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Subject: Re: Plea for IDL 2000 (was: a plea for more reliable mathematical routines)  
Posted by [davidf](#) on Sat, 18 Sep 1999 07:00:00 GMT

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Greg (ushomirs@my-deja.com) feels like this discussion is getting a little hot. I'm sorry he feels that way and I'm sorry if he feels like I'm contributing some of the heat.

Let me just say, again, that I am completely in favor of discussions of IDL's weaknesses. Many people at RSI read this newsgroup (I know this from my personal experience of feeling a little heat myself from time to time) and this is a useful forum for making our thoughts, feelings, and even our wish-lists known to them. They DO pay attention. And they DO care about what you have to say. Their goal--as even the most cynical among us must acknowledge--is to sell software. They can't write software that is indifferent to the needs and wishes of their users if they want to be successful.

But what is not helpful--indeed it might even be counterproductive--is to couch our disappointments and displeasure and whatever it is that is not working for us in invective. Better, and MUCH more productive, to voice our concerns and offer a few constructive suggestions, as Mr. Vukovic did a day or so ago. You might even try wit and humor if you are capable of it. Although humor sometimes goes awry in print form, it at least makes for more interesting reading than a rant of the things you don't like and it can be every bit as sharp.

Will RSI respond to everything we want? Not likely. While the software costs more than Microsoft Office, RSI probably sells the same number of licenses in a year that Microsoft sells in an hour. Pockets and staff (whatever you may have heard) are not nearly so deep. So wish-lists have to be balanced against time, priorities, and staff considerations. What people have asked for and what they want DOES figure into that equation. More now, I think, than it did several years ago when I was more familiar with the process.

The bottom line is this: keep those cards and letters pouring in. RSI *\*needs\** our feedback. But nobody--from dogs to children to software companies--responds well

to shouted criticism. Show them the stick (and your wallet), but give them the carrot, too.

- > So i don't see how unsound programming practices
- > that would have been acceptable in a prototype could pass in a real,
- > shipping product.

Several years ago now RSI realized that what seemed like a good program structure 16 years ago wasn't working so well anymore. It was becoming more and more difficult to graph new features onto the underlying program scaffolding. So they took nearly one and a half years to completely rewrite the IDL internals, using the best programming practices at the time. The idea was to create an internal structure that would allow things like objects and pointers and the new development environment, which would probably not have been possible with the old structure.

What I remember most about that time was how often I had to face irate people who were screaming at me that for a year and a half they had gotten NOTHING for their maintenance dollars! Why was RSI ripping them off! Was David Stern talking the whole company on vacations to Mexico with their money, etc., etc. I felt like \*I\* was under a lot of pressure, and I wasn't even writing the code. I can imagine what the engineers were feeling, working 10-12 hour days. I think the fact that a fair number of them left the company at the end of that effort is testament to the strain they were under.

But you see, it is the nature of people that they want to have their cake and eat it too. I wouldn't be a programmer for a software company for anything. You are always in the hot seat, no matter what you do. And who among us can write bug-free code under that kind of pressure?

- > And boy, does Microsoft get major flak for bugs in their stuff!

Yeah, well, they deserve it. Gates is rich as hell. :-)

- > SO while my original complaint about bad documentation for LSODE started
- > this big flame war, nobody even bothered to take on my second question,
- > how the heck do i call an IDL function from an external (linkimage or
- > dlm) module??

Donno. Not my job as Defender of the Realm. :-)

Cheers,

David

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