

***Unleashing Web 2.0: From Concepts to Creativity***

by Gottfried Vossen and Stephan Hagemann  
(Morgan Kaufmann, 2007)

Review by Ross Gagliano

Vossen is both an IS & CS Professor at the University of Muenster, and also served as European Editor-in-Chief for Elsevier's international information systems journal. Hagemann is his PhD student whose area of research is Web technology.

Their book banks on the assumption that 21st century individuals no longer will rely exclusively on printed matter, physical office space, and local libraries. Clearly, the computer and the WWW have changed all that. What this book attempts to do is to identify the salient features of prior Web events, features, and activities as they pertain to what some envision as a second (hence, the '2.0') generation.

Thus, Web 2.0 is seen as an ever-evolving, two-way information-communication model whereas the initial Web was based primarily on the time-tested, one-way, broadcast approach, all of which leads inexorably towards the concept of the 'Semantic Web.' Wikis and blogs are two examples; wikis (means 'fast' in Hawaiian) and blog (a contraction of 'Web Log').

The book refreshes much of the early Web history in terms of it as a: "library" - search engines and portals; "commerce platform" - facilitating buying and selling; and "media repository" - a place to retrieve all sorts of 'free' stuff like information. Recalling Thomas Friedman's 1995 term 'world flattener,' Vossen and Hagemann see Web 2.0 technologies as becoming increasingly digital, mobile, virtual, and personal.

Certainly not a detailed 'how-to' book, there are discussions of HTML, scripting languages, P2P protocols, APIs, Web procedure calls and 'mash-ups,' Apps, and tagging. In an evolving body of Rich Internet Applications (RIAs) are also developments such as AJAX, OpenLaszlo, and Ruby on Rails.

A neat aspect of the book is that it can serve both the CS and IS communities. Obviously, it may disappoint each as there is always the problem of being either too 'techie' or not enough. My take is that this book can be a great 'stocking stuffer' for the Webster in your life, be he/she a business person or a game player.

Ross Gagliano is a retired professor and co-founder of the Computer Science Department at Georgia State University. Previously, he was a senior researcher at the Georgia Tech Research Institute.

***The LEGO Mindstorms NXT Idea Book: Design, Invent, and Build***

by Martijn Boogaarts, Jonathan A. Daudelin, Brian L. Davis, Jim Kelly, David Levy, Lou Morris, Fay Rhodes, Rick Rhodes, Matthias Paul Scholz, Christopher R. Smith, and Rob Torok (All contributors to TheNXTStep blog)

(No Starch Press, 2007)

Review by Ross Gagliano

Listen up, Lego Lovers! Here is truly a DIY-gem from amongst a raft of similar books (too numerous to list) that was generated by a host of eleven Lego lunatics. The main distinction is that this book provides a straight-forward how-to for the Lego Mindstorms NXT kit, plus there are plans and parts lists for eight different robots (Beach Buggy Chair, BenderBot, CraneBot, marty, RaSPy, ScanBot, slot machine, and 3D PhotoBot).

Carefully explained and illustrated (dozens and dozens of photos) are NXT parts such as axles, beams, and gears, along with directions to not only build the robots but to program them in the NXT-G programming language. One appendix helps with troubleshooting (if the robot fails to work), and the other discusses prices and choices. LEGO aficionados, old and new, most certainly can use this fairly inexpensive book to not only learn about Lego robot construction but also to determine how much they want to invest in this geeky but chic techno-divertissement (or toy, whatever!).

Merry Christmas.

Ross Gagliano is a retired professor and co-founder of the Computer Science Department at Georgia State University. Previously, he was a senior researcher at the Georgia Tech Research Institute.