

AppleScript for the Internet - Karl Peter

Pros: At long last a book about AppleScript actually in print!

Cons: Given the dearth of AppleScript books per se, broader coverage than its use on the 'net would be welcome.

Categories: Programming

Authors: Ethan Wilde

Publisher: Visual QuickStart Guide,
PeachPit <<http://www.peachpit.com/>> Press, Berkeley

Page count: 340

Illustrations: Monochrome

ISBN: 0201353598

RRP: US \$34.95, CA \$48.95,

UK £21.95 approx.

YET ANOTHER UNSUNG TREASURE

Given how every Macintosh comes with a free, powerful and relatively easy-to-use automation and scripting language called AppleScript, that allows us to control so many aspects our Macs' daily operations whether within the Finder, specific applications or our interaction with the Internet, it has been surprising to say the least that there have been next to no books available on the subject.

Scripting language master Danny Goodman once wrote a long out of print book called Danny Goodman's AppleScript Handbook, that various small presses keep threatening to republish some day so celebrated it was back then, and the venerable Berkeley Mac Users' Group (BMUG) once released the only other AppleScript alternative, the Tao of AppleScript.

A HISTORY OUT-OF-PRINT

Try looking for both titles at Amazon.com and you will be invited to add your name to an already considerably long list of hopefuls wanting a copy of either in any condition short of unreadable. Apple themselves once issued a couple of short AppleScript reference books, again well out of print although they can be found in PDF form on the AppleScript Web site at <<http://applescript.apple.com/>>. I am no fan of doing deep study

off a PDF file on a computer screen however.

PeachPit are to be congratulated therefore in spotting so obvious a gap and releasing this book that addresses some of the automation needs of millions of Mac owners worldwide.

WHY APPLESCRIPT?

So what is AppleScript and why is it so useful? Prior to its upgrading in Mac OS 8.5 when AppleScript was rewritten as native PowerPC code and thus gained a five-fold increase in speed, AppleScript was perceived as the exclusive province of print productivity experts. It was most often used to automate the legion of daily production tasks in the publishing and printing industries, and a small tribe of AppleScript-for-print specialists grew up around the centres of those industries.

Later, with the advent of the World Wide Web would-be webmasters found themselves in charge of Mac servers but minus the programming skills their UNIX server counterparts could lay claim to. They needed to create CGI (Common Gateway Interface) applications to control data and server operations. AppleScript proved the answer, especially given its close relation to plain English and thus lower learning curve than the alternatives like Perl (or MacPerl in its Macintosh incarnation). Meanwhile other Mac users were discovering that AppleScript was good at automating a range of other types of applications, especially those where their developers had built in extensive AppleScript support. A user community began to grow and exchange knowledge, and when Apple hinted it may discontinue AppleScript development were vociferous enough to convince them to improve it radically from Mac OS 8.5 onwards.

IS THIS BOOK THE COMPLETE ANSWER?

Emphatically, and regretfully, no. It does a great job at quickly coaching us through getting started in AppleScript with reference to objects and strings and similar scripting things, then loops, error handling and handlers. It is a little heavy in parts, and might better have been done through short follow-me tutorials that allow us to achieve little victories, that grow in complexity along with our understanding.

Most people new to AppleScript will be new to any kind of programming language after all. Chapters 4 and 5 are about using AppleScript on the Desktop and in controlling Open Transport and Networking, something virtually every user does nowadays even if just to dial up the 'net and collect and send email. The rest of the book is about FTP, HTML, CGIs, FileMaker Pro and other non-Web applications in relation to the Web. The grist of being a webmaster rather than a regular Mac user.

MY RECOMMENDATION

The emphasis in AppleScript for the Internet is in the scripting language's use with the 'net, the Web, FTP and email, but 5 chapters out of 24 are of value to non-'net users. This being the only AppleScript book available right now, better than nothing at all, then my recommendation is you get it to learn what the fuss is all about. At the Visual QuickStart Guides' low prices it will be a money well spent. Then we can live in hope that PeachPit or some other equally prescient publisher will bring us the definitive

AppleScript book for newbies and those who are already power users alike. AppleScript is too important to have been ignored like this for so long.

© Copyright 1999 Karl-Peter Gottschalk. All rights reserved.

 Karl-Peter Gottschalk,
<<mailto:karlpeter@ozemail.com.au>>