

BOOK REVIEWS

BY JAMES MOHR

Build the Best Data Center Facility for Your Business

The material in this book didn't exactly rivet me to the couch, despite the fact that I understand and appreciate the importance of building a good data center. Although I would be tempted to describe the topics as "dry," I think the author did a good job of presenting the material in a way that is easy to understand. *Build the Best Data Center* is written by team leaders of Cisco Systems' Data Center Infrastructure teams, so you know that much experience has gone into this book.

It's possible that you might be intimidated by the title and think this book is only relevant if you are running a facility with hundreds of computers. Even though the author does discuss issues that are only applicable to larger installations, the book is still filled with good information, even if you only manage a handful of systems.

Build the Best Data Center covers everything from the physical building, to the layout of the server cabinets, to labeling the cables. I liked the book and would definitely recommend it to anyone working in a data center, but there were several aspects of the book that bothered me. First, the book is obviously written for readers in the US. Although measure-

ments are typically translated into their metric equivalents, some of the standards only apply within the US. This US focus might not be the authors' fault, but it is definitely something to keep in mind if you live in a country that doesn't use these standards.

The second issue is that the author seems to only address building a data center from scratch. Since not every company has unlimited choice of where they can place their data center, I felt the book needed more information on converting an existing facility into an up-to-date data center. In most cases, however, one can still read between the lines to get good information from the book.

The book does contain the word "build" in its title, so it is logical that there is an emphasize on the physical aspects of the data center. Still, I felt the author should have gone into more detail on the administration of the data center once it is up and running. Many details of the administration need to be decided *before* the data center goes live. Issues such as change and incident management were only briefly addressed. Speaking from experience, I know that if these



two issues are poorly implemented, even the best physical data center can quickly fall apart.

I also felt that the author was inconsistent with the content. For example, he discusses specific soft-

ware products to help in creating the data center layout, but he says nothing about what to use for monitoring, incident management, and so forth. Also, there were a few sections labeled "common problems," but this element is not consistent throughout the book.

Despite the shortcomings, this book does provide a lot of information on both planned and existing data centers. Even if you have been up and running for years, it is likely that you could improve your data center considerably by implementing the ideas discussed in this book.

Douglas Alger

374 pages

Cisco Press, 1-58705-182-6

£ 39.99, US\$ 55.00, EUR 52.90

Building Online Communities with phpBB 2

Coming across this book and its publisher was a very pleasant surprise. In comparison to other companies, Packt Publishing has a fairly small selection of books, but they address topics that few (if any) publishers address. Also, they provide a kind of royalty to the open source projects discussed in their books.

I use phpBB on my own web site, and I wanted to delve more deeply into the topic than I could go with the existing documentation. I prefer not to

spend my time searching for answers. Rather than jumping between the user's guide, FAQ, and the knowledge base, I found what I needed was a single source: this book.



Throughout the book, the reader is presented with the background information about a specific task, followed by a block called "Time For Action," which includes step-by-step instructions on performing a certain task.

Rather than simply repeating what is available else-

where or just giving the reader a list of instructions, the authors go into detail on what each step is actually doing, as well as why you would choose one option over another. When the topic requires additional information about other tools (e.g., MySQL), the authors provide sufficient information to help you perform the task at hand.

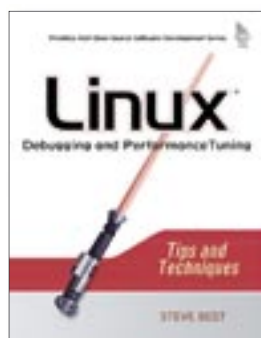
The book includes special boxes labeled "What just happened?" with detailed information on actions the reader just performed. This aspect is definitely a plus for the book, since many books just provide instructions on how to perform a task, but never really get

Linux Debugging and Performance Tuning

Linux Debugging and Performance Tuning is one of those books that they were thinking about when they coined the phrase “you can’t judge a book by its cover.” This book is **not** about debugging and performance tuning of Linux systems, instead it is about debugging and performance tuning of software running on Linux. If you look closely at the cover, you will see that it is part of the Open Source Software Development Series, so you could interpret that as meaning a book only for software developers, which more or less fits.

I don’t want to make you think that this is not a good book. In fact, the book is loaded with a lot of low-level details. However, unless you are either a fairly proficient C programmer or know a fair bit about operating system internals (or both), it is unlikely you’ll get a great deal out of it. The book does talk about the standard tools, such as *gcc*, *gdb*, and *gprof/kprof*, which is helpful to people without much experience. It then proceeds to less common tools that address common problems, such as memory leaks, overruns, dead code, and so forth. At least, in this regard, the book serves as a good source of information.

The author goes into detail on a number of specific problems. The book includes debug and trace output, as well



as code, to illustrate the topic. Still, the author’s choice of topics and the depth at which some topics were addressed left me a little confused as to what the real goal of this book was. For example, although the author mentions tools such as *ipconfig*, *arp*, *netstat*, and *tcpdump*, he goes into almost no detail about how to use these tools to troubleshoot network connections. Yet he does provide

very detailed descriptions of how to use other tools to debug code.

I was also bothered by the choice and usage of screen shots. Personally, I do not like screen shots of the console, unless there is no other way to display what you are talking about. In this case, it seemed like most of the screen shots

were thrown in to simply break up the text and added very little to understanding the material. In fact, I felt that, in a lot of cases, the screen shots were actually a distraction.

The book does contain a lot of information, however, unless it addresses specific problems you have experienced, you are going to need to dig.

Steven Best

427 Pages

Prentice Hall Professional Technical Reference, 0-13-149247-0

£ 25.19, US\$ 49.99, EUR 47.90

around to explaining what each step really means.

The book starts off with a nice introduction to the features that phpBB2 provides and then moves on to installation and configuration. The “Quick Tour of phpBB” chapter covers both using and administering phpBB. Although each topic is discussed quickly, you are introduced to everything you really need. Despite being fairly proficient with phpBB, I did learn from this chapter.

The authors include a few chapters on modifying phpBB beyond simple administration. The book looks at phpBB from the inside and gives a lot of important

information about modifying the HTML pages and templates, CSS files, and even the PHP code. Although the modifications often require a fair level of competence, the authors do a great job of guiding you through each step.

The appendix, which provides a tour of the phpBB directory structure, definitely adds to an already useful book, although I would like to see the appendix expanded a bit.

Stefanov, Rogers, and Lothar

343 Pages

Packt Publishing, 1-904811-13-2

£ 22.99, US\$ 39.99, EUR 32.99