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Hello, I'm Darryl Gove, I'm going to be talking about the book "The Developer's Edge" which came out earlier this year.

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The talk is going to cover some of the motivation behind the book, the people who contributed to the book, what topics the book covers, and where the book is available. I'll be sticking around at the end of the presentation to answer any questions that you might have.

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There are a number of places where people find information. Most of us use search engines to find information when we need it. These lead us to a variety of sources: articles, blog posts, and often the documentation for the product. When you look at these media, you can plot them on various axes, I've chosen "Completeness" for one axis, by which I mean the amount of the product that is documented, and "Approachability" for the other axis, by which I mean how easy it is to read.

If the types of material are plotted on these axes, then I hope that you would agree that the documentation for a product is typically complete, in that it should cover every feature that the product has, but it is typically not very approachable – in that it might be a rather dry read, or there might be so many features of the product that it becomes hard to separate the important features from the bells and whistles. At the other end of the spectrum you'd find blog posts, which typically focus on a small problem domain or feature, but do so in a way that grabs attention or explains in a colourful way. Other materials fall into this same spectrum, articles are similar to (but longer than) blog posts.

Books form an interesting mid-point. Books should really strive to find a balance between the completeness of documentation and the approachability of blog posts.

As I said earlier, I could have picked other axes. Another candidate for the x-axis is "immediacy". Documentation is typically provided as part of the product and evolves slowly. The documentation for a product might be a couple years old, but in that time the features of the product will not have significantly changed. Blog posts, discussions on mailing lists and in forums can spring up over night. If one person blogs about solving a problem, then that solution can be almost immediately available to others searching for solutions to the same problem.

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So what we have is something of an edge. On one side we have the traditional product documentation and on the other side we have articles and blog posts which represent a more immediate and approachable way of getting information.

There's a huge amount of information that Sun provides either through blogs or articles. It is hard to keep up with the volume, and it is hard to identify reputable sources of information.

The motivation for the book was to gather some of this 'edge' material and provide it to developers and other interested people in a convenient format. The material was selected because it was a combination of: useful to know, interesting to read about, not well known, or otherwise of interest to developers. The resulting book is an interesting mix of different authors and different topics, but the litmus test for me was when I received the proof copy, and I found myself rereading some of the material, and still

finding it interesting

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.In selecting content we restricted ourselves to content appearing on Sun sites, this eliminated the possibility of having content provided by customers, and essentially left two groups of authors. We have the people at Sun who develop the tools and the people at Sun who use the tools. So some of the material discusses the, for want of a better word, “features” of the tools. The articles by Rod Evans are a great example of this. In one, he talks about the implementation of the lazy-loading feature of the runtime linker, and how it was designed to cope with existing customer codes. Representing the users of the tools, Stefan Schneider and Thomas Bastian wrote a number of articles on tools which they generously gave permission to include in the book.

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The book is organised into eight chapters, but any division of material into arbitrary sections is going to be imperfect. Because the book is made up from blog posts and articles, you might expect it to be very fragmentary, lots of short posts on disparate topics. However, it turned out not to be that way. The articles ended up having definite themes and these fairly naturally arranged themselves into the chapters.

Programming and developing applications is very much at the core of the book. There are sections that cover programming language specific topics, for example Douglas Walls discussing compatibility between GCC and the Sun Studio C compiler. There are more hardware specific topics such as Albert Huang's explanation of the AMD64 calling convention. There are also more general topics such as Richard Friedman's discussion of Amdahl's law.

As I've previously alluded to, there is content describing linking applications, developing libraries, and using a large number of the tools provided with the operating system and compilers.

The book structure should appear relatively familiar to those who have read my other book “Solaris Application Programming”. This is not totally unexpected. My contributions to this new book were often a side-effect of the process of writing the programming book. I would often research topics and then write a short blog post about the research, or I would be answering a question from a customer and the results of that question would be an article for the developer portal. As a result of this, the books are very complementary, the themes might appear similar, but the topics within those themes are different, and the voices of the authors of the topics are different.

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“The Developer's Edge” was intended to be very accessible. It is available through the Safari books-online service for those who subscribe to the service. It is also available as a print-on-demand book through Vervante, and for convenience it is also listed on Amazon. The book is priced at twenty dollars to make it relatively inexpensive to get hold of.

So, this concludes the formal part of the presentation. As always I would love to hear feedback on your opinion of the book, your experiences of the tools that we provide, information that you would like to see, or any other topics. If you don't have the opinions now, please do follow up with me either through e-mail, or my blog. So what questions do you have?