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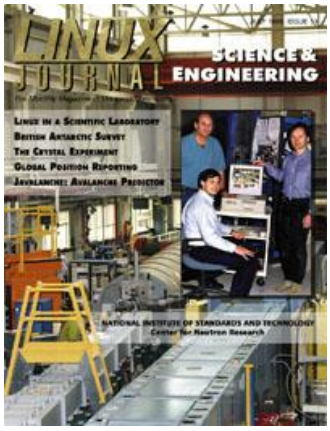

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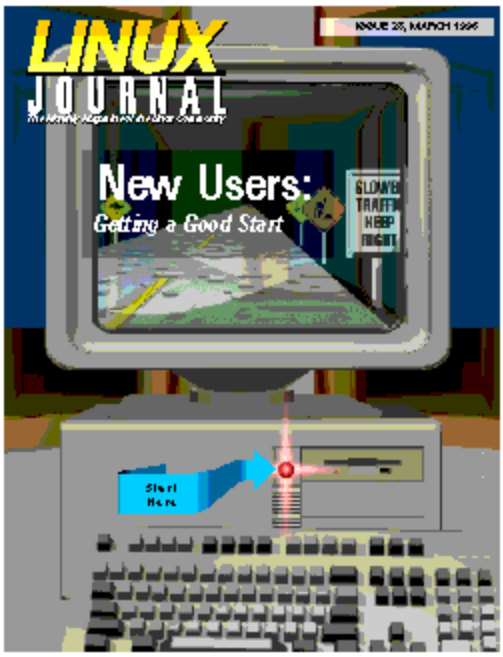

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Book Review

by Phil Hughes

Title: Building a Linux Internet Server
Authors: George Eckel and Chris Hare
Publisher: New Riders
ISBN: 1-56205-525-9
Price: $40.00 (including Linux CD)

The first thing that caught my eye about this book is that it is about doing something with Linux. Up until this point the major focus of Linux books has been how to install it, how to network it, what commands are available and such. This book, instead, offers the reader a chance to implement something which just happens to use Linux.

Let me quickly cover what I found wrong with this book. It in no way detracts from the usability of the book, only from the number of copies that are likely to be sold. The problem is that the audience isn't identified. As I read the book I continued to wonder who would really want to buy it. Sections start off with introductory material but quickly (in a few pages) get to the nitty gritty of command options and configuration files.

Finally, when I had finished reading the book and thought about it, I realized that the book was intended for someone like me. That is, someone with lots of Unix experience but a minimum of experience setting up Internet servers. Or the Unix systems administrator who was just told by his boss that the company was about to have a Web presence and he should implement it. The problem could easily be solved with a one-page Preface (are you listening New Riders?), and I would expect sales to jump.

That said, let's get to the content of the book. The first part covers an introduction to the Internet and talks about the ideas behind a business presence and advertising on the Internet. This part includes profiles of users, trends and a look at companies that are already on the Internet (primarily as WWW sites).

If part one convinced you, part two goes on to cover how to get connected. After a brief look at terminology and connection characteristics, the book goes on to cover the types of services you may want. Their list includes finger, telnet, e-mail, ftp, WAIS, Archie, Gopher and World Wide Web. Part two ends with information on types of connections with associated costs, legal considerations and security.

Assuming you want to go through with the mission of offering services, part three of the book goes on to describe each service and show you how to get it up and

running. This amounts to about half the book (150 pages) and covers Linux installation basics and how to set up ftp, freeWAIS, Gopher and WWW services. There is also a section on ZDIST, beta software that offers enhanced functionality over freeWAIS.

While seeing a description of how to set up freeWAIS is very rare (and, if you need it, well worth the cost of the book), I expect the service most often offered is WWW. There are huge books written on just setting up a WWW site, but in less than 20 pages, this book manages to explain where to get client software, how to set up the NCSA server software and how to get started. The next chapter goes on to cover management of WWW services and includes some design information, sources of conversion utilities, log management and analysis, CGI and security.

Appendices cover available Gopher services and sources of free software on the net. Finally, a short glossary covers the common terms you would expect to be new to the Internet-neophyte.

The CD-ROM has Slackware Linux on it (version 2.0.1) plus what appears to be a browser for some operating system that uses programs with names that end in .exe and .dll. Not having that system I was not able to evaluate this. Also, as Slackware 1.0.1 is history, the CD is not the exciting part of the book.

In conclusion, if you know what you are doing with a Unix system and are considering setting up some sort of Internet server, the book is well worth the money. And if you think your company should set up such a server but you need to convince management, there is enough in this book that they can read and understand to explain why it is a good (or not so good) idea.