

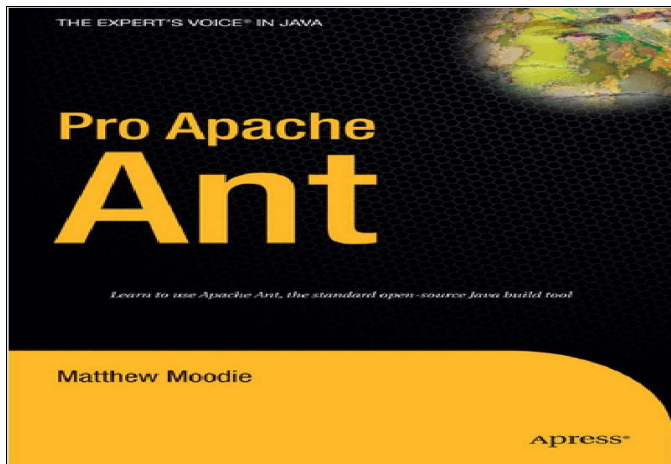


Published on Free Software Magazine (<http://www.freesoftwaremagazine.com>)

Book review: Pro Apache Ant *by Matthew Moodie*

By Steven Goodwin

This book covers the popular Java-oriented build tool, Ant. It is a combination of reference manual and user guide, which demonstrates how to create Ant scripts that can compile projects, test them, and perform the many other manual tasks involved in the build pipeline, above and beyond standard compilation phase.



Pro Apache Ant

The first impressions are good, allaying any initial fears that the book would be one-sided, focusing too heavily on either reference or manual descriptions. It gets into the material quickly and effectively, creating confidence in the book and the readers ability to effectively use Ant. It does this by opening up a lot of basic functionality of Ant early on, thereby limiting the number of “What if?” questions you may have.

The book is ordered sequentially from simple common tasks, to more complex, specific, ones. Whether by accident or design, it is a good approach for books like this

The contents

At a surprising small 340 pages, this book still packs a lot between the covers. Beginning with a gentle introduction to Ant and its installation, the book quickly moves onto the basic mechanisms of Ant. This is taken at a sensible speed, given its importance to the process. From here, Moodie takes a very practical approach by taking a real-world project and demonstrates how to build it. Much of this becomes self-explanatory after a while and is either a testament to the ease of his writing, or the simplicity of the original Ant design. The book ends with the “good stuff” on API usage and Ant tasks, both of which allow you to execute custom code on particular files in your project.

Who's this book for?

The topic as a whole is not for the faint hearted, but any intermediate level developer should be able to follow the logic and examples laid out here with relative ease. Some of the material is complex by its very nature and may take a couple of read throughs before the solutions feel completely natural. But principally, if you're tasked with work on the build processes you should be of a suitable mindset to handle the examples and repeat them in your own work.

Relevance to free software

Ant itself is free software, as is JUnit (the unit-testing framework that the book integrates with Ant), Tomcat and the various tasks and examples included within the text. By using examples from the free software field you get drawn into advocacy without realizing it, and by the end of the book you can see the wealth of good development you've managed to achieve without even thinking of proprietary software!

Pros

This is a clean and concise book that appears to cover the entire the breadth and depth of the Ant. The author reiterates the means by which Ant build files should mirror the structure of the project, thereby encouraging best practice and an effective use of the Ant system. The examples are fulsome and cover a lot of ground.

Cons

The examples cover a disparate range of technologies (JUnit, Jakarta, PGP, and so on) that may not be installed, by default, on your system which can limit the practicality of many examples. You definitely need your own (sand)box for this. As a consequence, those working on both GNU/Linux and Windows might feel left out when developing with the latter.

Also, the book contains a lot of sample code that can make the book feel padded in places, such as when discussing customized loggers. This abundance of examples, sample output and screenshots (especially when discussing Ant extensions) can tempt the eye to skip over large sections of potentially useful text.

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|----------------|----------------|
| Title | Pro Apache Ant |
| Author | Matthew Moodie |
| Publisher | Apress |
| ISBN | 1590595599 |
| Year | 2006 |
| Pages | 340 |
| CD included | No |
| FS Oriented | 10 |
| Over all score | 9 |

In short

Biography

Steven Goodwin (/user/39" title="View user profile.): When builders go down to the pub they talk about football. Presumably therefore, when footballers go down to the pub they talk about builders! When Steven Goodwin goes down the pub he doesnâ€ t talk about football. Or builders. He talks about computers. Constantly... He is also known as the angry man of open source. Steven Goodwin (<http://www.bluedust.com/blog/>) a blog that no one reads that, and a beer podcast (<http://www.thebeercrate.com>) that no one listens to :)

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