
Subject: Re: Free Advice, was: PostScript and IDL
Posted by [mgs](#) on Thu, 28 May 1998 07:00:00 GMT
[View Forum Message](#) <> [Reply to Message](#)

In article <MPG.fd71db939c942909897bb@news.frii.com>, davidf@dfanning.com
(David Fanning) wrote:

> Mike Schienle (mschienle@dtsi.com) writes:
>
>> The reality of the situation is that giving away things for free leads
>> to ... giving away more things for free. I maintain the FAQ for this
>> newsgroup and nearly every week I receive private email asking to help
>> solve a problem with IDL. Not once has a free solution I've offered
>> turned into something tangible, nor do I expect it to. I'm not
>> complaining, just pointing out the reality.
>
> Beyond the fact that I just plain *like* to answer questions
> and write IDL programs, it's no secret that I sell IDL books,
> teach IDL courses, and write IDL programs for a living. To
> a large extent giving things away for free is what constitutes
> "marketing" in this business. RSI doesn't tell me who their
> customers are and when I send e-mail to lists of IDL users I
> gather mostly from this newsgroup I get painted as a spammer.

Same Mike Schienle, just from a different address this time.
Personally, I get annoyed when I see the occasional post berating David
for mentioning he has written IDL books and sells them. Would it be better
to sell a batch of them to RSI and let them sell through their own
distribution? There will either be a mark-up on RSI's side, or a mark-down
on David's side. Nothing against RSI, but cutting out the middleman saves
everyone some money.

> So there aren't too many options available to me to reach
> people who need what I have to offer. I thought from the
> beginning that a web page with good advice and good software
> would at least get my name recognized.
>
> So I spend my 2-3 hours a day answering questions here
> and via private e-mails. I don't resent it, although
> I am constantly surprised by the large number of people who
> don't even acknowledge the help. Not being paid directly makes
> it possible to say "screw you" when I get yet one more
> question from the ingrate using me as his/her personal
> on-line help source. (Present company excluded, of
> course. :-) It also makes it possible for me to work
> on questions or programs that interest me.
>
> What I don't do is give *everything* away for free.

Here's something that happened to me several years ago that is somewhat relevant. I had a very mild car accident and the door wouldn't close properly. I took it to the body shop and asked to have it repaired. I was told it would be \$50 to align the door, which I paid, then asked when I could pick it up. The repair guy walked out to the car, opened the door and damn near lifted the car up by it. To my amazement, the door shut perfectly afterwards. Now, I don't want to imply that David writes code the way this guy fixes cars :-) but there are some functions that we have already written to handle situations like this. We developed them on our own time to solve our own problems.

- > And
- > I have been thinking lately, as I am sure Mike has been
- > thinking lately, that *some* of this stuff is certainly
- > worth money to some people. The question is, how can
- > we produce the software and sell it to the people who
- > need it at a reasonable cost? Mike and I and several
- > other people who nibble around the edges of RSI's
- > business have been thinking about some kind of shareware
- > cooperative, where we could put some of our best
- > programs.

The shareware cooperative is what I was alluding to when I mentioned having an ulterior motive at the end of the previous post. Like David, I get a real kick out of helping people with their IDL problems. I work as a contract programmer and depend on repeat customers and word of mouth. When I'm negotiating contracts I usually try to separate general purpose tools from application specific portions of the applications. The result is a lot of reusable code for my own use as well as filtering it through the IDL and PV-WAVE community. If I just give it away, the incentive to enhance and upgrade it is minimal.

One of the areas we got hung up on when discussing shareware was on-going support. Like David mentioned above, it's easy to walk away when the point of diminishing returns has been reached. Since there are no tangible returns to diminish, think of it as "you got what you paid for" and move on. When I develop applications for a client, I maintain and upgrade them as long as that client asks. To date, I haven't turned down a request for an update to a function.

- > There are many questions, of course, not least of which
- > is this: Will anyone pay us? And for me there is the
- > question of whether this goes against the grain of
- > the open, nurturing community of this newsgroup.
- >
- > I don't know the answers. I do know that being compensated
- > for your work is powerful incentive to write and maintain

> good programs. :-)
>
> I'd like to hear your view.

I'll start the bidding, if you name a price.

> Cheers,
>
> David

Regards,

--

Mike Schienle
mgs@sd.cybernex.net

Interactive Visuals
<http://ww2.sd.cybernex.net/~mgs/>
