

JBoss™: A Developer's Notebook™
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JBoss is an open source J2EE (Java) application server similar to BEA WebLogic and IBM WebSphere. It is to Java application servers what Apache is to HTTP (web) servers: popular, powerful, high quality, cross-platform, and free. This notebook demonstrates by example how to install and configure JBoss and then roll out an application. A realistic application is left as an exercise to the reader, but the source code, libraries, Ant build scripts, and configuration files for two examples, an Einstein quote generator and "ToDo" list manager, can be downloaded from the book's web site.

The book's audience consists primarily of Java programmers writing web applications for deployment on JBoss and potential JBoss administrators. To get the most out of it, you'll need to download separately JBoss (the book uses version 4.0.2), Java (only the JRE is required to run the examples, but some source code is developed in the book necessitating J2SE or better for compilation), Ant (1.6.2), MySQL (4.1.8 GA), JDBC driver (Connector/J 3.0.16ga), OpenSSL (no version specified), and an LDAP server (no product or version specified). XDoclet (1.2.2) is included with the source code. Since a large portion of the book is dedicated to configuration and the settings are stored in XML files, an XML editor comes in handy. Ant is used as a scripting tool, mostly for deployment. Its build.xml files generally need to be edited to specify the JBoss installation directory. The book outlines many changes to configuration files, but look ahead to the end of each section to check whether the files have been prepared in advance and can be deployed by including a few Ant parameters. JBoss ships with the Hypersonic database and the examples will use it, but the procedure for converting to MySQL I found to be interesting and informative. I have no access to LDAP and the short section on the topic didn't warrant looking into OpenLDAP, but it certainly is a possibility for anyone interested.

JBoss and web applications seem to be programmed as much in XML as they are in Java. The configuration files are not described in gory detail, but the most important parts are covered in an accessible way. The XML files are located in several different directories and include application, build, ejb-deployer, hsqldb-ds, hsqldb-jdbc-state-service, hsqldb-jdbc2-service, log4j, login-config, jboss-service, jboss-web, jbosscmp-jdbc, jbossmq-destinations, jbossmq-service, jmx-invoker-service, mail-service, monitoring-service, mysql-ds, server, servlet, standardjbosscmp-jdbc, uil2-service, web, web-ejbrefer-local, web-sec-roles, and web-security. They are unfortunately not listed in the index and I undoubtedly missed some, but the collection suggests the terrain covered. Listings of the files are well-tabbed and the text in question is nicely highlighted. Not much Java code is shown, as that's not the focus of the book, but it is just as legible and so too are the few snippets of SQL.

It is refreshing to see screen shots and command lines taken from a Macintosh running OS X (10.4.1). The Safari web browser is used to demonstrate the example web apps as well as the JBoss management tools jmx-console and web-console. A few small problems result. The Safari version number in the book isn't given, but some of the screen shots don't match my Macintosh display. The applets didn't appear at all in Window's Internet Explorer until I installed a newer version of Java. The Ant build scripts produced warnings on my Windows

machine, despite Ant having a matching version number. Source code is packaged in a zip file which Windows Explorer cannot open properly. I had to resort to WinRAR. It may not be related to the platform, but the URL for the sample application was incorrect: in chapter two try simply /quote rather than /quote/quote. I originally tried to compile and deploy the samples in Eclipse using the included Ant plugin and some help from MyEclipse for lack of a stand-alone Ant installation. That turned out to be counterproductive; take the time to install Ant and use it for deployment. Eclipse was a significant help in browsing the Java code, of course, but what I saw was just about enough to scare me away from J2EE programming.

If (or when) I come up with an application, JBoss will be a candidate server, in part because of the good introduction that this book provides. It fulfills its promise of getting you going with a minimum of hassle and frustration.

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