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Subject: Re: Best platform for IDL 6.2?

Posted by [Wolf Schweitzer](#) on Fri, 02 Dec 2005 13:44:25 GMT

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I have experience running IDL under Mac OS X on Dual G5 Powermac, under OS X on various G4-configs (Powerbook, Powermacs), we currently run IDL also under AIX on an IBM Intellistation 275, and I'm at this moment waiting for a 2xproc-AMD-Opteron-254 machine (I ordered a Fujitsu Siemens Celsius v830 to replace my old G4 Powermac at home) that I'll set up with Linux and IDL.

I like Mac OS X for it's desktop productivity and seamlessness, and I like it as X-Windows-Client - but Mac OS X does not have full 64-bit capability (so you can't get IDL to run more than 2GB-processes) and even a Dual-Processor G5 Powermac is considerably slower than, say, an IBM Notebook or a cheap Acer Veriton desktop computer (which we tried in evaluating our options). In terms of it's performance, even fast Macs really are too slow for the price they cost. In terms of combined desktop software-productivity and hardware, Mac OS X is luxuriously nice.

Our IBM workstation contains PowerPC-processors (two dualcore Power4-processors), so that's basically the same as the G5-processors (also produced by IBM). While to no surprise the IDL stuff doesn't really run much faster on the IBM workstation than on the G5 (the little Apple brothers of the same processor), the 64-bit capability with the 12 GB RAM really, really, really make a big difference (volume data ranging between 400MB-9GB) - so it is possible to work with a lot more data. Currently, I prefer to work on IDL on the IBM workstation, and simply FTP any data on/from it from the Mac.

My colleague (who shares the workstation with me; we both probably use it ~ 20-30% of the time at the moment) and I both use X-windows to access this workstation, and it's a really useful setup. However, installing other packages (The Gimp, ..) under Unix may require a lot more patience than installing software on an Apple Macintosh computer, depending on the type of software (even though some is really simple rpm -i .. stuff not worth worrying about).

Currently I would recommend getting any machine that runs AMD 64-bit-processors under Linux (or if you like Windows...) and an IDL license for that type of machine (have you checked <http://www.monarchcomputer.com> - that is where I would shop if I was in the USA). If your "desktop productivity does require" (i.e. "your finances allow") an additional Mac OS X, you could maybe get the slowest Mac that still does what you need it to do - like a smaller G4 Powerbok, a G4 iBook, or maybe an iMac G5 as they look trendy; currently I'd wait until January to see what's up with Apple. I would not get Sun (like Apple, too expensive for the performance), or SGI (..), and I'd

definitely stay away from Windows unless you are absolutely sure you need Windows for other reasons. I'm sure Apple has the potential to release some wonderfully fast machines running a full 64-bit-OS and IDL at a prime speed in, maybe, mid 2007 - it's only that they're not there yet.

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