In a followup to Fred Knights bug report on window color allocation problems such as:
OPEN LOOK Toolkit Error in application "imslidl": Can't allocate gray pixel

Yes, I have encountered a series of problems along these lines and have had several conversation with the IDL folks. After a number of attempts, I convinced their tech support that there was a problem, part of which they say they will address in the next release. I found I could lock up an IDL session by opening one session, opening a window, starting a new session, and attempting to open a window twice. Tech support reported there was a bug in their window color allocation algorithm. Your two approaches, setting Idl.colors: to something like -5 or the -16 you suggested, or using the window, color= keyword are the appropriate solutions. I hope they will make IDL (IMSL_IDL, PV-Wave) more robust along these lines.

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