
Subject: Re: Cool Help!

Posted by [JD Smith](#) on Tue, 16 Jul 2002 20:38:46 GMT

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On Mon, 08 Jul 2002 07:53:47 -0700, Ben Tupper wrote:

> Hello,
>
> You may recall a while back that I had a thorn under my saddle regarding
> the IDL online help (in particular for IDL 5.5 which was padded on as a
> PDF.) Some folk passed along ideas about what might be nice for future
> online help system, and I faithfully sent those ideas along to RSI. I
> hope I sent them to the right place but I have no idea since I received
> no response.
> In the meantime, Andrew Cool had been cooking up a method for extracting
> the online help text (including that for IDL 5.5) via that neat IDL 5.5
> HTML help files that David is hosting at his website. I still don't
> know who crafted that

The help text came from IDLWAVE, the Emacs IDL programming/shell mode (idlwave.org), which uses it for it's own internal fast text-help system.

The massive perl script `get_rinfo` does the heavy lifting, but relies on the excellent `pdftotext` program by Derek Noonburg to extract raw text from RSI's PDF help files. It also flags and corrects typos, inserts updated documentation that RSI was too lazy to integrate themselves ;), normalizes calling sequences, etc. It employs all manner of crufty techniques to digest this inconsistent data pile, to pare it down to something useful.

However, since `get_rinfo` creates lisp-indexed files for use by IDLWAVE, converting the `idlw-help.txt` file it creates to HTML is somewhat roundabout. It would be easy enough to take `get_rinfo` as a base, and, in perl, create a full HTML-izer for RSI's PDF help texts which is rather more optimal than the by-hand-from-ascii method Andrew employed. You could create full indices, nicely-layed-out tables, cross-references within help documents, etc.

If anyone is interested, `get_rinfo` is available as part of the IDLWAVE package at idlwave.org.

JD

P.S. The other option is to bug RSI to include full HTML versions of their help system... this may not be as hopeless as you'd guess.
