

## First Monday, Volume 1, Number 2 - 5 August 1996



PEER-REVIEWED JOURNAL ON THE INTERNET



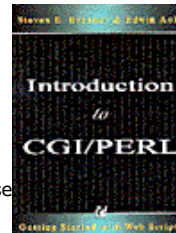
### Webmastery explained: Reviews of Recent Books on CGI, Perl, and HTML

A recent page-one story in the weekly magazine *Computerworld* called "Webmastery a little mystical." The same article explained that the most important characteristic of a Webmaster is an "ability to combine left- and right-brained thinking." I assume that kind of thinking includes some interest in reading. Since the Web and Internet publishing are moving at such a rapid pace, even the most astute Webmasters need every byte of information they can locate, even in traditional media - like books. These titles are written with those left- and right-brained thinkers in mind, with much "food" for thought for all cerebral compartments. Anyone seriously contemplating Web artistry needs these kinds of books (and especially their accompanying compact discs and diskettes) within reach, when all other sources fail, or simply for inspiration. - ejv

#### Steven E. Brenner and Edwin Aoki

Introduction to CGI/Perl: Getting Started with Web Scripts  
New York: M&T Books, 1996.  
151 p., paper. ISBN 1-558-51478-3  
Price \$US19.95

Truly interactive Web servers use the Common Gateway Interface or CGI and scripts (or little external programs) written in a computer language called Perl to do some work on behalf of users. If you are unfamiliar with CGI and Perl, this book provides truly an outstanding introduction, especially for those not born computer coders. Brenner and Aoki in four well-written and nicely illustrated chapters (and in four extremely helpful appendices) give you everything you need to know to start creating simple scripts. Chapter one provides an introduction to CGI, chapter two to Perl, chapter three to forms (read the contents of sample Web pages in the figures to understand the authors' sense of humor), and chapter four to the Hypertext Transport Protocol (HTTP). Aware that you'll encounter troubles with your first scripts, Appendix A provides answers to some basic troubles. Appendix B deals with configurations for Windows, Mac, and UNIX, Appendix C describes the cgi-lib.pl Library, and Appendix D points to where on-line you can find help. For anyone interested in improving their Web sites, and especially Perl and CGI virgins, this book is highly, highly recommended. - ejv



#### John Deep and Peter Holfelder

Developing CGI Applications with Perl  
New York: Wiley, 1996.  
299 p., paper. ISBN 0-471-14158-5  
Price \$US29.95

Developing CGI Applications with Perl has a misleading title because this book treats much more than just CGI scripts. It covers everything from an overview of the World Wide Web and Hyper Text Markup Language to designing and coding the CGI scripts. The style is relaxed. Many chapters have been written by experienced Web providers who offer not only a first-hand view of the Web but also lots of tips of the trade. Especially useful chapters review the anatomy of a form and several scripts providing tutorials on creating a form, an interactive graphic, a database front-end, and a dynamic document. The book has good clear examples, and is careful to distinguish any Netscape enhancements and extensions to HTML that are presented in the text. Several chapters have lists of useful resources to learn more about topics. In addition, the Wiley Computer Publishing Web site (<http://www.wiley.com/compbooks>) is providing the sample CGI applications in the book and links to Perl programming resources. The treatment of topics -- brief and to the point -- makes this book highly useful for those seeking a quick introduction or a quick answer. - Nancy R. John, University of Illinois at Chicago, [nrj@uic.edu](mailto:nrj@uic.edu)

#### William Horton, Lee Taylor, Arthur Ignacio, and Nancy L. Hoft

The Web Page Design Cookbook  
New York: Wiley, 1996.

649 p., paper, with CD-ROM. ISBN 0-471-13039-7  
Price \$US34.95

Imagine a cookbook where you can test and taste every recipe before you try make it on your own. With The Web Page Design Cookbook, William Horton and his skilled team have created literally a cookbook where you can view almost every recommendation before trying it on your own. Thanks to the book's invaluable CD-ROM, and frequent pointers from text to digital examples, you can literally view a Web solution before coding away on your own. In twelve entertaining chapters plus appendices pointing you to on-line and CD-ROM resources, this book will keep even the most expert Webmaster entertained and pleased. Like a cookbook, you don't read it from one end to another, you dive in where you need some help or a recipe to solve a specific situation. With great relief, just as an example, this cookbook helped me resolve a problem with tables that I couldn't resolve in any other way. Chapters on forms, image maps, and tables are well done as well those on aesthetics and international tooling and refining of your Web handiwork. For even Web experts, this book is a great find, with its advise, humor, and excellent examples. The accompanying CD-ROM is well integrated into the book, and should be an example to others on how to successfully marry print and digital media in one tidy package. - ejv



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### **Bryan Pfaffenberger**

Web Search Strategies

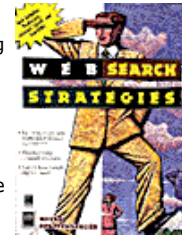
New York: MIS:Press, 1996.

427 p., paper, with diskette. ISBN 1-558-28470-2

Price \$US29.95

Bryan Pfaffenberger admits right off the bat (in his acknowledgments) that he's not a librarian, but that a librarian, Carole Leita at the Berkeley (Calif.) Public Library saved him repeatedly from making "technical gaffes," as he calls them, in this book. It's not surprising that librarians are taking a leadership role in working as truly intelligent agents on the Internet. This book explains only at the most basic level what most Web- and Internet-savvy librarians have been doing for years.

Twenty-eight chapters, divided into seven broad categories, describe Pfaffenberger's approach to Internet hunting and gathering. Much of what he writes will be obvious to most librarians, even those who are Internet-phobic. His descriptions of Boolean searching and some of Internet search engines may make some Internet-keen cringe, but for most, his explanations are useful and digestible. Like any book on this topic, some of the sites referenced have moved on and changed. In other cases, new search engines have appeared such as Digital Computer's Altavista that make some of Pfaffenberger's remarks ancient. Plus, there are gaps; not even a word anywhere in the book about Apple Computer's search engine, AppleSearch, or other similar commercial solutions. Nevertheless, those interested in a basic understanding of how to search the Internet might look to this book as a starting point. For more up-to-date facts and help, find a librarian working at an Internet-connected computer. - ejv



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### **Ed Tittel, Mark Gaither, Sebastian Hassinger, and Mike Erwin**

Foundations of World Wide Programming with HTML & CGI

Foster City, Calif.: IDG Books, 1995.

648 p., paper, with CD-ROM. ISBN 1-568-84703-3

Price \$US39.99

Common Gateway Interfaces and HTML make the World Wide Web interactive. Every time you fill out an Internet form, search a Z39.50 on-line library catalog, or marvel at a real-time traffic report, you use CGI, HTML, and Perl in imaginative ways, hidden from sight. The authors, in 32 chapters neatly divided into four sections, help you in this book, understand this coding mysticism, and help you improve your Internet publishing in new fashions. The first part of this book analyzes the trinity of the Internet, HTML, and CGI. In the second section, CGI applications, their advantages, and problems are described in further detail. The third section looks at specifics relative to WAIS, MIME, robots, image maps, and other techniques and components. The final section details advanced concepts such as real-time video and user interactions. Given the number of examples and pointers in this dense book, not everything will be found on the accompanying CD-ROM; a CD icon in the margin of the pages indicates where you will find further details (documents, software, examples) on the compact disc. For advanced Webmasters, this book will be an inspiration to improve your home pages and on-line skills. For those just starting out, this book will give some idea where the Web and its resources are moving, to a truly interactive and dynamic kind of environment. - ejv



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### **Jon Wiederspan and Chuck Shotton**

Planning and Managing Web Sites on the Macintosh: The Complete Guide to WebSTAR(TM) and MacHTTP

Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1995.

368 p., paper, with CD-ROM. ISBN 0-201-47957-5

Price \$US39.95

One-third of all Internet Web sites run on the Macintosh platform, and most of these run a version of WebSTAR or its predecessor, MacHTTP. This book is authored by a first-rate team of Mac experts, the author of MacHTTP and the creator of a very useful and popular source of Mac tutorials and support programs. It offers considerable help for Web site managers using Macintoshes, present and future. The authors focus on security and performance issues. They give good advice, based on their considerable experience, on configuring servers. Several sections address CGI scripting and other ways to extend the capabilities of server software. An accompanying CD-ROM contains a special time-limited version of WebSTAR 1.2.2, CGI scripts, and a selection of useful utilities. For several years, the authors have shared their knowledge over the Internet via lists and newsgroups, and this expanded collection of their wisdom and advice, on paper, will be welcomed by Web Mac-ophiles. -ejv

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Book reviews by Ed Valauskas and Nancy R. John.

*First Monday*, volume 1, number 2 (August 1996),

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