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News from the *TER* Editorial Board

by Sharon Rankin

If you have comments about this issue or have suggestions to make, do not hesitate to send to email to sharon.rankin@mcgill.ca (<mailto:sharon.rankin@mcgill.ca>).

REVIEW OF: Scott Granneman. (2005). *Don't Click on the Blue E!* Sebastopol, CA: O'Reilly. (ISBN: 0-596-00939-9).

by Craig S. Booher

Subtitled " *Switching to Firefox* ", the author suggests this book is for "Windows users who are thinking about replacing the Blue E (Internet Explorer)" [1]. It will also be useful for those who have already switched and now want to know how to take advantage of the many features offered by this elegant tool.

Released in November 2004, Firefox quickly became the darling of the "bash Microsoft" crowd. Its popularity continued to rise throughout 2005 although usage statistics were often contradictory. Recent estimates project a penetration rate of 10-15% with one source [2] claiming Firefox is used by 25% of the market.

The author is unabashedly a Microsoft Internet Explorer (IE) basher. Fortunately, except for an occasional jab elsewhere in the book, Granneman confines his subjective remarks about all that's wrong with IE to the first chapter. Here one receives a very thorough introduction to the development of the browser, starting with Tim Berners-Lee and the birth of the World Wide Web in 1990. Along the way the reader learns how IE defeated Netscape in the browser wars and receives a strongly biased explanation for why everyone should replace IE with Firefox. Although interesting, pragmatic browser users can easily skip this chapter if they simply want to know what Firefox does and how they can make it work for them. In fact, one wonders why the author didn't include this information in Appendix A where there is an excellent overview of half a dozen other browsers - Opera, Camino, Konqueror, Safari, OmniWeb, and Lynx.

Chapter 2 discusses installing and configuring Firefox. Installation of Firefox is so straightforward that, unless you've never installed a single piece of software on your computer, the 4 pages addressing this topic are almost superfluous. However, the remainder of the chapter affords helpful information on using the Options menu to configure the installation.

This chapter focuses on the General options, including settings for home page, fonts and colors, and designating Firefox as the default browser. The remaining options are briefly discussed in the chapter, but extensively covered in Appendix B. Here the reader finds in-depth coverage of the Privacy, Web Features and Advanced options. In addition to describing the features, the author provides excellent advice on various security issues such as allowing cookies, blocking popup windows and enabling Java and JavaScript.

Chapter 2 concludes with a few other tidbits the reader will find helpful. First, it briefly describes how to customize the toolbars. Second, it explains the function of the Firefox profile (a folder containing your customized settings), where to find it on the hard drive of your computer and how to use Profile Manager to view, create, delete or rename a profile. Finally, the chapter introduces the reader to MozBackup, a very handy freeware utility for backing up your Firefox profile.

Chapter 3 walks the reader through some of the key features of Firefox, beginning with the Navigation and Bookmarks Toolbars. It calls attention to the Search Bar, a novel feature of Firefox that enables users to search for information using search engines at Internet sites such as Google, Yahoo!, and Amazon.com. Next, the reader is given a tour of the pulldown menus and contextual menus. With the exception of boilerplate functions (such as Open File), the author provides at least a brief description of almost every option found under the menus. This won't make the reader an expert in their use, but at least it provides the reader with a general understanding of their function.

Several features receive special attention. These include tabs, Sidebars (Firefox's answer to IE's Explorer Bars) and several tools known as managers - Bookmarks Manager and Download Manager. In each case, Granneman explains the purpose for the feature and provides advice on using the feature, including keyboard shortcuts.

Chapter 4 focuses on plug-ins, themes and extensions. Here the reader learns how to enhance their web experience by customizing Firefox. Plug-ins enable browsers to handle multimedia resources such as sounds and movies. Several plug-ins are discussed, including Macromedia Flash and Shockwave, QuickTime, RealPlayer, and Adobe Reader. Each section provides a description of the plug-in and a URL where one can go to download the plug-in. Some, such as Flash and Shockwave, can be installed using Firefox's Plugin Finder Service; others need to be installed manually.

Themes, also known as skins, change the look and feel of your browser. A brief section introduces some of the more common Firefox themes and instructs the reader on how to find, download, install and change themes.

Extensions enhance existing features or add new functionality to the browser. For example, ForecastFox displays the weather forecast in Firefox's Status Bar. Several hundred extensions are available for Firefox. Granneman highlights three types of extensions: searching, information display, and entertainment. Under searching he looks at GoogleBar, Yahoo!Companion and McSearchPreview (renamed BetterSearch beginning with version 1.8). ForecastFox and TargetAlert (which analyzes a link on a web page and tells the viewer whether the link is to another web page, a PDF file, a zip file that will be downloaded, or some other resource) are examples of extensions designed to enhance the user's access to information. On the lighter side, Granneman describes CardGames and CuteMenus, two extensions succinctly defined by their names.

Near the end of this chapter, the author issues a warning about Tabbrowser Extensions (TBE). Although not a malicious code, it is apparently so complex that some users report problems after installing it. Therefore, Granneman recommends the reader use caution if they intend to use TBE to configure tab options.

Chapter 5 wraps up this introduction to Firefox by looking at some of its more advanced features, either under configuration options or in the form of additional extensions. The chapter begins by exploring advanced searching techniques. These include finding words or phrases on a web page, the use of Smart Keywords to quickly search frequently accessed websites, and using Live Bookmarks to manage RSS feeds. Next, a section describes extensions that support the display of a web page in IE (IEView), block Flash animations (FlashBlock), block ads (Adblock), and magnify font size (TextZoom). The chapter concludes with a brief discussion on various security issues (such as warnings when you request an encrypted page or about a potentially dangerous script) and some advanced configuration features that allow you to display a list of all the options with their current status and to change the Firefox interface using CSS and HTML.

Combining his background as an educator and experience as a technology consultant, Granneman certainly delivers a readable and informative book. As with most O'Reilly books, the layout includes plenty of screen shots and many useful sidebars highlighting notes and warnings. One of the most helpful features of the book is found in the "Where to Learn More" section at the end of every chapter. Typically, each points to dozens of URLs that form a list of suggested resources for the reader who wants to explore the chapter topic in greater depth.

Compared to other O'Reilly books, one might consider this a "lite" read. There's no dense code, no complicated syntax, no chapter with pages and pages of commands. Nevertheless, this book is rich in information with considerable practical value. Given its target audience, it delivers the right amount of information to assist the Firefox newbie in rapidly moving up the learning curve as they transition from the IE dark side and begin using the Firefox force.

[1] p. x

[2] "Browser Statistics." Retrieved February 21, 2006, from http://www.w3schools.com/browsers/browsers_stats.asp.
(http://www.w3schools.com/browsers/browsers_stats.asp)

Craig S. Booher has over 20 years experience as an information professional designing, developing, and implementing information systems in academic libraries and corporate information centers.

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REVIEW OF: Anne M. Mitchell and Brian E. Surratt. (2005). *Cataloging and Organizing Digital Resources*. New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers. (How-to-do-it Manual for Librarians ; 139). (ISBN 1-55570-521-9 ppk.)

by Bradford Lee Eden

This book is another volume in the excellent series by Neal-Schuman Publishers geared towards practical and organized solutions to everyday challenges and concerns in the field of librarianship. The authors make clear in their preface that they feel that the online catalog is the library's best place to organize and provide access to information in its many forms and formats; they do agree, however, that it is only one tool among many. The book offers step-by-step instructions for cataloging digital resources.

Chapter 1, Thinking about the Organization of Digital Resources looks at all the issues involved in the management of online digital resources, from planning and resources to collection development and administration. Chapter 2, Establishing the Cataloging Work Flow goes more in depth with how to do original and copy cataloging of these items. Exploring Alternatives to Cataloging, chapter 3, examines three alternatives to traditional cataloging: federated searching, context-sensitive linking, and web lists. Determining one's own local strategy for dealing with the organization of online resources is presented in chapter 4, Determining Bibliographic Control in the Online Environment. Chapter 5 gets to the meat and potatoes of the cataloging rules and record content for describing online resources with Understanding Cataloging Rules and Guidelines. Chapter 6, Analyzing the Bibliographic Structure of Online Resources is an introduction to the next three chapters (Chapters 7-9), which deal with the various classes of online resources: monographs, serials, and integrating resources. The three classes are based on the most current cataloging rules and standards (which of course are in the process of being revised and transformed at this very moment)! The last chapter, Online Trends to Watch, is a futuristic look at the impact of new technologies on the cataloging and organization of digital resources.

Neal-Schuman books always provide excellent textual devices such as sidebars, summaries, and checklists to help the reader navigate through all of the information presented in its books, and this one is no exception. This book is essential reading material and an important addition to all technical services departments' reference sections, and to anyone dealing with the challenges surrounding providing access and organization to digital resources.

Bradford Lee Eden, Ph.D. is Head, Web and Digitization Services at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas Libraries.

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REVIEW OF: Thomas Myer. (2005). *No Nonsense XML Web development with PHP*. Collingwood, Australia: SitePoint. (ISBN: 0-9752402-0-x).

by Jim Blansett

In *No Nonsense XML Web Development With PHP*, Thomas Myer has set out with two goals in mind. First, to introduce his reader to the "world" of XML and, second, to provide a practical step-by-step guide to building an XML Content Management System (CMS). Myer is a trainer for technical writers, project managers, database geeks, and, on occasion, a business owner. While Myer is at home with the technically inclined, in this book, he wanted to create an XML guide for "mere mortals". He pictures this audience as individuals who are intelligent and curious, possessing a wide range of technical proficiencies, and "overwhelmed" by XML terminology, processes, and technologies. For best results, Myer recommends that a person embarking on this XML journey should be equipped with a working knowledge of the web (including HTML and some JavaScript skills), and some experience with server-side programming language. If this describes you, and you have a couple of weeks to invest, then this is the perfect book for you.

Mr. Myer takes the reader by the hand and leads him/her through a maze of terminology, coding, and rationale. Myer takes a friendly, personal, approach as he encourages readers' persistence while pieces of the CMS are put together. Practical examples are given in each chapter that lead to the creation of separate components of the CMS project. Definitions are clearly marked in a consistent manner so that the reader can readily refer back to them (I found myself doing this on more than one occasion), and the "code" stands out clearly in gray boxes. Large, bolded, headings clearly label topics discussed. The author provides representative graphics and indented text to further draw the readers' attention to important and/or interesting points. As an example, for critical points, a graphic depicting a circled exclamation point (!) above the word "Important" readily draws the readers' attention to adjacent indented text. Myer makes every effort to clearly organize complex material.

The first three chapters lay the groundwork for the CMS project. Chapter 1 introduces XML (Extensible Markup Language). Meyer explains the history of XML and how it can make Web applications "smarter, more versatile, and more powerful". He provides examples of HTML code and compares it to XML, which lays the groundwork for XML's structural standpoint (did I say that this book was not for the faint of heart? The reader must be willing to be persistent through many twists and turns as Meyer weaves interconnections). Myer explains that, until now, web designers have been allowed to be a bit relaxed when using HTML, but the luxury of relaxation will not be possible with XML. Although there is a great degree of flexibility within XML, one must play strictly by the rules, of which there are many. Myer patiently takes the reader through these rules with the introduction of DTD (document type definition - a language

that describes the requirements necessary for valid XML documents), along with XML elements, tags, and nodes. By now, you are probably getting picture that there is a great deal to know; however, with diligence, by the end of Chapter 3, the reader has learned most of the requirement for a CMS project.

Chapters 4 and 5 work with displaying XML in a browser through the use of XSLT (Extensible Style Sheet Translation) and allow the reader to build many of the public display templates that are needed for the CMS project, as well as develop an XSLT-driven site map. The next two chapters, 6 and 7, deal with manipulating XML on the client-side and server-side, respectively. Manipulating Client-side tools include the use of Document Object Modeling (DOM) and handling XML in different browsers (i.e. Internet Explorer compared to Firefox and other Mozilla-based browsers). Server-side manipulation looks at using PHP 5 and exploring differences in function libraries for working with XML such as SAX (simple API for XML), DOM, and SimpleXML (allows updating of values in a straightforward fashion). By the end of Chapter 7, administrative tool files are created that provide login/verification templates and article create/update/delete templates.

Chapter 8 teaches how to consume an RSS (Really Simple Syndication, an XML format for distributing or syndicating content) feed from another site and display the headlines as part of your own site which adds functionality to the CMS project in customizable headline feed. This addition allows each user to select the newest categories of interest on-the-fly. In this same vein, Chapter 9 examines Web Services and teaches the creation of an XML-RPC server and client for use with the CMS project. XML-RPC is a "very simple protocol" that uses XML messages to call a function stored on another computer.

Finally, Chapter 10 aligns XML and relational databases. In this chapter, the reader learns how to use phpMyAdmin (an all-purpose MySQL interface built into PHP that helps administer a MySQL Web database). For the final part of the CMS project, a PHP script and database tables are added that facilitate a back-up of versions of XML content. To finish the project, two appendices provide further information: Appendix A provides a list of PHP's XML functions and; Appendix B provides the finishing touches for the CMS project by providing various PHP scripts for an administrative interface for your new site.

In *No Nonsense XML Web Development with PHP*, Myer has led the reader through a complex subject. Unlike some of the other writings on XML that are available, this book was not intended to cover the vast array of XML technologies. It was designed to cover practical uses of XML that Web developers can implement right now. While the author advises that the reader come to this book with a working knowledge of the web (some skills in HTML, JavaScript and server-side programming language), Myer's step-by-step guide provides a great degree of background and interconnections that could provide a dedicated novice with the tools to understand the topic well enough to produce the model CMS project. A person

with the suggested background should find this book readily fills in the holes in his/her knowledge and provides a solid foundation to relieve feelings of being overwhelmed by the complexity of XML Web development.

Jim Blansett is Information Resources Librarian in the McLure Education Library of the University of Alabama.

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REVIEW OF: Sid Steward. (2004). *PDF Hacks: 100 Industrial-Strength Tips and Tools*. Sebastopol, CA: O'Reilly. (ISBN 0-596-00655-1).

by James L. Van Roekel

PDFs, or Portable Document Format documents are everywhere. Adobe Systems have been developing and redeveloping the format since the early 1990's. This has given 10 years to publish an untold number of documents in a format that can be read on just about every platform keeping all of the document formatting that the author had taken the time to design, with free software.

For those of us who create, utilized, and distribute PDF files, *PDF Hacks* is not only a fun read, it has great information. The Tips and Tools are just that; everything from managing plugins to embedding fonts; collecting data to using PHP to create PDF documents.

The volume is organized into 278 pages containing 7 chapters: Consuming PDF, Managing a Collection, Authoring and Self-Publishing (includes hacks on selling through Amazon.com), Creating PDF and Other Editions, Manipulating PDF Files, Dynamic PDF, and Scripting and Programming Acrobat (the PDF creation software). Source code, illustrations, and screen captures are all very legible and easily understood. *PDF Hacks* discusses the use of other software such as Microsoft Word, Excel, Adobe Photoshop, and Illustrator. The book also supplies a companion supplemental website containing the codes in an electronic format as well as sample hacks: <http://www.oreilly.com/catalog/pdfhks/> (<http://www.oreilly.com/catalog/pdfhks/>).

Hack number 32, Create Interactive PDF with Your Word Processor, is especially useful for those who utilize lengthy electronic documents. This hack describes turning outlines and other styles into PDF bookmarks and links that allows for greater navigability with a document. The PDF of this hack is on the book website.

Hack number 86, Use Perl to Create PDF (also available at the book website), is a good example of creating dynamic content output to PDFs. My university uses a similar method with our reporting system. Rather than receiving reports as green-bar prints or email and the like, a popup window with a generated PDF appears, formatted for printing just another way to utilize our tools.

Finally, while this is not described in the book (though the concepts are there), we use PDFs in booking our ITV (interactive television) classrooms for offered courses within a semester. Because we require original signature (not electronic), we are able to setup our request PDF to be filled out online and submitted to a printer for signature. In the back end, the data from the form is sent to our ITV classroom calendaring system and email to the techs who setup the rooms, all from one click of the submit button.

PDF Hacks follows the quickly recognizable O'Reilly design. I would recommend this to all users on PDF documents, and, especially, PDF designers. Many libraries already use PDF documents as internal forms, electronic reserves, and the like. *PDF Hacks* will assist in taking your documents to the next level.

James L. Van Roekel is the Director of Academic Instructional Technology and Distance Learning Academic Affairs at the Sam Houston State University in Huntsville, Texas.

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REVIEW OF: Cheah Chu Yeow. (2005). *Firefox Secrets*. Collingwood, Australia: SitePoint. (ISBN: 0-9752402-4-2).

by Michael Yunkin

Because the Firefox browser is no longer new, it is reasonable to ask if there are really any "secrets" left in it? This book, though not without its problems, makes it clear that, for the newbie or casual user, the answer is a definite "Yes."

The book is organized into eight chapters, with a short introduction and a usable index. The chapters are as follows:

1. Introducing Your New Favorite Browser
2. Essential Browsing Features
3. Revisiting Web Pages
4. Dressing Up Firefox

5. Personalizing Firefox
6. Tips, Tricks, and Hacks
7. Web Development Nirvana
8. Living on the Edge

Chapter 1 introduces the reader to Firefox, focusing on the value of open source software, the problems inherent in Internet Explorer (IE), and how one goes about finding and installing Firefox on Windows, Mac, or Linux. This chapter sets the tone of the book, and shows the author as a true fan of the browser. Although this enthusiasm begins as endearing and even infectious, it sometimes (throughout the book) becomes a little irritating, particularly when the Microsoft-bashing begins. Yes, Firefox is more secure than IE, but this could have been highlighted without a subsection called "Complacency at Microsoft."

Chapter 2 provides a brief overview of Firefox's native features, including tabbed browsing, pop-up blocking, the download manager, and JavaScript-disabling tool. Also introduced here are Firefox's myriad searching mechanisms. Searching in Firefox is really the book's leitmotif, and the author comes back to it again and again with the acronym TMTOWTFI (There's More Than One Way To Find It). This doesn't become distracting, though, because it turns out Firefox really does offer many ways to conduct -- and configure -- searching.

Chapters 4 and 5, which should probably have been condensed into a single chapter on personalizing Firefox, deal with changing the look and functionality of the browser. Here the author looks at some of his favorite Themes (or skins) and Extensions, including instructions on how to locate and install both, and some troubleshooting tips. Extensions are really the great draw of Firefox for most people, and the author does a good job of explaining what they are and how particular ones might be useful. Some of the extensions are fairly easy to understand (miniT, SessionSaver, Adblock), while others are much more difficult to comprehend, install, and configure, and perhaps should not have been included (SyncMarks). I particularly appreciated the detailed discussion of Mouse Gestures, a concept I had read about before but didn't entirely understand. Troubleshooting is covered very well, with an in-depth look at possible extension installation problems and fixes.

It's important to note, though, that this book was published before Firefox version 1.5 was released, and there have been many reports of extension compatibility issues that are not covered here.

Chapter 6 really gets to the meat of the book, and introduces a number of Firefox customizations and features that are probably unknown to the casual user. This chapter deals primarily with two of the browser's features: `about:config` and Profiles. The `about:config` command in Firefox is a gateway to truly customizing the browser interface and functionality. Although probably much more palatable for the more tech-oriented user, making changes to this interface can completely change your browsing experience by altering such things as: making all frames resizable, customizing pop-up windows, and speeding up page loading

times. Similarly, making changes to file in your Profile (via the ChromEdit interface) can change many characteristics of web pages you may have thought immutable by, for example, adding customized CSS styles to web pages you visit. Again, techies will get a lot more out of these "hacks" than the less tech-oriented.

This chapter also contains a number of easier-to-implement tips, like altering the browser template by removing icons or the search box, and using the Google search box as a calculator.

Entitled "Web Development Nirvana," Chapter 7 reveals the true target audience of the book: web developers. It's no secret to developers that Firefox has a number of developer-oriented extensions (LiveHTTPHeaders, Web Developers Toolbar, Checky, Colorzilla, FireFTP, Greasemonkey, and Venkman are discussed here), but many may be surprised by the breadth of tools that come natively with the browser, including: the ability to view partial HTML source codes, the Page Info document reports (which show a wealth of information about web pages, such as security, form information, links, etc.), a JavaScript debugger, a DOM viewer and editor, and more. This chapter is certainly not for the novice, but developers will find a lot to like, and very likely a lot they didn't know before.

Chapter 8 tells readers where to get Firefox news and gossip online, including websites, forums, and blogs (the author's own blog is included). It also contains some more troubleshooting suggestions, an explanation of Firefox's "nightly builds," and even tips for wannabe Firefox evangelists (tip #1: "Hold a party -- some of the Firefox 1.0 parties were huge.")

I do have a few complaints about the book's organization. For example, since so much of the book is dedicated to Firefox customizations, it seems counter-intuitive to have a chapter called "Personalizing Firefox," particularly when that chapter is entirely devoted to extensions. Why not call it "Extending Firefox," or simply "Extensions"? Additionally, changing the organization could greatly increase the book's usefulness as a reference work without losing its narrative. For example, why not put all of Firefox's searching abilities in a single chapter on searching, rather than having this functionality described throughout the book (to be fair, though, the index does a good job of listing all these sections)? Why not consolidate all the troubleshooting tips into a single section? Also, there is a lengthy section on the merits of tabbed browsing, which is followed by a how-to for using tabs. It seems to me that a novice user would prefer it the other way around.

Continuing with the negatives, the book attempts to capture the laid-back humor of a Dummies book, but occasionally crosses the line into irritating cutesiness ("You aren't restricted to searching on Google, even if it is the best search engine around and complemented by totally cool software.") On the security front, since so many users probably make the switch to Firefox

for security reasons, consolidating all the security and privacy functionality into a single chapter or sub-chapter would seem a no-brainer. And finally, a chart detailing all of Firefox's keyboard shortcuts would be a useful inclusion.

On the positive side, I actually did learn a few useful Firefox tricks that I didn't know before: smart keywords allow users to do targeted searches from the URL location bar (for example, type in "wp patrick henry" (without the quotes) to go straight to the Wikipedia article for Patrick Henry, or type "dict extemporaneous" for a definition of extemporaneous from Dictionary.com); I can make CSS changes in my profile to change the look of web pages I visit, no extensions needed; and there's really a great deal of hidden configurability that I know will be useful to me in the future.

So is the reading this book worthwhile? The answer is a qualified yes. Non-techies who've recently switched to Firefox will find a lot of useful information, particularly regarding customizing the look of the browser and installing and using extensions, presented in a very readable and easily-understood way. Techies will find a few useful tips, including some that are great time-savers, but perhaps not enough to justify the price.

Michael Yunkin is Web Content/ Metadata Manager for the University of Nevada, Las Vegas Libraries.

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About TER

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