Design Document for ECE 445, Senior Design, Spring 2023

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By

portable thermal printer

Contents

[1. Introduction 1](#_Toc127547870)

[1.1 Problem 1](#_Toc127547871)

[1.2 Solution 1](#_Toc127547872)

[1.3 Visual Aid 2](#_Toc127547873)

[1.4 High-Level Requirements 2](#_Toc127547874)

[2 Design 2](#_Toc127547875)

[2.1 Block Diagram 3](#_Toc127547876)

[2.2 Wireless Subsystem 3](#_Toc127547877)

[2.2.1 Description 3](#_Toc127547878)

[2.2.2 Requirements and Verification 4](#_Toc127547879)

[2.3 Imaging Subsystem 5](#_Toc127547880)

[2.3.1 Description 5](#_Toc127547881)

[2.3.2 Requirements and Verification 5](#_Toc127547882)

[2.4 Board Subsystem 6](#_Toc127547883)

[2.4.1 Description 6](#_Toc127547884)

[2.4.2 Requirements and Verification 7](#_Toc127547885)

[2.5 Power Subsystem 8](#_Toc127547886)

[2.5.1 Description 8](#_Toc127547887)

[2.5.2 Requirements and Verification 8](#_Toc127547888)

[2.6 Tolerance Analysis 9](#_Toc127547889)

[3. Costs 10](#_Toc127547890)

[3.1 Analysis 10](#_Toc127547891)

[3.2 Schedule 10](#_Toc127547892)

[4. Ethics and Safety 11](#_Toc127547893)

[5. References 12](#_Toc127547894)

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Problem

One of the biggest problems surrounding frequent travelers is the issue of portability. Items that are carried along have limits on their weight, cannot consume too much space, and have to compromise on quality. A target area that has been identified by the Hewlett-Packard Company (HP) lies within the commercial printer industry. Printers as a whole have remained relatively unchanged over time with respect to other technologies that have shifted towards more portable means. As such, they remain inconvenient for travelers who need to quickly print items on the go. HP has identified a potential entry into the portable printer market to remain competitive in this industry and find new methods for company innovation.

## 1.2 Solution

Our solution is a portable thermal printer, a system that receives wireless instructions for printing on receipt paper. Users will be able to upload images from their phones or computer that this system can fetch and print.

We will use a field-programmable gate array (an FPGA) to implement our solution because they can stand in place for a real-world application-specific integrated circuit (ASIC) and eventually be developed in an ASIC. It will be utilized as the base of the project. Additionally, we need to have a way to print, so we will be using the internals of a thermal printer along with a microcontroller unit (MCU) to handle the wireless components. Finally, we will be creating our own input/output shield (I/O shield) for the PCB that has the subsystems listed further down on top of it.

## 1.3 Visual Aid

Figure . A high-level visual representation of the general usage of the Portable Thermal Printer.

## 1.4 High-Level Requirements

1. The device design is portable. It should be able to wirelessly and accurately get the user-uploaded image data from a server to the embedded MCU. It should sit as a small footprint of at most 12"x12" as to fit comfortably within a suitcase, allowing for ease of transportation.
2. The device itself should also be completely powered by batteries, having an average (if not worst case) battery life of ideally 1.5 or more hours.
3. The start to end time, between user upload and completing the printing, should be within 20 seconds so as to not consume too much time for the user.

# 2 Design

Discuss general design alternatives. Give equations, simulations, general circuits. Describe design in detail, addressing each major component. Include schematics with components, drawings, flowcharts, etc. Some teams may wish to split this chapter in two: 2. Design Procedure, and 3. Design Details. This template will not automatically update numbering systems for chapters, sections, figures, tables, etc., so keep track of them as you develop and revise the text.

Following is a “template” for displayed math. Use the MathType extension of Word to generate your own content, and note the use of the invisible table (no borders) to keep the optional number flush right.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Insert math here using MathType | (number) |

## 2.1 Block Diagram

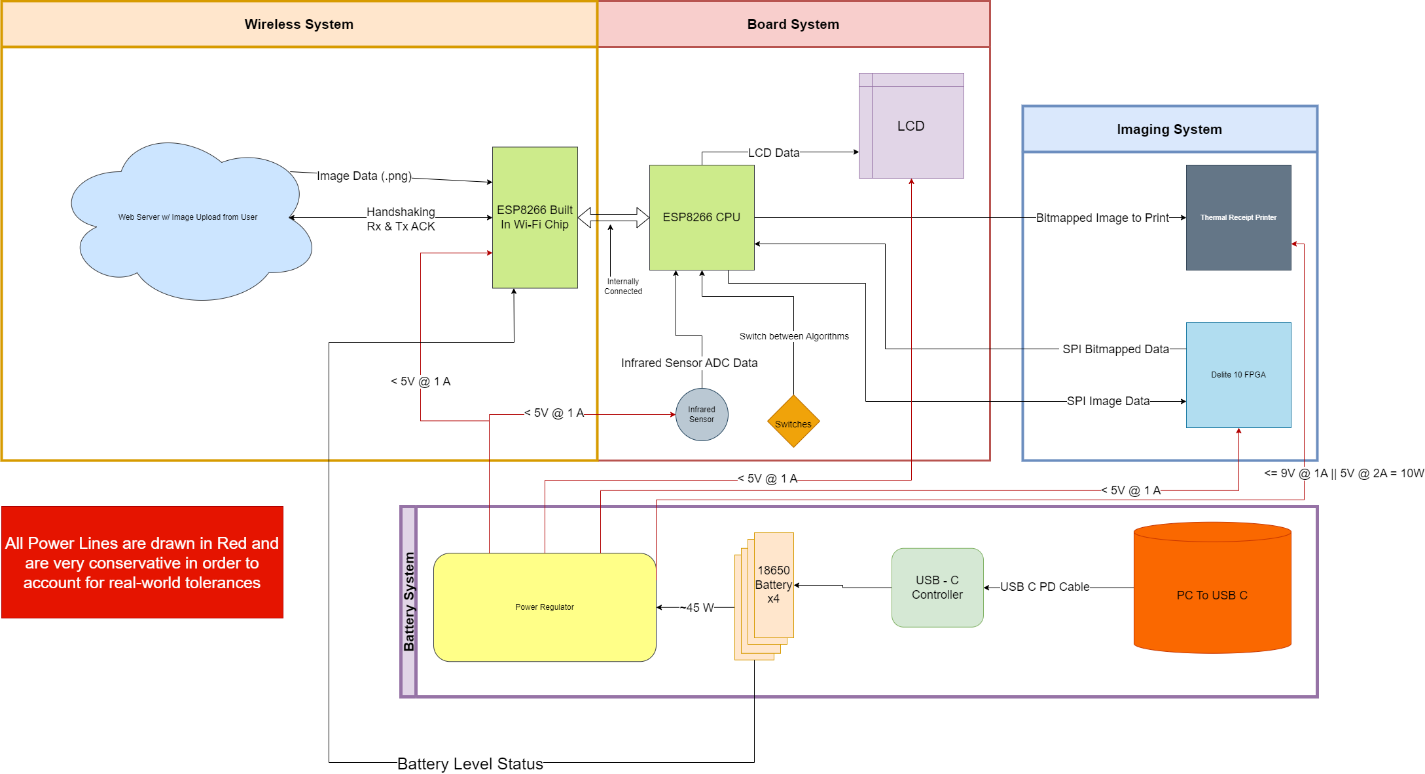


Figure . Portable Thermal Printer system block diagram.

## 2.2 Wireless Subsystem

To create a section head, go to the Styles gallery under the Home tab and pick Heading 2. It automatically formats as above and creates a table of contents entry (after you click the Update tab).

### 2.2.1 Description

The purpose of the Wireless Subsystem is to allow the system to wirelessly connect between a server (can be locally hosted on a computer or on the cloud), a user, and the ESP8266 MCU. The benefits of this subsystem add portability for the product and a more "polished" feel for the user, reducing the need for excessive cables and clutter.

There will be a simple web page backed by the server that a user can interface with and upload an image to and upon which, the user can request a connected printer to print the uploaded image. The server will send data to the MCU through a WiFi connection between the MCU and the server. Upon receiving this data, the MCU will further process it.

### 2.2.2 Requirements and Verification

**Table 1: Wireless Subsystem R&V**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Requirements** | **Verification** |
| * Connected users can upload an image successfully quickly. |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |

ESP8266 Microcontroller (MCU):

- This low-cost MCU will be embedded on the custom PCB (we will design this as an I/O Shield for the system's FPGA). With respect to the wireless functionality, it is responsible for allowing the printer system itself to stay wireless, as it has a built-in WiFi microchip, enabling simple connection to an application server (discussed below). With the MCU acting as a client to an application server, it can create something such as HTTP requests and receive data from the application that users can upload an image to (can be programmed to perform requests at certain intervals, manual button press, etc.).

- This MCU will then be responsible for delivering the image data to a buffer for the FPGA to further process towards printing, taking advantage of the FPGA for hardware acceleration in implementing DSP algorithms (such as the Floyd-Steinberg dithering algorithm) in order to speed up the image manipulation and cleaning processes. It will also send diagnostic data about the state of the current processes to an LCD display, such as about current battery status, ready for printing acknowledgement, paper jam, etc.

Application server:

- A server which allows the user (when connected) to upload an image through a computer or cell phone and enables the MCU to receive the data through a request following the event. The front end can be created with a simple interface (i.e., basic web development through HTML/CSS/JavaScript) that allows users to upload an image, and an on-screen button which flags the image as ready to be delivered to the MCU upon the next request. The back end can be handled with the Django framework and an API which allows the user to actually upload the image on the server and for the MCU to get an encoded version of the to-be-printed image (i.e., through base64 string encoding in a JSON) from the server.

- As mentioned previously, the server can be hosted locally for the scope of this project as-is, especially as a means of saving a consistent amount of money as opposed to hosting on a commercial cloud platform such as AWS or GCP. For large scale implementation, we of course cannot rely on local servers, but this simplifies our testing requirements with a small sample set of users and devices to work with.

- The MCU will require 12 mA of current and anywhere between 3-3.3V continuously for operation [2], defined in the Power Subsystem how it will be delivered. The local server, being hosted a computer, will require power delivered through a commercial power adapter supply (i.e., laptop being powered by a laptop charger), however, we allow this to be hidden from view for the user.

## 2.3 Imaging Subsystem

To create a section head, go to the Styles gallery under the Home tab and pick Heading 2. It automatically formats as above and creates a table of contents entry (after you click the Update tab).

### 2.3.1 Description

The Imaging Subsystem allows for three pixels to be converted and mapped into the dithered equivalent after being processed. The processing is done entirely by hardware as this is the "hardware accelerator" portion of our project. This will allow for the images to be printed out at an incredible rate in a very similar fashion to how it is done in industry with consumer grade printers at HP. Additionally, this subsystem includes the thermal printer itself, which takes the hardware accelerator's image and routes it back through the board so that the MCU can send the image to the printer to be printed.

### 2.3.2 Requirements and Verification

**Table 2: Imaging Subsystem R&V**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Requirement | Verification |
| * Processing an image with the FPGA should be fast. |  |
| 1. Requirement    1. Subrequirement    2. Subrequirement   Subrequirement | 1. Verification    1. Subverification    2. Subverification   Subverification |
|  |  |

DE10-Lite FPGA:

- An FPGA will be utilized to simulate the operation of an ASIC which is not openly available to the mass public. FPGAs are commonly used to test HDL code at a very cheap cost compared to a full scale tape out, albeit at a slower clock, so we will attempt to multiply our hardware throughput at the correct proportional speedup rate. The FPGA can run at a speed of 50 MHz [7], while mainstream ASICs can usually run 10-50x faster than this, but this will still be much faster than processing the image through software means (on the cloud or on the MCU).

- The FPGA must take in data through the SPI protocol and be able to send data back out through the SPI protocol as well.

- The FPGA will take in three pixels and run it through a pipeline. Firstly, the FPGA must store all of the RGB (red, green, and blue) values of an image into its onboard memory to prepare it to be processed. While the pixels are being stored into memory, we can start processing some of the data while it is still in the process of gathering data from the MCU. This is because many of the algorithms that will be applied, such as Floyd-Steinberg dithering [6], only requires 5 adjacent pixels for the image to start being processed. We need to set up a state machine that detects whenever a threshold amount of pixels have been loaded into the FPGA, and then, it will start to process this data simultaneously. The third stage of the pipeline is when the data needs to be stored in a final bitmapped processed stage, and then this final image will be sent back out into the MCU and will be ready for printing. This process happens very fast, and doing the math, it should not take more than 3 \* (Number of pipeline stages) \* (xy) = 3xy clock cycles in order to process a single image, where x and y are the dimensions of the picture.

Diagram of sample algorithm (all are pretty similar except for different ALUs):

![Diagram](https://raw.githubusercontent.com/Jellyyz/ECE445/main/Proposal/fpga\_image\_processing.drawio.png)

- As for the printer, the printer must be able to interact with the MCU correctly. This means that the ports coming out of the MCU has to be connected correctly to the printer. We also need to make sure that the printer receives enough power so it will be run with power through its own dedicated rail, since we expect that at least 10W will be used by the printer during peak run time.

## 2.4 Board Subsystem

To create a section head, go to the Styles gallery under the Home tab and pick Heading 2. It automatically formats as above and creates a table of contents entry (after you click the Update tab).

### 2.4.1 Description

The Board Subsystem is the interactive and diagnostic block that allows for the user to check the status of the entire system at a glance.

The primary component is a small 1.8" raw TFT display **[4]** that displays useful information about the battery level and the status of a printing job for user diagnostics (e.g., completed, failed, paper jam), all of which is processed and delivered from the MCU.

There will also be an infrared receiver sensor that will sense if there is still a supply of thermal paper for the thermal printer to print on. If the sensor detects a change in the paper supply, this information will be sent to the MCU, which will have the LCD print out a visual warning/error and prevent the printing process.

Finally, there will be a switchbox that the user can use. Switches, when turned on and off, will change which algorithm the FPGA will use when processing the image (e.g., Floyd-Steinberg Dithering, Burkes's Dithering **[5],** etc.).

### 2.4.2 Requirements and Verification

**Table 3: Board Subsystem R&V**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Requirement | Verification |
| * The diagnostic LCD must be responsive if the system status changes. | * Start at a known system state where the diagnostic LCD is outputting a steady state. * Change the system state by either hardcoding a state change or disabling the printer. At this point, start recording time elapsed on a stopwatch. * Stop the stopwatch when the diagnostic LCD updates its display to the correct status. * If the time elapsed is greater than 5 seconds, verification fails. Else, verification succeeds. |
| * The “algorithms” switchbox controls the image processing algorithm the FPGA uses. | * Start with one of the switches ON. Record what algorithm this switch maps to. |
| * The “algorithms” switchbox is responsive. |  |
|  |  |

- This block contributes to the overall design by providing a reasonable level of user experience. It informs the user of potential issues pertaining to battery life and printer status and allows the user to change between different image processing algorithms based on their needs.

- One requirement for the LCD is that it must be able to refresh its status/display at a decent rate so that monitoring/debugging the system is reasonably convenient for the user (< 5 seconds). If something changes in the status of the system, the LCD should be able to reflect upon this change with little lag.

- While not directly responsible for the Board Subsystem, the MCU is responsible for sending and processing data that is delivered to this subsystem. Without it, the LCD would fail to function and as a result, the Board Subsystem would essentially be rendered useless.

## 2.5 Power Subsystem

To create a section head, go to the Styles gallery under the Home tab and pick Heading 2. It automatically formats as above and creates a table of contents entry (after you click the Update tab).

### 2.5.1 Description

The power subsystem supplies power to every other subsystem. Namely, it powers components such as the ESP8266 MCU at 3-3.3V [2], the thermal printer at 5-9 V [3], the FPGA at 5 V [7], the LCD at 3.3V [4], and the infrared sensor at 3-5 V [10]. Its components are a USB-C controller that will be connected to a PC's USB-C port. This connection will supply power to our four 18650 batteries. We use a regulator system to maintain constant voltage levels to the components stated above. It will also flash the MCU (send program information to the MCU to execute).

This subsystem as a whole is necessary for supporting the continued operations of the entire system, which includes displaying the diagnostic information, the Wireless Subsystem receiving image data, processing image data, and printing.

### 2.5.2 Requirements and Verification

**Table 4: Power Subsystem R&V**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Requirement | Verification |
| * The provided power this subsystem generates must be sufficient for the entire system. | * We will measure the voltages of other components with a multimeter. The voltage ranges accepted for verification are: * ESP8266 MCU at 3-3.3V [2] * Thermal printer at 5-9 V [3] * FPGA at 5 V ± 5% [7] * LCD at 3.3V ± 5% [4] * Infrared sensor at 3-5 V [10] |
| * The subsystem is safe. | 1. Verification    1. Subverification    2. Subverification    3. Subverification |
|  |  |
|  |  |

- The other subsystems must be powered on with this subsystem at the stated voltage and current levels or with a maximum of -5% deviation.

- It is important that the power system is able to supply the upper conservative limit of 45W as well, since this would be able to provide enough power to the system in the case of subcomponents requiring peak power.

- We also must be able to check the current battery level percent of the 18650 batteries on the LCD in the Board Subsystem. This diagnostic data is to be delivered to the Board Subsystem for displaying to the user.

## 2.6 Tolerance Analysis

- The printer itself needs to operate at over 150 degrees Fahrenheit in order to activate the thermal paper, and therefore we must ensure, for the safety of the device for the user, that the specific area intended to be held by the user remains under 120 degrees Fahrenheit throughout operation. The reason for 120 degrees Fahrenheit is because this is generally agreed upon for handheld products as the upper limit of a safe-to-touch temperature [9], and it would be extremely detrimental if the device were to cause harm by exceeding this rating.

# 3. Costs

Make sure that any tables of costs are numbered, given titles, and cited directly in the text.

## 3.1 Analysis

Following is a starter table for parts costs. Add cell contents as well as rows and, if necessary, columns. Update the table number according to your sequence. Note that columns 1 and 2 are set up for centered text (words) and columns 3-5 (numbers) are set up for right-alignment so that decimal points align.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Table 4: Parts Cost** | | | | |  |
| **Part** | **Manufacturer** | **Retail Cost ($)** | **Bulk Purchase Cost ($)** | **Actual Cost ($)** | **Link** |
| ESP8266 SMT Module - ESP-12F |  | 6.95 |  |  | [Available](https://www.adafruit.com/product/2491) |
| Thermal Printer |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Total** |  |  |  |  |  |

## 3.2 Schedule

# 4. Ethics and Safety

We believe that this design is quite safe according to IEEE standards [1] since most of the components are found in everyday objects such as a phone and other consumer-grade products. However, we take some ideas from prior product failures, such as the Samsung S7 battery that exploded and imploded on itself due to a manufacturing defect [8].

Therefore, we should be testing the battery thoroughly in order to ensure that it is not causing any power overages to occur, which may cause harm to the user. This includes setting up battery current limitations as well as limitations on how much the battery can charge. By limiting the amount of things that the battery can do, this will in turn cause for the most volatile part of the system to be the most safe.

# 5. References

[1] *IEEE Policies, Section 7 - Professional Activities (Part A - IEEE Policies*), IEEE Code of Ethics 2020.

[2] Expressif Systems, "ESP8266EX Datasheet," 2015. Accessed: Feb. 07, 2023. [Online]. Available at: (https://cdn-shop.adafruit.com/product-files/2471/0A-ESP8266\_\_Datasheet\_\_EN\_v4.3.pdf

[3] P. Burgess and Adafruit Industries, "Mini Thermal Receipt Printer," Nov. 2021. Accessed: Feb. 07, 2023. [Online]. Available at: https://www.mouser.com/datasheet/2/737/mini\_thermal\_receipt\_printer-2488648.pdf

[4] Truly Semiconductors Co., "JD-T18003-T01." https://cdn-shop.adafruit.com/datasheets/JD-T1800.pdf (accessed Feb. 07, 2023).

[5] T. Helland, "Image Dithering: Eleven Algorithms and Source Code." <https://tannerhelland.com/2012/12/28/dithering-eleven-algorithms-source-code.html> (accessed Feb. 09, 2023).

[6] justinkraaijenbrink, "Exploiting the Floyd-Steinberg Algorithm for Image Dithering in R," Medium, Jan. 30, 2021. https://medium.com/analytics-vidhya/exploiting-the-floyd-steinberg-algorithm-for-image-dithering-in-r-c19c8008fc99 (accessed Feb. 09, 2023).

[7] Terasic, "DE10-Lite User Manual," Jun. 05, 2020.

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[9] Johns Manville, "Too Hot to Handle?," www.jm.com, Feb. 25, 2015. https://www.jm.com/en/blog/2015/february/too-hot-to-handle/ (accessed Feb. 08, 2023).

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