

BOOK REVIEWS

BY JAMES MOHR

In Search of Stupidity: Over 20 Years of High-Tech Marketing Disasters, 2nd ed.

When I read this book, I caught myself judging it by its cover (or rather, the title). I found a number of places where I thought it was unfair to call certain decisions “stupid,” because we now have more than a decade of hindsight, and what we know now was far from common knowledge then. However, the marketing department often has the final word, so don’t let the title detract from the content.

In short, this book is an overview of many decisions that led to the demise of some computer companies or at least caused them to lose money, market share, and even prestige. Even if you do not call any given decision “stupid,” when evaluating many of these decisions with the ex-



perience and knowledge you have today, there are good lessons about what might appear logical or “right” in another business. However, the computer industry does not always work the same way.

Perhaps my favorite example is the one in which the developers of MircoPro’s WordStar product spent months “cleaning” their printer driver database and then had to change the applicable code instead of adding features to the product. “Never touch a running system” also applies to code, which is now something every good techie knows.

This was not so 10 years ago. I, along with many others, had an almost religious fervor about “clean” code. Today, people should know how the code works (i.e., good

documentation), but spending weeks or months to make the guts of your application look pretty, thus delaying the next release, is bad for business. There are, however, many past examples of what company big-wigs decided that simply make you sigh and shake your head.

The content is worth the price of the book. Added to this, the author, Merrill R. Chapman, speaks not as an historian, but as a participant – a victim of many of these “stupid” decisions. This provides an insight into the events that someone reporting on it after the fact would not have. Chapman also has an amusing style that makes this book an enjoyable read.

Merrill R. Chapman
Softcover; 408 Pages
Apress
ISBN: 1590597214
£ 17.99, US\$ 34.99, EUR 28.95

DNS and BIND, 5th Edition

I read the first edition of *DNS and BIND* along with several other books sent from an acquaintance at O’Reilly. I gave him a list of the “issues” I found, which led to me reviewing some other O’Reilly titles. This led me to write my own book. So, I was a little sad about tossing out something that helped start me on my literary journey, but only for a moment.

I read *DNS and BIND* as a junior tech support engineer to learn the “mysteries” of DNS. Liu and Albitz showed me that things were put together logically, and despite the complexities, DNS is easy to understand.

This latest edition not only addresses the most recent software version. The authors know that many administrators cannot simply upgrade when they want

to. With this in mind, the authors provide information about using the more recent version, but also note when a feature is not in previous versions.

While not a layman’s introduction to networking, this book provides an easy-to-understand guide to a complex subject. The first three chapters introduce DNS. Although most end users would find the rest too detailed for their needs, the authors have bridged the gap between in-depth technical information and readability.

In addition to information to help successfully set up DNS, Liu and Albitz ad-



dress potential problems, how to prevent them, and how to implement DNS in more complex environments. They also explain how to interpret debug information, which is not always easy to do.

I tried hard to find something bad I could say about this book.

However, I couldn’t.

Cricket Liu and Paul Albitz
Softcover; 640 Pages
O’Reilly
ISBN: 0596100574
£ 35.50, US\$ 49.99, EUR 43.95

Implementing SugarCRM

If you didn't know what CRM (Customer Relationship Management) is or didn't know why you need it, then I doubt you would buy this book. I was tempted to say that the beginning of the book is superfluous, then I reconsidered. A manager may know what the letters "CRM" mean and *think* he needs it. After reading the first part of this book, he may realize he *really* needs a CRM system. The following two chapters provide useful information to help determine what kind of CRM system you might need and how to implement it.

In the next chapter, "CRM Basics," the author, Michael J.R. Whitehead, combines abstract CRM concepts with an introduction to SugarCRM. Rather than simply stepping through the screens and explaining them in a CRM context, Whitehead offers a tutorial of the product, showing how to use each form. This is further enhanced by explaining why you would fill out the form in a particular way, how objects within SugarCRM work together, and so forth. Subsequent

chapters go into more detailed aspects of the product. Although I was expecting it to be something for the system administrator, I found the chapter "Managing Your CRM Implementation" provided good information about putting the product to use once you have it installed and running on your desktops.

I *might* be tempted to ding the book for not providing more details about the insides of SugarCRM. However, that is not really the goal of the book. Rather, the book is intended for users of the product, so the author is speaking to managers and business owners, rather than system administrators. In that regard, the author does a great job of presenting the business aspects of SugarCRM along with necessary "howto" information users need.



It's interesting that the author covers installing SugarCRM in an appendix. It is likely that you will purchase this book after having already installed SugarCRM and are simply looking for a way to learn more. In that case, including a chapter on installing the product at the beginning of the book is more of

a stumbling block than a benefit.

Whitehead's business experience and experience with SugarCRM are revealed throughout the book. The author provides solutions, rather than descriptions of what fields each form contains. Thus, he shows not only how to use, but how to implement SugarCRM.

Michael J.R. Whitehead

Softcover; 328 pages

Packt Publishing

ISBN: 190481168X

£ 37.99, US\$ 59.99, EUR 54.99

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