
Subject: Open letter to RSI about dropping Alpha Tru64
Posted by [thompson](#) on Thu, 25 Oct 2001 14:44:17 GMT
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This is a copy of a letter sent to RSI.

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Dear Sir or Madam:

I'm writing you as a private citizen about your recent decision to drop future support for IDL on Tru64 Unix on the Alpha platform. Although the future of this platform is limited, it is currently an important platform for our project, and will be for several years in the future. It is too soon to drop support for Tru64 Unix.

Although the number of computers running IDL on Tru64 may not be as big as some other platforms, the influence and importance of these computers is far greater. Alpha workstations are used by the instrument teams of at least two instruments on the Solar and Heliospheric Observatory, SOHO. Because the core teams use IDL, universities and laboratories around the world who want to use the data from these missions also purchase IDL. The strong support of IDL by NASA has led to it being widely accepted by the astronomical community, and in particular the solar physics community. I know for a fact that some influential scientists associated with upcoming solar missions are now openly questioning whether we can continue to depend on IDL, in the light of the recent dropping of platforms. Even those who use platforms which are still support worry that these may be dropped in the future.

Cross platform compatibility is very important to us. The software which we develop is intended to work not only on our own computers, but on the computers which are used by the worldwide scientific community which is using our data. Thus, we write our software to work on all the platforms that our colleagues use, as well as our own. For this reason, the announcement that the Macintosh platform saddened me greatly, even though I don't personally use this platform. RSI's decision to rethink this decision based on porting from the Unix version of IDL is highly welcome, because I know that some of colleagues do use Macintoshes.

One can understand that porting IDL to a completely new and different Macintosh operating system, and maintaining the older Macintosh systems, would be a large drain on resources. The same is true for OpenVMS, an earlier dropped platform, because these systems are so radically different from the other platforms that IDL runs on. However, it's difficult to understand how dropping Tru64 Unix could represent a tremendous savings, since it's not that dissimilar to the other Unix platforms that IDL runs on.

I also question how accurately RSI can determine how many of their customers

are using Tru64 Unix. Just before RSI made the announcement about dropping platforms, I had just put in a purchase order for yearly maintenance for our Tru64 and Windows platforms. However, many of our licenses are now floating licenses, and may not be properly accounted for as being used on Tru64 platforms.

In summary, I ask you to rethink your decision to drop support for Tru64. Although this decision may appear to be a good decision in the short term, I hope that I've convinced you that it is bad decision in the long run.

Sincerely,

William Thompson

P.S. The views expressed here are my own, and do not represent those of NASA, the NASA Goddard Space Flight Center, or any other organization.
