



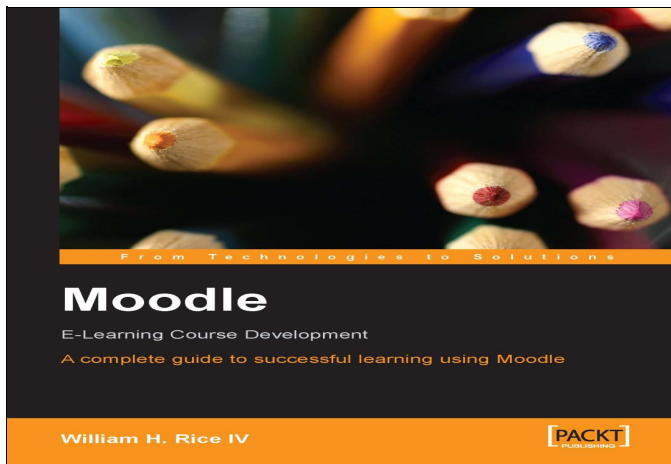
Published on Free Software Magazine (<http://www.freesoftwaremagazine.com>)

Book review: Moodle E-Learning Course Development *by William H. Rice IV*

Enabling Learning

By Alan Berg

Within the Education biosphere, there are a number of significant free software Course Management Systems. Moodle is one and a popular one at that. The book Moodle E-Learning Course Development by William H. Rice IV is a serious, practical guide to getting a Moodle installation off the ground and imparting the relevant knowledge required for a teacher or an administrator to create a well-balanced online PHP based learning environment.



The book's cover

Learning is an important aspect of our lives. Online learning enables previously disqualified groups such as single parents and full time workers to learn outside the time constraints of conventional campus structures. Free software has delivered tools such as Moodle, Sakai, Atutor that fulfill this any time functionality with feature-rich sets and dynamically active group awareness.

My first impression of the book was that it was a screen-grab-rich, quick read that does the job that it is intended for. Moodle, being a low maintenance PHP application, requires relatively little installation effort and this reality is reflected in the book. The book dwells correctly on the more important core business of making and administering courses.

Moodle, being a low maintenance PHP application, requires relatively little installation effort

The contents

Impressively practical and accurate, this book's 250 pages of straightforward and easy to understand text is another effective book from the PACKT publishing stable. Rice writes in such a way that you don't have to be

Book review: Moodle E-Learning Course Development by William H. Rice IV

a rocket scientist to follow along and create an interactive website and fill it with content. Each chapter has a purpose that builds on the chapters before. Starting with installation, you'll soon find yourself managing categories, creating static and dynamic content, grading, customizing and extending via modules. Yes, you'll learn the system at a rapid, breath-taking pace.

You'll learn the system at a rapid breath-taking pace

Being a developer with a bias towards big educational systems and large audiences, I always like to have my escape routes for debugging and backing up. Therefore, I was pleased to see a section that others may consider mundane on the location of logs (p197) and a solid description of how to back up sites (p219-229). In a previous life, I was a teacher and a course writer. And, with that hat on, I avidly read chapter 6 about the dynamic features that potentially keep the students attention e.g.: chat functionality, forums and the inbuilt wiki.

Who's this book for?

Moodle is an easy to use, feature rich, and thus popular Course Management System. I would expect anyone that wishes to get to know the product quickly will find this book of value, for example teachers and administrators. Further, I see no reason not to abuse Moodle and deploy within an intranet environment as a kind of interactive local wiki for small businesses. Thus, this book may be also be an interesting read for commercially interested parties.

Relevance to free software

The development community has written Moodle with the PHP and made this learning Management System database agnostic with most deployments pointing to MySQL. The client software is a web browser and in theory Moodle can be viewed with full rendering accuracy from within Firefox as well as IE6 and IE7.

The book itself focuses in only on the pragmatic aspects of deploying Moodle which is pure free software. Installation instructions very briefly mention deployment of PHP on a Windows system. However, the vast majority of the book deals with interactions with the GUI and thus nearly 100% of the time dealing with free software alone.

Pros

William Rice has written a clear explanation of the core details required to get a working instance of Moodle off the ground with solid course content backing. I particularly like the fact that it has so many screen grabs, making the walkthroughs transparent and obvious, even to me.

Cons

The Moodle book is specific to Moodle and not Course Management Systems in general. This may limit its value for decision makers.

The section on installation is perhaps a little on the short side. However, the press and many websites have dealt with any potentially missing content, on the subject of installing PHP, thoroughly and on numerous occasions.

Book review: Moodle E-Learning Course Development by William H. Rice IV

Title Moodle E-Learning Course Development
Author William H. Rice IV
Publisher PACKT
ISBN 1904811299
Year 2006
Pages 250
CD included No
FS Oriented 10
Over all score 8

In short

Biography

[Alan Berg](#) (/user/8" title="View user profile.):

Alan Berg Bsc. MSc. PGCE, has been a lead developer at the Central Computer Services at the University of Amsterdam for the last eight years. In his spare time, he writes computer articles. He has a degree, two masters and a teaching qualification. In previous incarnations, he was a technical writer, an Internet/Linux course writer, and a science teacher. He likes to get his hands dirty with the building and gluing of systems. He remains agile by playing computer games with his kids who (sadly) consistently beat him physically, mentally and morally.

You may contact him at [reply.to.berg](mailto:reply.to.berg@chello.nl) At [chello.nl](mailto:reply.to.berg@chello.nl)

Copyright information

This article is made available under the "Attribution" Creative Commons License 3.0 available from <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>.

Source URL:

http://www.freesoftwaremagazine.com/articles/book_review_moodle_e-learning_course_development
