DSL and cable modem services are rolled out, and as Internet access becomes mission-critical to more businesses, network redundancy will be seen as prudent and affordable.

Pete Dyson

Detailed reference for taking TeX to the Web

***The LaTeX Web Companion*, by Michel Goossens and Sebastian Rahtz. Addison-Wesley, 488pp, $36.95.**

Years before PostScript's invention, TeX had already become the preferred "page description language" for anyone who needed to publish mathematics. In part, that's because (like PostScript) TeX is more than a format encoding scheme; it is an algorithmic language. But much of TeX's popularity stems from the LaTeX macros, which transform TeX from a detail-oriented low-level language to a results-oriented high-level language. For many a journal publisher, moving to the Web means figuring out how to deal with a quarter-century of back issues that are all coded in LaTeX.

Several conversion programs already exist, but you have to know where to find them, how to use them and when each is appropriate. That's where *LaTeX Web Companion* comes in. It has detailed recipes for turning LaTeX into PDF, HTML, SGML, XML or MathML. There's also the no-conversion option: LaTeX-enabling the browser with plug-ins and Java applets.

Our take. The Seybold editors collectively know quite a bit about TeX, SGML, PDF and XML. But no one of us was able to take the measure of this book. It simply spans too many specialties. Instead, several of us looked it over and, to the limits of our own technical expertise, found that it made sense.

That might sound like a weak endorsement, but it's really pretty strong. There are deep and subtle differences between the rich old forms (such as TeX) and rich new forms (XML et al.). A book that tries to bridge the gap must be correspondingly detailed and diverse. *LaTeX Web Companion* fills that bill.

Pete Dyson

Good timing for O'Reilly's broad guide to PNG

***PNG: The Definitive Guide*, by Greg Roelofs. O'Reilly & Associates, 321 pp, $33.**

PNG, the portable network graphics standard, was created to be a better GIF: smaller, more capable and (most important) royalty-free. Most of the implementation was done in 1995, resulting in a collection of free code libraries and published source code.

Although all the hard work had already been done, the Big Two browser makers procrastinated before releasing products that could display PNG images. The support is only partial in version-4 browsers; we're told it will be complete in version 5. On the creation side, Adobe Photoshop 4 had serious mistakes in its PNG output, and 5.0 did not fix them all. (We're told 5.5 is much cleaner.) The result is that PNG is only now coming into common use.

In other words, the time is ripe for O'Reilly to publish an authoritative guidebook on the subject. *PNG: The Definitive Guide* has sections for artists, webmasters and programmers. There's an extensive review of image editors and utilities; when the book was written in early 1999, hardly any product supported the full PNG spec. There's a good discussion of adding Web server support and a extensive survey of browser foibles.

Programmers will find sample code and a helpful discussion of pitfalls, along with tips for using the open-source libraries.

Nevertheless, *Definitive Guide* has a major flaw. The trouble is that programmers (who want to add PNG support to their software) and artists (who want to pack the most message into their media by understanding PNG's subtleties) are two distinct audiences. Each audience needs its own book, yet *Definitive Guide* tries to address both. Reading it, we were occasionally startled by sudden shifts in context.

A bug or a feature? With so few books yet available on the subject, we may be mislabeling as a flaw what is really a benefit. Certainly *Definitive Guide* earns its name; the newcomer will find PNG's history and rationale, tips for creating and displaying images, consumer advice and a shopper's guide all in one place.

Nevertheless, other books will enter the market to better fill each of these specialized niches. We hope that for the second edition, O'Reilly will split the topic into two and give each its own full-length treatment.

Pete Dyson

Seybold San Francisco Coverage: Hot Picks

This month's story on Adobe's WebBuy Plug-in for Acrobat 4 *(page 23)* is a look at just one of the many Hot Picks we have selected for Seybold San Francisco 1999. In our October issue, we'll have extensive show coverage of other Hot Pick recipients and new developments from other suppliers, here are a few we plan to review:

- Versifi, Inc. recently spun off from Garg Data International (GDI, Inc.) to market its V-business Manager Web Publishing System on its own. The system addresses content management, authoring, and e-commerce, packaged together with IBM's Net.commerce system. The database-driven system is also made for integration with legacy authoring products.
- Quark will show the first of its long-awaited trio (code name: Troika) of Web products, an XML extraction tool called Avenue.quark. The product lets users outfit XPress Documents with XML tags so as to later extract the content in XML form. Once specific tagging rules have been set up by a user, much of the process can then be automated.
- SoftBook Press will unveil its latest contribution to the exploding E-book market with an upgrade to the SoftBook Reader. The latest version contains built-in Ethernet connectivity and modem connections for standard phone lines, increasing fucntionality in both the business and consumer markets.
- Object Publishing Software has a suite of database-oriented publishing software under the ObjectPublisher name. The suite consists of a design studio, an on-demand package, and a content management solution, all of which are aimed at efficient, media-independent publishing, including print, CD-ROM, and Web.

For the full list of hot picks, visit www.seyboldseminars.com.