Subject: Re: The death of WIDED (was: Interactively building GUIs in IDL 5.1?)
Posted by Richard G. French on Sun, 12 Jul 1998 07:00:00 GMT
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David Fanning wrote:
>
>
> If I were to tell you that I had a piece of software that
> would allow you to build widget programs interactively
> (I mean by this that you could drag and drop "widgets"
> onto a palette, set properties by double clicking the
> widgets, add event handler code by means of a built-in
> editor, be able to recover and re-edit the IDL code it
> generated, etc.), what would you be willing to pay for it?
>

I think this is a useful topic for discussion. As has been pointed out before in this news group, there is a whole range of software, from the clever 1-line routine that determines the ENDIAN nature of the particular machine, to libraries of routine available on the web for medical or astronomical data analysis, for example, to commercial products like ENVI (and PV-WAVE?) that have IDL as their basis but provide professional-quality enhanced features.

One of the great things about using IDL is the amount of free advice and help that is available on this newsgroup. Everything is 'freeware' so far - I have not seen IDL shareware around. Also, to remain competitive, all computational software needs to add new features on a regular basis. So, my first reaction to David's question was that RSI should provide this capability for free, but as I think about it, I realize that there are other models worth considering. For example, with MATLAB, you can buy the basic program, but add functionality with add-on 'toolboxes'. I have found these toolboxes pretty expensive, but well-documented, very useful, and supported by the makers of MATLAB. I am willing to pay the price for something that works and meets professional standards. Home-brew software nearly always fails that test in some way or another.

I have tried twice to create a large widget-based program, and I have had to relearn the tricks of the trade each time, due partly to the many enhancements in the way RSI has set up widgets. There are now approximately 580,358 keywords available for each widget program, and some of us would like to avoid having to learn about each and every one of them just to put together a widget. I know that it would increase my produtivity enormously if I could build widgets with a widget-builder. When I build WEB pages, I do it by hand, without a composer program, but I shamelessly copy examples

from every nice web page that I see. Widgets are a lot tougher than HTML, and I have gone to David Fanning's book and web page quite a bit to try to learn a proven style for widgets that avoid the dreaded XMANAGER error messages.

I'd be willing to pay someone for a widget-building program as David describes. Although it would be nice to think that I could see the source code for the program, I don't ask that of the Mac and PC programs I buy, nor of ENVI, and a compiled savefile would be fine by me. In MATLAB, there is a licensing scheme by which the toolboxes are added to the license, and I would have no objection to this kind of restriction so that the software provider got paid for each instance of the program used. I think this kind of protection is essential for the programmer, or you end up with a million pirate copies and no financial return for the programmer.

How much would I be willing to pay? Tougher question, but certainly as much as $150 and probably not more than $250.

Other opinions welcome, even if they disagree with mine! I'd love to see such a program developed.

Before closing, how about a package of object oriented programs that are complete and do useful simple things? There is a steep learning curve for them, and I'd be willing to pay for them as well, although I think that RSI should definitely work on supplying more of them themselves. I know that they are not doing much to help the neophyte object-oreinted programmer like me take the giant step to trying to build a large OOP application.

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