
Subject: GUI Builder limited to Windows platform (LONG)
Posted by [David Foster](#) on Tue, 10 Nov 1998 08:00:00 GMT
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I wanted to post a response I received from Mark Goosman, the IDL Product Manager, about my concern that the new GUI Builder is meant only for the Windows platforms. As far as I can tell, they have no plans on extending this functionality to other platforms.

For a company that makes cross-platform compatibility one of its main selling points, I think this is inexcusable. Does anyone else agree?

I probably wouldn't even use the Builder myself, but I know a lot of groups that are just beginning to develop widget programs, and this tool would be invaluable to them.

Anyway, here is Mark's response. I've prefaced my comments by % (pun intended). First, I want to thank Mark for taking the time to send me a very thorough response.

===== Response from RSI's Mark Goosman, IDL Product Manager =====

Dave:

Your Email to Jennifer Lodder was forwarded on to me. We are a small enough company that Email to just about any account finds it's way to a rightful recipient.

I understand, and to a certain extent, share your comments regarding the IDL GUIBuilder being limited to the Microsoft Windows platforms. There are several issues that went into this decisions.

The primary decision was the additional effort required to support the IDL GUIBuilder on all supported IDL platforms. This would have required development and testing on each of the Motif versions of Sun, HP-UX, SGI, IBM/AIX, DEC Unix, in addition to the Macintosh. We also have some very verbal OpenVMS customers who expect the same level of support. This level of resource is beyond the scope of Research Systems and would have prevented us from releasing IDL 5.2 in a reasonable time frame. We also had a large number of other major features for IDL 5.2 that could not have been implemented had we not limited the IDL GUIBuilder to the Windows platform. I'm not sure if you've seen the total list of new features for IDL 5.2 but we've added several new data types (16 bit unsigned, 64 bit signed, and 64 bit unsigned), support for several new data file formats (HDF-EOS, DICOM, PNG, DXF, and others), very large files, and several other features requested by our user community.

% So it really boils down to a question of priority. Either get
% version 5.2 released, or spend resources implementing the Builder
% on other platforms. Tough decision. My first question would be: If
% supplying a GUI Builder for the platforms that use IDL is "beyond
% the scope of Research Systems" then why was the Builder created
% for the Windows platforms in the first place? And my next question
% would be: How many other platform specific tools (and perhaps
% upgrades!) will we have to look forward to?

We are finding that most Unix users of IDL do have access to Windows machines. The recent addition of FlexLM support to IDL for Windows means that anyone with an Unix floating license can set up IDL for access on their Windows platforms. This offers a solution to a large percentage of our Unix customer base. One major goal of the IDL GUIBuilder was that the generated code be cross-platform compatible.

% No. I would agree that most Unix users have access to Windows
% machines, but it is not true that most Unix users have floating
% license; at least not here at UCSD, where this is definitely
% not true. For a group such as ours, floating point licenses
% are much more expensive, so upgrading the licenses would not
% be an acceptable option.

One other major aspect of the decision was the demand for GUI development tools on the Windows platform compared to the same market for Unix. There are several major companies offering these types of tools (Microsoft Visual Basic, Symantec Cafe, etc). There are, however, fewer products for Unix users reflecting less of a demand.

% If this is the kind of reasoning that RSI's marketing used to
% reach these decisions then we are really in trouble! The demand
% for GUI builders for Visual Basic, C and Pascal reflect a need
% for such tools by those creating commercial applications that
% they intend to market. My impression is that most of the users
% of IDL are writing in-house applications for their own research
% purposes. The software is to be used locally, and not distributed.
% There is absolutely no reason to assume that those users of IDL
% using Windows machines have any more need for a GUI Builder than
% those who use Unix machines.

%
% So as I now understand it, what it *really* boils down to is
% "market demand".

Any decision on new features and functionality in IDL is based on providing the best solution to the IDL user community. I hope it is apparent that RSI makes every effort to prioritize resources in a way that makes IDL most effective in solving the needs of our users and

customers.

% Don't get me wrong. I love IDL, I would be a great salesman for
% it. But it concerns me when I see a company begin to favor support
% for one platform over another, based on an analysis of "market
% demands". This is the first time I have seen this with RSI. I
% have seen this many times with other companies, and the results
% are always unfortunate for those who don't happen to be using the
% most common platform/hardware/software/etc.. If RSI decides to
% support a particular platform, then SUPPORT it!
%
% Thank-you for your valuable time; I really appreciate your
% very thoughtful response.
%
% Dave

Please let me know if you have any questions or additional comments.

Best regards,

Mark Goosman

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