
Subject: Free Advice, was: PostScript and IDL
Posted by [davidf](#) on Thu, 28 May 1998 07:00:00 GMT
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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. 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. 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.

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.

Cheers,

David

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