

Introduction

This is a book about Perl, the programming language. More specifically, this is a book about some aspects of Perl interacting with the Internet. The book includes coverage of CGI through the Perl CGI.pm module, as well as much additional information. You'll explore such topics as how to send e-mail from a Perl program through Net::SMTP, how to use Net::DNS, and even how to use Net::Ping. You'll learn how to build a templated web site two different ways, one with the help of HTML::Mason and the other with the Template Toolkit. You'll learn how to consume SOAP web services, how to read and write RSS, and how to work with XML, all through Perl.

What This Book Covers

This book attempts to give readers who have learned some Perl a grasp of the concepts and considerations for programming for the Web or creating a Perl program that interacts with the network. This book is fairly Linux-centric. That's not to say that these programs won't run on a Windows platform—they will, with very little tweaking.

The book is divided into five parts. The first part covers what comes to mind for many people when they think of Perl and web development—namely, CGI development and database interaction. The CGI module is examined, and I present tips for programming CGIs, such as the Carp module for debugging. The second part of the book widens the focus into Internet interaction with Perl. The Net:: family of modules is covered, along with the LWP for retrieving web pages through Perl. Coverage of XML and RSS make up the third part of the book, where you'll learn about XML parsing through Perl, consumption of SOAP web services, and RSS feeds. The fourth part of the book looks at mod_perl for development. The fifth and final part of the book examines templating through the Template Toolkit and HTML::Mason.

What You Should Know

To use this book successfully, you'll need to know about Perl basics such as scalar variables, arrays, and hashes; the use of control structures such as if/else, for, and while; and other topics such as those you'd find in a book like *Beginning Perl, Second Edition* (Apress, 2004). Essentially, you should be comfortable with Perl before reading this book. You should also know how to install Perl modules, whether through your distribution's mechanism, such as apt for Debian, or through the use of CPAN. The book's appendix is an excerpt from the aforementioned *Beginning Perl* title. If you haven't used Perl in a while, the appendix can provide a good refresher into the language, but you'll find that reading the entire *Beginning Perl* book will be helpful to pick up where the appendix leaves off.

This book will use Perl on a Linux system. The exact flavor of Linux isn't important, though I likely have some references to Debian. Perl being Perl means that the programs will run successfully with little modification on any system that can run Apache, including Microsoft Windows.

Why Apache?

Simply put, Apache works. Apache is overwhelmingly the most popular web server in use on the Internet, according to the Netcraft survey (http://news.netcraft.com/archives/web_server_survey.html). Apache is open source and configurable for just about any need. Apache is stable and predictable, even under heavy load. Apache is robust, serving web without using too many resources, and it's able to use resources effectively to serve heavy traffic loads.

This is not to say that Microsoft's IIS hasn't made good strides toward meeting its competition in Apache. IIS has indeed improved its stability with version 6, but with the benchmark being IIS 5 and its predecessors, it didn't take much to improve on the stability. However, IIS is still not as good as Apache at serving web and has a long way to go before getting there.