
Subject: Re: Private vs. shared colormaps in IDL
Posted by [davidf](#) on Thu, 29 Jan 1998 08:00:00 GMT
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Scott Bennett (bennetsc@ucs.orst.edu) writes:

> I'm an IDL novice and need a bit of help. I'm running IDL 5
> on a Sun under Solaris 2.5.x and using an HP 735 running HP-UX 9
> as the DISPLAY. My problem is that I need idl to use shared color
> maps. Right now if I do a plot, for example, idl loads a private
> color table, which conceals nearly everything on the screen except
> the plot itself, even the window frame. That means I'm fishing in
> the dark just to find the button on the frame to change the window
> to an icon in order to reactivate the shared map used by all other
> applications and the window manager. I have also tried it using
> the Sun as the DISPLAY with the same results.

By default, IDL always grabs all of the colors that remain in the shared color map for itself. It will only be given a private color map if there are no colors remaining in the shared color map. (Or, more precisely, IDL will be assigned a private color map if it asks for more colors than can be provided in the shared color map.)

Clearly, the technical problem you are experiencing is known in the trade as "ain't no colors left". :-)

The question is, why?

I'll hazard a guess or two. Both the Solaris and HP operating systems use the Common Desktop Environment (CDE), and boy, does that splash screen look great! Unfortunately, it uses about 100 colors to get that great effect. Assign another 10 colors or so to the window manager, and that leaves the rest of the applications looking to share about 146 colors. Almost too few for real scientific programming.

But if you are like me, you don't grab your cup of coffee and immediately start knocking out beautiful widget programs first thing in the morning. You have to kind of ease into it. I like to read my mail. Knock off another 10 colors for the e-mail application. Then I usual see if the Germans have left any interesting messages on the IDL newsgroup overnight. That takes another 20 or so colors for the news reader. Inevitably someone references some neat new web page that I haven't looked at yet and I fire up the ol' browser.

Whoops. All my colors are gone. Because NetScape acts sort of

like IDL and thinks its the king of the roost. It grabbed all the colors remaining in the shared color map.

My the time I get around to doing a little IDL programming and justifying the brand new computer, there are no colors left in the shared color map and I get a private color map.

What could I have done about it?

Well, I could have read the CDE documentation and figured out how to set the CDE to use a "medium" or "low" number of colors. That would help.

I could have started IDL up before I started all those other applications. (But I better learn how to do it in such a way that all those other applications don't hate me!)

I could also read the NetScape documentation to tell it to use some specific number of colors (25 seems about right to me).

Suppose I want to start IDL up before all the other applications, but I want to leave some colors in the shared color table for them to use. I could start IDL up and then open the very first graphics window (this is when the number of colors in that IDL session is determined) like this:

```
Window, Colors=-30
```

Now IDL has taken all but 30 colors from the shared color map. Those 30 remaining colors can be fought over by the other applications.

You can find a number of other articles about color and IDL on my web page. I'm currently working on an article about how to get IDL and an application like NetScape to share the *same* set of colors in the shared color map.

There are other things that could be going on here, too. This is not the only scenario. Only the most likely, in my experience. Another possibility is that someone put the selection of IDL colors in the .Xdefaults file and you simply don't have that number of colors in your shared map when you start IDL. If you want to call me while you are in front of the machine we could probably sort it out in a couple of minutes.

Cheers,

David

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