
Subject: Re: Help for non-RSI libraries under IDL 4.0
Posted by [thompson](#) on Sun, 28 May 1995 07:00:00 GMT
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twf@pfc.mit.edu (twf@pfc.mit.edu) writes:

> In article <3q36dl\$iid@nntp5.u.washington.edu>,
> Eric Deutsch <deutsch@astro.washington.edu> writes:

>> I've installed version 4.0 of IDL, and the new help system is fairly helpful,
>> although just as ugly as the MS Windows help browser.

>>

>> However, there seems to be one terrible thing lacking: it appears to me that
>> the new help system provides no support for linking other help files from
>> user-created or downloaded libraries to the new help system. i.e., whereas
>> in IDL 3.6 and before, help files for the JHUAPL library, etc. where
>> browsable from the '?' facility, this appears to be no longer possible.

>>

>> Can someone point out how this can be done? I must be wrong in thinking
>> that it is no longer possible to browse .HELP files...

> The word from RSI is that the help files can only be created by using a
> third party proprietary product. They have begun to get complaints about this
> problem. The short term workaround is to use the same procedures that were
> invoked by the ? before to access user libraries:

> IDL> man_proc, '*'

> I hope this is not the final answer. One of IDL's nicest features was the
> ability to extend its functionality in a way that made the extensions seem
> like they were part of the IDL package. Providing one help facility for
> RSI's functions and procedures and a separate lower class help facility for
> add on's is not very appealing. Perhaps the license for the help compiler is
> reasonable enough to make all of this a mute point. I don't know the answer
> to that.

The modern standard for hypertext is HyperText Markup Language (HTML) as used in the World Wide Web. RSI should consider moving to this standard as this will be what their customers will be most familiar with.

We've long since given up on using help files for getting help on procedures. Instead, we use the routine XDOC which is able to retrieve the documentation header from any routine in IDL's path. When used with X-windows, it can also display the entire source code, and has some other nifty features. A particular advantage is that you don't need to create separate help files, which may end up being out of date with the current software. One place you can find the XDOC and associated routines is in

<http://sohowww.nascom.nasa.gov/softops/cds/util/help/>

Bill Thompson
