

Beyond Books: New directions for user documentation

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ABSTRACT: *Newer methods of delivering user documentation, in particular, at the point of use, as online help, and as single-topic white papers are described, along with other initiatives underway to improve the Cray user experience.*

KEYWORDS: CrayDoc, online help, software documentation, user documentation, GUI

Introduction

Over a decade ago, we introduced CrayDoc, a browser-based application for delivering software documentation for Cray system software and programming environments. Since that time CrayDoc has been updated several times to improve its stability and ease of use. However, it is becoming increasingly apparent that Cray customers rarely use a CrayDoc installation to access our documentation, preferring to go directly to the Cray Inc. documentation sites on the Internet, or to copy the individual manuals in PDF format to their personal work environment. With the goal of using our documentation resources to best advantage for our customers, this paper describes some of the alternative formats we are beginning to use, or considering using to deliver information to our customers. We solicit feedback from the readers as to whether these formats are attractive to them, and for suggestions on other ways that we can provide product documentation that is useful, timely, and accurate.

The Internet—Available and Searchable

Customers have requested the ability to access the contents of our public website, docs.cray.com, via Internet search engines, such as google. Our packaging method made the documents on our site unavailable for indexing by conventional search engines, and the CrayDoc search engine did not return useful results. A new feature of google enabled us to make our manuals “visible” to the web crawler, allowing users to find the manual they need by searching for a task or keywords.

We are also working on a single download point for all Cray customer documentation, public and private.

Online Help

Version 1.5 of the Cray XT3 System Software features a graphical user interface (GUI) for the System Management Workstation (SMW). We are incorporating all of the documentation for administering the operating system, file systems, and the SMW into online help within the GUI. If future Cray platforms offer an integrated development environment, we look forward to providing similar online help to programmers.

White Papers

In the past year we have been using white papers to provide more information outside of the regular release packages. Most recently we sent a paper to all of our XT3 sites, advising them of features in the forthcoming 1.4 software release and how the upgrade would affect users. Other papers have described specific security measures to implement on the XD1 and a description of programming considerations when migrating from the catamount compute OS on earlier versions of the XT3 to the catamount virtual node (CVN) OS on XT3 1.4.

Conclusion

The CrayDoc document server was a leap forward from traditional printed and bound computer manuals but we believe it no longer meets the needs of our users. We look forward to developing new document delivery systems that bring user assistance closer to the user’s work environment.

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