

Digitizing and Modernizing a HP141 Display



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Declaration

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When you ask God for a gift, be thankful if he sends not diamonds, pearls, or riches but the love of real, true friends.

—*Muhammad Ali*

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Abstract

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Abbreviations

ADC Analog-to-Digital Converter

AMPS Advanced Mobile Telephone System

ASIC Application Specific Integrate Circuit

AvM Average Mode

BLE Bluetooth Low Energy

CPU Central Processing Unit

CRT Cathode Ray Tube

DAS Data Acquisition Subsystem

DC Direct Current

DFT Digital Fourier Transform

DPS Digital Processing Subsystem

DSI Display Serial Interface

DSP Digital Signal Processor

DVI Digital Video Interface

EDA Electronic Design Automation

FFT Fast Fourier Transform

FIFO First In First Out

FPGA Field Programmable Gate Array

GPU Graphical Processing Unit

GUI Graphical User Interface

GUIS Graphical User Interface Subsystem

HDL Hardware Description Language

HDMI High Definition Multimedia Interface

HP Hewlett-Packard Company

IF Intermediate Frequency

LCD Liquid Crystal Display

LO Local Oscillator

MCU Microcontroller Unit

MSPS Mega Samples Per Second

OLED Organic Light-Emitting Diode

OS Operating System

PCB Printed Circuit Board

PHM Peak Hold Mode

RAM Random Access Memory

RBW Resolution Bandwidth

RF Radio Frequency

RGB Red Blue Green

RTL Register Transfer Level

RTSA Radio-Time Spectrum Analyzer

RwM Raw Mode

SA Signal/Spectrum Analyzer

SBC Single-Board Computer

SCS Signal Conditioning Subsystem

SDK Software Development Kit

SNR Signal-to-Noise Ratio

SPI Serial Peripheral Interface

SPS Samples Per Second

TFT Thin-Film Transistor

UI User Interface

USB Universal-Serial Bus

VGA Video Graphics Array

VSA Vector Spectrum Analyzer

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background

Designed and patented in the 1970s, Hewlett-Packard Company's (HP) high performance plug-in model 8552B and 8555A spectrum analyzers (SA), equipped with the 141T display, remain powerful tools for characterising signals in the frequency domain. The 8552B is particularly convenient for measuring spectra in a wide frequency range between 20 Hz to 40 GHz. Another advantage of these spectrum analysers is that a user can broaden frequency requirements by increasing the number of tuning sections. Additionally, the 141T features absolute calibration of amplitude as well as high resolution, sensitivity and a simple display output.

The shortcoming of the spectrum analyzer, however, is that it uses a cathode ray tube (CRT) display which is prone to degradation after extended periods of usage and is outdated compared to the display on most modern devices. In this project, a single board computer and a liquid crystal display (LCD) touch screen is interfaced with the 141T display unit, thereby, replacing the outdated CRT technology. This allows users to continue to exploit the advantageous capabilities of the spectrum analyzer, such as the wide frequency bandwidth, despite damage to the CRT display. In addition, interfacing a single board computer with the 141T offers improved software-based features for performing frequency analysis.

Specifically, this project aims to develop a new display for the high resolution 8552B intermediate frequency (IF) section equipped with the 8555A spectrum analyzer radio frequency (RF) section which can make frequency domain measurements from 10 MHz to 18 GHz. The broad scanning frequency bandwidth of this model makes it suitable for frequency domain analyses in engineering applications such as mechanical vibrations and EMC field strength analysis with a calibrated antenna [2].

The CRT display subsystem consists of a post-accelerator storage tube with a 9 kV accelerating potential and aluminized P31 phosphor for producing high trace brightness. When calibrated, the CRT screen can display frequency bandwidths of up to 2 GHz wide. To display the full frequency range with a maximum of 18 GHz, the CRT can be calibrated in 10 frequency bands using internal mixing. One of advantage of the 141T over other displays that were manufactured during that time is that more detail can be observed in the spectrum by progressively narrowing frequency width from 100 Hz/division to 2 kHz/division. Overall, the 141T consists of a CRT graticule which can plot the frequency domain representation of a signal on a 2D plane with 8 x 10 divisions.

For this project, the 141T is powered by a 220 V single-phase source at 60 Hz, requiring less than

225 W even when plug-ins are connected. To achieve the 9 kV accelerating potential for deflecting electron beams in producing the **CRT** display, the device uses a step-up transformer and transistorized oscillator. The main disadvantage of having to increase the accelerating potential in a **CRT** display system is that the performance of electronic voltage regulation components such as capacitors, diodes and resistors can degrade over time.

Another challenge of using a phosphor **CRT** display is the effect of persistence on the saccadic information transfer which can lead to bias in experimental results [3]. This effect of persistence on experimental results is of particular interest to frequency domain analysis since displayed signals include noise from the environment which can make it difficult to extract accurate frequency information from plots. For the Model 141T, the persistence varies from the natural persistence of P31 phosphor (0.1 s) to a maximum of 15 s when the device is operating in the maximum writing rate mode. Therefore, phosphor persistence in the **CRT** display can significantly affect the amount of time to acquire measurements as well as the precision of the data extracted from the display.

1.2 Objectives

The aim of this project is to design a new display with full functionality and computer-aided signal processing features such as signal normalization. The digital display has to be compatible with the voltage outputs that enable analog signals to be plotted by the 141T. The aim of digitizing the signals is to interface measures from the spectrum analyzer with a computer that can perform tasks and store data accordingly. Therefore, a survey of the 8555A **RF** section and 8552B **IF** section outputs and available single board computer and touch screen options must be conducted. Furthermore, the project aims to investigate basic XYZ replicas, performing digital signal processing algorithms, how to correctly display signal data on annotated axes depending on available instrument settings.

This report aims to provide:

- Characterization of the HP141 display inputs from the 8555A **RF** section and 8552B **IF** section
- Available options for single-board computer and touchscreens options and the most suitable selection for interfacing with the two spectrum analyzer sections
- A design and simulation of interface between the single-board computer which includes analog converter for digitizing outputs from the **RF** and **IF** sections
- Algorithms for processing the digital signals and performing operations on displayed spectra
- Results on the construction, unit tests and integration tests of the improved system for spectral analysis

1.3 Project Requirements

Before detailing system requirements, user requirements were used to scope the project in terms of objectives that are not related to functions and performance. In designing the upgraded or ‘new’ **SA**, selection of hardware components was conducted with the aim of formulating specifications that

successfully fulfill user requirements. Table 1.1 summarises the user requirements and gives a short description of the objective.

Table 1.1: User requirements.

| ID | Requirement Description |
|------|--|
| UR01 | Display of the new SA must behave like the display of newer generations of SAs, such as the FieldFox. That is, the new SA must achieve more or less the same number data points as the FieldFox (801 points). |
| UR02 | The SA must have the following display modes: (a) Peak hold mode (PHM) which displays the largest value seen and updated at each scan. (b) Average mode (AvM) in which each frequency bin's average is updated at each scan. (c) Raw mode (RwM) where the latest value is displayed until the next scan and overwriting each value during a scan event. |
| UR03 | SA unit must have a suitable vertical resolution based on a 10 dB/division in the logarithmic scale. |
| UR04 | Linear display mode must have low priority. |
| UR05 | SA display subsystem must have setting markers, similar to the FieldFox analyzer. |
| UR06 | Design must be capable of storing and recalling traces. |
| UR07 | Users must be able to change modes by touching the screen and must be able to enter data using a keyboard. |
| UR08 | All software must load on power up. |
| UR09 | SA unit must use a single wall wart power source for the display subsystem. |
| UR10 | Project must develop an HP141T display emulator of horizontal sweep, vertical sawtooth and pen lift state. |

Table 1.2 details system requirements in terms of functions and performance. These requirements were developed after a review of the scope through the formalization of the user requirements in table 1.1 above.

Table 1.2: System requirements.

| ID | Requirement Description |
|------|---|
| SR01 | The system must digitize analog outputs from an HP141T 8555A model which performs frequency domain measurements between 20 Hz and 18 GHz. |
| SR02 | Digitized outputs must be interfaced with a single board computer for performing signal processing tasks. |
| SR03 | The system must include a signal conditioning box for debugging purposes and replicating the outputs of the spectrum analyzer during testing. |
| SR04 | The system must be simulated using software. |
| SR05 | The display must include new annotations that take instrument and operator manual inputs into account. |
| SR06 | The system must include appropriate documentation such as tutorials and operational instructions when using the signal processor and screen. |

In addition to the above mentioned system requirements, the project considers the basic configuration parameters that signal analyzers typically provide such as:

- Setting the minimum and maximum frequencies to be displayed based on a given center frequency

- Setting the reference amplitude for frequency responses and a span that is suitable for the spectrum analyzer
- Setting the frequency resolution according to the passband of the **IF** filter
- Setting the sweep time required to record the full frequency spectrum that is of interest

1.4 Scope & Limitations

The focus of this report is in the design and implementation of a digitized display for the HP141T that interfaces with a single board computer for storing and manipulating signal data from the oscilloscope. The scope is limited to selection of electronics that are suitable for converting the analog signals from the HP141T that are responsible for displaying signals. The scope only includes a survey of the HP141T circuits and outputs that directly affect how a spectrum is generated with respect to time domain and frequency domain analyses. The paper is not concerned with changing or improving the operational design of the device with respect to its power, amplification and filtering circuitry.

1.5 Report Outline

Chapter 2 initiates the report by establishing the general history and theoretical framework for the design and applications of spectrum analyzers in engineering. The same chapter details the previous techniques for converting the output of a **SA** to digital values that can be manipulated by a processor. Finally, designs of displays are explored in literature to establish an approach to representing the processor output on a **LCD** screen.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The aim of this chapter is to conceptualize the operation of spectrum analyzers and establish a theoretical foundation for the frequency analysis techniques applied to produce the correct output. This conceptualization is then integrated with a broader review of digitizing and modernizing the display of spectrum analyzers.

In circumventing design limitations of spectrum analyzer displays, it is prudent to survey the most suitable hardware components. This is particularly true for the case where electronic components are required to perform in a broad frequency bandwidth. For example, for high frequency signals, the Nyquist theorem indicates that the ADC is required to have a sample at a frequency that is more than double the frequency of the output signal. Furthermore, the challenge of presenting signals in the frequency domain using electronics exists due to the fact the input signal to the ADC holds information about frequency in the time domain. Therefore, the investigation of literature that is presented in this chapter aims to provide a motivation for the design decisions taken in digitizing and modernizing the HP141T display.

The chapter begins with an evaluation of the frequency domain analysis theory that is applied in the operation of signal analyzers. Then, the different principles that distinguish different types of analyzers are explored to form the basis understanding the expected behaviour of a spectrum analyzer with specific settings. Following descriptions of the operation of spectrum analyzers from literature, the chapter includes a review of the investigation into different techniques for digitizing analyzer displays. This also includes a review of the different electronic components and techniques for digitizing frequency information in order to survey available hardware options that can be selected for a cost effective implementation. Finally, a broad discussion is included on different types of displays for analyzers in literature and a critique of the literature is provided to outline the purpose of the proposed design.

2.1 Mitigating Spectrum Analyzer Obsolescence: A Historical Perspective

2.1.1 Introduction to Spectrum Analysis

A spectrum analyzers [SAs](#) is a critical instrument for investigating properties of physical phenomena that can be interpreted through power and frequency characteristics of analog signals derived from voltage measurements. This project differentiates between spectrum analyzers and oscilloscopes such that spectrum analyzers are instruments that display waveforms in the frequency domain and oscilloscopes

2.1. Mitigating Spectrum Analyzer Obsolescence: A Historical Perspective

as instruments that operate in the time domain. However, the paper recognizes their significance in signal processing applications, as well as some of the shared similarities in their subsystems.

As such, the following section is a review of the history and applications of spectrum analyzers and oscilloscopes to establish the context of the project. By assimilating literature on the applications of these instruments in engineering, the section also aims to formulate design guidelines from previous works that can improve the operation of the digitized HP141T, thereby satisfying user and functional requirements.

2.1.2 Early Developments in Waveform Analysis

The evolution of [SAs](#) is closely linked to that of the oscilloscope. In a review of the history and technology of oscilloscopes, Pereira attributed the invention of the electromagnetic oscillograph to the French physicist, André-Eugene Blondel [4]. Oscillographs were devices that used a pen attached to a moving coil to trace an ink record on a rotating paper chart [4]. According to Herres, the motivation for the invention of oscillographs was to extract waveforms from acoustic and electrical phenomena, however, the devices had a severely limited frequency response and bandwidth because of the inertia of the pen and ink recording equipment [5]. Ultimately, the operation of these devices was restricted by the working principle based on mechanical devices which limited the bandwidth in the range of 10-19 Hz [4].

Following the invention of the oscillograph, available waveform analysis tools included contact diode and vacuum tubes as the only form of signal detectors [6]. Technologies such as the slotted line and phase bridges became the standard instruments for measuring amplitude and frequency but were often slow and tedious [1]. In 1933, Rohde & Schwarz developed the improved Z-G system which was the first to directly indicate complex parameters on a Schmidt chart as shown in figure 2.1 [1].



Figure 2.1: The Z-G Diagram by developed by Rohde & Schwarz with a Schmidt chart for measuring complex parameters [1].

2.1.3 Advancements in Spectrum Analysis Technology

The first commercially available real-time signal analyzers ([RTSAs](#)) were introduced in the 1960s by Federal Scientific to process data up to 20 kHz through a single filter that could change modes in milliseconds [7]. These devices were designed for analyzing mechanical faults and failures in rotating machinery and for investigating vibratory motions of components, systems and structures [7]. In contrast to the the [SAs](#) introduced in the 1960s for characterizing rotary machinery, this paper is focuses on [SAs](#) that were designed for displaying wide-band signals up to the K-band of microwave signals.

Rapid progress in semiconductor technology and microwave elements laid a foundation for the developed first waveform instrumentation devices with 1 GHz bandwidth [6]. With the advent of wireless network

2.1. Mitigating Spectrum Analyzer Obsolescence: A Historical Perspective

technologies, **SA** developments became focused on high frequency instrumentation which had to meet testing requirements of first generation technologies such as the **Advanced Mobile Telephone System (AMPS)** operated at frequencies at 800 MHz to 900 MHz. Vector network analyzers were introduced as an extension of spectrum analyzers capable of displaying amplitude and phase relative to a reference signal [8].

2.1.4 Early Modifications to Spectrum Analyzers (1960s - 1980s)



Figure 2.2: The HP8568A spectrum analyzer which was the first spectrum analyzer from Hewlett-Packard Company to include a microprocessor in the 1970s.

a plug-in polar **Cathode Ray Tube (CRT)** display to show amplitude and phase [10]. The aim of the display was so that the device could be used with Smith chart overlay, or reflection coefficient measurements [10].

In 1982, D'Addario proposed the implementation of Hewlett-Packard Model 8410A network analyzer as a reflectometer in a system which included an Apple II Plus computer for performing computations of the short-open-load method of calibrating and correcting errors of signals in the S-band of the microwave region of the electromagnetic spectrum [11]. D'Addario stated that the advantage of implementing a computer-based system was in the software substituted a short delay line for open circuit calibration [11]. In addition, the software was mostly in Applesoft Basic that featured assembly language subroutines for performing complex arithmetic and controlling the interface [11]. Similarly, the proposed design in this project aims to exploit the advantages of computerization by introducing functions and libraries for performing digital signal processing tasks and controlling the **Graphical User Interface (GUI)**.

Another modification to the HP8410 was performed by NASA's Terry and Kunath in 1990, where the **SA** was used as an automated far-field antenna range receiver [12]. The

Motivated by applications in network analysis and microwave engineering, Hewlett-Packard developed the first fully calibrated spectrum analyzer that capable of sweeping broad frequency ranges [9]. After the introduction of easily-operated wideband network analyzer equipment in 1967, Hewlett-Packard Co. released a network analyzer with a range of 100 kHz to 110 MHz. In particular, the company released the Model 8407A which could resolve amplitude of up to 0.05 dB on



Figure 2.3: Illustrating the size of early spectrum analyzer setups. Digitization and modernization of these devices was also focused on reducing their size in order to improve portability.

2.1. Mitigating Spectrum Analyzer Obsolescence: A Historical Perspective

system included external mixers capable of harmonic mixing up to 18 GHz, Analog-to-Digital Converter (ADC)s, and interfaced with an external computer [12]. Terry and Kunath noted that the phase and amplitude signals could be converted to digital signals by using either ADCs or by using a digital voltmeter [12]. The authors used a HP308 personal computer with two processors that operated in the DOS 3.3 and HP Basic 5.0 environments, respectively [12]. The computer was employed as the system controller with programs for creating and editing control files for swept frequency, viewing radiated power level data, and running tests with parameters saved in files to be executed or edited at a later time [12]. Consequently, the designer needs to consider file formats, file sizes and file transmission in the process of digitizing a SA. This is particularly true when the system processes are performed across different devices and programs which may support different file formats and file sizes.

2.1.5 Commercial Digitization of Spectrum Analyzers

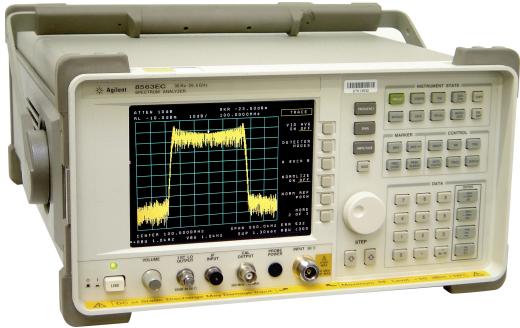


Figure 2.4: The Agilent 8560EC is shown with a LCD display. This was an improvement over the 8560E model which had a CRT display.

over previous versions when the HP8568A automatic SA, shown in figure 2.2, was introduced with a microprocessor controlling its operation.

In the 2000s, Agilent Technologies modernized the front and rear panels of HP8560E Model spectrum analyzers, by introducing LCD color display interfaced with a LCD driver board and VGA port located that did not require a user interface [14]. Further additions included ADC circuitry integrated into the controller board [14]. These improvements also translated into better portability of the system as shown in 2.4.

2.1.6 Obsolescence Mitigation and Modernization Strategies

Overtime as prices of new spectrum analyzers increased rapidly, researchers opted to use older SAs instead of replacing them. Research into strategies for mitigating risks related to the obsolescence of older SA models was conducted by Hoppin in 2002, where particular focus was allocated to HP8566/68 SAs in automated test equipment [15]. Hoppin stated that dependence on obsolete and unsupported equipment increased the risk of system and that as SAs aged, the time required for repair and the cost of replacement increases rapidly [15]. As a result of the inevitable obsolescence, Hopping proposed three strategies for dealing with the aged devices, namely, the *stockpile*; the *redesign*; and

HP85XX spectrum analyzers replaced the HP84XX analyzer series as the first SAs with synthesized frequency sweeps and an ADC converter for sampling a video signal and displaying it on a CRT screen. The HP85XX series expanded the capabilities of spectrum analyzers, however, earlier versions of these devices were large as shown in figure 2.3, where a technician is shown alongside a HP8566B SA at the heart of two EM1 receivers [13]. Significant improvements to this series of SAs were realised

2.1. Mitigating Spectrum Analyzer Obsolescence: A Historical Perspective

migration strategies. The stockpile strategies requires industry organizations to identify sources of spare replacement components and instruments, and offer repair and calibration services [15].

This project follows a strategy similar to the redesign strategy proposed by Hoppin in which automated test equipment program managers are required to assess the feasibility of introducing replacement instrument specifications, feature and capability requirements [15]. Hoppin noted that one of the risks of applying the redesign strategy is that software projects are notoriously hard to manage to scope, budget and schedule [15]. Additionally, since the devices have aged significantly, the languages, tools and methods originally used may be lost, requiring designers to apply reverse engineering techniques [15]. To mitigate the costs from applying the redesign process, Hoppin described three main components that need to be considered, namely, test code creation, test instrumentation, purchase and integration, and revalidation measurements and results [15].

In a similar research published in 2010, Wolle discussed the various aspects related to replacement of obsolete instruments to overcome the challenges that arise when newer versions are not compatible with previous systems [16]. In the paper, Wolle postulated that an emulation strategy can help designers to incorporate new test instruments to migrate from obsolete instruments [16]. In addition, Wolle noted that when assessing version migration strategies, modernizing test equipment typically has much higher costs but leads to greater reliability and faster tests [16]. This was first noted by Hoppin who detailed two risks of implementing a migration strategy as low compatibility and disagreement in measurement results due to differences in architectural and measurement methods between legacy and newer-generation platforms [15].

In a 2014 paper by Iglesias et al., the high cost of spectrum analyzers is also noted as a primary motivation for further developing spectrum analyzer designs [17]. Iglesias et al. also indicated that because **SAs** employ non-invasive methods to detect machine failures in real-time, the devices need to be continually upgraded to reduce failures by improving the efficiency of industrial monitoring systems [17]. Following the motivation for improving **SAs**, Iglesias et al. postulated that modernization of **SAs** was primarily enabled by the fast evolution of **ADCs** and **Digital Signal Processor (DSP)**s which offer the opportunity to implement multiple methods for spectrum estimation such as Barlett and Welch's methods for averaging periodograms [17]. The authors listed devices such as **Field Programmable Gate Array (FPGA)**s, **Application Specific Integrate Circuit (ASIC)**s, general-purpose **CPUs**, and **Graphical Processing Unit (GPU)**s as feasible candidates for digitizing **SAs** [17], however, **ASICs** were listed as the best implementation with respect to area, power, and speed [17].

2.1.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, the evolution of spectrum analyzers is characterized by advancements in metrological accuracy in waveform analysis, a migration from analog to digital processing, as well as improvements in functionality and hardware of the user interface. From early mechanical oscilloscopes to modern digital spectrum analyzers, each technological advancement has been motivated by the need for higher frequency capabilities and improved usability. Technological advancements have culminated in the introduction of computerized control using microprocessors and **ADC**-based systems that support more efficient signal analysis in the digital time domain.

A primary conclusion that can be drawn from the historical review of **SAs** is that modernization

2.2. A Preview of the Operation of Spectrum Analyzers to Establish the Context for Digitization and Modernization

strategies for obsolete instruments must balance cost, functionality, and compatibility with newer technologies. **SAs** and network analyzers like the HP8410A and HP8568A introduced microcontrollers to automate functions. More recent trends that were introduced with Agilent Technologies' **SAs** emphasized **GUIs**, software-based processing, and integration with digital communication protocols.

In this project, the digitization of the HP141T spectrum analyzer builds on the primary ideas presented in history on the modernization of spectrum analyzers. Similar to implementations in history, the design proposed in this paper leverages modern single-board computing, digital displays, and software-based signal processing techniques for implementing the redesign strategy for circumventing the obsolescence of the **SA**. Furthermore, this project aims to retain the core measurement functionalities of the original device while introducing intuitive graphical interfaces and improved data handling capabilities. The following sections discuss similar works and the challenges that researchers overcame in digitizing and modernizing spectrum analyzers.

2.2 A Preview of the Operation of Spectrum Analyzers to Establish the Context for Digitization and Modernization

Formulating an understanding of the internal operation of the HP141T system is critical for extending functionality through digitization and modernization. In this regard, this project establishes the context of the term **digitization** as the development of a system which converts the analog signals from the **SA** into digital values that are processed on a computer. The context for the term **digitization** and its usage were explored through literature as described in this section. Key related works were collated and focus is placed on detailing the internal path of an analog signal through the major components of **SAs** in general.

The term *modernization* is also clarified through collated literature. In particular, this section details features of modern **SAs** and their user interfaces which largely depend on the employed display type. By redesigning the display of the HP141T, the project aims to improve the overall performance of the system with respect to power consumption, ease-of-use, portability, and signal processing features. Changing the display from **CRT** to **LCD** can be considered as a partial fulfilment of modernization, while ensuring that analog outputs from the HP141T can be stored and retrieved for processing at a later time is forms part of the digitization of the system.

To establish a context for these terms, this section begins by differentiation between the different types of **SAs** while focusing on the key operational principles that govern the behaviour of the HP141T. Then, the section details the purpose of primary components in spectrum analyzers to formulate a steps for digitizing the system from literature. The section concludes with findings on features of modern spectrum analyzers that differentiate them from older models, and challenges that related works overcame during the modernization process.

2.2.1 Classifications of Spectrum Analyzers

2.2.2 Primary Components of Spectrum Analyzers

2.2.3 Features of Modern Spectrum Analyzer Displays

2.3 Digitizing Spectrum Analyzer Outputs

2.3.1 Output Voltage Regulation and Preparation for Frequency Analysis

2.3.2 Transforming Spectrum Analyzer Output Signals to Digital Frequency Domain

2.3.3 Interfacing Computers with Spectrum Analyzers

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Methodology Outline

This chapter details the design process and approach employed in achieving the aim of the project which is to digitize and modernize the HP141T display by replacing the [CRT](#) monitor with a [LCD](#) touchscreen display that offers different functions and modes of operation. Design decision are also documented here, showing the considerations that were made based on the operation and outputs of the HP141T spectrum analyzer and ensuring that the newly integrated display is compatible with the device's hardware. For example, the design required selection of the digital hardware for processing the analog voltage signals from the [SA](#). The selection of the digital processor made from single-board computers such as the Raspberry Pi 4 Model B, microcontrollers like the STM32F4 boards, [FPGA](#) such as the Artix-7 from Xilinx, or a heterogeneous digital processor which consists of a combination of these options.

Other considerations were made regarding the electronic circuits for converting the auxiliary output voltages from the HP141T to the appropriate voltage level for the operation of [ADC](#). This chapter describes how together, the [ADC](#) and digital processor form a crucial part of the system. Additionally, the chapter details the software development kit ([SDK](#)) and associated coding language that was used. The selection of the development framework depended on the choice of processor and digital processing algorithms that were required to fulfil the project requirements. For example, assuming that a [FPGA](#) is the chosen digital processor, the [SDK](#) would include tools such as the AMD Vivado and electronic design automation ([EDA](#)) software and the choice of coding language between Verilog, VHDL, and SystemVerilog would depend on how comfortable the developer is in representing digital processing algorithms, such the [DFT](#), using the chosen language.

Overall, this chapter documents an overview of the design methodology and different phases in the design process. The design process followed a variation of V-Model in which a series of iterative phases was implemented with a process checking mechanism. The chapter begins by highlighting the design stages and modularization of the system. Thereafter, the chapter includes an assessment of the project requirements detailed in introductory section. Finally, the chapter describes the use of findings from the review of requirements in informing the design decisions and specifications.

3.2 Phases in the Design Process

The design process was decomposed into four iterative stages as illustrated in Figure ?? below. The first stage documented the digitization requirements and listed examples of modern **SA**s in order to define the requirements for modernization. As shown in the methodology overview diagram, the first stage also included thorough investigation into methods that have been implemented in literature for upgrading the functions and performance of **SA**s. A theoretical framework for relevant information about signal processing was also formulated based on the literature to ensure that the display modes and functions were consistent with the mathematically derived expected outputs in the system.

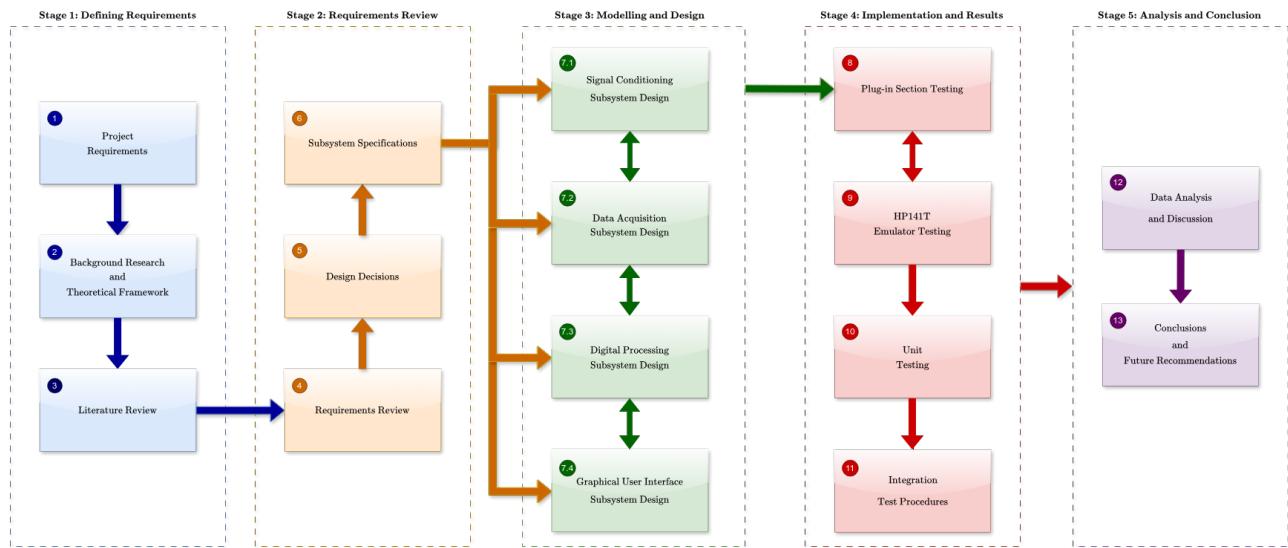


Figure 3.1: Methodology overview showing different stages in the iterative design process that was applied as a variation of the V-Model.

The second stage in the design process involved a review of the user requirements specifications detailed in chapter 1. The aim of this step in the methodology was to clarify the desired functions of the upgraded spectrum analyzer and to inform the design decisions with respect to the digital hardware and software development for digital signal processing. Additionally, the requirements review was employed in modularizing the design into four subsystems including, the Analog-to-Digital Conversion, Digital Processing, Screen and User Interface subsystems.

Stage 3 of the design process dealt with the design specifications of each of these subsystems by further decomposing each module into smaller hardware and software components. Each function is tested against a requirement in Stage 4 where each design specification was verified and the operation of the integrated system was tested to ensure that the interfaces between the subsystems was configured correctly.

In general, implementation of the design process adhered to the following design steps detailed in the project brief and are associated with the user requirement specifications:

1. Surveying the HP141T display and other outputs.
2. Surveying single-board computers and touchscreen options.

3. Phase One: establish a basic XYZ replica or HP141T emulator.
4. Phase Two: implement averaging and peak hold options.
5. Phase Three: annotate display axes.
6. Phase Four: determine the appropriate instrument settings.
7. Phase Five: design new annotations for display taking instrument or operator manual inputs into account.
8. Phase Six: include more tutorial and operational instructions using.

In finalizing the design process of the upgraded SA, results from acceptance tests were assimilated and a conclusion was drawn. Then, based on the outcomes of the project, future recommendations were made for future iterations of the upgrade SA system. Overall, the stages of the methodology included:

- Stage 1: Defining Requirements
- Stage 2: Requirements Review and System Overview
- Stage 3: Modelling and Design
- Stage 4: Implementation and Results
- Stage 5: Analysis and Conclusion

The first four stages of the design process were performed iteratively as a variation of the V-Model in which risk analysis was performed at each step, similar to the Spiral Model for design processes. Each iteration aimed at producing a new version of the upgraded HP141T display and a single conclusion was made when a satisfactory prototype was established.

3.3 Requirements Review

This section aims to clarify the scope of the project and produce a technical formalization of the user requirements specifications. The section begins by giving context to the term modernization by investigating the properties of modern SAs. Then, the section breaks down the user requirements into categories relating data acquisition, processing and display. Finally, the section concludes with a review of the requirement for developing a HP141T emulator.

3.3.1 Comparing the HP141T System to Modern Spectrum Analyzers

The first user requirement deals with the modernization of the HP141T system. The aim of this section is to review this requirement and to give clarification on the context of the use of ‘modernization’ in this project. To achieve this objective, the section begins with a description of the HP141T system and the functions that differ from ‘modern’ spectrum analyzers, such as the range of hand-held SAs by FieldFox, and the N9000B CXA SA manufactured by Keysight®. The section concludes with a summary table comparing the features of the HP141T system and modern spectrum analyzers.

The HP141T system is equipped with three plug-ins, namely the 8555A **RF** section which operates in the microwave region of the electromagnetic spectrum, the 8552B **IF** section and the Model 141T display which includes the **CRT** monitor. The three plug-ins operate in unison to electronically scan signals in the time-domain and provide a visual representation of the input signal's amplitude in the frequency domain on the **CRT** monitor [18]. Amplitude can be represented on a logarithmic (dB m) or linear scale (mV).

The 8555A and 8552B plug-ins apply principles of heterodyning spectroscopy, allows high frequency input signals with frequencies in the K-band of the microwave portion of the electromagnetic spectrum (i.e. 18 MHz) [19]. As noted from literature in the previous chapter, spectrum analyzers which rely on the **FFT** by sampling the continuous input signal and performing the Fourier transform on N total samples typically deal with signals that have lower frequencies. This is because **SAs** that employ the super-heterodyne principle like the HP141T determine the spectrum directly by analysis in the frequency domain and not from the time-dependent characteristics of the input signal. This is achieved by using a super-heterodyne receiver comprised of a mixer and tunable local oscillator (**LO**) which convert the input signal to an intermediate frequency as illustrated in figure ?? [20].

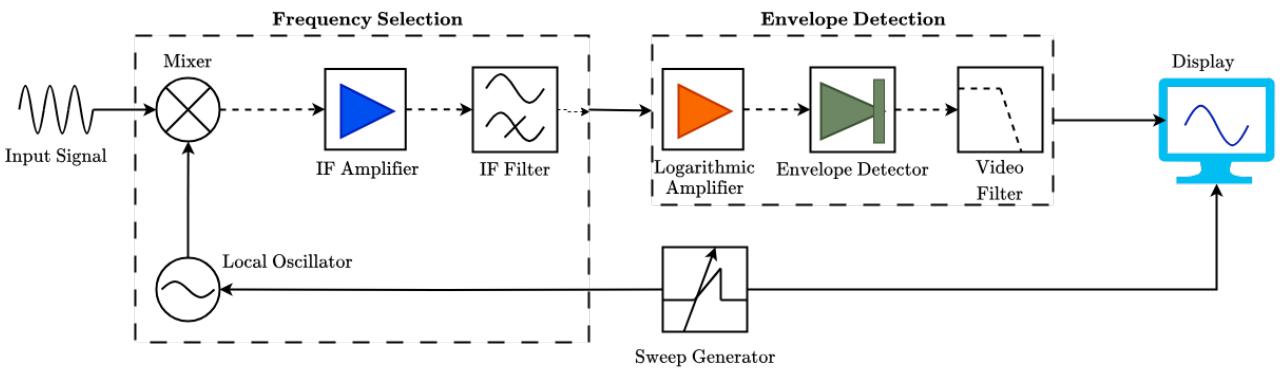


Figure 3.2: Heterodyne Spectrum Analyzer Block Diagram.

As noted in the literature review, most modern **SAs** are real-time spectrum analyzers **RTSA** which are a special case of vector spectrum analyzers (**VSA**) that use the super-heterodyne principle but digitize the input signal at the intermediate frequency, as shown in Figure ??, using a bandpass filter which can behave like a pre-select filter to limit distortions that arise from the mixer and shows the result in real-time. The advantage of digitizing the output of the **IF** section is that it enables large a input range of up to 50 MHz which can be analyzed in the time and frequency domain using digital signal processing techniques [21]. Much like **FFT** analyzers, vector analyzers are limited by the minimum and maximum sampling rate at which the **ADC** can operate. Additionally, exceedingly high sampling rates can lead to aliasing which causes frequencies outside of the bandwidth to fold into the frequency band [21].

Examples of modern real-time analyzers include:

- Tektronix RSA2208A which can scan input signals with frequencies of up to 8 GHz.
- Rohde & Schwarz FSP13 which operates within a 9 GHz to 30 GHz **RBW**.

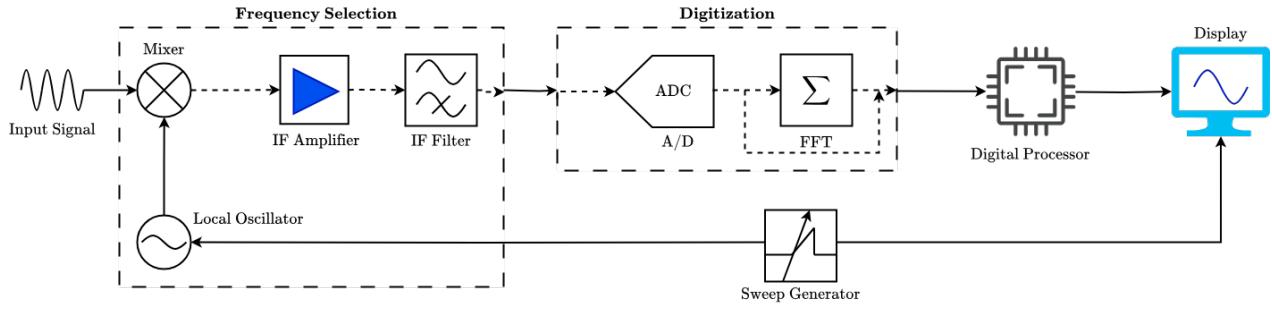


Figure 3.3: Vector analyzer block diagram showing digitization of the **IF** frequency.

- Agilent E4445A which offer frequency analysis up to 13.2 GHz.
- FieldFox RTSA which covers 5 kHz up to 50 GHz.

In modern **RTSAs**, **IF** analog output is transferred to the **ADC** through an anti-aliasing filter before being stored in memory [22]. This is in contrast to older heterodyne **SAs** such as the HP141T which takes the **IF** output through a video filter is essentially an averaging low-pass filter which smooths the **IF** output and reduces the effects of internal noise before the signal is channelled to the display [20]. HP141T video filters may select 10 Hz, 100 Hz, 10 kHz or OFF section of the low-pass filter for the detected video.

In the HP141T, the output of the video filter is transmitted to the vertical deflection of the **CRT** display [2]. For the horizontal deflection of the electron beam in the **CRT** display, a sawtooth signal from the sweep generator governs the horizontal scaling of the output frequency as electrons impinge on the phosphorescent screen. Modern **SAs** retrieve data from memory through high speed data lines to display information about the digital signal from the **ADC**. Digital display technologies include:

- **LCD** - most commonly used digital display which represents signal data with a sharp image and has low power consumption
- **OLED** - typically used in high performance **SAs** for displaying color coded spectrograms
- **TFT** - offer good visual quality and response time for sharper imagery when analyzing high frequency signals.

Displays in modern **SA** architectures offer more options for displaying frequency domain data. This is enabled by the processor, which is typically hosted on microcontroller board with high clock speed for performing digital signal processing algorithms. For example, **RTSAs** display the spectrogram as a color coded function of the amplitude of the signal [23]. In addition, digital displays generally consume less physical space compared to **CRT** displays with the same screen dimensions. This has allowed spectrum analyzers to become smaller as they entire system can fit into smaller packaging. For example, the FieldFox is an hand-held **RTSA** which despite its size, offers improved performance over the HP141T.

The comparison table in 3.1 below summarizes the differences between the HP141T analyzer (equipped with the 8555A and 8552B plug-ins) and modern **RTSAs**.

Table 3.1 shows that **RTSAs** also have connectivity abilities. For example, data can be transferred

| Feature | HP141T | Real-Time Spectrum Analyzer |
|--------------------------|---|--|
| Operation | Heterodyne | FFT-based real-time processing |
| Frequency Range | 10 GHz - 40 GHz | DC to 54 GHz |
| Scan Speed | 0.1 ms/div - 10 s/div | Real-time GHz bandwidth capture with no losses |
| Dynamic Range | High but limited by analog filters | Very high due to digital signal processing |
| Resolution Bandwidth | Adjustable limited by analog filters | As low as 1 Hz |
| Real-time Capture | No. Displays active signals and struggles with pulsed signals | Yes. Captures transient and pulsed signals with ease |
| Signal Processing | Analog signal processing with IF filters and logarithmic amplifiers | Digital signal processing from ADC-sampled signal |
| FFT Capability | - | Built-in FFT |
| Display Type | CRT | LCD/OLED/TFT |
| Trace Storage | No memory. | Digital data storage |
| Connectivity | None | USB, Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, BLE |
| Size & Portability | Large and mountable on a rack | Compact and portable |
| Settings & Configuration | Manual tuning and calibration | Automated measurements, presets, user-friendly |

Table 3.1: Comparing the features of the HP141T system to the modern RTSAs.

serially from on-board memory to an external device through the USB transfer protocol or through the BLE transfer protocol.

Features shown in the comparison formulated the modernization criteria to give context to the user requirement specification. Following sections expand on the features which can provide the functionality for associated requirements.

3.3.2 Data Acquisition in Digitizing the HP141T

As seen in the previous section, a primary criteria for modernizing HP141T is the translation of continuous analog input signals from the time domain to a digital signal that can be assessed using a digital processor such as a single-board computer, FPGA, or microcontroller. Selecting the point at which the conversion occurs in the pipeline of the HP141T super-heterodyne system plays a crucial role in the performance of the modernized system. The following project aimed to fulfil the signal conversion criteria by sampling the input signal at the intermediate frequency in a similar manner to the technique implemented by a modern RTSA and vector analyzers. In addition, user requirement UR01 states that the system needs to sample 801 points which is a standard for modern signal analyzers.

The following section reviews the user requirements to inform decisions about the data acquisition subsystem of the digitized HP141T subsystem. One of the most crucial parts in the design of the data acquisition subsystem is the selection of the ADC which samples signals and transmits them to the digital processor to store or manipulate signals in real-time. The section describes the limitations of this central part of the system and proposes solutions that can be implemented to fulfil the user requirements.

ADC Constraints

Table ?? shows constraints that influence the selection of the ADC and a solution for circumventing the limitation. For example, the operating voltage range of the ADC is a constraint which can be circumvented by including a signal conditioning circuit.

| Constraint | Problem | Solution |
|--------------------|--|--|
| Operating Voltage | Limited input voltage range of 0 V to 3.3 V or 5.0 V. The HP141T produces incompatible auxiliary output voltages | Signal conditioning circuit for scaling and shifting signals for compatibility with ADC operating voltages |
| Sample Rate | Required minimum of 801 points | Select an ADC with a high sampling rate (at 1 MSPS) |
| Resolution | Higher resolution is required for finer amplitude accuracy | Use an ADC with a minimum resolution of 16-bits |
| Number of Channels | The HP141T has 3 auxiliary outputs that are related to the frequency vs amplitude plot | Use an ADC with at least 3 channels |
| Latency | High latency can introduce delays in rendering signal data in real-time | Choose an ADC with SPI for low latency |
| SNR | ADC with a low SNR are more susceptible to noise and fluctuations in the amplitude | Use an ADC with a high SNR |

Table 3.2: ADC selection constraints and solutions.

Conditioning HP141T Output Voltages to Match the ADC Operating Voltages

To satisfy the modernization requirement, an ADC with at least three channels is required to sample the three auxiliary analog output signals from the HP141T system that are shown in Table ?? below.

| Name | Range | Description |
|-------------------|---------------|---|
| Pen-Lift | 0 V to 14 V | Triggers the CRT display. The pen-lift output is 0 V during scanning |
| Vertical Output | 0 V to -0.8 V | Detected video output proportional to the vertical deflection on the CRT, corresponding to the amplitude of the signal in the frequency domain. Voltage range is scaled for full vertical deflection of the electron beam in 8 divisions of the CRT display |
| Horizontal Output | -5 V to 5 V | Sawtooth signal for representing scaling frequency across 10 divisions of the horizontal deflection on the CRT display. The HP141T uses this output to control the trace of the spectrum across the screen. |

Table 3.3: Auxiliary voltages of the HP141T that must be sampled to digitize the system.

Since the operating voltage of most ADCs is in the range between 0 V and 3.3 V or ± 5 V, the auxiliary outputs listed in table ?? need to be scaled and shift to be within the operating voltage range. To scale the signal, an op-amp with appropriate gain A can be used between the auxiliary outputs of the

HP141T and the input channels of the [ADC](#). To shift the output voltages, a logic level-shifter can be used to translate the signals to be within the operating voltage domain.

Sampling Limitations in the Data Acquisition and Data Processing Subsystems

Among the constraints in the selection of the [ADC](#) is the requirement of the data acquisition subsystem to sample 801 points. Given that the 8552B has 16 internal scan rates from 0.1 ms/div to 10 s/div in a 1, 2, 5 sequence and given that the data acquisition subsystem needs to store 801 points per scan, the fastest scan rate, corresponding to 0.1 ms/div, can be achieved using an [ADC](#) with a sampling rate of

$$\frac{801 \text{ samples}}{0.1 \text{ ms}} = 8.01 \text{ MSPS}$$

Similarly, for the slowest scan rate corresponding to 10 s/div, the required minimum sampling rate of the [ADC](#) is 80.1 [SPS](#).

In addition to the sample rate of the [ADC](#), the design must take several factors into account regarding the integration of the [ADC](#) with a digital processor such as a [SBC](#), [MCU](#), or [FPGA](#). Table 3.4 shows the considerations that need to be made in selecting a digital processor that is compatible with the operation of the [ADC](#) and high sampling rate.

| Digital Processor Type | Consideration | Feature |
|------------------------|----------------------------|---|
| MCU | Communication Interface | Supports I ² C and SPI |
| | Data Transfer Rate | Up to hundreds of MHz |
| | Synchronization and Timing | Can use interrupts and FIFO buffers |
| SBC | Communication interface | Supports I ² C and SPI |
| | Data Transfer Rate | Suited for low sampling rates |
| | Synchronization and Timing | Requires buffering and introduces operating system relating delays |
| FPGA | Communication Interface | Supports SPI and high-speed parallel interfaces |
| | Data Transfer Rate | Can handle sampling rates at hundreds of MHz to GHz speeds. |
| | Synchronization and Timing | Uses parallel data pipelines suitable for high-speed sampling rates for real-time spectral analysis applications. |

Table 3.4: Digital processor selection based on [ADC](#) interface considerations.

Table 3.4 indicates that to fulfil the requirement for sampling 801 points per scan, the design that can deliver the highest performance in real-time data acquisition should include an [ADC](#) which can perform 8.01 [MSPS](#) and a [FPGA](#) with multiple pipelines for storing and processing rapidly sampled data in parallel. Alternatively, a heterogeneous digital processor can be implemented using a suitable combination of the available options listed in the table. For example, a Xilinx Artix-7 [FPGA](#) can be used for high-speed data acquisition while a Raspberry Pi [SBC](#) is used to process and display data. [MCUs](#) can also be daisy-chained to perform different tasks in the data acquisition subsystem.

Further Design Considerations in Digital Processor Selection

While **FPGAs** offer superior speeds in data acquisition and processing, one of the shortcomings of selecting it as the primary digital processor is that the overall development time is typically longer than the design time for **MCUs** and **SBCs**. This is because **FPGA** development has a structured design flow which includes details of the register-transfer level (**RTL**) using a hardware description language (**HDL**), validation, synthesis and implementation. Although tools like AMD Vivado exist to significantly reduce **FPGA** development times, the other available options offer significantly shorter development times.

Table ?? gives a comparison between the available digital processor options to highlight the most suitable option for fulfilling the requirements of this project.

| Design Aspect | MCU | SBC | FPGA |
|--------------------------------|----------|------------------|------------------|
| Development Time | Short | Moderate | Long |
| Processing Speed | Medium | Moderate to High | High |
| Programming Language | C/C++ | Python or C/C++ | VHDL or Verilog |
| On-board Memory and RAM | Very Low | High | Low |
| Power consumption | Low | High | Moderate to High |
| Scalability | High | Moderate | High |
| Cost | Low | Moderate to High | High |

Table 3.5: A structure comparison of the available digital processor options.

The different benefits of choosing a certain digital processor can be deduced from Table 3.4 and ?? . Other considerations need to be made regarding the memory capacity of the chosen processor, however, the primary objective is to satisfy UR06 which requires the data acquisition subsystem to be capable of storing and recalling traces. Due to the high sampling rate, the device must have a sufficient large memory capacity for storing signal frequency and amplitude related information at high-speeds. Specifically, given that a minimum sampling rate of 8.01 **MSPS** is required and supposing that the resolution of the **ADC** is 16-bit, the device must be able to store

$$8.01\text{MSPS} \times 16 \text{ bit} = 128\,160\,000 \text{ bit s}^{-1}$$

In other words, the device must be able to store 16.02 MB s^{-1} , which equates to approximately 1 GB per minutes. Thus, the selected digital processor must include efficient memory management algorithms to ensure that data is not lost or corrupted. The table indicates that the **MCU** has the most limited capability with respect to memory. This is because **MCUs** typically have few KB to MB of **RAM** and require external memory. Similarly, **FPGAs** offer limited memory capabilities since they typically use a small embedded **RAM** and require external memory for large data buffers.

In summary, the **MCU** is most suitable for its low cost, low power consumption, good real-time capabilities and short development time. However, the **MCU** is only suitable for moderate-speed sampling, which is not ideal for the high sampling rates that are needed to fulfil the requirements. While **SBCs** offer intermediate performs and features that combine the moderate capabilities of **MCUs**

and **FPGAs**, their primary shortcoming is poor real-time capabilities due to **OS** delays and overall low latency. Finally, the best option for this application is the **FPGA** due to its ability to perform real-time high-speed data processing and **ADC** synchronization, however, the biggest shortcomings are the development time and high cost.

3.3.3 Design Considerations in Satisfying Display Requirements

The choice of display depends on the selected processor type. The display hardware must satisfy multiple user requirements including UR03, UR07 and UR09 which are related to resolution, functionality and power. Further considerations have to be made for the display to satisfy requirements relating to the user interface (**UI**). The following section breaks down these requirements separately to evaluate the design choices that need to be made in modernizing the HP141T display.

Display Hardware Considerations for a **MCU**-Based System

Table 3.6 assimilates the design considerations for a **MCU**-based system. Overall, the design needs to consider factors such as clock and I/O speed, memory, power consumption and the display interface.

| Key Consideration | Aspects | Description |
|-------------------|---------------|---|
| Processor | Clock Speed | Clock speed of at least 100 MHz for rendering 801 points per scan to the display |
| | Architecture | A 32-bit ARM Cortex-M series MCU is preferred for good balance between power efficiency and speed |
| | I/O Speed | ADC waveform samples need to be rendered at high speeds. SPI is recommended for improving latency |
| Memory | RAM | At least 128 kB of RAM required for real-time display rendering |
| | Flash Memory | Required for storing firmware and display configurations which need to be loaded during power-up. |
| Interface | Compatibility | Should support the same communication interfaces as the display screen. |
| | Resources | Modern displays include internal frame buffers which can reduce the effect of memory and data transfer bottlenecks. |
| Power | Compatibility | System must be powered by a single wall wart power supply. |
| | Efficiency | Low-power and standby modes can reduce energy consumption when the display is idle. |

Table 3.6: Key considerations for the display subsystem for a **MCU**-based system.

Display Hardware Considerations for a **SBC**-Based System

If the chosen digital processor is a single-board computer such as the Raspberry Pi 4B, similar considerations need to be made regarding its compatibility of the display unit. Differences arise from the hardware capabilities that the **SBC** offers. Table 3.7 summarizes the design considerations that need to be made for the interface between **SBC** and the display unit.

| Key Consideration | Aspects | Description |
|-------------------|----------------------|--|
| Resolution | 1080p at 60Hz | Recommended for smooth spectrum rendering; higher resolutions. |
| | HDMI 2.0 | A high-speed HDMI 2.0-compatible display is required for the best display quality. |
| HDMI | HDMI Version Support | Older monitors may only support HDMI 1.2, which could limit resolution and refresh rates |
| | Data Handling | Improper extended display identification data detection may require manual configuration |
| | Adapter | Micro-HDMI to HDMI adapters are required. Faulty adapters may introduce noise |
| Touch | Touch Display | Dedicated SBC touchscreens can be used |
| | DSI | Raspberry Pi touchscreen connect via the DSI (Display Serial Interface) without required HDMI |
| | Power | Dedicated screen can be powered by the SBC |
| Monitor | Compatibility | Selected display must support the required resolution and refresh rate for clear visualization of digitized spectra. |
| | Over-scanning | Display adjustments may be required for screens that crop spectrum visualizations. |
| Software | OS Support | Dedicated OS recommended for compatibility with built-in display drivers and utilities. |
| | Settings | Used to adjust display resolution, rotation, and other settings for the most suitable spectrum visualization. |

Table 3.7: Display considerations for screen integration with a SBC-based system.

Display Hardware Considerations for a FPGA-Based System

Although FPGAs offer the best performance with respect to sampling rates and data processing speeds, they are not as suitable for processing display data compared to SBCs. However, the real-time capabilities of the FPGA-based system can provide a seamless user experience by rendering spectrum displays at a high frame rate. Table 3.8 lists the design considerations for the display of a FPGA-based system.

Display User Interface

User requirements relating to the aspects of the display that the user can interact with include UR02, UR04, UR05 and UR07. The primary objective of the project is to display a plot of the amplitude vs frequency for the input signal, in real-time. To achieve this objective, spectrum data needs to be organized and easily accessible from RAM or flash memory, depending on the architecture of the system that is centred around the ADC and digital processor. For example, STM microcontrollers have a dedicated LCD-TFT display controller with a frame buffer that can be located either in on-chip memory or in an external memory, depending on the resolution. Using external memory can increase latency which decreases the real-time performance of the system.

In addition, data needs to be scaled while considering the effects of windowing, so that all spectrum data can be translated to a grid with 8 divisions of the amplitude, on the vertical axis, and 10 divisions of the frequency, on the horizontal axis. This is also to ensure that the appearance of the CRT display,

| Key Consideration | Aspects | Description |
|-------------------|--------------|--|
| Video Output | HDMI Support | Different FPGAs feature built-in HDMI, DVI transmitters or external serializer chips. The chosen FPGA must support high-speed video output |
| | Parallel | For parallel RGB inputs, the FPGA must generate compatible timing signals for proper synchronization |
| | Buffering | Additional external memory may be required for storing video frames before display |
| Synchronization | Pixel Clock | Display's resolution and refresh rate requirements must be compatible with a stable FPGA pixel clock |
| | Fabric Speed | Spectrum updates can be rendered rapidly using the high-speed fabric which ensure low-latency |
| Interface | Protocols | The display must be able to interface with the available hardware on the FPGA |
| | Controller | Display must be compatible with FPGA IP cores for developing display functionality more easily |
| | Resources | Optimization is needed to balance consumption of FPGA logic, memory block and I/O pins by the display unit |
| Memory | RAM | External DDR memory may be necessary for extending limited on-chip RAM capacity |
| | Storage | Efficient memory management is essential to prevent bottlenecks |
| Power | Delivery | Some high-speed video interfaces require additional power regulators |
| | Heating | FPGA video processing generates heat which may require cooling to prevent damage to components of the FPGA |
| Software | Drivers | Display drivers must be implemented using HDL or software cores |
| | Updates | Updates must occur in real-time and support different display modes |

Table 3.8: Display considerations for an FPGA-based HP141T modernization system.

as shown in Figure 3.4, is maintained.

Secondary objectives include digitizing the operations that were previously executed by physical knobs such as horizontal and vertical scaling of the waveform. This objective can be as functions in a program that can be called to perform similar task. The choice of coding language and available development tools for the program that runs the display is a critical part of the UI subsystem.

An alternative approach to handling data acquisition and display functions on the same board would be to use a single-board computer for the display. Spectrum data can be retrieved from memory and displayed to the user in a Python, C/C++ or Java program. Knobs can be replaced by programmatic buttons with functions that users can access by touching the screen. This can allow other features such as averaging and displaying maxima and minima to be easily accessible to the user. For this project, UI must enable users to select between different display modes, including the PHM, AvM and RwM.



Figure 3.4: HP141T [CRT](#) display section.

The [UI](#) must enable users to switch between these modes seamlessly and allow for back them to return to previous screens using a back button in the program.

Overall, the project aims to adhere to Nielsen's heuristic design principles which includes:

1. Match between the system and the HP141T - the program should use the language and current features of the HP141T that users are familiar with
2. User control and freedom - the [UI](#) must support undo, redo and exit points
3. Aesthetics and minimalist design - the most relevant information that must be displayed is related to the frequency plot of the input signals as well as configurations and settings of the data acquisition and digital processing units that give context to the current display
4. Flexibility and efficiency of use - the [UI](#) interface of the modernized HP141T must be optimized for difference experience levels through suitable shortcuts and frequent actions such as averaging and showing maxima and minima of the input signal.
5. Help and documentation - documentation of the modernized HP141T display must correspond to current documentations of the entire system and must be easy to read
6. Error prevention - the [UI](#) must protect users from deleting stored traces and signal information
7. Visibility - a user must always know what is happening within the program and current state of their actions
8. Consistency and standards - the appearance of the [UI](#) must follow the conventions of modern spectrum analyzer displays through consistent words, situations and actions.
9. Help user to recognize, diagnose and recover from errors such as closing windows with information about pulses or signal noise

10. Recognition rather than recall - minimize users' memory load by making program features that are related to the most accessed signal data easy to access

3.3.4 Equipment for Debugging and Testing

The following section gives a review of the project requirement which necessitates the development of an HP141T display emulator of the three auxiliary outputs as shown in ?? . Additionally, the section describes software-based simulation tools that can be used in the development for debugging and obtaining an idea about the expected behaviour individual hardware components and overall system.

Emulating HP141T Auxiliary Outputs

The sawtooth signal can be generated using a 555-timer circuit which produces a ramp voltage with adjustable frequency to mimic the adjustable scan time, and a fixed peak-to-peak voltage of 10 V with no DC offset. This is to ensure that the horizontal sawtooth output range between -5 V and $+5\text{ V}$ is maintained.

To emulate the vertical output which swings between 0 V and -0.8 V , a simple voltage biasing circuit can be built with appropriate resistor values and input voltage. To control this level, a potentiometer can be used to manually adjust the voltage level within that range. Similarly, the pen-lift output can be produced using a biasing circuit with a potentiometer that allows the voltage to swing between 0 V and 14 V .

Lastly, the HP141T display emulator circuit needs to interface with the signal conditioning circuit that prepares the signal voltages to match the operating range of the ADC. Therefore, to avoid the development of multiple circuits, the output cables of the display emulator must be the same as the output cables that take the auxiliary outputs from the HP141T to the signal conditioning circuit.

Software-Based Simulation Tools

To optimize the selection and configuration of the data acquisition subsystem, ADCs can be simulated in MATLAB using Simulink to understand the behaviour of the sawtooth input from the HP141T or emulating hardware. Additionally, Simulink provides visualizations of the spectrum of the ADC output which can be used to determine the expected values from sampling signals. Simulink also allows users to add impairments to the ADC for introducing a layer of non-linearity that may be seen for signals with frequencies that are close the edges of the RBW or intermediate frequency.

Electronic circuits, such as the signal conditioning circuits with op-amps and level-shifters, can be simulated using LTSpice to predict the expected behaviour. Output values from LTSpice simulations can be used to simulate the behaviour of the system using Simulink with MATLAB.

3.4 System Design

Design decisions in formulating the specifications were informed by the requirement review in the previous section. This section aims to give a full description of the system and the interfaces between the different subsystems. The section begins with a visual representation of the system using a block

diagram. Following the visual representation of the design, the section includes specifications and concludes with acceptance and integration tests.

3.4.1 Overview System Block Diagram

The system block diagram shown in Figure 3.5 below is a graphical overview of the different stages that an RF signal goes through before the amplitude vs frequency graph is displayed. The modernized HP141T maintains the basic analog signal processing functionality performed by the HP8555A **RF** section and the HP8552B **IF** sections. The scope of the proposed design does not involve any changes to the signal processing components of the plug-in sections. However, the Signal Conditioning Subsystem (**SCS**) prepares the three auxiliary outputs from the HP8552B **IF** section for the Data Acquisition Subsystem (**DAS**) which requires input voltages in the range between 0 V and 3.3 V.

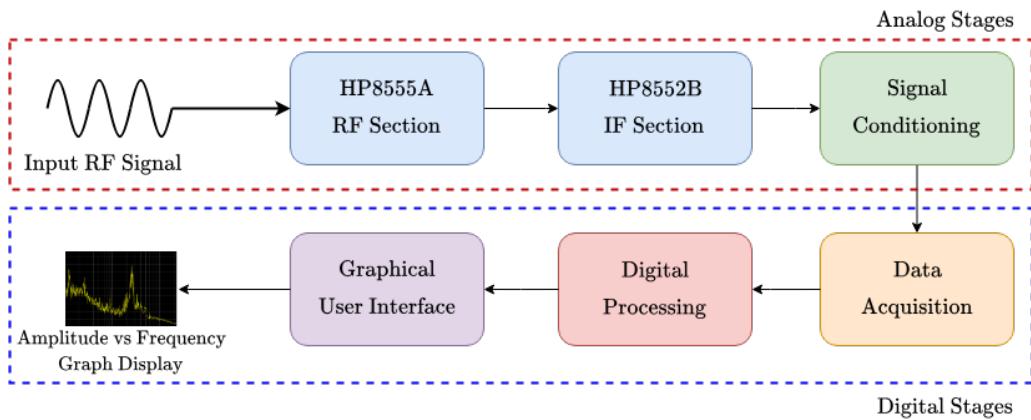


Figure 3.5: Overview system block diagram for the modernized HP141T which employs the HP8555A and HP8552B plug-in sections.

ADCs in the **DAS** play a primary role in digitizing the HP141T system by converting the conditioned analog signals into digital values which can be processed in the Digital Processing Subsystem (**DPS**) which enables manipulation of the digital values. This is particularly necessary for averaging and executing other arithmetic operations in order to satisfy the needs of the user. The Graphical User Interface Subsystem (**GUIS**) manages the display and user preferences for displaying the amplitude vs frequency information of the input **RF** signal.

Overall, the can be modularized into five primary subsystems, including:

1. HP141T Subsystem
2. Signal Conditioning (**SCS**)
3. Data Acquisition (**DAS**)
4. Digital Processing (**DPS**)
5. Graphical User Interface (**GUIS**)

Although this project does not involve the redesign of the HP141T subsystem, an HP141T Emulator design is proposed for simulating the outputs of the **IF** plug-in section. In particular, the emulator

produces signals that are similar to the horizontal, vertical and pen lift outputs of the HP8552B plug-in. This implies that the emulator can be considered as a secondary subsystem that can substitute the HP141T subsystem during calibration of the digital section of the proposed design, as illustrated in figure 3.6. Furthermore, the diagram illustrates that the emulator does not have high frequency input signals like the HP8555A RF section plug-in. Instead, oscillators and function generator chips are proposed for producing outputs that approximate the auxiliary outputs, as shown in table ??.

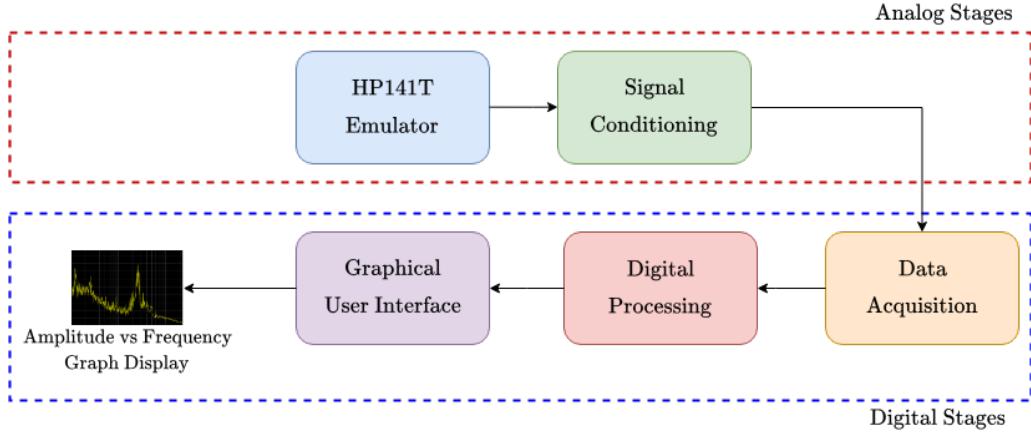


Figure 3.6: Calibration system diagram where the HP141T Emulator is used to configure the primary subsystems such as the SCS, DAS, etc.

All analog stages are executed in PCBs, and the digital stages are performed by a microcontroller and single-board computer. The following sections detail the specifications of the system modularization and components.

3.4.2 System Modularization

The system block diagram is expanded as illustrated in figure 3.7 where the primary components of each of the subsystems are shown. In the diagram, arrows with a solid line illustrate interfaces between subsystems, while arrows with dotted lines describes the flow of analog or digital signals within each subsystem.

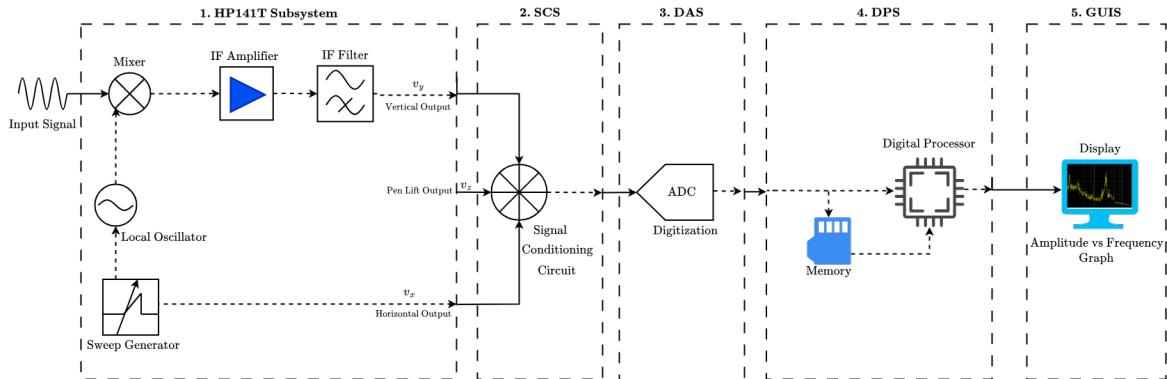


Figure 3.7: Expansion of the overall system diagram showing the primary components and functions in each subsystem.

| Subsystem | Component | Signal Type |
|---|---|----------------|
| HP141T Subsystem | HP8555A | Analog |
| | HP8552B | Analog |
| HP141T Emulator | Vertical Output Simulator | Analog |
| | Horizontal Output Simulator | Analog |
| | Pen Lift Output Simulator | Analog |
| Signal Conditioning Subsystem | Op-amp based vertical output conditioning circuit | Analog |
| | Op-amp based horizontal output conditioning circuit | Analog |
| | Op-amp based pen-lift output conditioning circuit | Analog |
| Data Acquisition Subsystem | ADC | Analog/Digital |
| | MCU | Digital |
| | Storage Device | Digital |
| Digital Processing Subsystem | MCU | Digital |
| | SBC | Digital |
| Graphical User Interface Subsystem | SBC | Digital |
| | LCD Touch Screen | Digital/Analog |
| | Software library | Digital |

Table 3.9: Showing components in each subsystem and the type of signals that are processed by each unit.

Figure 3.7 is accompanied by table ?? showing subsystem components in more detail. The table also details the components of the HP141T Emulator subsystem. Signal types are noted in table ?? because a significant part of the system behaviour can be attributed to the interchange between continuous or discrete values.

HP141T Subsystem Specifications

Table ?? shows the expected outputs collected from the technical manual of the plug-in which also details the expected frequency range.

| Output | Symbol | Voltage Range | Bandwidth |
|------------|--------|-----------------|--------------------|
| Horizontal | v_x | -5.0 V to 5.0 V | 0.005 Hz to 500 Hz |
| Vertical | v_y | -0.8 V to 0 V | 10 Hz to 300 kHz |
| Pen Lift | v_z | 0 V to 14 V | 0 Hz |

Table 3.10: Characteristic values of the HP8552B IF plug-in section's analog output signals [24].

Table ?? shows the amplitude specifications of the HP8552B plug-in section.

The HP8552B has four operational scan modes as shown in table ?? . The table also shows the scan time specifications of the HP8552B.

HP141T Emulator Subsystem Design

The outputs of the HP141T emulator must be the same as three outputs of the HP8552B IF plug-in section as described in table ?? above. The frequency range of the -0.8 V – 0 V vertical output, v_y ,

| Operation Mode | Amplitude Calibration Range | Amplitude per Division (dB/div) | Display Range (dB) |
|----------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------|
| Logarithmic | -130 dBm to +10 dBm | 10 | 70 |
| Linear | -23 dB V to +117 dB V | 10 | 70 |

Table 3.11: Amplitude specifications of HP8552B plug-in section [24].

| Scan Characteristic | Description |
|---------------------|---|
| Scan Time | 16 scan rates from 0.1 ms/div to 10 s/div in a 1, 2, 5 sequence |
| Scan Time Accuracy | $\pm 10\%$ for scan rates from 0.1 ms/div to 20 ms/div |
| | $\pm 20\%$ for scan rates from 50 ms/div to 10 s/div |
| Scan Mode | <i>Internal mode</i> for repetitive scanning by internally generated ramp |
| | <i>Single mode</i> actuated by panel push button |
| | <i>External mode</i> determined by a 0 to +8 V external signal |
| | <i>Manual mode</i> controls the scan by the position of the manual knob |
| Scan Trigger | <i>Auto trigger</i> runs the scan freely |
| | <i>Line trigger</i> synchronizes the scan with the power line frequency |
| | <i>External trigger</i> synchronizes the scan with an external signal (20 V max) |
| | <i>Video trigger</i> synchronizes the scan to an envelope of the RF input signal |

Table 3.12: Scan time and scan mode specifications of the HP8552B plug-in [24].

is limited to the bandwidth of the video filter in the **IF** section, i.e. 10 Hz to 300 kHz [24]. The front panel check procedure in the technical manual of the HP8552B **IF** section sets a frequency range of up to 10 kHz in the video filter, corresponding to a 30 MHz fundamental signal at the input of the **RF** section plug-in [18].

A XR2206 functional generator chip was selected for simulating the vertical output, V_y , of video filter during a configuration procedure that uses a calibration frequency of 30 MHz. The frequency was set to 10 kHz using an capacitors and resistors. The full vertical output simulator circuit is illustrated in figure 3.8, adopted from the recommended configuration in the chip's datasheet.

The required frequency is produced by an internal voltage-controlled oscillator that is set by a timing resistor at pin 7 and 8. Pin descriptions and the values of the capacitors and resistors that are connected to them are recorded in table 3.13. The table also shows whether a pin takes an input (I) or gives an output signal (O). Pins that are connected directly to ground are designated GND under the Connections column.

Given external capacitance of C across pin 5 and 6, and a timing resistance R , the operational frequency f_0 of the XR2206 is

$$f_0 = \frac{1}{RC} \text{ [Hz]} \quad (3.1)$$

To achieve an oscillation frequency of 10 kHz, a timing capacitor, C5, with a value of 22 nF, is paired with timing resistors R15 and R16 to produce a total resistance of 4520 k Ω . Specifications are summarized in table 3.14 including the 12 V supply voltage, V_{CC} and expected output voltage range.

The amplitude of V_y is controlled using the

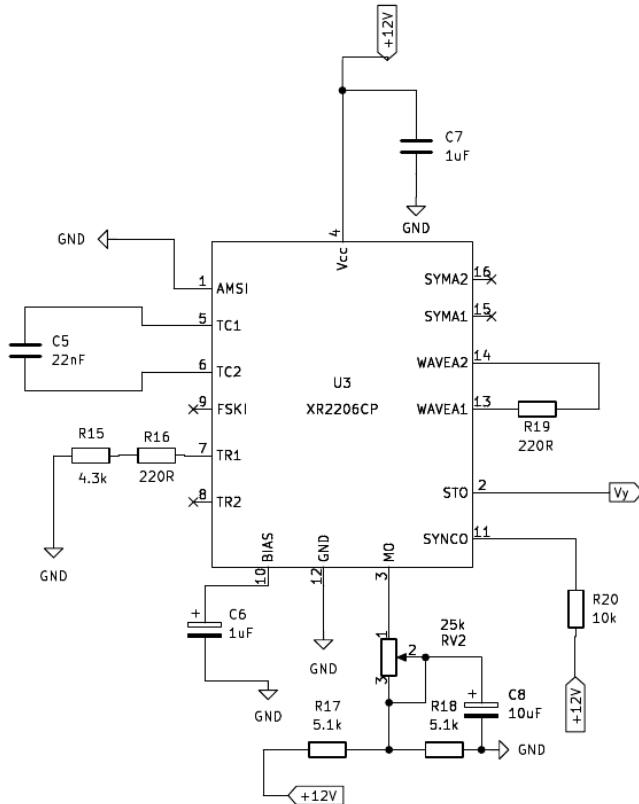


Figure 3.8: Circuit diagram for simulating the vertical output of the HP8552B IF section.

Table 3.13: Pin connection description for the XR2206-based vertical output simulation circuit.

| Pin No. | Type | Symbol | Connection(s) | Description |
|---------|------|-----------------|-------------------|---|
| 1 | I | AMSI | GND | A 0 V amplitude modulation signal input. |
| 2 | O | STO | V_y | Sinusoid wave output. |
| 3 | O | MO | C8, RV2, R17, R18 | Multiplier output for controlling the amplitude of V_y |
| 4 | I | V _{CC} | C7 | +12 V power supply with decoupling capacitor. |
| 5 | I | TC1 | C5 | Timing capacitor. |
| 6 | I | TC2 | C5 | Timing capacitor. |
| 7 | O | TR1 | R15, R16 | Timing resistor. |
| 8 | X | TR2 | X | No connection. |
| 9 | X | FSKI | X | No connection. |
| 10 | O | BIAS | C6 | Internal voltage reference. |
| 11 | O | SYNCO | R20 | Open collector with a pull-up resistor to the power supply. |
| 12 | | GND | GND | Ground pin. |
| 13 | I | WAVEA1 | R19 | First waveform-adjustment input. |
| 14 | I | WAVEA2 | R19 | Second waveform-adjustment input. |
| 15 | X | SYMA1 | X | No connection for wave symmetry adjustment. |
| 16 | X | SYMA2 | X | No connection for wave symmetry adjustment. |

Table 3.14: Vertical output simulation circuit specifications.

| Designation | Parameter | Minimum | Maximum | Units |
|-------------|-------------------|---------|---------|-------|
| Inputs | | | | |
| Outputs | | | | |
| $-V_{in}$ | height | | | |
| V_y | Vertical Output | 0 | 3 | V |
| V_x | Horizontal Output | 0 | 3 | V |
| V_p | Pen Lift Output | 0 | 3 | V |

Signal Condition Subsystem Design

Chapter 4

Results

Chapter 5

Discussion

Chapter 6

Conclusions

The same rule holds for us now, of course: we choose our next world through what we learn in this one. Learn nothing, and the next world is the same as this one.

—Richard Bach, *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*

The purpose of this project was to...

This report began with...

The literature review was followed in Chapter...

The bulk of the work for this project followed next, in Chapter...

In Chapter...

Finally, Chapter... attempted to...

In summary, the project achieved the goals that were set out, by designing and demonstrating...

Chapter 7

Recommendations

It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work
which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced.

—Abraham Lincoln

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