



Presentation to  
**The East Bay Ruby  
Meetup Group**



## Learning Ruby on Rails

**The 1<sup>st</sup> step is easy but watch out for the 2<sup>nd</sup> step...  
It's a doozy!**

April 17, 2007



## My background

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- **Started programming in 1967 – UF Computer Center:**
  - **My own water-cooled (personal) IBM 360 computer!**
- **Many different languages/systems:**  
**Assembler language, APL, C, CICS, Cobol, Control RDBMS, DBASE, Fortran, MS Access, Paradox, Perl, PL/1, REXX, Theos, Unix, Visual Basic...**
- **Mostly management consulting for the past 15+ years**





## What I wanted to do

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- Build database-backed web applications
- On my list since before Web 2.0
- Tried GoLive/Dreamweaver <ugh!>
- Looked at some commercial systems <\$!>
- Tried Perl frameworks <ugh!>
- Tried Rails <mmm! (sorta)>





# My approach

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- Read a bunch for starters
  - *Build Your Own Ruby on Rails Web Applications* <good starting point>
  - *Agile Web Development with Rails* <heavy going in places>
  - *Ruby for Rails* <good 2<sup>nd</sup> book>
  - *Ajax on Rails* <too specialized for beginners>
  - *Programming Ruby*
- Follow along with book's code
  - Only good up to a certain point
  - Lots of code that doesn't work
- Build a usable application and make it public!
  - 4mypasswords.com





# My webapp criteria

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- **Must be**
  - **Something I would use**
  - **Offered to the public**
  - **Free of ongoing administration**
  - **Memorable domain name (short...)**
  - **Relative quick/easy to implement in a basic form**
  - **Have an option for a revenue model if successful**

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# 4MyPasswords.com

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- **Place to store sensitive information on the web**
  - (e.g., passwords, credit card info, registration or serial number information, ...)
- **SECURE**
- **Easy to use**
- **For me: replace Coda Hale's *Genius* utility that I've been using for years**
  - Too many different machines I use
  - At different client locations

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# 1<sup>st</sup> Step...

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- **Pretty straight-forward:**
  - **Get the tools (InstantRails, RadRails, Firebug)**
    - (too bad: I like Vim)
  - **Create an application structure**
  - **Create a simple database**
  - **Create a simple interface (scaffolding!)**
  - **Actually use it for stuff!**
    - Internal “Ideas” application
    - Internal “Booklist” application





# 1<sup>st</sup> Results...



- Create a simple app in about 1 hour
- Cool!

*Create a general app and populate it with controllers/models/views...*

From the Instant Rails Console Log:

Create the framework for this app

```
rails booklist
```

Create the database for this app

```
mysqladmin -u root create booklist_development
```

Set up database migrations

```
rake db:migrate
```

Create the books model

```
ruby script\generate model book
```

Edit the 001\_create\_book.rb migration file to add the columns

```
create_table :books do |t|
  t.column :title, :string
  t.column :review, :string
  t.column :amazon_link, :string
  t.column :reviewed_by, :string
  t.column :reviewer_link, :string
end
```

Update the database with the new book model columns

```
rake db:migrate
```

Create the controller stuff for administrative (maintenance) activities

```
ruby script\generate controller admin
```

Edit admin\_controller.rb with scaffold to set up basic editing:

```
scaffold :book
```

*You're now able to edit the data in your browser! scaffold builds maint pages on the fly*

Change review field from string (too small) to text/limit=1000

```
ruby script\generate migration update_review_field
```

Edit the 002\_update\_review\_field.rb file to modify the column

```
change_column :books, :review, :text, ( :limit => 1000 )
```

Do it... and the field is updated

```
rake db:migrate
```





**Easy to scratch the surface...**

**STEEP learning curve after that!**

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## 2<sup>nd</sup> Step...

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- **Going beyond the 1<sup>st</sup> simple steps was much harder/more time consuming...**
  - Spent TONS of time Googling for info...
  - Collected many cheat sheets from the web...
  - Started creating my own cheat sheets for specific tasks...
  - Got deluged with porn spam on the rails wiki ([wiki.rubyonrails.org](http://wiki.rubyonrails.org))
  - Forums: Some great help; some non-responsive; some assumptions about how much people know





## Taking that 2nd step...

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- **Get as much 'off the shelf' as possible:**
  - **Improved scaffolding:**
    - [Ajaxscaffold.com](http://Ajaxscaffold.com)
  - **Encryption/decryption:**
    - [EzCrypto.rubyforge.org](http://EzCrypto.rubyforge.org)
  - **Rails webhosting:**
    - [RailsPlayground.com](http://RailsPlayground.com)
  - **CSS template:**
    - [minimalistic-designs.com](http://minimalistic-designs.com)
- **SSL – Thawte certificate**





# It works – and folks can use it!

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[www.4mypasswords.com](http://www.4mypasswords.com)

[nubyrubyrailstales.blogspot.com/](http://nubyrubyrailstales.blogspot.com/)

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## What I ~~like~~ love about Rails...

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- Framework & scripts
- Migrations
- WEBrick / Mongrel
- Conventions...?
- ~~Pluralization...?~~
- { Wiki / Api }.[rubyonrails.org](http://rubyonrails.org)
- Documentation
- ActionMailer
  - But it's a little weird





## What I ~~like~~ love about Rails...

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- Deprecation warnings...
- Pretty good tools (e.g., RadRails, ...)
  - But I wish there were a Vim option
  - VI Improved ([www.vim.org](http://www.vim.org)) has a *great* Rails plugin, but no visual directory tree presentation

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# ...and what I wonder about

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- What happened to script/help?
- ~~Pluralization...?~~
  - Conventions not followed:

Now, generate a controller:

```
ruby script/generate controller users
```

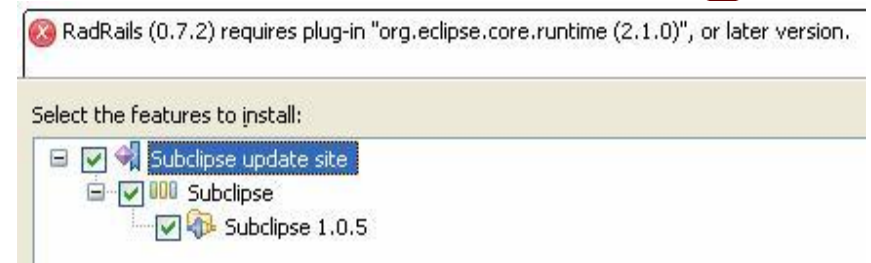
Open the controller file, users\_controller.rb and add the plugin include:

- ...and CamelCase versus camel\_case
  - script/generate ProductBacklog #> product\_backlog
- ...and just who is it “intuitive” to... Non-English speakers?
  - belongs\_to :user
  - has\_many :users
  - has\_and\_belongs\_to\_many :users
- ...and then there are collections
  - :client versus :clients ?



## ... and what I wonder about (2)

- **Things are broken:**
  - RadRails update fails
  - Ruby update fails
- **Installing a plugin is counter-intuitive:**
  - Sites say “do this” (script/plugin install...)
  - RadRails says “do this” (plugin create...)
  - ***Finally:*** just copy the stuff into the right directory!
- **Fast changing**
  - Deprecations – I’m just learning; why do I have all these recommended solutions with warnings...?





## ... and what I wonder about (3)

- Gaining familiarity with all the “auto-magical” stuff
- Soooo many special helpers, RJS, methods, ...
- Database collation defaults (not Rails?)

```
Collation latin1_swedish_ci
```

- **Documentation**
  - Scattered (rubyonrails.org, rubyforge.org, individual websites, ...)
  - Inconsistent
  - Missing
- Search engine visibility...?
- MySQL implementation: pure Ruby vs C gem...?

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## To be done...

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- Subversion
- Testing
- ActiveScaffold...?
- CSS/GUI interface updates
- User interface/functionality
  - E.g., password changes...
- Capistrano...?
- Testing
- Documentation
- XML Export/Import
- ...?

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## What's the Verdict?

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- Rails is awesome...
- ...and has some maturing to do
- **And I love it!**

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## Trade for services?

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- I've got a SuSE Linux machine running, and would like to get it set up for development.
- I've got a running Sun Classic X system for trade.



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