

# Quick Intro to PHP Development

Contributed by Alan  
Wednesday, 15 November 2006

Chances are that if you've been around the Internet long enough, you've heard of server-side scripting languages such as PERL, ASP and ColdFusion. These are all popular languages that are used to add interactivity to Web sites, but one stands out from the crowd in terms of usability, power, and, yes, price: the PHP scripting language. Initially developed in 1995 by North Carolina programmer Rasmus Lerdorf, PHP has since blossomed into one of the leading open-source, cross-platform scripting languages available.

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One very strong reason is that PHP, unlike PERL CGI scripts, is scalable and fast. Instead of requiring the server to start a new process in the operating system's kernel for each new request, which uses both CPU time and memory, PHP can run as a part of the Web server itself, which saves a considerable amount of processing time when dealing with multiple requests. This decreased processing time means that PHP can be used for high-traffic sites that cannot afford to have their performance hampered by relatively slow CGI scripts.

In addition to its scalability and speed, another usability factor that sets PHP apart is its ease of use. The PHP language is considered to be a mix between C and PERL, and it draws from the best features of each parent language, while adding unique features of its own. For example, PHP code can be embedded within standard HTML documents without using additional print statements or calling separate scripts to perform the processing tasks. In practice, this allows for very flexible programming practices. Although a working knowledge of HTML is a prerequisite for PHP development, PHP's basic functions can be learned quickly and applied to a wide range of common Webmaster-related projects, such as order forms, e-mail responses, and interactive Web pages.

Contributing to the power of the PHP language, is its native support for leading relational database platforms, including MySQL, Oracle and PostgreSQL. Platform-specific functions are built into the language for 12 databases in all. This native support for database platforms is a boon to any site that needs to track user information, store product data, or collect sales information.

Last but not least, because PHP is open-source, it is essentially free to use. Almost all professional Unix-based Web hosts offer PHP as an included option with hosting accounts. Be sure to check with your host to see if it is available to you.

This article is meant to be an introduction to the PHP language and not a tutorial, but have no fear—here are several first-rate sites that have articles that will guide you along in beginning your PHP development projects:

[www.php.net](http://www.php.net)

[www.onlamp.com/php/](http://www.onlamp.com/php/)

[www.phpbuilder.com](http://www.phpbuilder.com)

#### About the Author

Alan is the lead developer for InfoServe Media, LLC (<http://www.infoservemedia.com>), a Web development company that specializes in Web site design, hosting, domain name registration, and promotion for small businesses.