Subject: Re: How does IDL do ...
Posted by Liam Gumley on Fri, 02 May 1997 07:00:00 GMT
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Peter Webb wrote:
[stuff deleted]
> So, you don't get to go faster than FORTRAN. On the other hand, you
> don't often go much slower. And your program will be working a week
> before that other guys!

Absolutely - don't try and sell IDL on the speed of execution - just
tell people it's as fast as FORTRAN. Sell it on the basis of much faster
development time (once you're up the learning curve a little bit).

A few other things about IDL that I really like:

(1) It's very easy to look at graphical output while you're developing a
numerical analysis program. Often a plot of an array you are working on
is much more informative than printing it as text.

(2) As long as you follow a few simple rules, you can port that
whiz-bang graphical program from a Sun to an SGI to a laptop running
Linux (of course porting to a PC or MAC can be a little more
complicated, especially if you use widgets). I see people here who have
developed large FORTRAN applications on one Unix box that they won't
even *attempt* to port to another architecture - they know it will mean
several weeks of frustration. Also, sharing IDL applications with your
colleagues as XDR SAVE files is very useful. They don't even have to buy
IDL first (grab a copy via FTP) - you can get a lot done in 7 minute
demo mode (it forces you to start writing programs), especially since
Postscript output and HDF input/output work just fine in demo mode.

(3) A lot of the time, it's fun! I had pretty much written FORTRAN code
exclusively since I started college in 1983. In 1993 I first started
using IDL, and it took a couple of years before I was writing well
documented, reusable IDL procedures and functions. Now, I only use
FORTRAN if I absolutely *have* to - anything new that I do is in IDL.
And I'd have to say that I have a lot more fun programming in IDL that I
ever did in FORTRAN. Once you've got the hang of writing FORTRAN-like
numerical programs in IDL, there's still a whole different world to
discover when you start writing widget-based applications, which are not
like anything you've created before (if you're a FORTRAN programmer like
me).

Just my $0.02 worth.

Cheers,
Liam.