

BOOK REVIEW / CRITIQUE DE LIVRE

Creating database-backed library Web pages: using open source tools. By Stephen R. Westman. Chicago: American Library Association, 2006. 268 pages (soft cover). ISBN 0-8389-0910-8. US\$48.

Stephen Westman is the Digital Information Services Librarian for the J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, where he is involved in creating databases to organize and provide access to information on the Web. In this book, he provides a starting point for librarians who want to use databases as back-ends for library Web pages without using Web-authoring software. He explores the advantages of this approach and provides examples of and information on the various ways librarians have used this technology to provide information on the Web more effectively.

The book's contents are exactly as the title suggests. The writing style is clear, sentences are short, directions are systematic, and common words are used in favour of technical jargon when it is practical. Westman combines a cookbook-and-recipe approach with concepts and examples familiar to librarians as he provides information on programming, documentation, and project planning.

Westman provides an overview of available open source tools, the pros and cons of each, and then focuses on how to use his menu of recommended applications — Apache server, MySQL relational database system, PHP scripting language, and PhpMyAdmin graphical user interface. With these, he reviews the basics, provides examples of library applications, and points the reader to more basic information: the software and available tools and shortcuts that can be used with these applications.

The book is divided into 10 chapters (which includes the Introduction) that are organized to take the reader through the stages of a database-backed Web project process. The chapters are Database Basics, Setup and Administration, Introductory Programming, Creating Reports, Project Design, Programming Application, Security Related Techniques, Creating Public Interfaces, and Development Procedures. The book concludes with a very useful appendix on programming standards plus a glossary.

At a glance, the book appears to be quite technical, so it may discourage the novice. Even the experienced user may have to clear their desk and concentrate while digesting the loaded content. Experience with using database-management and Web-authoring tools to create database-backed webs or a firm understanding of relational databases and user infor-

mation needs, seeking, and uses will be helpful to those using this book. Ideally, the book will support course work, as library school graduates who successfully complete a course or two based on *Creating database-backed library Web pages: using open source tools* would be hot commodities.

Anyone familiar with the project management approach can get a sense of the level of detail Westman provides by reading the chapters titled Project Design and Development Procedures. The author provides a practical but condensed approach to project planning and management specific to database-backed library Web pages. He includes examples of forms and recommends approaches necessary for gathering specifications and reaching consensus, designing and testing the application, implementing, documenting, testing, and debugging. Though a librarian inexperienced in the project management approach might be able to follow this approach, experience with project management would make it much easier to understand.

The book will be of interest to library administrators and information managers who need to understand concepts for project planning. Librarians who already create database-backed webs using FrontPage and Access or other combinations of Web-authoring and database management tools should find Westman's recommended approach doable. For many librarians like me, Westman's approach would only be feasible if we were given permission from Information Technology Department security and network analysts to establish a server.

For a sample of some of Westman's related work, please see "Building database-backed Web applications: process and issues" in *Information technology and libraries* (Vol. 21, No. 2, 2002, <http://www.lita.org/ala/lita/litapublications/ital/2102westman.htm>). For more information on *Creating database-backed library Web pages: using open source tools* and a link to the companion Web site, please see its entry in the ALA Store at http://alastore.ala.org/SiteSolution.taf?_sn=catalog2&_pn=product_detail&_op=1919.

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