



From Technologies to Solutions

Building Websites with

XOOPS

A step-by-step tutorial

Get your XOOPS website up fast using this easy-to-follow guide

Steve Atwal

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BIRMINGHAM - MUMBAI

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Since 1997, Steve has been helping the University of British Columbia to improve the Information Technology infrastructure for two large departments. To this end, he has been developing IT policies and procedures, capacity planning, chairing and participating in various committees for IT initiatives, preparing for disaster recovery using virtualization technologies, and ensuring that high security of all servers, desktops, and networks is enforced.

Steve chose XOOPS because of its feature set, expandability, and ease of use. You can contact him and leave some comments on his blog (www.steveatwal.com).

I wish to thank my daughter Alisha, who has a young and tender heart, for her playful distractions that refueled and energized me; and our Friday night dinner and movie. I would also like to thank my family and friends who have provided endless encouragement, especially Navi, Jinder, and Lek. I will not easily forget my recent trip to London – thanks Navi! I would also like to thank Michael LeBlanc who has been a good friend with his technical advice, code input, and reviews.

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I would like to praise the designers of my new UTStarcom 6700, which has been both an entertainment device, with the support of live streaming music stations from the UK, as well as a WiFi Skype communication device. Yes, I am a computer geek at heart!

And, of course, I would like to thank you, the readers. I hope you enjoy this book and send me some feedback on my blog!

About the Reviewers

Marc-André Lanciault is a Business Management bachelor with specialization in Information Systems. For the last few years, Marc-André has been actively involved in the open-source world, especially in XOOPS open-source content management system.

He is the leader and founder of The SmartFactory (<http://smartfactory.ca>), a development team that produces high-quality modules for XOOPS. The SmartFactory has acquired a solid reputation among the community for its complex and flexible, yet easy-to-use modules. Thousands of XOOPS webmasters have adopted one or many of the SmartModules, making The SmartFactory the leader in XOOPS modules development.

Marc-André is also the co-founder of Montreal-based INBOX International (<http://inboxinternational.com>) specializing in personalized web solutions. As Canada's leading expert on XOOPS, INBOX International is providing state-of-the-art expertise to organizations around the globe that have adopted this content management system.

On a more personal level, Marc-André is the lucky father of a handsome little 22-months boy named Félix.

Michael Hokamp's first experience with computing was in 1985, when he tried to figure out how to get his AMIGA to work as intended. During the next ten years he got used to computers driven by Microsoft with Office applications such as Word and Excel. During that time, he took his first steps in the World Wide Web, beginning to explore the virtual world, and creating websites for himself, friends, and family.

He started to work with content management solutions in 2000. In 2002, after experience with some of the available open-source CMS, he began to use XOOPS and dug deeper into CSS and XHTML. As a webmaster, he used tools on servers and webspaces to communicate with clients and visitors.

Michael lives in Germany with his two twin boys and wife, and runs the <http://xoopsfactory.com> website.

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Preface

XOOPS is an open-source web content management system, written in PHP. It allows site administrators to easily create dynamic websites with great content and many outstanding features, with a minimum of coding. It's great for creating small to large dynamic community websites, intra-company portals, and much more. It has a large, enthusiastic, and helpful community of users.

If you want to create a powerful, fully-featured website in no time, this book is just for you. This book will help you explore XOOPS, putting you in the picture of what it offers, and how to go about building a site with the system.

You will be introduced to the main components of XOOPS, and learn how to manage them. You will develop the skills and the confidence to manage all types of content on the site, and also understand how users interact with the site. As you find your way round, your own ideas for what you need in your new website will begin to crystallize around what you can see about the capabilities and flexibility of XOOPS.

What This Book Covers

The book begins with an overview of XOOPS, its history, and its community.

Chapter 2 shows you how to set up a local development environment for running XOOPS, and also what needs to be done before you can install XOOPS to have a live, public-facing, website. Once your development environment is set up, the chapter shows you how to get XOOPS installed and working.

Chapter 3 takes you through the basic configuration of your XOOPS installation, to get all the site details correct, and make sure your site is hooked up to a mail server for important notifications.

Chapter 4 covers many of the administration tasks that you will perform while managing your site. You will see how to manage users and groups, add and activate new modules, add and position blocks, and manage banners and images among other things.

Chapter 5 introduces XOOPS themes, which control the look and feel of your site. You will see what a theme is, and how to install and modify an existing XOOPS theme to customize it to your needs. You will also get started with creating a brand-new XOOPS theme.

There are many modules available for extending the functionality of XOOPS. In *Chapter 6*, we cover a number of the most popular modules available from the XOOPS website, and explore their installation and use. We will look at modules for tasks like handling news, calendars, creating an image gallery and a forum, and also adding a sitemap to your site to improve its accessibility to search engines.

Chapter 7 demonstrates the use of the IntranetPack, a free package available from www.xoops.org. This package contains some commonly used modules that can be used to put together a company portal. The chapter will walk you through each of these modules to give you a working intranet.

Conventions

In this book, you will find a number of styles of text that distinguish between different kinds of information. Here are some examples of these styles, and an explanation of their meaning.

There are three styles for code. Code words in text are shown as follows: "The header and footer sections can be changed using the main `theme.html` and `style.css` files."

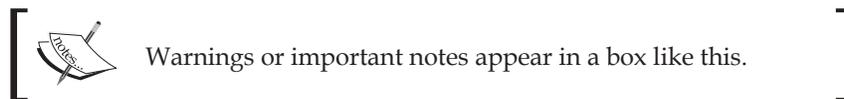
A block of code will be set as follows:

```
<ul id="nav">
<li class="first"><a href="<{$xoops_url}>/">Home</a></li>
<li><a href="<{$xoops_url}>/modules/mydownloads/">Files</a></li>
<li><a href="<{$xoops_url}>/modules/xoopsfaq/">FAQ</a></li>
<li><a href="<{$xoops_url}>/modules/contact/">Contact Us</a></li>
<li class="last"><a href="<{$xoops_url}>/modules/newbb/">Forums</
a></li>
</ul>
```

When we wish to draw your attention to a particular part of a code block, the relevant lines or items will be made bold:

```
<tr>
  <td></td>
  <td class="obNavWidth" ><a href="{xoops_url}/" >HOME</a></td>
  <td width="22" ><img src=
    "{xoops_imageurl}/images/na_1.png" alt="" /></td>
  <td class="obNavWidth" >
    <a href="{xoops_url}/modules/mydownloads/" >DOWNLOADS</a></td>
  <td width="22" ><img src=
    "{xoops_imageurl}/images/na_1.png" alt="" /></td>
```

New terms and **important words** are introduced in a bold-type font. Words that you see on the screen, in menus or dialog boxes for example, appear in our text like this: "Click on the link for **English** under **Languages** on the left-hand side of the page."



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1

Overview of XOOPS

Before you can learn to use XOOPS, you need to know what it is, why you should use it, and what the future holds for this CMS (content management system).

What is XOOPS?

Before we delve into XOOPS, let's ask a related question: what is a web-based content management system (or CMS)? Such a system is available to anyone with sufficient permission to access it over the Internet using just a web browser. And, this kind of system allows us to manage websites and web content such as text, images, sounds, videos, and animations. There is a wide array of content management systems, each hoping to fill some special need. The market is fragmented, and there seems to be little in the way of standards in the way content is served or managed. There are many open-source solutions and almost as many proprietary commercial solutions. However, a few of these systems stand out above the rest; XOOPS is one such open-source content management system.

So, why do you need a web content management system? One of the biggest advantages of using such a system is that it allows collaborative management of content. In other words, content can be added and changed by many different people, and granular permissions can be assigned to limit who can change and manage which content.

This book will show you how to use some common features of the XOOPS content management system. XOOPS is a fairly easy-to-use system and we will provide a tutorial-type introduction to it.

In terms of the technology used, XOOPS is a set of programs written in PHP. Together, these programs allow you to manage content (such as text, images, audio, or video), which is stored on a web server, using a web browser.

A more formal definition of XOOPS, from the Wikipedia (<http://en.wikipedia.org>), is:

"XOOPS is a content management system that allows administrators to easily create dynamic websites. It is a tool for developing small to large dynamic community websites. It is written in PHP and interfaces with a database such as MySQL."

What this means is that you can share your information with other employees, friends, and prospective buyers. The medium for sharing this information is the Internet.

XOOPS is released under the GNU General Public License (GPL), which gives you the right to use it freely, to modify it to suit your needs and then to redistribute it under the terms of the GPL. XOOPS is pronounced as "zoo'ps".

The name XOOPS is an acronym of "eXtensible Object-Oriented Portal System". The word "portal" hints at the original intent of the software as a portal system, but XOOPS is striving to meet the ideals of a true content management system.

The XOOPS Foundation is the umbrella group under which XOOPS is developed and maintained, and under which a number of teams are managed. Some of these teams are the following:

- Core Development Team, responsible for the maintenance and further development of the XOOPS core code.
- Module Development Team, responsible for the maintenance and further development of the XOOPS official modules that come with the full package.
- Theme Design Team, responsible for running and supporting Theme Design and development for the XOOPS system.
- QA (Quality Assurance) Team, responsible for quality-assurance testing of modules.
- Documentation Team, responsible for the preparation and addition of introductory manuals, reference guides, tutorials, and technical documents.
- Marketing and Communications Team, responsible for external marketing, communications, and visibility of XOOPS.
- Support-Forum Moderation Team, responsible for helping the XOOPS community and new users solve common problems by ensuring that each issue reaches the appropriate team.
- XOOPS Core Team, comprising team leaders of all the other teams, which is responsible for the "Big Picture", ensuring that the work of all the teams comes together to make XOOPS a more cohesive product.

Why XOOPS?

If you take a quick look at the popular "try before you use" website www.opensourcecms.com (where you can test-drive a CMS before you install it to manage your own website), you will notice that many open-source content management systems exist. It is interesting to know what sets XOOPS apart from the others. Let us first see what other CMS software is available that is comparable to XOOPS. The following table illustrates this:

CMS	License	URL
Drupal	GPL	www.drupal.org
Joomla	GPL	www.joomla.org
Typo3	GPL	www.typo3.org

XOOPS is comparable with these systems, but the combination of ease of use and the number of applications or plug-in modules available for it make it a compelling choice. In addition, XOOPS provides a complete development API (Application Programming Interface) for anyone wanting to extend the functionality of the base system. XOOPS has multi-language support, site-wide search, and built-in support for banner advertising. There are even some e-commerce modules available if you wish to create an online store.

There are some really good reasons to use XOOPS, such as:

- Ease of installation. The web-based installation is quick and painless.
- Simple web-based administration of users and the website interface.
- Multiple output formats, such as RSS feeds, which allow users to check for new content on your site without having to open up a web browser.
- Workflow is supported by modules that have a submit, review, and approve process.
- Enterprise-level user authentication is supported using LDAP.

Want to take your corporate data online? Want to start a business online? Want to share your family photos with relatives scattered around the world? Want to share information on your hobbies? Want to collaborate on projects with other like-minded people but they are too far away for you to meet in person?

XOOPS allows you to do all of the above, and much more. If you are willing to learn to program using PHP, then what you can do with XOOPS is limited only by your imagination. However, you do not need to know PHP in order to manage your web content; but a little knowledge of HTML would be handy.

Is XOOPS right for you? There are many CMS and blogging systems that are freely available. What you need to consider is the purpose of your website. XOOPS is for you if you want:

- A portal, a collaboration and feedback website, static and dynamic information sharing.
- Plug-in features, such as an upload/download area, a calendar, a polling area for feedback from users, and an image gallery.
- Easy personalization of the website, to allow you to change the look and feel of the website without a lot of work.
- Presentation of content of different types and technologies.
- Subscription to information on your website using technologies such as RSS (Really Simply Syndication) that allows users to consolidate their information gathering needs in a central location without visiting your website.
- Easy web-based methods of adding additional features and performing maintenance of older information.

Following are some example websites that use XOOPS. This shows the variety of content that can be served by XOOPS.

- Geek Web Talk, USA: Internet Marketing and Search Engine Optimization (<http://www.geekwebtalk.com>).



- Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, Japan: A bi-lingual campus with students from over 80 nations (<http://www.apu.ac.jp>).

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