



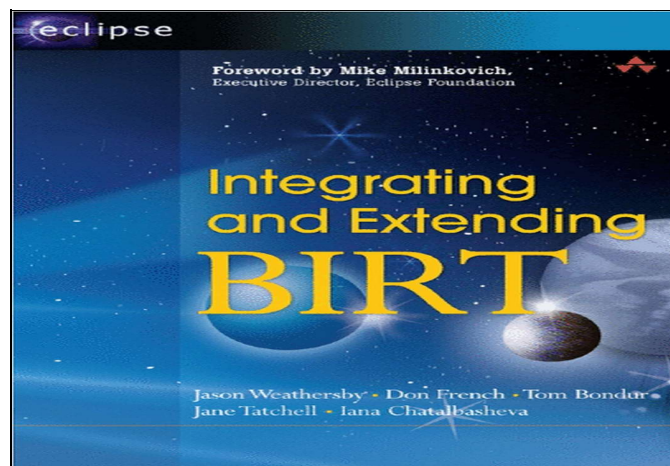
Published on Free Software Magazine (<http://www.freesoftwaremagazine.com>)

Book review: Integrating and Extending BIRT by *Jason Weathersby, Don French, et al*

Let us integrate

By Alan Berg

Integrating and Extending BIRT authored by Jason Weathersby, Don French, Tom Bondur, Jane Tatchell, Iana Chatalbasheva and published by Addison Wesley is obviously all about BIRT. So what is BIRT? BIRT is a subproject of Eclipse. Eclipse is one of the big well-known free software projects that has had a deep and profound impact on a large community of programmers. Not only can you consider Eclipse an Integrated Development Environment, but also a graphic tool kit and a plug-able structure, where it is very easy to add extra features and frameworks to. One of the feature rich area's of expansion is the Business Intelligence and Reporting Tools (BIRT) project. BIRT enables complex report generation from within Eclipse and includes facilities for writing to HTML and PDF and a web application for viewing. Further, developers can apply BIRT as a set of libraries to extend their most valued applications and expand the feature set of the Eclipse embedded report generation tool.



The book's cover

Integrating and extending BIRT requires previous background knowledge in report generation to set the book properly in its context. The authors have delivered a solid blend of knowledge, which they communicate in a direct and straightforward manner.

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The contents

Within the five sections, 19 chapters and 608 pages of this book there's enough information for a well seasoned application builder to push embedded reports or sub-functionality into their most favored applications.

The contents

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Systematically, inch by inch this content driven book builds up your basic understanding of what BIRT as a complex framework is and how to extend and embed the various feature sets, especially the report generation within Eclipse itself. Section 1 discusses installation and deployment of BIRT, Section II explains what the framework actually can do. Chapter 7 details the Report Object Model XML format for saving reports. XML with a well-defined schema is easier for computers to understand and convert than formats that are more propitiatory or obtuse. The existence of an XML export is therefore an important buying factor for a business that does not wish like many other businesses to be locked into a single manufacturer's product set.

For those of you that are itching to get your hands dirty with making reports more interactive or intelligent, then section III on scripting in a report design will be the section most visited. Both the use of JavaScript and Java and their interactions with the exposed event handlers is thoroughly detailed.

Section IV on Integrating BIRT functionality into applications was for me the most interesting part of the whole story. I like the concept of embedding the chart rendering functionality (chapter 14) and adding some needed spice to some of my less visual and ugly applications—you know, the ones that do not need refactoring at all.

I like the concept of embedding the chart rendering functionality to some of my less visual and ugly applications

Who's this book for?

The developer who wishes for a head start in integrating and extending BIRT should consider buying this book. Anyone else should not.

Relevance to free software

BIRT and Eclipse are free software so the book is 100% about free software. Further, BIRT simplifies the effort of creating reports and viewing the reports in PDF, HTML and, over the course of time, other formats. Free software developers who are looking to enhance their products with chart rich reporting features should consider coalescing around this product and framework. Further, the ROM XML format for saving reports is an open format that makes writing code for importing to other tools practical.

Pros

If you are past generating your first reports and wish to script-in a report design or integrate reports into your most favored applications, then this specialized book will lower the pain of the learning curve.

Cons

BIRT is a highly specialized topic area and may find a relatively small audience. Further, if you wish only to generate reports and not to extend BIRT, then the sister book [BIRT, A Field Guide To Reporting](#) is more immediately relevant.

Title	Integrating and Extending BIRT
Authors	Jason Weathersby, Don French, Tom Bondur, Jane Tatchell, Iana Chatalbasheva
Publisher	Addison Wesley Professional

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ISBN 0321443853
Year 2006
Pages 608
CD included No
FS Oriented 10
Over all score 8

In short

Biography

[Alan Berg](/user/8) (/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.

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