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Subject: Re: Top 10 IDL Requests

Posted by [Patrick Broos](#) on Mon, 17 Jul 2000 07:00:00 GMT

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> So, here is the deal. If you feel inclined to  
> submit a couple of ideas to this newsgroup, I  
> will collect them and submit them personally  
> to the VP. I'll even follow up and make sure  
> he has, uh, read them. :-)

David,

Thanks for working to improve IDL on behalf of the user community. I don't have any humorous thoughts this morning, but here are some ideas that you might consider.

\* Like you, I have spent a lot of effort working around IDL's very primitive handling of color. I eventually developed an environment for my own applications (as you have) that allows 8 & 24 bit color, X and PostScript devices, user-defined color tables, and named colors (e.g. "red"). For the beginning user however there is a tremendous learning curve to do something like, say, `tvscf an image user a specified color table, draw a "blue" box on it (where blue is not in the given color table), and print it out in color PostScript.` Surely more of this could be available "out of the box".

\* Similarly, it takes a great deal of reading and effort to mix images and plot axes. Yes, you've done it, I've done it, and many folks have done it, but it remains a significant obstacle for new users.

\* It would be nice if RSI better supported the administration of IDL at a user site (as opposed to single-user installations). For example, it would be convenient if the IDL administrator had a convenient way to supply `IDL_PATH` and `IDL_STARTUP` values to all users, while retaining the user's ability to supply additional path and startup information. I wrote a script to do this ([http://www.astro.psu.edu/users/patb/psu\\_idl](http://www.astro.psu.edu/users/patb/psu_idl)) but RSI could support this problem more directly.

\* As I've ranted and raved before, I still think RANDOMN() and RANDOMU()  
have  
such a checkered history of bugs and very poor semantics that they  
should be  
retired and replaced with a new routine of better design.

\* A lot of code could be streamlined if IDL widely supported the concept  
of a zero-length  
array (distinguished from an undefined variable). Think how useful the  
concept of  
the null string is in string processing.

Thanks,  
Pat

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