



LAUGHING BEAR 117 NEWSLETTER

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The Surviving Small Press: Scripting a More Powerful Web Site

Small presses are coming to depend on their web sites more and more for sales, marketing, and exposure. The relatively low cost of building and maintaining a web site, as well as the opportunity to reach so many people, has the potential of being as big a boost to independent publishing as desktop publishing was as it developed in the 1980's.

According to a survey of nearly 9,000 publishers conducted by BookZone, Inc., 78.4 percent of them already have web sites, whereas 56% of U.S. businesses overall plan to by January 2000.

More than half of those publishers paid less than \$1,000 to build their sites, and most of those were built by in-house staff.

The books reviewed this month will help you design and build your own web site, or make the one you've already got more powerful and effective.

These books are all available at any bookstore with a decent selection of computer books, and you can usually find them in online bookstores at a discount.

With one exception, the book on HTML, these are all about scripting. Scripts like CGI (Common Gateway Interface), JavaScript, and ASP (Active Server Pages) are used to add action to your web pages. For example, if

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Beginning Active Server Pages 2.0

By Brian Francis, John Kauffman, Juan T. Libre, Dave Sussman, Chris Ullman

Wrox Press Ltd., Arden House, 1102 Warwick Road, Birmingham B27 6BH, U.K.; <http://www.wrox.com>; 672 pp, 7 1/4" x 9", perfect, \$39.99

There are few computer-related books I've had contact with that I would describe as being fun to read, but I honestly had fun working my way through this book.

Part of the reason for that is the quality of the instruction in all Wrox Press books. They are by far the easiest books I've found to use because many of the authors have taught what they are writing about in addition to being professional programmers.

It also helps that the examples you work through are things you can actually use on your web site.

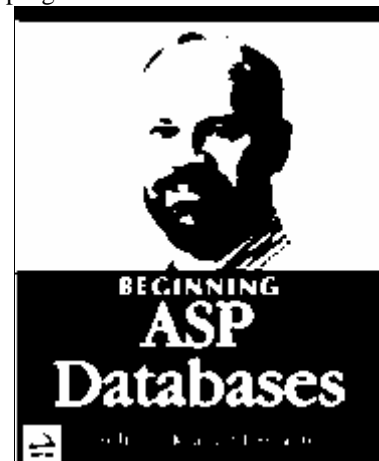
(Continued on page 4.)

Beginning ASP Databases

By John Kauffman

Wrox Press Ltd.; 844 pp, 7 1/4" x 9", perfect, \$39.99

For most people with a small business site using ASP this is going to be the book to tackle after the beginning ASP book. *Professional Active Server Pages* is more for server administrators and programmers.



As I've said, one of the major advantages of ASP is the ability to use Access databases with your web site. Databases are used for passwords and cookies, search engines, tracking visitors, creating online catalogs, and keeping track of customers and orders.

The beginning ASP book devotes only a couple chapters to showing how databases work in ASP. This book looks in detail at building, utilizing, and maintaining databases for your web site that will let visitors access and add information making your site more interactive and useful. •

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Scripting (continued)

you want buttons to change color when you touch them with your mouse pointer or you want the contents of a form to be sent to you by e-mail, you need to write those instructions in a script.

The type of script you use depends on the type of web server your site is on and what you want the script to do.

ASP only works on a Windows NT or 2000 server. It is Microsoft technology written in a Microsoft language, VBScript, and because of that it works smoothly with no compatibility problems. It also lets you tie your site to Microsoft Access databases.

CGI works on everything else. It can be written in several languages and works on several operating systems. It has been the standard for years, but is difficult to learn and find decent documentation on because it can be used in so many combinations of languages and servers.

JavaScript is powered entirely by the visitor's browser, so there are no server compatibility problems. However, it will only work on Java-enabled browsers. That includes all the browsers released in the last couple years, but there are still 5-10 percent of users who use old ones. Therefore, JavaScript is used most of the time for interactive graphics, page navigation, and other cosmetic functions.

Learning any kind of scripting is difficult, but will pay off in the end. If you hire someone to do it, it will be expensive and you have to keep bringing them back to maintain and upgrade your site.

And here's a valuable tip: Don't try to do scripted web pages in Front Page. Don't even open one in it. The program inserts code that will screw up your script. I don't know about the other HTML editors like PageMill, but I have had pages ruined by Front Page. •

HTML 4 for the World Wide Web: Visual QuickStart Guide

By Elizabeth Castro
Peachpit Press, 1249 Eighth St.,
Berkeley, CA 94710; 394 pp, 7" x
9", perfect, \$19.99

I keep my Peachpit Press books at my desk. I have lots of computer books, but when I need a quick answer, I go to these.

The earlier version of this book taught me most of what I know about HTML. While other books try to tell you why HTML works and how, this book shows what you need to know by example.



When I was first trying to build web pages, I got overwhelmed by all the code and rules. The books were confusing. The instructions from my internet service provider were worse.

At that time I just wanted to get a web page up. I didn't want to get a degree in computer science.

This book shows you how to build pages by showing you the code for a table, for instance. Then it shows you what the page looks like in a browser. Then it shows how to do the code to add color to the table and so on.

I still use the book as a reference because I can find what I need quickly. It's got great charts of colors and symbols, and plenty of cool tricks as well. •



Professional Active Server Pages 3.0

By Alex Homer, Dave Sussman, Brian Francis
Wrox Press Ltd.; 1294 pp, 7
1/4" x 9", perfect, \$59.99

This book carries on where *Beginning Active Server Pages* left off. The earlier book demonstrated how ASP works and what it is capable of. This one takes each of those features and looks at them in-depth.

It also goes more into actual programming than just scripting. And more advanced subjects like electronic commerce and secure servers, adding e-mail support to your site so registered members can send and receive e-mail, and how to build everything you need to start an online community.

This ASP 3.0 version of the book is for use with a Windows 2000 server. If your web host is not going to upgrade from Windows NT soon, you should get *Professional Active Server Pages 2.0*.

This book is certainly not for everyone. Much of it is aimed at server administrators. But if you want to get very serious and set up a sophisticated, professional site with your own secure server, registered members, and all the bells and whistles, the information is here.

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Professional ADO RDS Programming with ASP

By John Papa, Matt Brown, Charles Caison, Peter DeBetta, Eric Wilson

Wrox Press Ltd.; 596 pp, 7 1/4" x 9", perfect, \$49.99

If you've gone through *Beginning ASP Databases*, this is the next step in adding data control to your site. In this book, you'll learn how to make your databases more efficient and use fewer resources. In addition, you'll be able to obtain data from other sources, including spreadsheets and other files.

ADO stands for Active-X Data Objects and RDS for Remote Data Services. Those probably don't mean much to you, but basically it means that what you've already learned about databases can be applied to other data sources, and you can combine databases with those other sources to manage data in creative new ways.

This book shows how to use those capabilities to make your web site more dynamic and to help you develop better ways to collect and use information from and about your visitors.

For one example of how this could be used, you put add a bar graph on your site representing visitor responses to a poll and it would automatically show the change when a user submits their vote from a form on the site. •



CGI/Perl Cookbook

By Craig Patchett and Matthew Wright

Wiley Computer Publishing, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 605 Third Ave., New York, NY 10158-0012; 624 pp, 7 1/2" x 9 1/4", perfect, CD-ROM included, \$49.99

I went through several books on CGI before I was lucky enough to find this one. This is a collection of powerful CGI scripts with all the information to set them up on Unix, MacOS, and Windows servers – though I wouldn't use CGI in Windows NT because it is not reliable.

Matthew Wright is the Matt of Matt's Script Archive, Inc., the most popular ready-to-use script collection on the web (<http://www.worldwidemart.com/scripts/>).



The scripts here are more feature-packed versions of scripts available on his web site, and they have the advantage of better documentation to help you get them working.

The book also is meant to help you learn how to program CGI in Perl by going through the code for the scripts line by line.

The scripts include Form-handler, a workhorse script for controlling forms. It is worth the cost of the book by itself, but there are also impressive scripts for a shopping cart, download center, message board, a script to track visitors, and more. •



JavaScript for the World Wide Web: Visual QuickStart Guide

By Tom Negrino and Dori Smith
Peachpit Press; <http://www.peachpit.com>; 304 pp, 7" x 9", perfect, \$17.99

This is another great little book from Peachpit Press.

JavaScript is the magic kit for webmasters. With it you can create the special effects that make a static HTML page come to life.

On Laughing Bear's site I use JavaScript to make the menu buttons change color when you touch them with your mouse pointer. It lets me use drop-down lists to jump to different headings on a page. And adding a little Java to a link can make the new page open in a separate browser window so I don't lose visitors when they jump to another site.

JavaScript can also be used in conjunction with other scripting languages to add spice to a page or to validate a form before it is sent out. If the visitor leaves out some information, JavaScript will tell them to go back and fill it in before the form can be submitted.

Like the Peachpit HTML book, this one teaches by example, showing you how to add interactivity to your pages quickly without having to wade through technical explanations. •

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Beginning ASP (continued)

In this book, for instance, you will learn how to build a visitor counter that shows not only how many hits you've gotten, but also which are your most popular pages, the path a visitor takes through your site, and how long visitors stay on your site.

You'll also learn how to set up a password controlled page, how to use cookies to keep track of visitors' preferences between visits, how to make your page sense the kind of browser your visitor is using and display the page accordingly, how to use a database with your web site, and lots of other useful projects.

For the final project in the book, you use everything you've learned to build an elaborate auction site on which sellers can post items for sale, buyers can bid on them, and then the sellers can approve the sales.

One particularly useful thing the authors did is use questions that have come up in classes to anticipate the problems you'll have working through the examples. There is also a user forum on the Wrox web site, as well as all the examples from the book for you to download, errata that have come up since the book was released, and other online support.

To use this book you need to be on a Windows NT server. In January, *Beginning Active Server Pages 3.0* will be released for Windows 2000 servers.

It is suggested that you use Personal Web Server to view your projects. It is easier than loading them onto your server, seeing if they work, and then loading them again if they don't work. Personal Web Server is available free from Microsoft's web site at <http://www.microsoft.com>.

To do the coding, you can use any text editor, including NotePad that comes with Windows. •

Announcements

- **Small Press Book Fair** (Small Press Center, 20 West 44th St., New York, NY 10036; 212-764-7021, <http://www.smallpress.org>) will be held March 25-26. Over 200 presses will be participating in this event which is a major event of Small Press Month 2000. Edgar Allen Poe has been selected as the Center's Author of the Year for 2000. He self-published his first book when he was 18. Spaces are still available for the fair.

- **Fiction Writer's Connection** (Lisa Schaeffer; 342 Lincoln Ave, Pottstown, PA 19464; <http://www.fictionwriters.com>). In addition to her own publishing, Schaeffer offers PR services for small presses who publish nonfiction writers.

- **North American Bookdealers Exchange** (Al Galasso, exec. Dir.; PO Box 606, Cottage Grove, OR 97424; <http://www.bookmarketingprofits.com>) is an international book marketing organization to help independent publishers promote and market their books. The organization publishes *Book Dealers World*, a very useful 32 page, quarterly magazine.

- **Newcomb & Newcomb Editorial Services** (Karen Newcomb; PO Box 190, Penn Valley, CA 95946) is a print media consulting firm. Newcomb and her husband are also authors for major publishers and are involved in a small press called Niche Publishing. To help promote their books and those of their press and clients, Newcomb started another side business putting together gift baskets that include the books. The gift basket site is at <http://www.ptbaskets.com>.

- **BookZone** (<http://www.bookzone.com>) has provided over 1,100 publishing-related companies with web hosting, development and promotion. At their site, you can read the highlights of the survey of publishers quoted in this issue's lead article.

- **Book Publishers of Texas** (PO Box 831495, Richardson, TX 75083-1495; 972-671-0002, <http://www.authorlink.com/bpt.html>) has a new board of directors and is looking to the 21st century with a revitalized outlook. Benefits include a directory, a marketing campaign featuring Texas publishers, a monthly review column in newspapers and magazines state-wide, and discounts on publishing services.

- **Copyright Clearance Center** (Edwin W. Colleran, Assoc. Dir., Rightsholder Relations; 222 Rosewood Dr., Danvers, MA 01923; 978-750-8400, ext. 2562, <http://www.copyright.com>) has long helped publishers get royalties for photocopies of their copyrighted material. Now they are offering the same service for material published on the world wide web. Check out their web site for more information.

- **CM: Circulation Management** (P.O. Box 4235, Stamford, CT 06907-0235; 800-775-3777, circ@intertec.com) is a free trade magazine for magazine publishers. Whenever someone contacts me about starting a magazine, I suggest they get a subscription to *CM*. It is a great resource.

Advertising: Insert ads, in the form of flyers to be inserted in newsletter mailings, are welcome. Send 200 copies of the ad with \$50, and the ad will be mailed with the next issue of the newsletter. Contest and other events or promotions that solicit money in the form of reading or other entry fees will not be accepted.

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