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Perl And XML



Synopsis

XML is a text-based markup language that has taken the programming world by storm. More powerful than HTML yet less demanding than SGML, XML has proven itself to be flexible and resilient. XML is the perfect tool for formatting documents with even the smallest bit of complexity, from Web pages to legal contracts to books. However, XML has also proven itself to be indispensable for organizing and conveying other sorts of data as well, thus its central role in web services like SOAP and XML-RPC. As the Perl programming language was tailor-made for manipulating text, few people have disputed the fact that Perl and XML are perfectly suited for one another. The only question has been what's the best way to do it. That's where this book comes in. Perl & XML is aimed at Perl programmers who need to work with XML documents and data. The book covers all the major modules for XML processing in Perl, including XML::Simple, XML::Parser, XML::LibXML, XML::XPath, XML::Writer, XML::Pyx, XML::Parser::PerlSAX, XML::SAX, XML::SimpleObject, XML::TreeBuilder, XML::Grove, XML::DOM, XML::RSS, XML::Generator::DBI, and SOAP::Lite. But this book is more than just a listing of modules; it gives a complete, comprehensive tour of the landscape of Perl and XML, making sense of the myriad of modules, terminology, and techniques. This book covers: parsing XML documents and writing them out again; working with event streams and SAXtree processing and the Document Object Model; advanced tree processing with XPath and XSLT. Most valuably, the last two chapters of Perl & XML give complete examples of XML applications, pulling together all the tools at your disposal. All together, Perl & XML is the single book that gives you a solid grounding in XML processing with Perl.

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Customer Reviews

I am a professional developer, working mostly with Perl. I work in the field of biology and bioinformatics, but have spent the last 8 years working as a web and database Internet developer. And, I own practically every O'Reilly Perl book ever published (not that I necessarily think they're all worth buying). So, now that you know where I'm coming from...If you are preparing to do a serious amount of XML development, and you're in the process of determining a) which Perl XML modules on CPAN you want to use, and b) how to use them; and, you don't have a whole lot of time to spend tracking down the sometimes-hard-to-find documentation on these modules; then buying this book is a no-brainer. It covers all the major XML modules, how to use them and really helps you figure out when to use the different modules. Even if you're not new to XML and Perl, this book would serve as an excellent refresher course on what XML tools are available out there for you... Maybe you haven't looked at your code in awhile, or want to update it to use a newer module from CPAN? Or, maybe you're looking for a better way to do it? Then, this book would definitely help you out. While a fan of O'Reilly books in general, I'll be the first to admit some of them are more useful than others. I have to give this book a very solid rating, as it's actually useful, comprehensive and very well presented. I find myself cracking it open all the time, especially as my utilization of XML has grown more complicated. It has definitely earned its place in my Aqua Perl book collection.

I liked the way this book was structured - it was a quick read over a thanksgiving family visit, and it gave a good overview of what XML is and what XML isn't, and what tools are available already in Perl to use it. I particularly liked the middle of the book, and how it dealt with trees and event streams. First there was in short intro chapter on why you'd want to parse XML as an event stream, and some simple modules that give back event streams. Then the next chapter would be a longer one on SAX - the definitive way to do event streams. Same thing with trees and DOM. It ends with some examples of real-life XML processing, such as consuming and producing RSS feeds. The book also has the best description of Unicode I've ever read, and did it with just a few pages. What ticked me off about this book were the egregious errors in the sample code. The very first piece of code they show in chapter 3 is a 100-line XML parser that doesn't need any support modules. The problem is that it doesn't recognize any XML because the regular expressions are wrong, which was pretty confusing for me (I'm relatively new to Perl, so I figured they were just "another way of

doing it" that I didn't understand). I downloaded the examples from the O'Reilly website, and they're wrong there too - so it's not just a printing error. Worse, the example XML file I tried to test the parser on was also from the tarfile I downloaded - but it was invalid XML! (example 3.4). So I was trying to learn XML with a sample parser that didn't work, on invalid XML! This is not the quality I am expecting from O'Reilly!(In fairness, both of these errors were in the online errata, but I'm not sure if they were corrected in the 7/04 reprint)There are other errors in the code too - so be sure and check back with the errata page if you're going to seriously use the code. If they'd run their sample code before printing, I'd probably give this book a better rating.

I have wanted to learn about XML, but I found the pure XML books dry and too theoretical. However, putting XML in the context of something familiar, i.e. Perl, made it much more accessible. This book gives a nice overview of XML parsing using event based and tree based parsers that are available as Perl modules. The book presents SAX and DOM standards compliant modules as well as modules with more Perlish interfaces, e.g. XML::Grove and XML::Twig. It discusses the pros and cons of event vs. tree parsing of XML as well as a few advanced technologies such as database integration and SOAP. The only knock I have on the book is that the examples are a bit contrived and do not show how to solve meaningful problems.

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