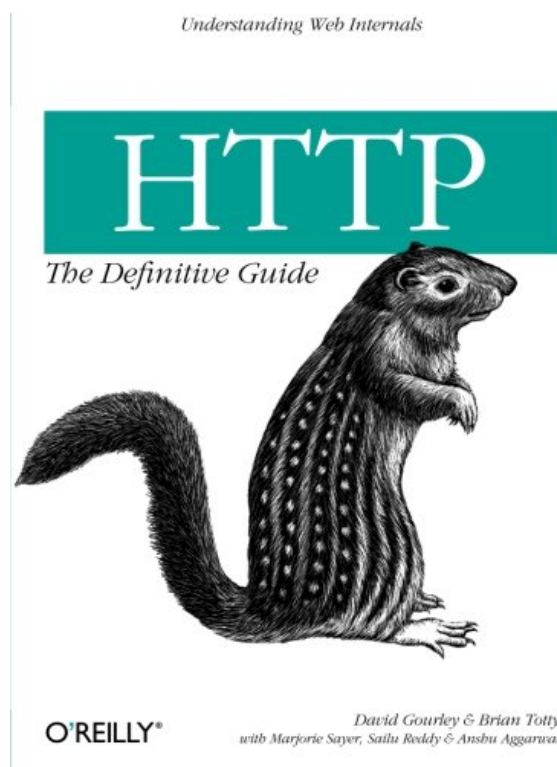


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Understanding Web Internals

HTTP

The Definitive Guide



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David Gourley & Brian Totty
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Review

"I think this book is an extremely useful, very comprehensive and clearly-written reference to all aspects of the internals of the Web going well beyond just the bare mechanics of HTTP. Even where its huge detail does stop on a topic, there are extensive and useful references for further reading on each topic covered given at the end of nearly every chapter." - John Collins, News@UK, March 2003

About the Author

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Behind every web transaction lies the Hypertext Transfer Protocol (HTTP) --- the language of web browsers and servers, of portals and search engines, of e-commerce and web services. Understanding HTTP is essential for practically all web-based programming, design, analysis, and administration. While the basics of HTTP are elegantly simple, the protocol's advanced features are notoriously confusing, because they knit together complex technologies and terminology from many disciplines. This book clearly explains HTTP and these interrelated core technologies, in twenty-one logically organized chapters, backed up by hundreds of detailed illustrations and examples, and convenient reference appendices. HTTP: The Definitive Guide explains everything people need to use HTTP efficiently -- including the "black arts" and "tricks of the trade" -- in a concise and readable manner. In addition to explaining the basic HTTP features, syntax and guidelines, this book clarifies related, but often misunderstood topics, such as: TCP connection management, web proxy and cache architectures, web robots and robots.txt files, Basic and Digest authentication, secure HTTP transactions, entity body processing, internationalized content, and traffic redirection. Many technical professionals will benefit from this book. Internet architects and developers who need to design and develop software, IT professionals who need to understand Internet architectural components and interactions, multimedia designers who need to publish and host multimedia, performance engineers who need to optimize web performance, technical marketing professionals who need a clear picture of core web architectures and protocols, as well as untold numbers of students and hobbyists will all benefit from the knowledge packed in this volume. There are many books that explain how to use the Web, but this is the one that explains how the Web works. Written by experts with years of design and implementation experience, this book is the definitive technical bible that describes the "why" and the "how" of HTTP and web core technologies. HTTP: The Definitive Guide is an essential reference that no technically-inclined member of the Internet community should be without.

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0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

A must have book for serious web app pentesters

By Rob53

Although this book is very in-depth, long, and quite possibly a good cure for insomnia, any decent web app pentester would be remiss without having this great reference book in their nerd library. This book explained virtually everything I ever wanted to know about HTTP headers. It is extensive and is a technical guide, however, the author does do a good job of keeping the information light, entertaining, interesting, and informative as best as anyone could on a topic such as this. If anything, reciting the knowledge I obtained from this book (and I'm only 50% through it at the time of this review), makes my co-workers think I'm some super-nerd on the HTTP protocol. In my opinion, this is a Must Have book in your arsenal of references.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

Comprehensive and well written

By Joshua Davies

Who would have thought you could write a 600+ page book about HTTP? The official specification itself is less than 200 pages - what else is there to say? As it turns out, quite a bit. This book traces the history of HTTP from 0.9 to the current version (1.1) and talks about the proposed HTTP-NG extensions as well. Part 1 covers the basics of HTTP: what it actually does and is for. Part 2 talks about the components that make HTTP work: servers, proxies, caches, etc. Part 3 covers HTTP security, including authentication headers and a brief overview of HTTPS. I would have liked to have seen some coverage of SSO here - SAML is close enough to HTTP as to be on topic in a book section about HTTP authentication - but they stuck with what's "baked in" to HTTP. Part 4 was my favorite part: this is where they talk about encodings, chunking, compression, internationalization, etc. This is the stuff that will get you when you're trying to deal with HTTP at a low level, and they cover it in a lot of detail, but manage to keep it interesting. Part 5, on the other hand, seemed like sort of an afterthought, which was a shame, because there was a lot of potentially great material in there. This is where they cover web publishing (as it relates to HTTP). Unfortunately, there's not much information here that you can't get from official specifications - the 30 pages they devote to WebDAV,

for example, are just a dry repetition of the mechanics of WebDAV with no discussion of how it's used, or what problems you might run into trying to get it running. The final chapter on logging was OK, but again, it seemed like they could have gone into a lot more depth on actually using log files to troubleshoot problems than just telling you what was in the Apache/Netscape/Squid/etc. log files.

Still, for such a long book, it's amazing that they kept their focus on HTTP so well - there's a lot of good advice and information in there. I'd recommend it to anybody who deals with the web at a technical level, from programmers to website administrators.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

Overall good, but light on https / ssl

By Russell

Overall this book really fits my reading style and I liked it. This book is for you if you like to-the-point books without repetition. There is a good reference in the back for http headers, http codes, mime types, etc. The author also has a hint of humor at places which I feel is necessary in technical books or I feel quite drowsy after a while.

That being said there is one area I felt could have used more explanation although perhaps I'm just not putting it all together correctly. The author takes time to go over https where he prefaces with security concepts such as: asymmetric encryption, symmetric encryption, certificates, etc. What I felt was very lacking was explanation precisely how SSL works. In fact if I recall the portion that actually talks about SSL is 1 or 2 paragraphs that fit on a page.

The only other thing I might say is feel free to skip sections you aren't interested in, for instance the book goes into detail about how servers interact with clients, how requests might be ran in parallel, etc. If you're just looking for straight up http, be mindful of the index and skip sections when applicable. That being said, overall a great book and worth getting. I personally still feel a little hazy on SSL though and which this was more concrete in my mind.

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