
Subject: Re: Knew this would happen after Kodac purchased RSI
Posted by [Struan Gray](#) on Tue, 23 Oct 2001 14:24:10 GMT
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JD Smith, jdsmith@astro.cornell.edu writes:

- > I post here my private email to RSI concerning
- > their abandonment of Macs and MacOSX, and encourage
- > others to do so, so at least someone will notice the
- > sentiments, and perhaps others will be encouraged to
- > let their feelings be known too. At the very least
- > we can demonstrate that the "only 3 calls or emails"
- > statement is either in error or misleading.

Here's my effort.

I disagree with the first poster, and the title of this thread. I'm sure that RSI can screw up on their own, without orders from Kodak to do so :-)

For me, switching from IDL will be tiresome, but not a life-engulfing process. Ironically, I will probably end up using PCs a lot more than I did, but at least I won't be paying extra over my colleagues for the privilege.

Struan

Dear RSI,

I recently learned that IDL 5.5 will be the last native version of IDL for the Mac platform. This is very disappointing news, and for me at least negates the few other advantages that IDL has over its competitors. As a direct result of this decision I will not be renewing the maintenance contracts for my Mac or PC licences early next year. I have also shelved the completed grant application I had written for using ION to do web-based teaching of crystallography and solid-state physics.

I am sure that since your announcement you have received plenty of argument that the Mac is still an excellent platform for scientific computing. Ironically, one of the best arguments in its favour was your own press release announcing altivec support. However, one point not generally made is that Macs are still very popular in countries where English is not the first language. Other OSs are catching up, but it is still the case that a Swedish Mac is more Swedish than Swedish Windows or

Swedish Unix. More generally, and unlike the other systems whose support you have dropped, the Mac has continuing viability for serious computing into the foreseeable future.

I am not a major user of IDL, having a whopping two licences, plus a run-time licence for a microscope controller from Omicron Vakuumphysik GmbH. However, I have been an active IDL evangelist. The most recent generation of Synchrotron X-ray sources create the sort of multi-dimensional data sets where IDL excels, and I have been asked about IDL more in the last year than in all the previous seven that I have been using it. My most recent success was with a Mac-only department who are now wondering how they go about cancelling their purchase.

There are two main reasons the people I have tried to persuade have not bought your product. The first is that your academic pricing policy is downright stingy. This probably looks like ivory tower whining, but your competitors are much more generous in this respect, so they get our bums on their seats. My colleagues can get Mathematica, Matlab and the National Instruments tools cheaply or for free via university or faculty-wide site licences. IDL costs money that could send a student to a conference. To overcome this objection, IDL needs to offer something the other programs do not have: for me, easy cross-platform code sharing was the single biggest such factor.

The second reason is that RSI is perceived as being a small operator with an uncertain future. Even with Kodak backing and glossy adverts in New Scientist and Physics Today, IDL is not a mainstream product in the way that Matlab is. It is here that the cross-platform nature of IDL really worked in your favour. It not only made you different, but provided reassurance that any effort put into creating programs would not be wasted. That's gone.

In your public announcements you have stated that the decision to drop IDL for Mac development was a business one. To me, it looks less like a strategic move than a piece of post-facto success-spotting: you are putting all your eggs into the basket which turned out to be most profitable last time round. I am the sort of user who offers you the chance to break into new markets, but I get the feeling that you prefer to be a service company for those few users who have a large number of existing licences. I can understand that desire, but it gives me no reason to use your product, and I shall migrate elsewhere.

Struan Gray

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