
Subject: Unhappy plotter

Posted by [Cliff](#) on Thu, 06 Apr 2006 22:41:30 GMT

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In the beginning I used add ons to Fortran to visualise my data, so when I came across PV-WAVE it was like a miracle appearing on my desktop. Then came IDL, widgets, pointers etc etc. I was a happy plotter. I started to write applications and soon found direct graphics a little clunky. Then came objects - much more like it and I was a anticipative plotter. Then came object graphics, oops, it was like the wind was knocked from my sails. Why oh why are they so complicated? Then I found MATLAB, this is how graphics should work. Make a plot and you have a functional oo plotting system - like LIVE_PLOT on acid. I jumped with joy in anticipation when I heard of the arrival of iTools. Ooops, why oh why oh why? Complicated, indecipherable and unusable unless of course one has a spare month or two for the learning curve (my boss would not be happy). Suppose I'll have to carry on using DGs for my applications. Am I just dim? It's not like I'm an IDL novice. Does anyone else feel this way? oh and why can't object methods be used as widget events. Moan over ...

Subject: Re: Unhappy plotter

Posted by [David Fanning](#) on Thu, 06 Apr 2006 23:01:28 GMT

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- > as widget events. Moan over ...

The gulag is growing. Maybe I'll have to dust that Catalyst Library off after all. Easy, understandable, and object methods as widget events. Sounds better and

better, doesn't it. :-)

Cheers,

David

--

David Fanning, Ph.D.

Fanning Software Consulting, Inc.

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

Subject: Re: Unhappy plotter

Posted by [Andrew Cool](#) on Fri, 07 Apr 2006 00:15:44 GMT

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David,

We've expressed our interest in Catalyst to you.

But you've yet to provide proof of the pudding...

Regards,

Andrew

Subject: Re: Unhappy plotter

Posted by [David Fanning](#) on Fri, 07 Apr 2006 01:22:50 GMT

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Andrew Cool writes:

- > We've expressed our interest in Catalyst to you.
- > But you've yet to provide proof of the pudding...

Yes, it's a problem... :-(

It seems an iffy financial investment. *Everyone* would be interested in it for free, I guess. But I have already invested two years of work in it, and it would take another six months, probably, to get it ready for someone else to use. And every time I start to work on it, tuition dollars start flashing in front of my eyes.

If you have a suggestion that will help turn it into cash, I'm all ears. It's tough to see something this useful go

to waste.

To tell you the truth, though, I think my run with IDL is almost over. I'm not interested in iTools and the direction IDL is going these days. I haven't renewed my maintenance contract, and see no particular reason to do so. There hasn't been much new in IDL that excites me or the people I work with in quite some time. Catalyst is old school. RSI will, I think, never provide decent fonts for direct graphics applications. What's the point of finishing it? I could invest another \$50K of my time to finish it and reap the \$50 a year I average in PayPal contributions, but I think my poor wife has had enough.

I'd be further ahead, I think, going back to science communication, a field I *thought* I was starting out in 20 years ago. If you had a job for a science writer/editor there in Aussie you can bet I would be all over it!

At one time I thought I could never just close the web page and logout of this newsgroup. But now, I'm not so sure. I've been looking for a new job. If it comes along, I think I am out of here. I'll leave this job to Antonio and Robbie and all those other young guys who find iTools so exciting. :-)

Cheers,

David

--

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

Subject: Re: Unhappy plotter
Posted by [Robbie](#) on Fri, 07 Apr 2006 03:03:03 GMT
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Perhaps you could start a TV show called CodeBusters. It would be in the spirit of <http://www.thedailywtf.com/>

Robbie

Subject: Re: Unhappy plotter

Posted by [liamgumley](#) on Fri, 07 Apr 2006 09:56:30 GMT

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I'm not a Matlab user, but a while back I spent some time looking at the documentation for the Matlab handle graphics suite. It really looks very simple, straightforward, and powerful. It is designed to be driven from the command line. If someone could write a graphics library for IDL which emulated the Matlab handle graphics suite, I think they would gain eternal fame.

Here's some more information:

http://www.mathworks.com/access/helpdesk/help/techdoc/creating_plots/hg_objec.html#27602

Cheers,

Liam.

Practical IDL Programming

<http://www.gumley.com/>

Cliff wrote:

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> when I came across PV-WAVE it was like a miracle appearing on my
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> as widget events. Moan over ...

Subject: Re: Unhappy plotter

Posted by [Jo Klein](#) on Fri, 07 Apr 2006 11:07:35 GMT

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Hi David, hi folks,

David Fanning wrote:

> To tell you the truth, though, I think my run with IDL
> is almost over. I'm not interested in iTools and the
> direction IDL is going these days. I haven't renewed
> my maintenance contract, and see no particular reason

> to do so. There hasn't been much new in IDL that
> excites me or the people I work with in quite some time.
Sad as it is, I do share your sentiment. I recently bought maintenance
because I had to move to a different environment, and thus upgraded from
5.3 to 6.2. There is hardly anything new that I missed in the old
version, which is quite a shame when you think what an antiquated
version of IDL I had been using all these years. For me, the basic
operations are what makes life easy - things like extra DIMENSION
keywords and so on, and there are a few of these in 6.2, but not for all
routines where you would expect it (why can I dim max, but not mean?). I
don't need Object Graphics or iTools, and Matlab does indeed do a good
job at certain graphics-related things - such as being able to produce a
decent, resizable correlation plot from a matrix without me having to
set a myriad of keywords.
For me, IDL is just a means to an end - I use it to solve my everyday
imaging problems and write small widget application that others can use
as well, and I'm not happy spending all that money on maintenance when I
don't see any useful additions. Not even the DE is up to modern
standards - NEdit does a better job at highlighting syntax, brackets and
such than the expensive original.
Maybe I shall bite the bullet and defect to the Matlab side of the iron
fence ...
Sorry for the rant,

Jo

Subject: Re: Unhappy plotter
Posted by [David Fanning](#) on Fri, 07 Apr 2006 13:06:04 GMT
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Liam writes:

> If someone could write a graphics library for
> IDL which emulated the Matlab handle graphics suite, I think they would
> gain eternal fame.

I doubt it. I have pretty good evidence--on several fronts--that they
would suffer ignoble disinterest like the rest of us.

Cheers,

David

P.S. It is interesting to see my Catalyst Library so well
documented, though. :-)

--

Subject: Re: Unhappy plotter
Posted by [Rick Towler](#) on Fri, 07 Apr 2006 16:08:57 GMT
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liamgumley@gmail.com wrote:

> I'm not a Matlab user, but a while back I spent some time looking at
> the documentation for the Matlab handle graphics suite. It really looks
> very simple, straightforward, and powerful.

Everything looks greener from the other side of the fence...

About a year and a half ago I started working in a MATLAB shop. I had always wanted to spend some real time with MATLAB and now I had the chance. Someone opened the (very expensive) gate and guess what? The lawn on the other side has just as many brown spots, mole mounds, and doo doo piles.

From a programmer's perspective, I think IDL's OG are superior to ML's HG. IDL's object API is superior. I hear Michael and others groaning, but the truth is while not complete it is sufficient and most importantly easy to use. Maybe it is just me, but I always feel constrained (and a bit confused) when writing classes in MATLAB. In IDL, I was composing classes in literally minutes under David's tutelage.

To be fair, ML's HG aren't bad. The biggest advantage (and I guess this is pretty big, I have been waiting for this from RSI for *years*) is that the HG system has a lot of "value added". Mathworks doesn't just give you the bricks, but full blown houses. RSI gave us the atoms and took a "If you build it, they will come" attitude and, well, very few people have come.

But at the end of the day they both have their warts. MATLAB doesn't pass by reference, doesn't have keywords nor pointers, and is *really* expensive. IDL's IDE is lacking (especially non-windows platforms), the GUI builder is weak, and it's OG library is limited.

To bring this back to the iTools discussion, for those of you that haven't used MATLAB, the iTools are, IMO, RSI's attempt to provide an interface similar to MATLAB's figure. And let's be honest, this is sorely needed in IDL. I think the problem is that RSI went from one extreme (atoms) to the other (iPlot, iSurface, iImage) and I think the majority of IDL users live somewhere in between wanting something with the ease of the direct graphics system and the power of the object

graphics system. While some of us have made attempts, we the users can't really do it. iTools has shown us that some of this needs to be implemented internally. I wish I would have had the vision to see this back during the 6.0 alpha...

It will be interesting to see where all of this goes. I for one will stay around, not because of the iTools, but because (despite the warts) when I need to do 3d, IDL is the best game in town. But since now I need to do some quick and dirty 2d plots from the command line, I'm firing up MATLAB.

-Rick

Subject: Re: Unhappy plotter

Posted by [Michael Galloy](#) on Fri, 07 Apr 2006 16:51:46 GMT

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Cliff wrote:

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- > as widget events. Moan over ...

I appreciate the sentiment about the iTools, though I'm being slowly converted. Even extending the iTools, which I thought was very painful in IDL 6.0, doesn't seem so bad now in IDL 6.2. (Is this proof you can get used to anything?)

It's annoying that XMANAGER can't call an object method as an event handler, but it's certainly easy to get around. What bothers you about it?

-Mike
michaelgalloy.com

Subject: Re: Unhappy plotter

Posted by [Cliff](#) on Wed, 19 Apr 2006 21:42:04 GMT

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Sorry about the initial rant that started this mini-debate, I'm usually quite positive about things (honestly). I suppose the main problem that frustrates me is not having the time (like David and his Catalyst library) to invest in learning the iTools system.

I am sad, David, to hear that you are losing faith in IDL. I was fortunate to attend one of your courses in the UK and besides the Coyote Tales was most struck with your enthusiasm. I suppose the crux of the issue is that we're all in some way trying to earn a living and time is also money.

I hope that whatever you decide to do that you have all the success and one day come up with the killer app that can allow you the luxury to do the things you want to do just for fun.

All the best

Cliff

Michael Galloy wrote:

> Cliff wrote:

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>
> -Mike
> michaelgalloy.com

Subject: Re: Unhappy plotter
Posted by [David Fanning](#) on Wed, 19 Apr 2006 23:43:36 GMT
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Cliff writes in support of my lost faith in IDL:

> I hope that whatever you decide to do that you have all the success and
> one day come up with the killer app that can allow you the luxury to do
> the things you want to do just for fun.

Well, that was plan A. I'm on to plan B, property management,
now. :-)

Cheers,

David

--

David Fanning, Ph.D.
Fanning Software Consulting, Inc.
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