

Chicago VMUG Enthusiasts Talk About Upcoming Book Release

Chris Wahl and Steven Pantol talk with VMUG Voice about themselves, their experiences and the upcoming release of their first book, *Networking for VMware Administrators*, due out through VMware Press, spring 2014.

VMUG Voice: Congratulations on the pending publication of Networking for VMware Administrators. Is this your first book?



Chris: (@ChrisWahl): Strictly speaking, yes. I've written several hundred articles for Wahl Network and other publications, and have held the title of technical editor for other books, but have yet to set aside the time necessary to write a book until now.

Steve: (@StevePantol): Hey, thanks. Yes, this is my first official big-boy published book, though I have a drawer full of teen paranormal romance novels queued up for Kindle Direct. I expect a huge crossover audience.

VMUG Voice: So, why this topic? What need did you see in the workplace?

Chris: The idea stemmed from my own journey to master the concepts of virtualization, and a distinct lack of published knowledge around how to bridge the virtual and physical networking worlds together. In many of my previous work environments, the network was a mysterious place where packets magically teleported from place to place. This was considered business as usual in the past, but we are now entering a time frame where there are literally more virtual switch ports than physical ones. The need to have a solid foundation of networking operational knowledge is imperative.



Steve: Why this topic? Chris said, "Hey Steve, want to write a book on virtual networking?" As for the need, there seems to be a wall between the server and networking teams in many of the organizations we've worked for or with, and this is our modest attempt at helping to break it down.

VMUG Voice: What about your background prepared you to respond to that need?

Chris: I've spent most of my 13-year career working in technical environments to hone my craft, including the past two years as an enterprise consultant. In that time, I've had the pleasure of experiencing a vast number of environments while being responsible for operating in multiple silos. Much of the book has "real world" pointers where I try to add some of the flavoring from my personal experience to add value to the reader.

Steve: I was a network guy in a previous life, and my current role requires a high degree of jack-of-all-tradesness, as well as fostering that in others.

VMUG Voice: Who should read it?

Chris: Anyone who runs VMware vSphere in the environment. It was important to make the book as accessible as possible, and as such we wrote the content for someone who has very little networking experience. The book gradually becomes more advanced as it progresses, building on the content, which should appease the more technically experienced folks, too.

Steve: Anyone that thinks networking isn't their problem.

VMUG Voice: What was the best part about putting it all down in a book?

Chris: I was really surprised at how much advice ended up pouring out of my noodle as the book was formed. I could visualize many old war wounds from hitting snags and pitfalls. Writing them down (and hoping people will be able to avoid them) felt great.

Steve: I really enjoyed the back-and-forth process. We divvied up chapters to tackle individually, but there was a good bit of review and editing before we threw each chapter back over the wall to VMware Press. Many spirited debates were had over adverb usage, how many exclamation points were appropriate for the material and what words actually mean. And the feedback process, getting comments back from technical editors, blew my mind. They have some really smart people over there.

VMUG Voice: What was the most challenging?

Chris: People tried warning me, but I didn't realize how many moving parts were involved with writing a book. It takes a lot of time and effort from many people to get it right. I also did copious research to ensure what I wrote was absolutely true, since unlike a blog post there is no easy way to fix the content once it's published.

Steve: It's been a slog. What sounds fun when you're first talking about it at a bar becomes painful pretty quickly, particularly when the project is vying for time between a more-than-full-time job and wrangling small children.

VMUG Voice: Who are you going to buy a copy for? Will they want it autographed?

Chris: We get a few copies gratis as authors, so I have already promised them out to my family and friends. I'll most likely just make them out to "eBay" in case I get famous some day and they need some quick cash.

Steve: It'll likely become part of our new-hire training program. We often hire people with a particular specialization – maybe they're storage experts, or they've done a ton of core vSphere stuff – and our first challenge is rounding them out so they can build a more holistic view of the data center. Networking is often where they're weakest, so this'll be a good start.

As for autographing, since Wahl's so heavy with a sharpie and the promotional swag, I figure the un-autographed, un-sullied version will be worth more in time.

VMUG Voice: Tell us about your VMUG participation.

Chris: I am one of the Leaders of the Chicago VMUG group. For the past three years I have been working with the team to put on some really spectacular local meetings and user conferences. VMUG is an awesome organization run by people who are passionate about virtualization and providing a positive experience for the community, and I am proud to be a part of the force that moves it forward.

Steve: I just attended my first VMUG conference, after something like six years of good intentions. I just always found myself out of town for them. It was a blast, but if you've ever been, you know that.

VMUG Voice: When you are not working, what do you like to do?

Chris: I also run Wahl Network, which is a combination blog and YouTube channel focused on technical content. Most of my time is spent crafting content, being briefed on new products, or traveling the globe to attend or speak at events. Once in a great while I'll take a break and play something on Steam, but I really dislike spending time on tasks with no tangible outcome.

Steve: I have three kids under three, and boy, are they needy. They suck up most of my non-work time. During the rare pockets of me-time, I like to read and I dabble in writing mediocre short fiction.

In advance of the book, *VMUG Voice* readers are invited to read a [sample chapter](#).