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Xsl Fo

Making XML Look Good in Print

XSL-FO

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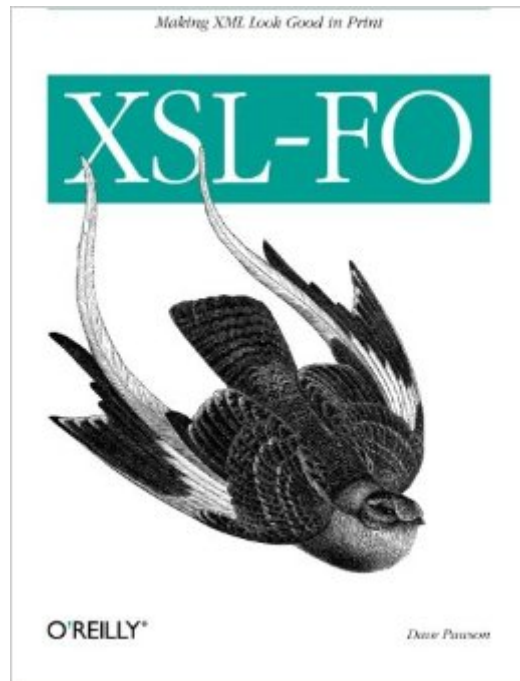*Dave Pawson*

Synopsis

No matter how flexible and convenient digital information has become, we haven't done away with the need to see information in print. Extensible Style Language-Formatting Objects, or XSL-FO, is a set of tools developers and web designers use to describe page printouts of their XML (including XHTML) documents. If you need to produce high quality printed material from your XML documents, then XSL-FO provides the bridge.XSL-FO is one of the few books to go beyond a basic introduction to the technology. While many books touch on XSL-FO in their treatment of XSLT, this book offers in-depth coverage of XSL-FO's features and strengths. Author Dave Pawson is well known in the XSLT and XSL-FO communities, and maintains the XSLT FAQ. An online version of this book has helped many developers master this technology. XSL-FO is the first time this reference is available in print.The first part of the book provides an overview of the technology and introduces the XSL-FO vocabulary. The author discusses how to choose among today's implementations, explains how to describe pages, and shows you what is going on in the processor in terms of layout. You'll learn about the basics of formatting and layout as well as readability.The second part focuses on smaller pieces: blocks, inline structures, graphics, color and character level formatting, concluding by showing how to integrate these parts into a coherent whole. XSL-FO also explores organizational aspects you'll need to consider?how to design your stylesheets strategically rather than letting them evolve on their own.XSL-FO is more than just a guide to the technology; the book teaches you how to think about the formatting of your documents and guides you through the questions you'll need to ask to ensure that your printed documents meet the same high standards as your computer-generated content. Written for experienced XML developers and web designers, no other book contains as much useful information on this practical technology.

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Customer Reviews

An interesting book covering a powerful but niche technology. Not a book for the faint of heart, get it only if you want to investigate this very specific topic or plan to do things like XML > PDF transformation. The author digs immediately into the technical details, condensing a relevant amount of info in less than 200 pages; the results are good, focused and well structured, but it's not an entertaining read. This is definitely not a beginner book. A decent understanding of XML, XSL and XPath is required; some knowledge of printing would be helpful too

My main gripe with this book is the manner in which the author chose to present the material.Rather than focusing on "literal" XSL-FO, the author gives fragments of XSLT stylesheets that produce the XSL-FO. This means that the path to understanding the XSL-FO in the examples goes through XSLT.While I understand the author's point in choosing this presentation (that no one will "really" be coding XSL-FO by hand, but will instead be writing XSLT stylesheets to generate XSL-FO from other XML input), I don't agree that it's the best way to explain the material.I would have preferred to see actual, "complete" fragments of XSL-FO (both with and without larger context). I can draw my own conclusions about structuring the XSLT that I need. What I'm really keen to see is how the XSL-FO itself works, otherwise I've got no clue -what- to generate.

Armed with only the most rudimentary understanding of XSLT, I found this book a little overwhelming. It's not a "cookbook", though the examples are good. There are a few places where it seems to dwell on minutia, but mostly it moves along at a jog to brisk run pace. I got a better understanding of the topic and and am prepared to do more research, but this could not be my only reference.

the author says he expects only some knowledge of xslt, but I think that some knowledge of printing and characteristics about texts, images, ... are also very useful if you want to understand this book. If you have this knowledge, this is a very good book for getting into the basics of xsl formatting objects.

The book is a competent explainiation of XSL-FO, which is an XML-based language for describing the appearance of text, usually for the purposes of printing it. If you thoroughly read everything, you will understand how areas, blocks, spacing, and the various other technicalities interrelate to one another.However, the author does not seem to be very good at explaining these crucial concepts for an audience that has no or little familiarity with the subject matter. One can pick them up, but the author does not make it easy. In order to delineate the book into chapters, the author will make a mention of some crucial fact, but not go into detail on it until much later in the book. The material is complex enough, and the author's method of demarcation does not help the matter.Also, as mentioned by others, this book does often use XSLT transform examples to "explain" XSL-FO concepts. While any significant use of XSL-FO will certainly use XSLT transforms to convert from some other XML format into the XSL-FO, it is not appropriate to offer examples of XSL-FO that are written as an XSLT transform. Having a chapter or two in techniques for writing XSLT transforms for XSL-FO would have been more appropriate than providing examples of XSL-FO concepts using XSLTs.That being said, this book does cover some fairly difficult material. XSL-FO is very complex, particularly when it comes to positioning things. The information is all there, and it is all good. It is simply a matter of explaining that information in a way that one can read the book in a linear fashion and understand. To gain the full measures of XSL-FO, you will need to re-read the book, or at least the sections on position of elements.

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