Hi Folks,

Charles Martin and Bill Sawchuck had a lot of nice things
to say about some manuals I wrote and classes I taught.
Thanks to both of them.

I just want to clarify a couple of points.

Charles wrote:

> The fact that I was never even informed about the existense
> of this manual really annoys me. It seems as if RSI expects
> you to take the training course if you want to do anything
> but the basics in IDL. Another thing that frustrates me is
> that even if the training course was free, for me
> reading the manual was enough. I would not want to waste
> time traveling to and from the training site.

I don't think RSI tried to hide the existence of these
manuals at all. They were on the official IDL price list
from the day I wrote them. And although there was (and
still is) a rule about responding to newsgroup articles,
I probably wrote 5-6 private e-mails a day answering questions
and letting people know the manuals were available. This is
probably the "fluke" you mention for how you came to hear
about the manuals.

And although I am pleased that you were able to read the
manuals and learn what you needed to know, there is no
comparison at all between what you learn in a manual
(even a very good manual) and what you learn in a class.
I had many discussions at RSI about whether the sales
of the manuals would cut into course revenue. My position
has always been that to think so is nonsense. I personally
think people who come to classes (well, at least *my* classes
:-))learn far more information than they can get from
the manual alone.

But more importantly, the information you learn is
much more current. To some extent the stuff an author
commits to paper is old hat. If you are any good as an
instructor or as an IDL programmer you grow and mature
and the way you do things changes, sometimes dramatically.

Building Graphical User Interfaces in IDL was a good manual, but I would not recommend using it now as an example of good programming style. It was written almost two years ago.

Bill wrote:

> Fortunately, I think we are all in luck. It is my understanding
> that David is currently working on an IDL book which is to include
> some coverage of the newly added object functionality which has
> been incorporated into IDL 5.0.
>
> David, what is the status of this latest venture of yours?

When I worked for RSI I was fortunate enough to have "creation of training materials" as part of my job description. This made it much, much easier to put other things aside and work on manuals. (And one thing I don't think anyone really appreciates is how much hard work it takes to produce a good manual. I mean look around you on your book shelf. How many do you see? I had the leisure, because I worked at home and nobody knew what the hell I was doing, to do it right. Most technical writers do not work under such perfect circumstances. That they do as well as they do is a mystery to me. I could not do their job.)

Anyway, book producing nowadays is not a revenue producing operation. (How much would you want to pay for one of those manuals, anyway, Charles?) I have to jam it in around trying to make a living, carting children to 5-10 soccer and basketball practices and games a week, and learning stuff that people expect me to be an expert on.

That said, I am about a chapter away from having a book that is the equivalent, I suppose, of the Learning IDL manual I wrote for RSI. All of the graphics chapters are done, as are the hardcopy output chapters, etc. It is a book about practical programming techniques and the tricks that you can only learn from a lot of programming experience.

The intended audience for this book are people just starting to work with IDL and those people who have had to learn IDL on their own from the IDL manuals. I am very pleased with it. I've taught enough IDL classes to think I know what people want and need to learn about IDL. This book covers those essential things. Looking ahead at my summer schedule, that book should be for sale by the end of the summer, if not sooner.

The second book I have in mind to write will be concerned with

writing larger IDL programs and applications. It will be
the equivalent of Building Graphical User Interfaces. It will
cover object graphics (if I can learn them!), widget programming,
and what I think of as the "art" of writing good IDL programs.
I do not have a release date in mind for that book.

In any case, when the book is ready I am sure you will hear
about it. :-) It will come with a lot of example programs
that I think demonstrate good programming techniques. I am
going to self-publish it.

In the meantime, check out the programs and article on my
web page. This is where I try out new ideas and get feedback
on what customers need and want. The example programs there
often reflect my thinking today on the proper way to write
IDL programs. I hope there is something there for people
who don't want to pay $$$ for training. And I always hold
something back, so that the people who *do* want to pay $$$
always get their money's worth. :-)

Cheers,

David

 --- -----

David Fanning, Ph.D.
Fanning Software Consulting
Customizable IDL Programming Courses
Phone: 970-221-0438 E-Mail: davidf@dfanning.com
Coyote's Guide to IDL Programming: http://www.dfanning.com
IDL 5 Reports: http://www.dfanning.com/documents/anomaly5.html

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Subject: Re: The Secret Widget Manual and IDL V5
Posted by Bill Sawchuck on Tue, 10 Jun 1997 07:00:00 GMT
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Charles Martin <martin@uthscsa.edu> wrote in article
<martin-0906971210080001@biad16.uthscsa.edu>...
> Hi All,
>
> A long time ago when IDL first came out with widgets, I tried to write
> widget programs based on the standard documentation. I was able to get my
> widget programs to work, but they felt kludgy. I also decided that widget
> programing was much harder than it was worth so I mostly stopped writing
> widget code.
>

> Then as kind of a fluke I got a hold of the RSI manual called "Building
> Graphical User Interfaces in IDL: An Interactive Training Course". This
> manual was written by David Fanning and is the manual they give you if
you
> sign up for one of their $$$ training courses. This manual was great. I
> read it in 1 day. I never bothered to download the examples from the ftp
> site. Now widget programing is simple and straight forward. I use widgets
> all the time.
>
> The fact that I was never even informed about the existense of this
manual
> really annoys me. It seems as if RSI expects you to take the training
> course if you want to do anything but the basics in IDL. Another thing
> that frustrates me is that even if the training course was free, for me
> reading the manual was enough. I would not want to waste time traveling
to
> and from the training site.
>
> So now IDL version 5 is here. Many fairly sophisticated users seem to be
> having trouble using objects. I read the objects manual and I got the
same
> feeling I got when I read the standard documentation on widgets. I wonder
> is there a training manual out there somewhere on IDL objects? If so is
> there a way to get that manual without taking a training course? Or does
> RSI expect us to fork over another $1k to learn the secrets of the new
> features?
>
> Just Wondering,
>
> Charles Martin, PhD
> University of Texas
>

Charles,

I had the pleasure of attending the last widget training course which David
taught at RSI in October 1996. It is also my opinion that his training
manuals on IDL programming are second to none and should be required
reading for *anyone* who is serious about IDL programming. I had had the
same experience as you when taking my first stab at widget programming.
After taking the course with David and reading the manual from cover to
cover it was nothing short of amazing how the daunting task of writing
large widget applications had suddenly and mysteriously become easy almost
overnight.

Fortunately, I think we are all in luck. It is my understanding that David
is currently   working on an IDL book which is to include some coverage of
the newly added object functionality which has been incorporated into IDL

5.0.

David, if you are out there (and I know you are), what is the status of
this latest venture of yours? As I have said before, we are counting on
you.

Anyone who has accessed this newsgroup has come to know David and the
quality of his work. I believe anyone who has taken a course with him
would agree he is an excellent teacher and story teller with a natural
ability to get the point across with a sometimes unnatural love for IDL. I
would urge anyone who is thinking about getting some extra help on IDL to
get in touch with David as a first step. You will not be disappointed.

Bill Sawchuck
Space Telescope Science Institute
3700 San Martin Drive
Baltimore, MD 21218
sawchuck@stsci.edu

p.s. The IDL training manuals can be ordered directly from RSI. An order
form is included with the IDL 5.0 release.

Subject: Re: The Secret Widget Manual and IDL V5
Posted by davidf on Wed, 11 Jun 1997 07:00:00 GMT
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Jim O'Connor writes:

> David:
>
> How applicable will your book be to those of us who use PV-Wave? I
> imagine the basic language portions will be the same, but I don't have
> a good feel for how much the two products have diverged since 9/90.
>
> I plan on buying your book regardless of the degree of overlap, but it
> would be ideal if the book showed both the Wave and the IDL way of
> doing things.

I think the topics in my first book will be very applicable to
PV-Wave. (To tell you the truth, I often use PV-Wave documentation
to figure out what is going on in IDL!) My original goal was to
create separate books for IDL and PV-Wave users. But I have been so
busy that I really have not had the time to re-learn PV-Wave the
way I need to if I am going to write sensibly about it. My
immediate goal now is to just get the IDL book finished and out
there. If you are really going to buy a copy I have hope that
the revenue might be enough to buy me some leisure time to

write a PV-Wave book. :-)

In the perfect world, I would have enough income from teaching
IDL/PV-Wave classes that I could produce training materials
full-time. We will see...

Thanks for signing up as my first customer. I'll let you
know ASAP.

Cheers,

David
--
David Fanning, Ph.D.
Fanning Software Consulting
Customizable IDL Programming Courses
Phone: 970-221-0438 E-Mail: davidf@dfanning.com
Coyote's Guide to IDL Programming: http://www.dfanning.com
IDL 5 Reports: http://www.dfanning.com/documents/anomaly5.html

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Subject: Re: The Secret Widget Manual and IDL V5
Posted by Jim O'Connor[1] on Wed, 11 Jun 1997 07:00:00 GMT
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David:

How applicable will your book be to those of us who use PV-Wave? I
imagine the basic language portions will be the same, but I don't have
a good feel for how much the two products have diverged since 9/90.

I plan on buying your book regardless of the degree of overlap, but it
would be ideal if the book showed both the Wave and the IDL way of
doing things.

--
Jim

davidf@dfanning.com (David Fanning) writes:

> Hi Folks,
>
> Charles Martin and Bill Sawchuck had a lot of nice things
> to say about some manuals I wrote and classes I taught.
> Thanks to both of them.
>