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Subject: Re: IDL 5.2 reviews?

Posted by [Randall Smith](#) on Wed, 04 Nov 1998 08:00:00 GMT

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davidf@dfanning.com (David Fanning) writes:

>  
> Gwyn Fireman (fireman@magictrick.gsfc.nasa.gov) writes:  
>  
>> Now that IDL 5.2 has been officially announced, I'm being asked if we  
>> should upgrade. I have what RSI sent, and the press release - where  
>> can I get more information?  
>  
> I will say this about IDL 5.2 (whether I am suppose to  
> or not): if you work for NASA and you don't get this  
> upgrade you must be working in the backwaters and are  
> about to lose your funding. If this upgrade is not named  
> the "NASA upgrade" internally, then it ought to be. I can't  
> imagine a group of people better suited to using its new  
> functionality. Consider just file formats for a moment: TIFF++,  
> GeoTIFF, PNG, HDF+, HDF-EOS. That list, along with unsigned  
> integers, has to have NASA types drooling. :-)  
>

Well, speaking as an ex-NASA postdoc, yes, having those file formats is terrific but RSI had better watch the cost, especially for the small-time Unix users. I had some serious problems convincing my boss to go for the upgrade to v5, and many new Unix workstations are now IDL-free, at least where I was. When the cost of a new IDL license is 50% of the workstation cost, leaving it off starts sounding better and better.

This doesn't really affect places where there is a "systems group" that handles computer purchases and that ensures that all is well. But at least in the research groups, more and more computers are bought simply on research grants that have finite budgets. And these research groups eventually propose the multi-million dollar projects that buy IDL as a matter of course. Unless, of course, the underlying research group couldn't afford IDL before, and so nobody bothers to buy it now. It's a slow-brewing problem, though--one that won't show it's head until it's too late to do anything.

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