
Subject: Dialog_Pickfile Whack-a-Mole

Posted by [David Fanning](#) on Fri, 05 Oct 2012 13:23:47 GMT

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Folks,

I was excited to learn about Mark Piper's recent promotion (right word?) to IDL Product Manager. Although sorry he is leaving the teaching ranks. He was one of the best! We have already seen the benefits of having a programmer's sensibility in that position.

Since I am sitting here this morning reinstalling an operating system after an all-night wiping (and repair, God willing) of the hard drive, I thought I would share some of today's mail bag with Mark.

This letter is from "Vijay" who writes in to complain about his inability to position Dialog_Pickfile, which always appears in the upper-left corner of his display, to his mind the least advantageous spot on the whole computer. I commiserate, because I have been complaining about this lack of positioning control for about as long as Dialog_Pickfile has been with us, to no apparent effect.

Dialog_Pickfile actually only appears in the upper left the first time it's used. Thereafter, on my machine, anyway, it seems to come up in the last place you left it. (I wish to God it could remember the last directory, too, but that's why I use cgPickfile instead of Dialog_Pickfile.)

This letter strikes a chord with me because I have been frustrated with Dialog_Pickfile (via cgPickfile) for a couple of weeks now, too. Roughly corresponding to when I started working more regularly with IDL 8.x.

In a word, I can't find the damn thing half the time!

I type the command and stare at the screen and the grayed-out IDL prompt and think IDL has gone into a funk again (seems unlikely, but...), when I finally discover the dialog back behind another graphics window, or even behind the IDL workbench itself!

To my mind a blocking dialog should be, you know, somewhere where you can see the darn thing. This is

especially annoying when you are showing new IDL users how things work. They can't figure out WHAT is going on!

And, I can't say I understand it, either. Sometimes it's visible and sometimes it's not. I haven't yet figured it out. I just know that the annoyance factor is creeping up. And Vijay's e-mail this morning gives me a chance to mention it and see if anyone else has solved the mystery of where Dialog_Pickfile might or might not appear next.

Cheers,

David

--

David Fanning, Ph.D.

Fanning Software Consulting, Inc.

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

Sepore ma de ni thue. ("Perhaps thos speakest truth.")

Subject: Re: Dialog_Pickfile Whack-a-Mole
Posted by [Heinz Stege](#) on Mon, 08 Oct 2012 10:44:40 GMT
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On Fri, 5 Oct 2012 07:23:47 -0600, David Fanning wrote:

[...]

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> his inability to position Dialog_Pickfile, which always
> appears in the upper-left corner of his display, to his
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> anyway, it seems to come up in the last place you
> left it. (I wish to God it could remember the last
> directory, too, but that's why I use cgPickfile instead
> of Dialog_Pickfile.)

>

This morning I had an idea to create a workaround for the lack of the position parameters. When dialog_pickfile() has a parent, specified by the dialog_parent keyword, the start position is identical with that of the parent. (This is my observation, if the parent is a top level

base.) The upper-left of dialog_pickfile matches with the upper-left of the parent. The parent can be made invisible and everything looks fine:

```
tlb_wid=widget_base(xoffset=300,yoffset=200)
widget_control,tlb_wid,map=0
widget_control,tlb_wid,/realize
help,dialog_pickfile(dialog_parent=tlb_wid)
widget_control,tlb_wid,/destroy
```

Of course, this way of positioning works only on the first time calling dialog_pickfile in the IDL session, since dialog_pickfile remembers its last position. However dialog_pickfile is gone from the upper-left corner.

Note that dialog_pickfile also remembers its position, after a full reset of the IDL session. Be careful when testing. :-)

> This letter strikes a chord with me because I have
> been frustrated with Dialog_Pickfile (via cgPickfile)
> for a couple of weeks now, too. Roughly corresponding
> to when I started working more regularly with IDL 8.x.

>

[...]

I am happy, saying not to have this complaints (at this time).
!version={ x86 Win32 Windows Microsoft Windows 8.0.1 Oct 5 2010
32 64}
widget_info(/version)={ Windows Win32 5.1}

Cheers, Heinz

Subject: Re: Dialog_Pickfile Whack-a-Mole
Posted by [Mark Piper](#) on Wed, 10 Oct 2012 17:32:25 GMT
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On Friday, October 5, 2012 7:23:55 AM UTC-6, David Fanning wrote:

>

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>

> his inability to position Dialog_Pickfile, which always

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>

> I commiserate, because I have been complaining about this
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> lack of positioning control for about as long as
>
> Dialog_Pickfile has been with us, to no apparent effect.

Hi David,

Yeah, this has bugged me in the past, too. I'd like to see XOFFSET and YOFFSET (and maybe /CENTER) keywords for DIALOG_PICKFILE, as well as a YSIZE keyword. There are open requests for these that are years old. I'll work this into the backlog for IDL 8.3.

mp

Subject: Re: Dialog_Pickfile Whack-a-Mole
Posted by [Mark Piper](#) on Wed, 10 Oct 2012 17:38:21 GMT
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And this raises another issue: on Linux and Mac OS X, DIALOG_PICKFILE looks horrid (unless you really love Motif). I've been shopping the idea internally of giving it some form of native interface on these platforms.

mp

Subject: Re: Dialog_Pickfile Whack-a-Mole
Posted by [David Fanning](#) on Thu, 11 Oct 2012 01:57:37 GMT
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Mark Piper writes:

> And this raises another issue: on Linux and Mac OS X, DIALOG_PICKFILE looks horrid (unless you really love Motif). I've been shopping the idea internally of giving it some form of native interface on these platforms.

My goodness, Mark. You have only been on the job a week and already I've seen the polling numbers on how likely IDL is to survive another year go up 20 points! It's nice to have a programmer in this position. I'm beginning to feel understood. Thank you. :-)

Cheers,

David

--

David Fanning, Ph.D.
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Sepore ma de ni thue. ("Perhaps thos speakest truth.")

Subject: Re: Dialog_Pickfile Whack-a-Mole
Posted by [Yngvar Larsen](#) on Thu, 11 Oct 2012 14:17:36 GMT
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On Thursday, 11 October 2012 03:57:53 UTC+2, David Fanning wrote:

> Mark Piper writes:

>
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>
>

>> And this raises another issue: on Linux and Mac OS X, DIALOG_PICKFILE looks horrid (unless you really love Motif). I've been shopping the idea internally of giving it some form of native interface on these platforms.

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> My goodness, Mark. You have only been on the job a week
> and already I've seen the polling numbers on how likely IDL
> is to survive another year go up 20 points! It's nice to have a
> programmer in this position. I'm beginning to feel
> understood. Thank you. :-)

I completely second that one!

For 10+ years, I've been wondering why IDL GUI programs must look like 1985. My guess was that nobody at RSI/ITT/Exelis cares because they all use Windows. But I would be glad to be proven wrong!

--

Yngvar

Subject: Re: Dialog_Pickfile Whack-a-Mole
Posted by [Mark Piper](#) on Fri, 12 Oct 2012 21:58:10 GMT
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On Thursday, October 11, 2012 8:17:36 AM UTC-6, Yngvar Larsen wrote:

>
> For 10+ years, I've been wondering why IDL GUI programs must look like 1985. My guess was that nobody at RSI/ITT/Exelis cares because they all use Windows. But I would be glad to be

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>

I was hoping someone would bring this up, since it's the root of the DIALOG_PICKFILE issue. We need a new widget system in IDL. It will undoubtedly not be a drop-in replacement for the current widget system. Should the new system be a desktop system (using, e.g., GTK or Qt), or should it be webified (using, e.g., WebGL)? We need to think about this carefully; I don't want to develop something that will be obsolete in five years.

What do you think?

mp

P.S. Most of my development is done on Linux. It's not so pretty, but it works.

Subject: Re: Dialog_Pickfile Whack-a-Mole
Posted by [David Fanning](#) on Fri, 12 Oct 2012 23:07:43 GMT
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Mark Piper writes:

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I wouldn't get out too far ahead on this. (Some quick research on WebGL indicates it's not even supported by Microsoft. That could, uh, be a problem.)

I would try really, really hard to give the user something simple to use that looks professional. Five years is not a long time, but I do worry this might be a moot point if there are no users left to take advantage of it.

I did see a demo of some HTML5 functionality this week, and I have to admit, it looks great. Totally cool. But, it is clear that it is also still cutting edge. I think if I were making this decision, I would hang back for something more reliable. More buggy software is not likely to increase the number of people frending you on Facebook. :-)

Cheers,

David

--

David Fanning, Ph.D.

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Subject: Re: Dialog_Pickfile Whack-a-Mole

Posted by [Yngvar Larsen](#) on Sun, 14 Oct 2012 15:09:55 GMT

[View Forum Message](#) <> [Reply to Message](#)

On Friday, 12 October 2012 23:58:10 UTC+2, Mark Piper wrote:

> On Thursday, October 11, 2012 8:17:36 AM UTC-6, Yngvar Larsen wrote:

>

>>

>

>> For 10+ years, I've been wondering why IDL GUI programs must look like 1985. My guess was that nobody at RSI/ITT/Exelis cares because they all use Windows. But I would be glad to be proven wrong!

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>

> What do you think?

Hm. Interesting. If you asked me 5 years ago, I would have said pick Qt or something else that works equally well on Windows/Mac/Linux. The new possibilities with web-enabled frameworks is exciting, but as David says, be careful and avoid picking something too esoteric.

In any case, don't be afraid to ditch compability with the current widget system. The current system has some nice features (hierarchy of event handlers), but all in all it can be a nightmare to work with (completely impossible to make a widget rescaling framework that works for both windows and unix, opaque integer "handles" instead of real objects, butt ugly on mac/linux, and so on).

> P.S. Most of my development is done on Linux. It's not so pretty, but it works.

Yes it somehow works, and personally I also don't really care about looks for my internal stuff. Showing Motif based stuff to customers on the other hand, makes you look out of date no matter how good the actual functionality is...

--

Yngvar

Subject: Re: Dialog_Pickfile Whack-a-Mole
Posted by [tumanjong](#) on Tue, 16 Oct 2012 18:35:30 GMT
[View Forum Message](#) <> [Reply to Message](#)

On Friday, October 12, 2012 5:58:10 PM UTC-4, Mark Piper wrote:

> On Thursday, October 11, 2012 8:17:36 AM UTC-6, Yngvar Larsen wrote:

>

>>

>

>> For 10+ years, I've been wondering why IDL GUI programs must look like 1985. My guess was that nobody at RSI/ITT/Exelis cares because they all use Windows. But I would be glad to be proven wrong!

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>

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> What do you think?

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> P.S. Most of my development is done on Linux. It's not so pretty, but it works.

Hi Mark,

I have been asking for this (an updated widget toolkit) for a number of years now. It is about time that this issue is seriously explored. My personal choice would be for something like Qt that already has full cross-platform support and is still being actively developed and used.

Richard Tumanjong Azuah

Subject: Re: Dialog_Pickfile Whack-a-Mole
Posted by [Mark Piper](#) on Wed, 17 Oct 2012 15:25:39 GMT
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On Tuesday, October 16, 2012 12:35:30 PM UTC-6, tuma...@gmail.com wrote:

>

> I have been asking for this (an updated widget toolkit) for a number of years now. It is about time that this issue is seriously explored. My personal choice would be for something like Qt that already has full cross-platform support and is still being actively developed and used.

>

Hi David, Yngvar and Richard,

Thanks for your feedback. I'd like to start on this after 8.3. I'll post on the newsgroup again beforehand to solicit ideas and suggestions.

Just so you know my bias up front, I'd like a web-based widget system. You're welcome to attempt to convince me otherwise!

mp

Subject: Re: Dialog_Pickfile Whack-a-Mole
Posted by [David Fanning](#) on Wed, 17 Oct 2012 15:49:29 GMT
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Mark Piper writes:

> Just so you know my bias up front, I'd like a web-based widget system. You're welcome to attempt to convince me otherwise!

As I say, I'm not particularly opposed to a web-based widget system, provided it is simple enough to use and it works in a cross-platform manner. But, I don't know much about them. Do you have pointers to something you think is worth reading? Why do you prefer this solution? I'm leery mostly because I think HTML5 is too close to the cutting edge of where things are going in five years time. It will be hard to know whom to blame when things inevitably go wrong. ;-)

Does having a web-based system mean that we have to have a web server running on our machines if we are away from Internet access? Will you choose our HTML5 browser for us? How do you plan to finesse the inevitable browser war and feature creep?

Cheers,

David

--

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Subject: Re: Dialog_Pickfile Whack-a-Mole
Posted by [David Fanning](#) on Wed, 17 Oct 2012 15:52:29 GMT
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Mark Piper writes:

> Thanks for your feedback.

We probably need to change the Subject line of this thread or no one will be able to find it in the future. But, on the topic of Whack-a-Mole, I got another e-mail this morning from someone who would like to change the text on the inscrutable Save button to Open, if you are in fact opening a file with the dialog. :-)

Cheers,

David

--

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