
Subject: Re: Inexpensive / free-ware similar to IDL?
Posted by [Chris Schmidt](#) on Mon, 27 Sep 1999 07:00:00 GMT
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> "K. S. Balasubramaniam" wrote:
>> IDL has been a wonderful tool and has enormous strengths, but individuals
>> cannot afford it.

Liam Gumley wrote:

> If you're already familiar with IDL, is the cost of a single-user IDL
> license for Windows more or less than the cost of your salary and
> benefits for however many weeks it takes for you to find, learn, and do
> something productive with a 'free' package?

<climbs onto soapbox>

A part of the price issue that seems to be forgotten is how pricing affects the availability of IDL to students, both graduate and undergraduate. RSI encourages university departments to use IDL by offering discounts for license packages and site licenses. This has happened at both my undergraduate and graduate institutions. In my undergraduate physics program, IDL was indispensable because of the variety of locally written and vendor provided routines. We did things in our homework assignments that we couldn't dream of doing otherwise. We were lucky, however, that there were so few of us, and thus we almost always had access to machines with IDL. However, as dorm PCs (not owned by the university) have become more prevalent and powerful, the option of students having individual copies of IDL has become much more popular. The *idea* is popular, but the price makes it impossible. In the graduate level world, an increasing number of students have their own PCs at home, and again the same problem arises.

Yes, there is a "student version" of IDL. We helped Beta test it at Lawrence University back in 1996 or 1997. Even back then we knew that the array limitations (65,536 bytes of memory/array, not to mention the other limitations) would make it almost difficult or impossible to use the student version for most assignments in even the sophomore level physics courses. We informed RSI of this at the time.

It would be a great convenience to have a full version of IDL available to students (to run on their own machines, not university owned) at reasonable prices (say, sub \$300, for example). It is true that in most cases, students who use IDL have access to the full version through a site-license or group of licenses. However, I think it hurts the perception of IDL and also hurts the spread of IDL that there is not a full version that they can afford to run on their own machines. I know RSI is not a very large company, and I know that they work very hard to put out their products. I am also aware of their concerns that academic pricing could be abused (for example, used in a lab when

a site license would be the correct option). I firmly believe, however, that their user-base, and hence revenues, would grow strongly and steadily with increased availability of the full version to students, and as a consequence the prices for the individual, non-academic licence could come down as that larger, young user-base leaves academia for the "real-world" and wishes to continue use of IDL.

<gets off of his well-worn soap-box>

regards,
Chris Schmidt
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