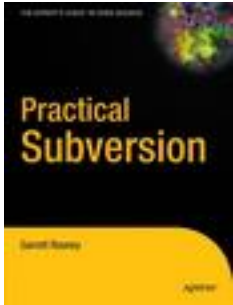# Practical Subversion *by Garrett Rooney*

Martin C Brown

Version control is—or at least should be—a critical part of the development process. As Garrett Rooney explains right at the beginning of Practical Subversion (published by Apress), using version control can help you recover that file you accidentally deleted, or put your code base back into the position it was in, when it worked, before you introduced that latest bug. For those not familiar with the topic, version control allows you to control and track the changes in text documents—typically development projects—so that you can monitor versions, create a static set of documents attributed to a global version number, and to log and synchronize changes to a project across a team.

Garrett is a Subversion expert. As well as his writings on the topic, he's also spoken at OSCON and contributed code and material to the project. That makes him an ideal candidate for writing a book on what is a complicated topic; at least when performed correctly.

Practical Subversion is a good combination of step-by-step instruction on the Subversion systems, a migration guide for users of other version control systems and an in-depth guide to more advanced techniques when using the Subversion libraries and API.

The contents

Practical Subversion is split into two main sections, the usage guide and the programming guides. The first part of the book is dedicated to using the Subversion system. This starts with a "crash course" on using Subversion for checking in and working with Subversion as your version control system. There's a lot of detail here in a comparatively short chapter, but anybody familiar with the basics of version control is not going to be phased by the terminology used here.

This first section then moves to more detailed investigations of specific topics, including administration, best practices and the integration of Subversion with other tools. Along the way, key chapters are those which offer advice on migrating from other version control systems (Perforce, CVS, RCS) and the extensive integration available with Apache.

The latter third of the book concentrates on the API—the programming interface to the Subversion system that enables you to build custom tools to use with the version control mechanism.

Who's this book for?

Developers are obviously the key audience for this title, but within this group, it is obviously those developers who are already using a version control system who will most benefit from the book. Without existing version control knowledge and experience, much of the content will be unintelligible to most developers. The book is not an introduction to version control techniques per-se; you are going to need to know the benefits of version control.

With the combination of the administration functionality, and integration with group level tools such as Apache, IDEs and the comprehensive API content, I can see the book appealing to users within an existing team development environment where they are already using CVS or similar and have their own custom toolset for making the most of the Subversion system.

Pros

Subversion is rapidly becoming the preferred solution for developers who have become disenchanted with RCS and CVS, tools which have for a long time had their own range of problems and issues.

As a guide to using Subversion the book is simple and straightforward and you should be able to pick up the basics quickly and easy. It's also nice to find a comprehensive guide on some of the more advanced techniques with Subversion, like the integration with Apache, and development tools such as emacs, Ant and even OS X tools like Interface Builder.

The API guide will also be useful to those people developing interfaces to Subversion in other environments and systems where developers are willing to develop their own tools.

Cons

Although the book is aimed for users of previous version control systems, there isn't much in the way of practical advice of migrating from one system to another—there are tables of comparative tools and commands, but I would have appreciated a walk through of a typical project in CVS and the same process and sequence in Subversion.

I also found the enormous section—almost a third of the book—on the API to Subversion to be a little excessive. While

it's nice to see the qualities of the extensive API, the amount of content felt out of place and proportion to the rest of the book. I would certainly have preferred to see more simple and straight-forward content on using Subversion itself.

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I also felt that some sections were skipped over when I would have liked more information. For example, hooks in subversion allow you to execute a script when a project is committed: to email the development group with the changes, or automatically run a build. However, the Hook Scripts section lasts little more than a page, with no real examples of the scripts themselves, just pointers to those in the distribution.

In short

Title	Practical Subversion
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Mark (out of 10)	8

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