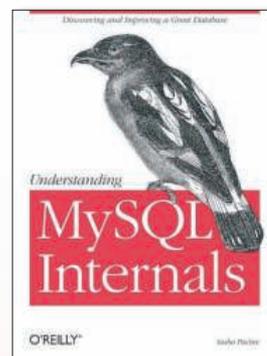
The book is not an easy read. For example, it is frustrating to find references to functions that *might* have been mentioned several chapters ago, but the original reference is not listed in the index. With that said, I wouldn't say that the book is poorly written – it does provide a great deal of information and you will certainly have a better understanding of MySQL internals after reading it – just expect to work for it.

Sasha Pachev
234 Pages, Paperback
O'Reilly, 2007
ISBN: 978-0-596-00957-1
UK£ 35.50, US$ 49.99, EUR 49.99

Wikis for Dummies

Although written by the original author of TWiki, this book is not about managing and using a specific wiki. Instead, *Wikis for Dummies* is about creating and running a wiki, regardless of what software you are using.

The book is broken down into four parts starting with the basics of wikis, moving on to using and contributing to a wiki, continuing with managing a wiki, and finishing with several 10-point lists that cover the key aspects of wikis. The authors have gone so far as to create wikis for the book on several "wiki farms," where you can work with a wiki without having to install the software or worry about problems you might cause on a "real" wiki.

In the first part, the authors describe what a wiki is, how it works, and what it is not, comparing it to other types of communications software (e.g., email and blogs). The next chapter discusses contributing to a wiki and touches on the markup specific to TWiki.

The next chapter lists a number of wikis to provide an overview of the ways they can be implemented. The following chapter is on using Wikipedia, which is interesting because Wikipedia uses MediaWiki rather than TWiki.

Next is a look at alternative ways to get your wiki online by hosting it with a wiki service provider. Following chapters cover the creation of content, which details TWiki-specific markup, linking, finding wiki pages, and the design of your wiki.

The third part looks at how to get your wiki to work, covering topics such as getting people to use the wiki in the first place, choosing and implementing the right wiki software, and administrative aspects of running your wiki. Should your wiki be accessible from the Internet, this is the chapter explaining how to keep your wiki safe. The chapter on creating applications, with the use of a "structured wiki," was particularly interesting and includes topics such as using forms, creating new pages from templates, and using some of the more common and useful TWiki plugins.

The most exciting aspect of this book is that it addresses aspects of wikis that are usually missing from product documentation. Whereas documentation tells you what buttons to click, it won't tell you how to implement software effectively. *Wikis for Dummies* is a great resource for anyone considering setting up a wiki.
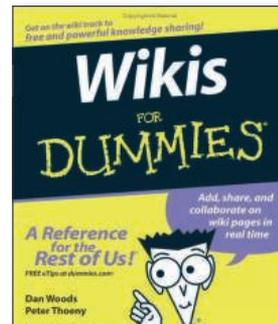
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