OK. Hereï¿½s my scoop.

I just finished a conference call with Matthew Powell (PR), Mike Scally
(CEO) and Richard Cook (VP Dev) from RSI and have more information and
impressions.

Thing 1. While Iï¿½m still disappointed in the general situation, Iï¿½m
certainly not mad at RSI, nor to I mistrust anyoneï¿½s motives. Iï¿½ve been
convinced that their effort to support OS X lasted to the end of their
ability to do so (at least for now), and perhaps a bit beyond.

Thing 2. The future is not entirely bleak.

Thing 3: They are very painfully aware of the communication breakdown
that resulted in the current hubbub and are taking steps to remedy it.
My telecon was one. When they finished with me, they were moving on to
another similar one with someone else. I would assume the web/sales/tech
information is not going to be too far behind.

Here are some questions I had and _paraphrases_ of the answers. To the
user community, I apologize if I missed a key question or didnï¿½t follow
up. To RSI, I hope I represented things accurately. This is my first foray into journalism. :-/

Q: Did Kodak make them do it?
A: No. Kodak owns RSI and has put profitability pressure on it, but
doesnï¿½t issue edicts about how to run things. [I believe ï¿½em.]

Q: Did they figure in the impact of the loss of the cross platform
crown? 100+ license labs to go away (or worse, not sign on at all) due
to the mixed nature of the lab and the need to share data/programs.
A: They tried, but it is a difficult intangible to judge.

Q: What the heck was so unrecoverably expensive about OS X?
A: [Summary only] Writing, documenting, debugging, Q&A, and support on
an entirely new ground-up One-off build for a niche market proved more
than they could support. They went several months farther in development
than they thought they should have because of their desire to make the
mac platform work out. In answer to a related question, Mac-based
licenses would have to basically _quadruple_ (to roughly $1 million a
year), and continue to show increase to make the effort profitable.
[Opinion ï¿½ I think OS X has a shot if anything does, but it is asking
allot]

Q: Couldnï¿½t they just put the development on hiatus until they saw how

OS X shook out?
A: No, for a variety of reasons.

Q: Could they release an unsupported Beta?
A: Possibly, but it would satisfy no one. The first major bug would be a
quality assurance nightmare. [Opinion ï¿½ it would stand a chance of
pissing off more people than it would please]. When stopped, the build
was about half done. I got the impression it had some ways to go to make
it even a decent Beta.

Q2. What about volunteers who wanted to help finish the code?
A2. Easier said than done. Again a QA nightmare. Potential licensing
issues.

Q. Could they make a Mac Linux release? [Personal note ï¿½ this would go
90+% of the way to making me happy. Iï¿½m a command line user of IDL and
have used it on *ux systems for years. I hate widgets. I donï¿½t care about Aqua or Cocoa.
All I want is IDL running natively on my mac.]
A. It may be feasible. They have not yet done due diligence exploring
the possibility. The effort up till now has been OS X or bust.
Engineering opinion is that the IDL core should present little to no
problem. The third party libraries can be worlds of trouble however (an
example was given of the headaches converting some older HDF and other
libraries to HPUX 64 bit).

Q2. How long would it take to determine if they could do it?
A2. A few people, a few weeks. More for Quality assurance.

Q3. Would they be willing to farm out some QA to the user community?
A3. Probably.

Q4. If this would work, could Mac-Linux version keep pace with other *ux
versions?
A4. [I got the impression it would certainly be easier than writing and
supporting a fully native OS X build]

[At this point I asked them to please please please do the due dilligence]

Q. Could they support IDL 5.5 (and maybe beyond) in the Classic
environment of OS X? [Personal note: This would go 50% of the way for
me. Though I had visions of dropping OS 9.x altogether eventually, it
ainï¿½t going to happen for quite a while with Adobe etc going slow in
carbonizing. I run IDL 5.4 in classic right now with very few problems and
can continue as long as 9.x is around. Be even better if RSI supported
it]
A. Theyï¿½re evaluating that now. They sounded optimistic. Thereï¿½s an
issue with the Hasp, which goes away either with or after 5.5. Without the
hardware protection it gets difficult to protect licenses on Macs.

[Opinion: I certainly understand that it takes only a couple vindictive souls or freeloaders to damage software-keyed product profitability. Theyï¿½re working on solutions for that, too, but did not elaborate. Again, though, this is a Mac-only problem.]
[Opinion: I like this as a short term solution. I like it a lot. It would give RSI an opportunity to hang in there and see how OS X affects the Mac market.]

Q. Is the decision to halt Mac OS Development set in stone now and forever?
A. No. Regardless of what they do theyï¿½ll be watching the Mac. They really wanted this to work. [Opinion: I believe them]

Q. Does Apple know that Mac+IDL kicks butt as a science app? Can they help?
A. Appleï¿½s donated a G4. RSI could use more help.
[Opinion: The Mac IDL base would be wise to turn some attention to Apple. I personally think that RSI and Apple could pushme/pullyou into the science mainstream, but it wonï¿½t happen if they donï¿½t back each other]

Final impressions (all my own):
RSI is doing and has done the best it can for the Mac. The communication cock-up cost them and they know it. There is at least a real chance for a) Classic support and/or b) IDL for Mac-Linux. There is also chance for future revival of OS X native IDL, but the numbers (big numbers) have to be there. I judge the chance remote, at least for now. I personally think that a Mac-Linux solution would be just fine. The IDL community that must have OS X native IDL should ask/pressure Apple to partner more deeply with RSI.

Thanks to Matt, Richard, and Mike for that most valuable commodity: information.

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