The first striking thing about Visualizing the Semantic Web is its appearance. Its colorful cover and numerous full-color diagrams and screenshots jump out at you even before you begin reviewing the chapters. Although relatively short at just under 200 pages, it's undoubtedly a beautifully constructed text.

The book surveys the various conceptual areas in the Semantic Web and visualization techniques for this emerging means of structuring Web information. Although the chapters are organized rather randomly, the mixture of topics makes the book easy to read intermittently, without forcing you to reread large quantities to continue with a concept thread.
AN INITIAL OVERVIEW

Part 1 provides an overview of the Semantic Web's main components and visualization methods. Chapter 2 was particularly noteworthy, outlining the different yet complementary natures of the Semantic Web and information visualization techniques. As Chaomei Chen writes, "[The] Semantic Web emphasizes that data should be machine readable, whereas information visualization aims to maximize our perceptual and cognitive abilities to make sense of visual-spatial representations."

On the one hand, the Semantic Web strives to make the information more structured and machine-like, while on the other, information visualization strives to make the information more accessible and less structured to improve usability. Conceptually, it's intriguing to realize that although these two topic areas are on different ends of the technical spectrum, joining them provides for a greater utility for both in the long run. It might even provide a way to create solutions that drive both into the marketplace sooner.

APPLICATION SCENARIOS

Part 2 goes further into the visualization mechanisms, but it also includes a useful chapter by Alexander Nakhimovsky and Tom Myers on Web services and using ontology in relation to the Web services metaphor in building systems. Part 2 also introduces several application scenarios as a means to explore the combination of visualization and semantic description. Scenarios such as corporate document classification using an ontology, the use of recommender systems for isolating interesting content, and the automated creation of concept maps for navigation are all helpful examples that bring the concepts to life. If your particular systems interest is not in these areas, however, you might not find these chapters terribly interesting or useful.

WHO SHOULD READ IT

This book isn't a textbook; its intention appears to be to unify some diverse topics to identify and debunk at least some terminology mysteries. The writing's clarity will appeal to those in industry who need a short but academically grounded guide to these new topic areas. Those in academia might find that the book's survey format provides more breadth than depth, although as an introduction for those not in computer science or engineering, this would be excellent supporting material. The style is informal yet technical.
CONCLUSION

*Visualizing the Semantic Web* is an excellent introduction to the Semantic Web, information visualization, and the possibilities of the two working together. It provides a useful survey of topics across these domains while offering a colorful, informative text with application scenarios to support and solidify the concepts. It would work as a recommended text or as supporting material for a class perhaps, but most likely it's a perfect book for technical managers, corporate researchers, developers, or those trying to quickly and efficiently come up to speed on this emerging Web area.

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