Subject: Re: Best platform for IDL 6.2?
Posted by David Fanning on Wed, 16 Nov 2005 02:33:30 GMT
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Bas writes:

> I was curious what platform seems to be the best for running IDL. I
> have read some of the topics and it seems some platforms have problems.
>
> Currently I run a Apple with OS10.4. I was thinking of upgrading to a
> Sun or SGI workstation. I just wanted some opinions and any
> experiences you have had with IDL on your platforms.

I'd stick with the Mac. That deal where you can slide around to
from one desktop to another is *definitely* worth the price of
admission. And the keyboard just feels so unbelievably
luxurious. Not to mention the great screen saver that shows
all the photos from your trip to Hawaii. You'll hardly notice
that your IDL code... uh, doesn't run so well. :-)

Cheers,

David

P.S. Did I mention you can hook your iPod up to it?

--
David Fanning, Ph.D.
Fanning Software Consulting, Inc.
Coyote's Guide to IDL Programming: http://www.dfanning.com/

Subject: Re: Best platform for IDL 6.2?
Posted by Richard French on Wed, 16 Nov 2005 02:54:55 GMT
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On 11/15/05 9:33 PM, in article MPG.1de4485574f9d83c9896b6@news.frii.com,
"David Fanning" <david@dfanning.com> wrote:

> Bas writes:
>
>> I was curious what platform seems to be the best for running IDL. I
>> have read some of the topics and it seems some platforms have problems.
>>
>> Currently I run a Apple with OS10.4. I was thinking of upgrading to a
>> Sun or SGI workstation. I just wanted some opinions and any

>> experiences you have had with IDL on your platforms.
>

I have both a Sun and a Mac, my work is mostly IDL-related, and I vastly prefer the Mac to the Sun. I should say that I have to maintain the machines myself. Upgrading the OS on the Sun workstation is a several-day chore, keeping up with security patches has been a nightmare (downloading a patch kit sounds easy, but not when you get lots of error messages objecting to inconsistent previous versions of patches that have been dutifully installed), and the machine is no faster than my G5. OS upgrades on the Mac, while not painless, are much easier to perform. Software libraries on the Sun vary from OS version to OS version, and this has been a nightmare for us when we try to share code from one researcher to another when we are using different versions of the Sun OS.

For our work, it is important to be able to do UNIX stuff along side of PC applications, such as Word, PowerPoint, Excel, etc. I tried mightily to install the Sun clones of these but failed miserably. On the Mac platform, you can use the native PC/Mac versions of these programs alongside of the unix applications.

A significant fraction of our research team has migrated all of our C and Fortran routines from our separate Sun workstations to the Mac, and we do our Matlab and IDL work on Macs as well.

Having said this, I have found some IDL quirks on the Mac that have been annoying. I've managed to work my way around all of them so far, although David probably has a broader range of Mac experience with all of the classes he teaches and the more varied set of IDL routines he has written.

Simply put, I think you need to look at the whole package of what you want your machine to do, rather than how IDL deals with things, unless you know of a specific bug that would drive you crazy when using the Mac.

FWIW, I don't use fancy screen savers, an iPod, or any glitzy gizmos on my Mac, although I do like the keyboard! - what I like best about it is that I can use Unix right along with other applications, and that I can maintain it reasonably easily by myself.

Dick French

Dick French

Subject: Re: Best platform for IDL 6.2?
Posted by Kenneth P. Bowman on Wed, 16 Nov 2005 03:46:15 GMT
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In article <1132107358.466534.145560@z14g2000cwz.googlegroups.com>,
"bas" <bas@hawaii.edu> wrote:

> Hi group:
>
> I was curious what platform seems to be the best for running IDL. I
> have read some of the topics and it seems some platforms have problems.
>
> Currently I run a Apple with OS10.4. I was thinking of upgrading to a
> Sun or SGI workstation.

Don't you mean downgrading? ;-)

Ken Bowman

Subject: Re: Best platform for IDL 6.2?
Posted by Kenneth P. Bowman on Wed, 16 Nov 2005 04:01:29 GMT
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In article <MPG.1de4485574f9d83c9896b6@news.frii.com>,
David Fanning <david@dfanning.com> wrote:

> I'd stick with the Mac. That deal where you can slide around to
> from one desktop to another is *definitely* worth the price of
> admission. And the keyboard just feels so unbelievably
> luxurious. Not to mention the great screen saver that shows
> all the photos from your trip to Hawaii. You'll hardly notice
> that your IDL code... uh, doesn't run so well. :-)

David, you really need to quit libeling Macs. People tend to believe
you when you talk about IDL. ;-) I run IDL on multiple platforms,
including Macs, Linux, and IRIX. I have no problem running my IDL codes
on all of those platforms, and I can't think of anything I have in my
codes that is Mac specific.

Ken Bowman

Subject: Re: Best platform for IDL 6.2?
Posted by David Fanning on Wed, 16 Nov 2005 04:30:22 GMT
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Kenneth P. Bowman writes:

> David, you really need to quit libeling Macs. People tend to believe
> you when you talk about IDL. ;-) I run IDL on multiple platforms,
> including Macs, Linux, and IRIX. I have no problem running my IDL codes
> on all of those platforms, and I can't think of anything I have in my
> codes that is Mac specific.

Libelling Macs! Heck, I *like* them! But I spend a couple
of hours a day trying to get them to work with IDL code
that works everywhere else just fine.

The real problem is probably NOT the Mac. Or even IDL
software. The *real* problem is that (I say this from
my own personal experience) most of the people who have
them don't know the first thing about using them! My God,
folks, they are UNIX platforms!! That is NOT the easiest
operating system to negotiate even if it *is* dressed up
as a Mac.

I'll be honest with you, at least a third of the people
in an IDL programming class--*any* IDL programming class
don't even know how to operate their own code editor. You
think I am joking, but I am not. When you look at an error
message and say the "error is on line 28" more than 50%
of the people in the room don't know how to negotiate their
way there. And then you want these people to configure and
support their Macs! Maybe I'm getting old and cynical, but
it just ain't gonna happen.

For the Macintosh to be useful to the people who love them
and have to have them, they are going to have to be a LOT
easier to use. Just my two cents. Personally, I would think
of buying one if I didn't have to also make the huge investment
in all the other non-IDL software I'd have to have to run my
life.

Cheers,

David
--
David Fanning, Ph.D.
Fanning Software Consulting, Inc.
Coyote's Guide to IDL Programming: http://www.dfanning.com/

Subject: Re: Best platform for IDL 6.2?
Posted by bas on Wed, 16 Nov 2005 08:26:23 GMT

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Opps...I didnt really mean "upgrade". My Apple is great! Its just getting a little slow and I was looking at getting something faster. Im not actually sure if IDL runs slow on an Apple G4 350, since I have yet to use IDL on it. I was just thinking about getting a new computer to help with my research (grad. school.) Since I will be using it pri. for IDL, I just wanted some experienced opinions before I purchased anything.

David - I totally agree with you about understanding and being able to operate your code editor. I took a lot of programming classes during my undergraduate studies and it helped so much knowing what the editor was telling you. By the way, where/when did you goto Hawaii? Just curious, since I live there!

Ken - How do you like working with IRIX?

Thanks everyone for your help.
bas

Subject: Re: Best platform for IDL 6.2?
Posted by David Fanning on Wed, 16 Nov 2005 08:51:01 GMT
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Bas writes:

> By the way, where/when did you goto Hawaii? Just
> curious, since I live there!

Hilo Town, bro, where the astronomy is happening. :-)

Aloha,

David

--
David Fanning, Ph.D.
Fanning Software Consulting, Inc.
Coyote's Guide to IDL Programming: http://www.dfanning.com/

Subject: Re: Best platform for IDL 6.2?
Posted by jm on Wed, 16 Nov 2005 12:15:25 GMT
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1990: Started using Sun workstations.

1993: Began using PV-WAVE.
1996: Switched from PV-WAVE to IDL.
2002: Bought iMac for home and working-at-home use.

Hmmm... this iMac (800MHz, G4) is no slower at flat-out
number-crunching than my Sun Blade 1000.
Would be nice to sync filesystems at work and home using a FW drive.
Only, you can't. There are FW ports on the Sun Blade, but no drivers.
How dumb is that? Can I burn CDs/DVDs on the Sun? Yes, but it's a
bother. Ever tried running Windows on the SunPCI card? Yuk!

2004: Finally! A twin G5 replaces my "state of the art" Blade 2000.
What a relief.
2005: A Powerbook arrives. I can now take *all* my work with me when I
go to conferences: prepare/run simulations on the fly,
post-process/analyze data with IDL, work on documents/presentations,
etc. And it's a breeze to sync filestems between the work desktop, the
portable and the (home) iMac.

Really, it's no contest.

-John Mardaljevic

Subject: Re: Best platform for IDL 6.2?
Posted by Michael Wallace on Wed, 16 Nov 2005 16:29:22 GMT
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> The real problem is probably NOT the Mac. Or even IDL
> software. The *real* problem is that (I say this from
> my own personal experience) most of the people who have
> them don't know the first thing about using them! My God,
> folks, they are UNIX platforms!! That is NOT the easiest
> operating system to negotiate even if it *is* dressed up
> as a Mac.

The same could be said of good ol' Windows. If you're going to be a
hater, be an equal opportunity hater. :-) I guess Windows are so easy
because the registry will corrupt itself randomly or because the
solution to every problem is to reboot, but there are cute little
buttons to click on, so that makes it all good and worthwhile.

> For the Macintosh to be useful to the people who love them
> and have to have them, they are going to have to be a LOT
> easier to use. Just my two cents.

For Windows to be useful to the people who love them and have to have

them, they are going to have to a LOT easier to use. Just my two cents.

-Mike

Subject: Re: Best platform for IDL 6.2?
Posted by David Fanning on Wed, 16 Nov 2005 16:44:40 GMT
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Michael Wallace writes:

> For Windows to be useful to the people who love them and have to have
> them, they are going to have to a LOT easier to use. Just my two cents.

I agree with this, too. In fact, after I teach an IDL class
or two my vision narrows until I think the only possible solution
to computer programming problems is 12 years of mandatory
typing classes in the lower grades. :-(

Cheers,

David

P.S. Who would have known that the most useful class I ever
took in high school would be the typing class I took only
because the female/male ratio was about 15:1?

--
David Fanning, Ph.D.
Fanning Software Consulting, Inc.
Coyote's Guide to IDL Programming: http://www.dfanning.com/

Subject: Re: Best platform for IDL 6.2?
Posted by K. Bowman on Wed, 16 Nov 2005 16:49:28 GMT
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In article <1132129583.191675.299480@g44g2000cwa.googlegroups.com>,
 "bas" <bas@hawaii.edu> wrote:

> Ken - How do you like working with IRIX?

IRIX is fine and has been very stable for us (64-bit also, which is nice). I
used to use it a great deal but now run on Mac OS and Linux. Sadly, I'm not
sure how much longer SGI will be in business. They made great machines at one
time, but the high end has shrunk to nearly zero and their market along with it.

Ken

Subject: Re: Best platform for IDL 6.2?
Posted by news.qwest.net on Wed, 16 Nov 2005 17:14:23 GMT
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"bas" <bas@hawaii.edu> wrote in message
news:1132107358.466534.145560@z14g2000cwz.googlegroups.com.. .
> Hi group:
>
> I was curious what platform seems to be the best for running IDL. I
> have read some of the topics and it seems some platforms have problems.
>
> Currently I run a Apple with OS10.4. I was thinking of upgrading to a
> Sun or SGI workstation. I just wanted some opinions and any
> experiences you have had with IDL on your platforms.
>
> Thanks
> bas

My 2cents,
IDL works well on a windows platform. (huh, where's all that booing coming from?)
A couple of nice things about it are that the IDE is an actual IDE
(not the *nix abomination that you get from idlde).
Also, intel compilation optimizations can really help zoom some code along
(in the past this was a big deal, and you can probably find threads discussing
this on google groups), but I am not sure how true that is any more.

On the other hand, linux has superior large memory performance for 32 bit machines
(where I can actually access almost all 4 gbs of memory, with a couple of arrays
that are ~1.2 gb each. Windows only can give 2 gbs, and even that is badly fragmented
so your max array sizes are limited).

I have a colleague who uses IDL on a mac, and all I can say is that I am amazed he has
the strength of will to keep going. Personally, I would have "checked out" a long time ago
if I was in that situation.

Cheers,
bob

PS the best thing about windows is that you can use "total commander", the
best filemanager EVER!!

Subject: Re: Best platform for IDL 6.2?
Posted by mmiller3 on Wed, 16 Nov 2005 17:50:30 GMT
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>>>> > "David" == David Fanning <david@dfanning.com> writes:

> P.S. Who would have known that the most useful class I ever
> took in high school would be the typing class I took only
> because the female/male ratio was about 15:1?

Here, here! It still amazes me when my fingers type something
and I look at it later and find it is correct! The quick brown
fox jumped over the lazy dog...

Mike

Subject: Re: Best platform for IDL 6.2?
Posted by news.qwest.net on Wed, 16 Nov 2005 17:59:53 GMT
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"Michael A. Miller" <mmiller3@iupui.edu> wrote in message
news:dlfrh5$f0f$1@rainier.uits.indiana.edu...

> Here, here! It still amazes me when my fingers type something
> and I look at it later and find it is correct! The quick brown
> fox jumped over the lazy dog...
>
> Mike

lol.
The thing that amazes me is how a great portion of my memory
is located in my fingers. For instance, I do not conciously know
what any of my passwords are, yet my fingers automatically type
them in for me.

Also, my hands are way better at spelling than I am (I am not
sure how that happened, by I have no idea how to spell "phenomenon",
but I can type it just fine).

Cheers,
bob

Subject: Re: Best platform for IDL 6.2?
Posted by Michael Wallace on Wed, 16 Nov 2005 18:17:23 GMT
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> The thing that amazes me is how a great portion of my memory
> is located in my fingers. For instance, I do not conciously know
> what any of my passwords are, yet my fingers automatically type
> them in for me.

When I first became aware that I was typing my passwords automatically without thinking about them I thought that I had reached security nirvana. <tin foil hat> Even if someone reads my thoughts from my brain waves, they still won't know my password! Mwahahaha! </tin foil hat> Of course, I'll have serious problems if I don't have and English qwerty keyboard in front of me...

-Mike

Subject: Re: Best platform for IDL 6.2?
Posted by Rick Towler on Wed, 16 Nov 2005 18:25:06 GMT
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Michael Wallace wrote:
>> The thing that amazes me is how a great portion of my memory
>> is located in my fingers. For instance, I do not conciously know
>> what any of my passwords are, yet my fingers automatically type
>> them in for me.
>
>
> When I first became aware that I was typing my passwords automatically
> without thinking about them I thought that I had reached security
> nirvana. <tin foil hat> Even if someone reads my thoughts from my brain
> waves, they still won't know my password! Mwahahaha! </tin foil hat> Of
> course, I'll have serious problems if I don't have and English qwerty
> keyboard in front of me...

Mike, you may want to consider moving away from tin/aluminum for your protective head gear. Recent research has shown that it actually amplifies common frequencies used by "the man":

http://people.csail.mit.edu/rahimi/helmet/

I'm not taking any chances. I have moved on to a hybrid foil/silly putty helmet.

Subject: Re: Best platform for IDL 6.2?
Posted by David Fanning on Wed, 16 Nov 2005 18:46:53 GMT
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R.G. Stockwell writes:

> The thing that amazes me is how a great portion of my memory
> is located in my fingers. For instance, I do not conciously know
> what any of my passwords are, yet my fingers automatically type
> them in for me.
>
> Also, my hands are way better at spelling than I am (I am not
> sure how that happened, by I have no idea how to spell "phenomenon",
> but I can type it just fine).

Ah, this may be the solution to my programming dilemma.
I'm going to make a list of the 100 most frequently used
passwords and use *those* for my variable names in all
future IDL classes!

Cheers,

David
--
David Fanning, Ph.D.
Fanning Software Consulting, Inc.
Coyote's Guide to IDL Programming: http://www.dfanning.com/

Subject: Re: Best platform for IDL 6.2?
Posted by Mark Hadfield on Wed, 16 Nov 2005 20:46:34 GMT
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R.G. Stockwell wrote:
> ...
> My 2cents,
> IDL works well on a windows platform.

I'll second that. I have used IDL with Windows since 1993 and am reasonably happy with it. A couple of years ago I added Linux (Red Hat 7.?) with a dual boot setup and intended to make the transition to Linux, but after a month or so I decided it was going to several months more before I could be as productive in Linux as I was in Windows, and I couldn't really justify this to my employer. When I get my next PC, I will probably install both Windows and Linux, but this time using VMware so I can run both at the same time. The Windows-Linux choice didn't depend only on IDL but that was a major factor

Pluses (Windows vs Linux) are:

* The IDLDE environment is quite nice on Windows and woeful on Unix.
* Graphics performance was somewhat better on Windows. (Originally I found IDL on Linux *very* slow, but I traced this to a setting like RETAIN. I posted about this on this newsgroup.) Last time I checked, IDL/Linux was still 30-40% slower for graphics than IDL/Windows on the same hardware. I know Karl Schulz has put some work into this, so this may not be true any more.
* The IDL2AVI DLM is very nice--I use it all the time.

Minuses (Windows vs Linux):

* Can't integrate properly with (X)emacs and IDLWAVE. The problem is the lack of a console-mode IDL executable on Windows. It would not be difficult for RSI to produce such a thing but they choose not to. I do use Xemacs & IDLWAVE to edit files but then have to switch back to IDLDE to compile & run. This works better than you might think, but still...
* Poorer memory handling. This has only become an issue for me in the last year or so, as dataset sizes have increased. It's still not a *serious* problem.

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

Subject: Re: Best platform for IDL 6.2?
Posted by Michael Wallace on Wed, 16 Nov 2005 21:07:01 GMT
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> Pluses (Windows vs Linux) are:
>
> * The IDLDE environment is quite nice on Windows and woeful on
> Unix.
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> (Originally I found IDL on Linux *very* slow, but I traced
> this to a setting like RETAIN. I posted about this on this
> newsgroup.) Last time I checked, IDL/Linux was still 30-40%
> slower for graphics than IDL/Windows on the same hardware.
> I know Karl Schulz has put some work into this, so this may
> not be true any more.

> * The IDL2AVI DLM is very nice--I use it all the time.
>
> Minuses (Windows vs Linux):
>
> * Can't integrate properly with (X)emacs and IDLWAVE. The
> problem is the lack of a console-mode IDL executable on
> Windows. It would not be difficult for RSI to produce such
> a thing but they choose not to. I do use Xemacs & IDLWAVE
> to edit files but then have to switch back to IDLDE to
> compile & run. This works better than you might think,
> but still...
> * Poorer memory handling. This has only become an issue for me
> in the last year or so, as dataset sizes have increased. It's
> still not a *serious* problem.
>

And one more thing I'll throw in to your list is that IDL under Windows still doesn't have a command line version. That may not be important to some of you, but because of integration we have with other languages, it is very nice to be able to spawn a quick IDL process when you need it whether it's in some automated nightly processing, responding to a request for data on a web site, or other task where you're not sitting in front of your computer.

Putting zealousness aside, a lot of people here will write their code on Windows to take advantage of the IDE and then deploy it on Unix/Linux. That setup seems to work well.

-Mike

Subject: Re: Best platform for IDL 6.2?
Posted by Mark Hadfield on Wed, 16 Nov 2005 22:18:57 GMT
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Michael Wallace wrote:
>>
> And one more thing I'll throw in to your list is that IDL under Windows
> still doesn't have a command line version. That may not be important to
> some of you, but because of integration we have with other languages, it
> is very nice to be able to spawn a quick IDL process when you need it
> whether it's in some automated nightly processing, responding to a
> request for data on a web site, or other task where you're not sitting
> in front of your computer.

Sorry to quibble Michael, but what you're referring to, I think, is IDL's lack of a *console-mode* executable on Windows (and I did mention this lack, in connection with IDLWAVE integration). I have submitted a

feature request for such a beast--after threatening to do so many times on this group. I haven't got a response yet and I doubt it is a high priority. If a few more people add their $0.02, perhaps the priority will rise a little. To see proof that an IDL console-mode executable would be feasible, just look at Python.

IDLDE on Windows can be launched from a command line and it does accept command-line parameters. (Like IDL on other platforms, the command-line capability was enhanced substantially in version 6.2 to support automated operation.) However it is not a console-mode program so it always opens a GUI and it cannot interact with the calling process via stdin and stdout. So you are quite right to say that it doesn't play very well with shell scripts, WWW-page processing and remote logons.

And by the way, people, please don't refer to the Windows console-mode command-line and batch-file processor, cmd.exe as a "DOS prompt". OK, Microsoft have been known refer to it in this way, but it has nothing to do with DOS.

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

Subject: Re: Best platform for IDL 6.2?
Posted by Michael Wallace on Wed, 16 Nov 2005 22:35:58 GMT
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> Sorry to quibble Michael, but what you're referring to, I think, is
> IDL's lack of a *console-mode* executable on Windows (and I did mention
> this lack, in connection with IDLWAVE integration).

Call it what you will (console mode or whatever), but we agree. I read over your previous comment without really processing it because it started with "Can't integrate properly with (X)emacs and IDLWAVE." Byt, yeah, we're talking about the same thing.

> However it is not a console-mode program so it always opens a GUI and it
> cannot interact with the calling process via stdin and stdout.

Exactly.

> And by the way, people, please don't refer to the Windows console-mode
> command-line and batch-file processor, cmd.exe as a "DOS prompt". OK,
> Microsoft have been known refer to it in this way, but it has nothing to
> do with DOS.

My, we're picky today, aren't we? ;-) It's just a name that got handed down from days of yore without being changed. It's like how we still "dial" phone numbers even though rotary phones disappeared quite a while ago.

-Mike

Subject: Re: Best platform for IDL 6.2?
Posted by Mark Hadfield on Wed, 16 Nov 2005 23:02:22 GMT
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Michael Wallace wrote:
> My, we're picky today, aren't we? ;-)

Every day :-)

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

Subject: Re: Best platform for IDL 6.2?
Posted by jm on Thu, 17 Nov 2005 09:12:41 GMT
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> I have a colleague who uses IDL on a mac, and all I can say is that I am
> amazed he has
> the strength of will to keep going. Personally, I would have "checked out" a
> long time ago
> if I was in that situation.

"Situation"? How so?

-JM

Subject: Re: Best platform for IDL 6.2?
Posted by wallabadah on Fri, 18 Nov 2005 04:19:53 GMT
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Another 2 cents from a long-time mac user, relatively new IDL user...

Yes, the idlde on unix/mac is pretty awful, but Macs have some of the

best text editors around - I use a macro in the idlde to automatically
open any source code in SubEthaEdit or TextWrangler, both of which have
features unavailable in the IDL editor on any platform - e.g. code
completion, bracket/brace balancing, as well as 'normal' features like
line numbers, syntax highlighting etc.
Using MacOSX also allows you to use things like grep for searching
whole source repositories, svn or cvs for version control, and the
already mentioned mainstream software for email, presentations, dtp,
etc. If you're into it, you can also do the emacs/idlwave thing, too.

Will.

Subject: Re: Best platform for IDL 6.2?
Posted by Ben Panter on Fri, 18 Nov 2005 09:26:31 GMT
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wallabadah@hotmail.com wrote:

> Using MacOSX also allows you to use things like grep for searching
> whole source repositories, svn or cvs for version control, and the
> already mentioned mainstream software for email, presentations, dtp,
> etc. If you're into it, you can also do the emacs/idlwave thing, too.

But these aren't *all* strictly mac things are they? I work in both a
LINUX/windows environment, and to answer your points

grep: works fine in linux and there is an opensource version for
windows. I now use google desktop search, which is much faster.

CVS: works fine in linux and there is an opensource version for windows.
Plug in eclipse and you wouldn't know the difference between the two
systems!

Email/Web: No outlook on linux, but thunderbird is great for both OS's.
Ditto Firefox, Netscape, Opera...

Office: Windows offers everything, but you're right with linux:
openoffice is not really a substitute for Powerpoint/Keynote.

I'm not saying that Macs aren't better (or worse), just pointing out
that the unique selling points mentioned aren't really that unique.

I'm one of the unix IDLDE users[1] and it's not all that bad, but it
could do with a bit of work. I keep on toying with IDLWAVE, but never
quite get there, just too used to IDLDE.

Ben

[1] The other two work at a remote observatory in Antarctica, but I
haven't heard from them in a while.

--
Ben Panter, Garching, Germany.
Email false, http://www.benpanter.co.uk
or you could try ben at ^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^

Subject: Re: Best platform for IDL 6.2?
Posted by Mark Hadfield on Sun, 20 Nov 2005 21:57:24 GMT
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Ben Panter wrote:
> I'm one of the unix IDLDE users[1] and it's not all that bad, but it
> could do with a bit of work. I keep on toying with IDLWAVE, but never
> quite get there, just too used to IDLDE.
>
> Ben
>
> [1] The other two work at a remote observatory in Antarctica, but I
> haven't heard from them in a while.

I have an image of a rescue team trudging through a howling snowstorm,
pushing open the door to the observatory and finding two bodies lying
against the wall, the frozen blood on their heads showing that they died
from repeatedly banging their heads against said wall. Unix/IDLDE has
claimed another couple of victims!

--
Mark Hadfield "Kei puwaha te tai nei, Hoea tahi tatou"
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National Institute for Water and Atmospheric Research (NIWA)

Subject: Re: Best platform for IDL 6.2?
Posted by JD Smith on Mon, 21 Nov 2005 19:40:42 GMT
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On Tue, 15 Nov 2005 19:33:30 -0700, David Fanning wrote:

> Bas writes:
>
>> I was curious what platform seems to be the best for running IDL. I

>> have read some of the topics and it seems some platforms have problems.
>>
>> Currently I run a Apple with OS10.4. I was thinking of upgrading to a
>> Sun or SGI workstation. I just wanted some opinions and any experiences
>> you have had with IDL on your platforms.
>
> I'd stick with the Mac. That deal where you can slide around to from one
> desktop to another is *definitely* worth the price of admission. And the
> keyboard just feels so unbelievably luxurious. Not to mention the great
> screen saver that shows all the photos from your trip to Hawaii. You'll
> hardly notice that your IDL code... uh, doesn't run so well. :-)

Here are my impressions, as a long time IDL Linux and recent IDL OSX user:

1. As of v6.1, IDL on MacOSX is relatively slow on G4s. Part of this is that the G4 of my shiny new powerbook isn't as fast relatively as it used to be when introduced several years ago. A bigger issue is that gcc3, which RSI has been using to compile IDL, isn't terribly well optimized for the G4. Despite what you may have heard from RSI marketing several years ago, IDL is not Altivec-optimized. Probably they are patting themselves on the back, given the impending switch to Intel processors (yet they could have easily used the processor-agnostic vector Accelerate framework). My 2005 PowerBook is about as fast as my 2003 Dell PIII, running at 60% the clock speed. My impression is that gcc4 should make big improvements in this arena; I'm not sure what they compiled IDL6.2 with, or how large the improvement would be.

2. Fast Macs typically have 2, and most recently 4 G5 processors. They are relatively fast, but given the compiler gap, fast Window/Linux will probably outperform single processor Mac systems. IDL is reasonably good at tapping multi-processor preformance for large data sets (i.e. data chunked into large individual arrays of which many need to be manipulated). For smaller data sets, only one of those processors will be used, and you'd have been better off with a fast Linux/AMD/Intel setup. I haven't tested a new Quad G5, but with large data sets which fit in memory it should really fly (and is roughly 1/2 the cost of a comparable Wintel quad-processor setup). New Macs also allow you to stuff 16GB of memory in them (if you can afford it). And IDL v6.2 can now allocate all of that (I think, anyone care to confirm?).

3. X11, which IDL runs under on both Linux and OSX, is more of a second class citizen on OSX, where it is not the primary windowing system. That said, since OSX10.3, the Apple X11 works very well,

and is actually quite fast. Since I use IDLWAVE under Emacs, I hardly notice the difference (other than trivial mouse/keyboard interaction differences). I go back and forth daily without any major issues.

Other than that, the experience is generally the same. Widgets will lay out perfectly on Linux or OSX, but probably not on Windows. In my field, you can safely ignore Windows users anyway ;). I'm not sure what generic issues David keeps having with OSX, but I've never found incompatibilities with Linux. I actually like having both: OSX for presentation (Keynote) and multimedia, Linux for raw performance, and server capabilities. When Mac switches to Intel over the next couple of years, the gcc compiler, used under both OSX and Linux, will likely assure very similar performance for the two.

My limited experience testing Windows vs. Linux on the same hardware is that, aside from graphics (where it's a very mixed bag depending on your vendor support), they are about even, Windows besting Linux on some tests, and visa versa. Linux is much better at memory management, but Intel compilers under Windows produced more optimized code. For most applications, this would result in a draw. IDLWAVE tips this strongly in favor of Linux for me. Regarding the Unix IDLDE, I haven't actually fired it up in several years ;).

JD