
Subject: Re: Is PDF the only help option in 5.6?

Posted by [David Fanning](#) on Tue, 11 Feb 2003 15:05:51 GMT

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Eric Williams (radvelmanUSE_NET@netscape.net) writes:

> I really dislike using Acrobat Reader to browse help in IDL now. Is
> there an option to get the old hyperlinked help back(last version
> before this I used was 5.3)? It was just a quicker, easier to use
> interface I feel. Everyone of my users has complained about this also.
>
> Thanks for any tips.

Oh, I think they will get used to it. Users are inherently conservative and loathe to change. Just be patient. A couple of months from now you won't hear any more about this.

But, EMACS is an option, I hear. :-)

Cheers,

David

--

David W. Fanning, Ph.D.

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Coyote's Guide to IDL Programming: <http://www.dfanning.com/>

Toll-Free IDL Book Orders: 1-888-461-0155

Subject: Re: Is PDF the only help option in 5.6?

Posted by [hcp](#) on Tue, 11 Feb 2003 15:45:35 GMT

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|> Eric Williams (radvelmanUSE_NET@netscape.net) writes:

|>

|> > I really dislike using Acrobat Reader to browse help in IDL now. Is

|> > there an option to get the old hyperlinked help back(last version

|> > before this I used was 5.3)?

The change happened between 5.5 and 5.6

|> > Everyone of my users has complained about this also.

Yup. Most of ours also.

... and In article <MPG.18b2bf3adc860ca6989ad7@news.frii.com>,

David Fanning <david@dfanning.com> writes:

> Oh, I think they will get used to it. Users are inherently
> conservative and loathe to change. Just be patient. A couple
> of months from now you won't hear any more about this.

Just because people get used to something doesn't mean it is good. And I
really do think this was a change for the worse. Is it just us Unix users
that this has happened to or did something similar happen on MacOS / Win?

Hugh

ObFreeSoftwareZealotry: Yet another reason to try R.

--

=====
=====

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=====

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Subject: Re: Is PDF the only help option in 5.6?
Posted by [Eric\[1\]](#) on Tue, 11 Feb 2003 15:56:26 GMT
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> ... and In article <MPG.18b2bf3adc860ca6989ad7@news.frii.com>,
> David Fanning <david@dfanning.com> writes:
>
> > Oh, I think they will get used to it. Users are inherently
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> > of months from now you won't hear any more about this.
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> Just because people get used to something doesn't mean it is good. And I
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> that this has happened to or did something similar happen on MacOS / Win?
>
> Hugh
>
> ObFreeSoftwareZealotry: Yet another reason to try R.

We are running on both Solaris and MacOS X and the help is PDF on both
of those.

I would also comment to David that sometimes users are loathe to change for a good reason. User interface is a big deal to some of us and this really appears to be a step backwards. Unfortunate. It seems things like this should improve with time, users should not have to "just get used to it". That is a real Microsoft type mentality.

--

Eric

Subject: Re: Is PDF the only help option in 5.6?

Posted by [David Fanning](#) on Tue, 11 Feb 2003 16:18:55 GMT

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Eric (radvelmanAT@netscape.net) writes:

> I would also comment to David that sometimes users are loathe to change
> for a good reason. User interface is a big deal to some of us and this
> really appears to be a step backwards. Unfortunate. It seems things
> like this should improve with time, users should not have to "just get
> used to it". That is a real Microsoft type mentality.

I had an feeling my "loathe to change" comment would get some juice going this morning. Have you noticed that things have been a little slow around here lately. :-)

Cheers,

David

--

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Subject: Re: Is PDF the only help option in 5.6?

Posted by [Pavel A. Romashkin](#) on Tue, 11 Feb 2003 16:24:29 GMT

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Eric wrote:

>

> I would also comment to David that sometimes users are loathe to change
> for a good reason. User interface is a big deal to some of us and this
> really appears to be a step backwards. Unfortunate.

Oh, what are you talking about! It is so simple to convert PDF to HTML and back. Takes no more than 200 lines of code. Not that I want to try it on IDL help. It is perfect as it is.

Cheers,
Pavel

Subject: Re: Is PDF the only help option in 5.6?
Posted by [Paul Van Delst\[1\]](#) on Tue, 11 Feb 2003 16:47:07 GMT
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H C Pumphrey wrote:

>
> |> Eric Williams (radvelmanUSE_NET@netscape.net) writes:
> |>
> |> > I really dislike using Acrobat Reader to browse help in IDL now. Is
> |> > there an option to get the old hyperlinked help back(last version
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> Yup. Most of ours also.
>
> ... and In article <MPG.18b2bf3adc860ca6989ad7@news.frii.com>,
> David Fanning <david@dfanning.com> writes:
>
> |> Oh, I think they will get used to it. Users are inherently
> |> conservative and loathe to change. Just be patient. A couple
> |> of months from now you won't hear any more about this.
>
> Just because people get used to something doesn't mean it is good.

Reminds me of a chinwag I had with a librarian friend of mine over the weekend. They use MS for all their computing needs and she said one of the ads for upgrading from Win2000/NT -> XP was a picture of the infamous "blue screen of death" with the (paraphrased) text "tired of seeing this? Upgrade to XP". Her response was "I'm tired of seeing this! Give me the damn XP upgrade for free!"

Like others have said, maybe RSI has adopted a MS strategy, as in "what're the user's gonna do, huh?".

Anyway....

paulv

--

Paul van Delst
CIMSS @ NOAA/NCEP/EMC
Ph: (301)763-8000 x7274
Fax:(301)763-8545

Subject: Re: Is PDF the only help option in 5.6?
Posted by [R.G. Stockwell](#) on Tue, 11 Feb 2003 17:50:44 GMT
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Pavel A. Romashkin wrote:

> Eric wrote:
>
>> I would also comment to David that sometimes users are loathe to change
>> for a good reason. User interface is a big deal to some of us and this
>> really appears to be a step backwards. Unfortunate.
>>
>
> Oh, what are you talking about! It is so simple to convert PDF to HTML
> and back. Takes no more than 200 lines of code. Not that I want to try
> it on IDL help. It is perfect as it is.
> Cheers,
> Pavel

If one is really interested, just google for pdf2html.

IMHO pdf is the standard for documentation/ebook/etc.
Submission to journals, or proposals for funding often
require pdf format.

One advantage is that users cannot (easily) modify the
document, so RSI can maintain control of the help files
better than easily-edited html files.

Cheers,
bob

(for fun I go onto my colleagues computers and grepily remove
all "not"s from their documentation. BWAHAHAHAHA!
Its called job security, ma'am.)

Subject: Re: Is PDF the only help option in 5.6?
Posted by [Wayne Landsman](#) on Tue, 11 Feb 2003 17:57:29 GMT
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Eric Williams wrote:

- > I really dislike using Acrobat Reader to browse help in IDL now. Is
- > there an option to get the old hyperlinked help back(last version
- > before this I used was 5.3)?

I never used the PDF help until I was forced to in V5.6, but now I must admit that I like it better. One of the nice features for me is being able to type
?procedure_name
at the iDL prompt, to quickly view the documentation, e.g.

```
IDL> ?congrid  
IDL> ?replicate
```

(This would sort of work in the old IDL help, but it would open a new window each time, and wouldn't take you directly to the documentation.)

Tastes differ but there are lot of options the user can set in their PDF preferences.

--Wayne Landsman

P.S. Though I don't miss the old help format, I still would like an HTML version of the documentation (which stopped appearing after V5.1), since this is the only type of online help available for user procedures.

Subject: Re: Is PDF the only help option in 5.6?
Posted by [Rick Towler](#) on Tue, 11 Feb 2003 18:01:14 GMT
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"H C Pumphrey" wrote >

- >
- > Just because people get used to something doesn't mean it is good. And I
- > really do think this was a change for the worse. Is it just us Unix users
- > that this has happened to or did something similar happen on MacOS / Win?

I can't say for sure about 5.6 for Win since it seems my license admin has gone on vacation / fell off the face of the earth but the beta shipped with a great "Windows Help" styled help system.

I can imagine your pain. I can also understand RSI's need to standardize the help system (although HTML might have been a better choice). Pavel is onto something. A search for pdf2html yields a number of hits. I don't know how feasible it is but you could convert your help files into HTML and

serve them up to your users.

You could also submit a feature request for HTML help pages.

-Rick

Subject: Re: Is PDF the only help option in 5.6?
Posted by [JD Smith](#) on Tue, 11 Feb 2003 19:52:08 GMT
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On Tue, 11 Feb 2003 10:57:29 -0700, Wayne Landsman wrote:

> Eric Williams wrote:
>
>> I really dislike using Acrobat Reader to browse help in IDL now. Is
>> there an option to get the old hyperlinked help back(last version
>> before this I used was 5.3)?
>
> I never used the PDF help until I was forced to in V5.6, but now I must
> admit that I like it better. One of the nice features for me is
> being able to type
> ?procedure_name
> at the IDL prompt, to quickly view the documentation, e.g.
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> IDL> ?congrid
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>
> (This would sort of work in the old IDL help, but it would open a new
> window each
> time, and wouldn't take you directly to the documentation.)
>
> Tastes differ but there are lot of options the user can set in their
> PDF preferences.
>
> --Wayne Landsman
>
> P.S. Though I don't miss the old help format, I still would like an
> HTML version of the documentation (which stopped appearing after V5.1),
> since this is the only type of online help available for user
> procedures.

Well, I might as well let the cat out of the bag, since it will escape sooner or later. I'm working on a radical new documentation system for IDLWAVE which makes use of an HTML version of IDL's help. Where did I get said version? Well, the new help format for Windows is Microsoft HTMLHelp. While this isn't exactly HTML, it can easily be decompiled into pretty decent HTML using the (free) Microsoft HTML Help Workshop. This

produces around 20MB of html+images in >2000 files.

Look for it "real soon now".

JD

Subject: Re: Is PDF the only help option in 5.6?

Posted by [Mark Hadfield](#) on Tue, 11 Feb 2003 20:07:17 GMT

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"H C Pumphrey" <hcp@newsread.ed.ac.uk> wrote in message
news:b2b5qv\$3c4\$1@scotsman.ed.ac.uk...

- > Is it just us Unix users
- > that this has happened to or did something
- > similar happen on MacOS / Win?

Can't speak about Mac OS, but on Windows IDL there is a very nice help
system using the system's HTML Help. It was substantially improved in 5.6.

Not that I don't sympathise...

--

Mark Hadfield "Ka puwaha te tai nei, Hoea tatou"
m.hadfield@niwa.co.nz
National Institute for Water and Atmospheric Research (NIWA)

Subject: Re: Is PDF the only help option in 5.6?

Posted by [Bruce Bowler](#) on Tue, 11 Feb 2003 20:14:14 GMT

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On Tue, 11 Feb 2003 14:52:08 -0500, JD Smith put fingers to keyboard and
said:

- > Look for it "real soon now".

JD, Can you narrow down "real soon now"? Are we talking days, weeks,
months? Inquiring "wavers" want to know!

Bruce

--

+-----+-----+
Bruce Bowler | To be ignorant of one's ignorance is the malady of
1.207.633.9600 | the ignorant. - A. B. Alcott

bbowler@bigelow.org |

+-----+-----+-----+-----+-----+

Subject: Re: Is PDF the only help option in 5.6?
Posted by [JD Smith](#) on Tue, 11 Feb 2003 21:58:48 GMT
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On Tue, 11 Feb 2003 13:14:14 -0700, Bruce Bowler wrote:

> On Tue, 11 Feb 2003 14:52:08 -0500, JD Smith put fingers to keyboard and
> said:
>
>> Look for it "real soon now".
>
> JD, Can you narrow down "real soon now"? Are we talking days, weeks,
> months? Inquiring "wavers" want to know!
>

Well, let's just say (TM) the satellite mission I've been working on for years is finally set for launch in mid-April.

Weeks *might* be realistic.

JD

Subject: Re: Is PDF the only help option in 5.6?
Posted by [Thomas Gutzler](#) on Wed, 12 Feb 2003 01:26:07 GMT
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Eric Williams wrote:

> I really dislike using Acrobat Reader to browse help in IDL now. Is
> there an option to get the old hyperlinked help back(last version
> before this I used was 5.3)? It was just a quicker, easier to use
> interface I feel. Everyone of my users has complained about this also.

Am I right ? .. the old (windows) one had no search function for inside the currently viewed page. I really prefer to have this now.

Tom

Subject: Re: Is PDF the only help option in 5.6?
Posted by [Randall Skelton](#) on Wed, 12 Feb 2003 08:24:38 GMT
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Hi Hugh,

- > Just because people get used to something doesn't mean it is good. And I
- > really do think this was a change for the worse. Is it just us Unix users
- > that this has happened to or did something similar happen on MacOS / Win?

MacOS is now OS X and it is *nix so we get the pdf help as well. To be honest, I don't mind it at all.

- > ObFreeSoftwareZealotry: Yet another reason to try R.

Does R have an indexed help system yet?

>
> --
>
> =====
=====

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> Department of Meteorology | FAX 0131-650-5780
> The University of Edinburgh | Replace 0131 with +44-131 if outside U.K.
> EDINBURGH EH9 3JZ, Scotland | Email hcp@met.ed.ac.uk
> OBDisclaimer: The views expressed herein are mine, not those of UofE.
> =====
=====

>

Subject: Re: Is PDF the only help option in 5.6?

Posted by [hcp](#) on Wed, 12 Feb 2003 09:58:05 GMT

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In article <Pine.LNX.4.33.0302120816270.16377-100000@moriaty.atm.ox.ac.uk>, Randall Skelton <rhskelto@atm.ox.ac.uk> writes:

|> > ObFreeSoftwareZealotry: Yet another reason to try R.

|>

|> Does R have an indexed help system yet?

Off topic here, but yes, sort of. The command-line search works, the javascript search engine built into the html help files doesn't. But that may be my version of Mozilla messing up, rather than R.

Really, I meant that RSI's attitude was a reason to look elsewhere, rather than the specifics of what the old and new help systems do and don't have.

Hugh

--

=====

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The University of Edinburgh | Replace 0131 with +44-131 if outside U.K.
EDINBURGH EH9 3JZ, Scotland | Email hcp@met.ed.ac.uk
OBDisclaimer: The views expressed herein are mine, not those of UofE.

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Subject: Re: Is PDF the only help option in 5.6?
Posted by [Robert S. Hill](#) on Wed, 12 Feb 2003 11:06:57 GMT
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> Eric Williams wrote:
>
>> I really dislike using Acrobat Reader to browse help in IDL now. Is
>> there an option to get the old hyperlinked help back(last version
>> before this I used was 5.3)?

On Tue, 11 Feb 2003, Wayne Landsman wrote:
> I never used the PDF help until I was forced to in V5.6, but now I must
> admit that I like it better.

I have always preferred the PDF help. My only (small) complaint about the current version is that the link to the reference manual is on the second page of the overall doc.

Usually when I'm developing I have an Acrobat started in background in one of my spare X desktops sitting there all day just for the IDL docs.

-Bob Hill

--

Robert S. Hill 301-286-3577
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Science Systems and Applications, Inc.
Code 681, NASA GSFC, Greenbelt, MD 20771

Subject: Re: Is PDF the only help option in 5.6?

Posted by [rmoss4](#) on Wed, 12 Feb 2003 16:48:52 GMT

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H C Pumphrey wrote:

>

> Really, I meant that RSI's attitude was a reason to look elsewhere, rather
> than the specifics of what the old and new help systems do and don't have.

>

Which attitude was that? The one that says "we are in this to make money, and we will switch to PDF format as a cheaper alternative to paying license fees to Bristol Technology"?

I have been using IDL for some 15 years now, and I have to say that I really do not think that the folks at RSI do things intentionally to tick off their users, nor do I think they sit around saying "well, too bad for them" when they make a change.

Perhaps there is some other "attitude" of which I am not aware.

Robert Moss, PhD

Subject: Re: Is PDF the only help option in 5.6?

Posted by [Alexander Rauscher](#) on Thu, 27 Feb 2003 10:10:28 GMT

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On Tue, 11 Feb 2003, Eric wrote:

*

*We are running on both Solaris and MacOS X and the help is PDF on both
*of those.

*

*I would also comment to David that sometimes users are loathe to change
*for a good reason. User interface is a big deal to some of us and this
*really appears to be a step backwards. Unfortunate. It seems things
*like this should improve with time, users should not have to "just get
*used to it". That is a real Microsoft type mentality.

*

*--

*Eric

*

funny, we just said the same thing: That is a real Microsoft type mentality. it was about both the help and about the non existing backwards compatibility of atan (and probably many other functions) . one wouldn't expect a change in such a fundamental function. so now atan(z, /phase) gives the same result as atan(z), where z is (re,im)... this is more than

stupid. this is dangerous.

alex
