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Book Reviews

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PHP and SQL Made Simple

Build Your Own Database Driven Website Using PHP & MySQL: A Practical Step-by-Step Guide, 3rd ed.

By Kevin Yank

373 Pages

US\$39.95

Sitepoint, 2004

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Build Your Own Database Driven Website Using PHP & MySQL by Kevin Yank provides a hands-on look at what's involved in building a database-driven Web site. Yank does a good job of patiently teaching the reader how to install and configure PHP 5 and MySQL to organize dynamic Web pages and put together a viable content management system. At just over 350 pages, the book is rather small compared to a lot of others on the topic, but it contains all the essentials. Yank employs excellent teaching techniques to set up the foundation stone by stone and then grouts everything solidly together later in the book.

Target audience

This book aims at intermediate and advanced Web designers looking to make the leap to server-side programming. Yank assumes his readers are comfortable with simple

HTML. He provides an excellent introduction to PHP and MySQL (including installation) and explains how to make them work together. The amount of material he covers guarantees that almost any reader will benefit. Read this book first and then, if you want to, move on to more in-depth books on PHP.

Organization and content

If you've never installed Apache, PHP, or MySQL or can't recall how to do it, Yank includes the steps for Windows, Linux, and Mac OS X in the first chapter. The early chapters provide a good overview of PHP and MySQL. By Chapter 4, the contents of the earlier chapters are being exploited as the SQL database connects to the Web page with PHP. The next chapters show how to use forms to manage, add, delete, edit, and search for data. By the book's midpoint, the reader has designed a database, organized it, created Web pages for the data, added administration pages, and administered the database. The part on relational databases management systems is very basic and a good place to start, but Yank then abdicates to www.datamodel.org for more information. The appendices include MySQL syntax, functions, column types, and PHP functions to use with MySQL. The book has an accompanying Web site (<http://sitepoint.com/books/phpmysql1>) that includes errata and four free sample chapters, which give a good idea of the book's content and style.

Strong points, weak points

I'd like to recommend this book because there is a lot going for it. The text is readable. The illustrations and screenshots are well done. The book includes many examples of code and screen shots, as well as a comprehensive index. Yank presents a nice learning curve from basic to reasonably high-level concepts.

The book's weakest part is the chapter on relational databases. If you've had no prior exposure to relational databases, then this chapter might be of limited usefulness. Perhaps the best thing I can say about the chapter is that it might motivate you to investigate designing a relational database using a more extensive text devoted to that subject.

Conclusion

Kevin Yank has written a book for readers who like step-by-step directions accompanied by explanations of how things work. I learned many things using his approach. His book is a stepping stone to creating dynamic Web sites.

The book's most attractive feature is that it covers a little of everything without overpowering you with too much information. Anyone who has experimented with Perl, PHP, ASP.NET, MySQL, or Access will enjoy it. However, those who can write PHP and MySQL with little help will need to find a more advanced book.

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