
Repeatedly foldable AMOLED display

Ryu Komatsu (SID Member)

Ryo Nakazato

Takeru Sasaki

Akio Suzuki

Naoyuki Senda

Takuya Kawata

Yasuhiro Jimbo (SID Member)

Tomoya Aoyama

Naoto Ohno

Susumu Kawashima (SID Member)

Hisao Ikeda

Shingo Eguchi

Yoshiharu Hirakata

Shunpei Yamazaki (SID Member)

Takashi Shiraishi

Seiji Yasumoto

Masataka Nakada

Masataka Sato

Chris Bower

Darryl Cotton

Andrew Matthews

Piers Andrew

Catalin Gheorghiu

Johan Bergquist (SID Member)

Abstract — In this study, a 5.9-inch foldable active-matrix organic light emitting diode (AMOLED) display was developed. A folding test was performed repeatedly. The display survived the folding test (100,000 folds) with a curvature radius of 2 mm. To protect an organic light emitting diode (OLED) against moisture, inorganic passivation layers are provided on the upper and lower sides of the flexible display. Using our transfer technology, high density passivation layers can be obtained. The measured water vapor transmission rate of the layer is 7×10^{-6} g/m²·day or less, which improves OLED reliability. With these techniques, we have developed a book-type display, which is repeatedly foldable like a book, and a tri-fold display including a display area, which is foldable in three.

Keywords — OLED, flexible, foldable, oxide semiconductor FET, White tandem, top emission, repeatable folding, WVTR.

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1 Introduction

Widespread use of small to medium mobile devices, such as smartphones and tablet PCs, has increased rapidly in recent years owing to their portability and convenience. Displays used for such mobile devices must meet certain specifications such as high-resolution, low power consumption, light weight, thinness, durability, and a variety of designs. The physical flexibility of displays is important, particularly in terms of portability and design. Flexible AMOLED displays have attracted significant attention.^{1–3} We have previously reported extremely high-resolution flexible AMOLED displays employing a top-emission or bottom-emission white OLED and a color filter.^{4–8}

A flexible AMOLED display may be applied to devices that require fixed degrees of bending, for example, static curved or circular forms. Such AMOLED displays may also be applied to devices that require dynamic folding. A dynamically foldable display requires a small curvature radius, which makes it difficult to realize.

There are several key points to be solved with flexible OLED displays, such as protection from moisture in air and prevention of breakage by bending. Generally, a flexible OLED display includes a plastic substrate rather than a glass substrate. Plastic transmits moisture; therefore, passivation films are required on and under an OLED to prevent the OLED from reacting with moisture and degrading. An OLED requires a passivation film with a water vapor transmission rate (WVTR) that is less than 1×10^{-5} g/m²·day. An inorganic film, such as silicon oxide,

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R. Komatsu, R. Nakazato, T. Sasaki, A. Suzuki, N. Senda, T. Kawata, Y. Jimbo, T. Aoyama, N. Ohno, S. Kawashima, H. Ikeda, S. Eguchi, Y. Hirakata and S. Yamazaki are with Semiconductor Energy Laboratory Co., Ltd., Kanagawa, Japan; rk0819@sel.co.jp.

T. Shiraishi, S. Yasumoto, M. Nakada and M. Sato are with Advanced Film Device Inc., Tochigi, Japan.

C. Bower, D. Cotton, A. Matthews and P. Andrew are with Nokia Research Center, Cambridge, UK.

C. Gheorghiu is with Microsoft Mobile Oy, Espoo, Finland.

J. Bergquist is with Nokia Advanced Engineering, Tokyo, Japan.

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silicon nitride, or aluminum oxide, is generally used for the passivation film. To reduce WVTR sufficiently, an inorganic film must be sufficiently thick. The plastic substrate and the OLED cannot withstand a high temperature. Therefore, an inorganic film must be formed at a low temperature. Under low-temperature conditions, the inorganic film does not become high density. Thus, the inorganic film needs to be formed thick in order to reduce permeation of moisture. However, when a thick inorganic film is used, productivity is reduced, and breakage occurs easily by bending.

We have solved these problems by fabricating a flexible AMOLED display using a transfer technology that employs inorganic separation layers. The transfer technology process involves a field-effect transistor (FET) array formed on a glass substrate that is separated from an inorganic separation layer by physical force and is then attached to a plastic substrate.

Field-effect transistors formed directly on a plastic substrate must be fabricated at a temperature lower than the heatproof temperature of the substrate. For example, in a method in which polyimide (PI) is applied to a glass substrate, the highest temperature may be approximately 300 °C. In the case of using a laser to crystallize a Si film on the PI film, the laser irradiation causes great damage to the PI film. However, because of the high heat resistance of the inorganic separation layer, our transfer technology enables the formation of FETs at the same temperature at which they are formed on a glass substrate. As a result, FETs with high performance and high reliability can be obtained easily.

We employed a *c*-axis-aligned-crystal oxide semiconductor (CAAC-OS), also called *c*-axis-aligned-nano-crystal oxide semiconductor (CANC-OS); we called “CAAC-OS” hereafter to put them together, for an FET of the display in this paper. As has been reported previously, it has been known that OS films can take the various structures that differ from

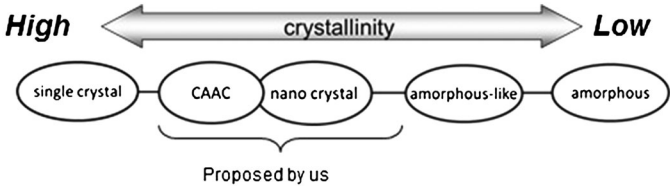


FIGURE 1 — Relation between single crystal, CAAC, nc, and amorphous OS.

TABLE 1 — Specifications of a 5.9-inch display panel.

	Specifications
Screen diagonal	5.9 inch
Driving method	Active matrix
Resolution	720 × RGB × 1280
Pixel pitch	0.102 × 0.102 mm
Pixel density	249 ppi
Aperture ratio	45.2%
Pixel arrangement	RGB stripe
Pixel circuit	5Tr+1C/cell
Source driver	Chip on film
Scan driver	Integrated

amorphous or single-crystal structures.^{9,10} OS thin films can have a nano-crystal structure, an aggregation of nanoscale microcrystals, and a CAAC structure we developed, which has a *c*-axis aligned perpendicular to the film surface. Figure 1



FIGURE 2 — Photographs of the prototype book-type display.

shows crystallinity of the CAAC-OS. The CAAC-OS has lower crystallinity than a single-crystal OS but has higher crystallinity than an amorphous OS and an amorphous-like OS.



FIGURE 3 — Photographs of the prototype tri-fold display.

Indium Gallium Zinc Oxide (IGZO) can be given as one of the OS's.^{11–13} The formation of a CAAC-IGZO thin film on a glass substrate requires annealing at less than 500 °C. We succeeded in forming a channel-etched OS-FET that uses CAAC-IGZO for an active layer and has improved characteristics and improved reliability by lowering the defect levels.¹⁴

Low-temperature polysilicon (LTPS) has been used for backplanes of small-sized and medium-sized displays. However, LTPS has some problems. For example, displaying a still image consumes a large amount of power due to a high off-state current; manufacturing requires a large number of steps, which increase costs, and special manufacturing equipment such as laser irradiation and ion doping apparatus is required. Although we have developed LTPS,^{15–18} we have also developed a CAAC-OS with fewer drawbacks. A CAAC-OS has some advantages: A still image is displayed with low power consumption due to a low off-state current; and a resolution as high as that of LTPS can be obtained. In addition, laser irradiation and ion doping are not required for a CAAC-OS.

In this paper, we newly fabricated a 5.9-inch foldable book-type AMOLED display and a 5.9-inch tri-fold type AMOLED

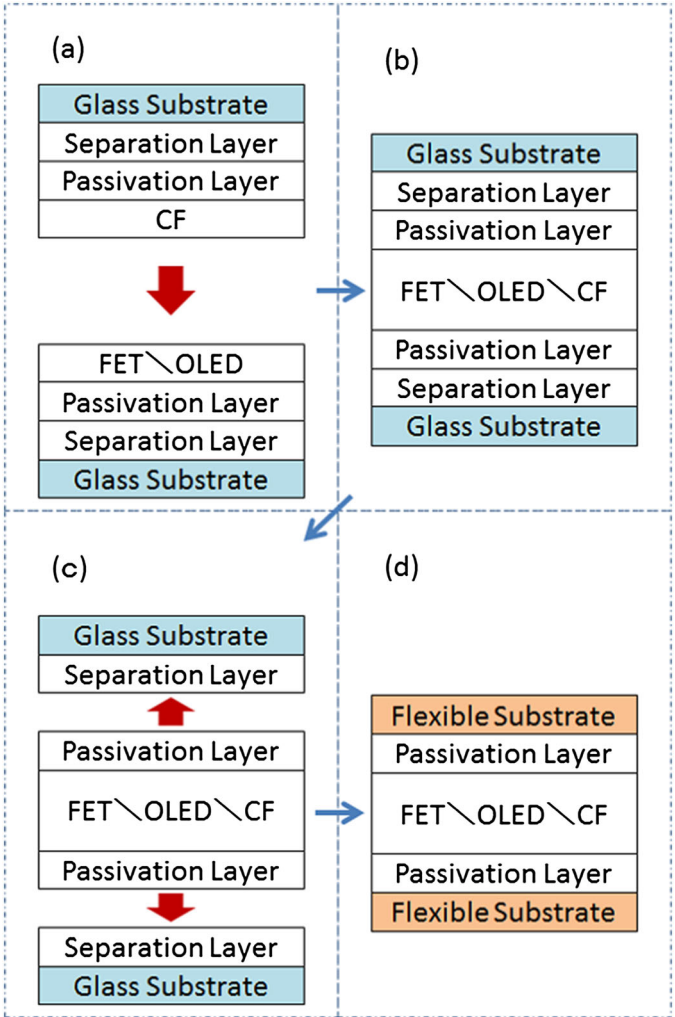


FIGURE 4 — Method for fabricating a flexible AMOLED using transfer technology.

display. Moreover, we report the measurement results of WVTR of a passivation layer and the results of a repeated folding test.

2 Specifications and characteristics of prototype displays

With our original transfer techniques, we prototyped a 5.9-inch foldable book-type AMOLED display and a 5.9-inch tri-fold display each of which may be applied to a smartphone or a tablet. Table 1 shows the specifications of the displays. The pixel density of each of the 5.9-inch panels was 249 ppi. A scan driver was incorporated into a bezel of each of the panels, and a source driver was attached externally by Chip On Film.

Photographs of the 5.9-inch prototype displays are presented in Figs 2 and 3. As can be seen, these displays are sufficiently strong against folding. These displays were driven without problems when they were bent while displaying an image. The curvature radii of the folded portions were 5 and 4 mm in the foldable book-type display and the tri-fold display, respectively. In the tri-fold display, the panel displays different images in the unfolded and folded states, which are detected by a sensor. Thus, driving of an out-of-sight display area in the folded state can be stopped, leading to power saving.

TABLE 2 — Number of folding times^a carried out in the repeated folding test (3.4-inch display).

	Radius of curvature			
	5 mm	3 mm	2 mm	1 mm
Type 1	>100,000	>100,000	>100,000	<4,000
Type 2	>100,000	>100,000	>100,000	<70,000

^aNumber of folding times with no defects occurring and driver operating normally after the test.

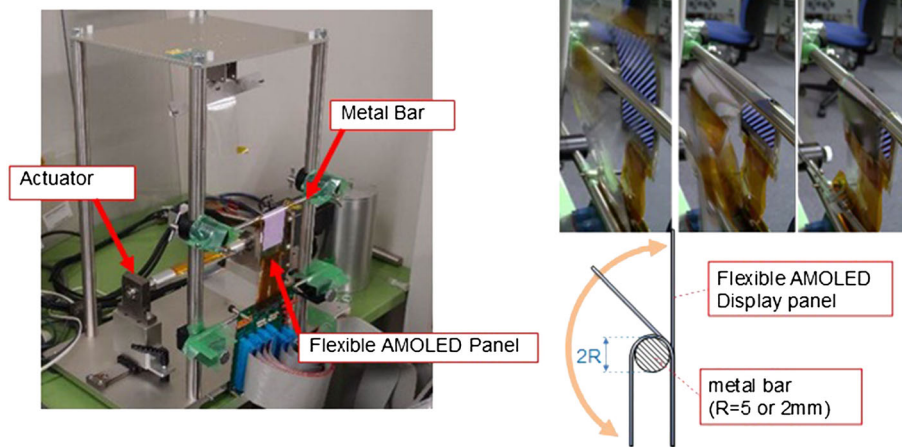


FIGURE 5 — Repeated folding test (Type 1).

3 Flexible active-matrix organic light emitting diode fabrication method

Figure 4 shows a method for fabricating a flexible AMOLED using our transfer technology.

First, a separation layer, a passivation layer, an FET layer, and an organic electroluminescence (EL) layer were formed on a glass substrate. For the separation layer, a film made from tungsten is used. And the passivation layer comprising stacked several layers of inorganic material was formed on the separation layer. Separation did not occur immediately after the formation. However, reaction occurred by performing baking treatment. The reaction changes the state of the interface, and brittleness is exhibited, leading to physical separation with a trigger for separation.

We employed a top-emission white OLED for the organic EL layer. The organic EL component had a two-layer tandem structure consisting of a blue fluorescent material and green and red phosphorescent materials. The FET was an oxide semiconductor FET having a CAAC structure. The CAAC structure is not amorphous; thus, there are few defect levels, and the FET has high reliability. Furthermore, grain boundaries are not clear; thus, in a flexible display having the CAAC structure, cracks are not easily formed. For the pixel electrode, a Ti film (5–10 nm thick) was formed over an Al electrode to prevent increased resistance due to oxidation of the Al surface, and an ITO film was formed over the Ti film. The thickness of the ITO film varied depending on the color of the pixel; thus, the total thickness of the ITO film, the EL layer, and the cathode was appropriately adjusted to produce a microcavity effect.⁵ Because this structure cannot provide sufficient color purity, a color filter (CF) was additionally provided on the counter substrate.

A separation layer, a passivation layer, and a color filter were formed over the other glass substrate. Then, as shown in Fig. 4(b), the FET substrate and the color filter substrate were bonded. The cell gap between the FET substrate and the color filter substrate was approximately 5 μm . After bonding, the

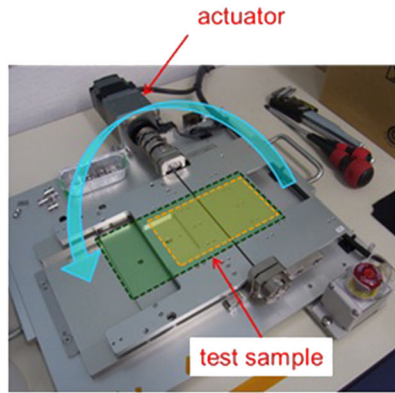


FIGURE 6 — Repeated folding test (Type 2).

upper and lower glass substrates were separated from the passivation layers by physical force as shown in Fig. 4(c). Then, the flexible substrates were bonded as shown in Fig. 4(d).

We used 20- μm -thick plastic films with a low thermal expansion coefficient for the flexible substrates.

4 Repeated folding test

The 3.4-inch flexible AMOLED display fabricated by the method described in Section 2 was subjected to a repeated folding test using a repeated folding test machine. The specifications of the display are the same as those in Table 2.

Figure 5 is a photograph of the repeated folding test machine and images how the repeated folding test was performed (Type 1). And Fig. 6 shows another repeated folding test (Type 2). The portion to be folded was placed in the middle of the panel and included part of a display area and a scan driver area. Folding was repeated 100,000 times. The folding curvature radius was set by a metal bar. For example, when the diameter of the metal bar was 10 mm, the curvature radius was 5 mm. The panel was folded such that the display surface (color filter side) was on the inside (facing inward).

Table 2 shows the results of the repeated folding test. For both curvature radii of 5 and 2 mm, no defects occurred in the display area, and the driver operated normally after 100,000 folds.

5 Measurement of water vapor transmission rate

To evaluate the passivation layer, we formed a sample and measured the WVTR. Figure 7 shows the structure of the sample. In the sample, the FET, the OLED, and the color filter in the structure described in Fig. 4 were not included. The measurement was performed using “HiBarSens” (Fraunhofer IWS, Dresden, Germany and Sempa Systems GmbH).

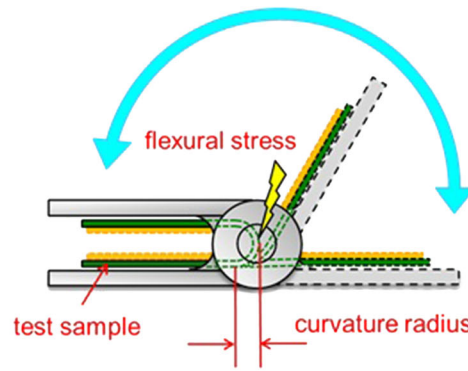


Figure 8 shows the results of the WVTR measurement. The WVTR under water vapor conditions of 38 °C and 90% RH after sufficient time had elapsed was estimated to be less than or equal to $7 \times 10^{-6} \text{ g/m}^2 \cdot \text{day}$.

6 High-temperature and high-humidity test of flexible display panel

A high-temperature and high-humidity test was performed on the flexible display fabricated by the method described in Section 3.

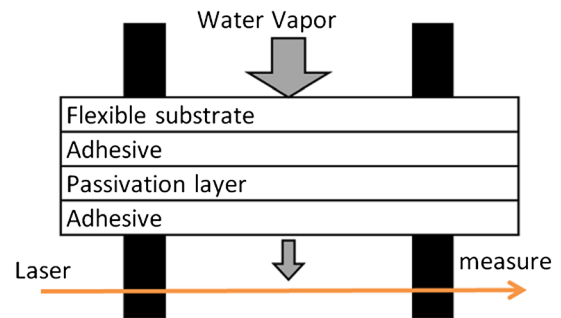


FIGURE 7 — Structure of sample for measurement of WVTR.

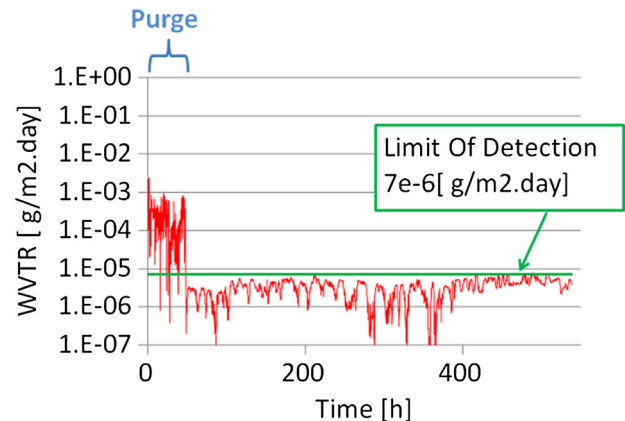


FIGURE 8 — WVTR measurement results (38 °C/90% RH).

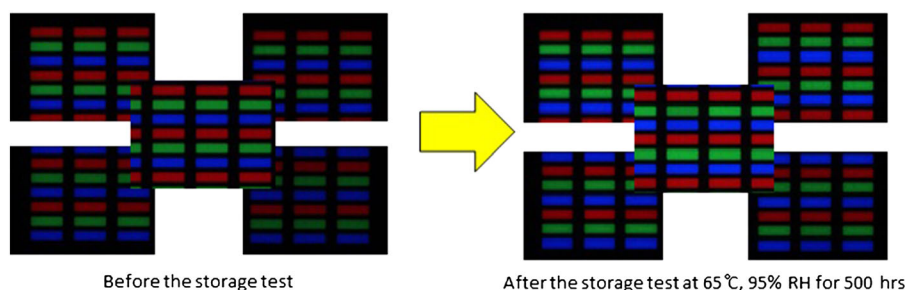


FIGURE 9 — High-temperature and high-humidity storage test (micrographs of the central area and four corners of the flexible display).

This display was stored in an environment of 90% humidity and at 65 °C for a long time. Figure 9 shows micrographs of pixels in the central area of the display observed before and after the test. Generation of a dark spot and pixel shrinkage was not observed after 500 h. Thus, the passivation film has high quality enough to withstand duration of 500 h.

7 Conclusion

A flexible AMOLED display including a CAAC-OS FET (or CAC-OS FET) and a white tandem OLED was fabricated using inorganic separation layers. The display was subjected to a folding test (100,000 folds) with a curvature radius of 2 mm and performed without problems. The WVTR of the passivation layer was determined to be less than or equal to 7×10^{-6} g/m²·day, which, in terms of performance, is highly favorable. We have successfully fabricated a 5.9-inch foldable book-type AMOLED display and a 5.9-inch tri-fold AMOLED display for a smartphone, which has the aforementioned structure. The very small bend radius that these displays are able to tolerate, together with the tolerance of a large number of folding and dynamic bending cycles will, for the first time, enable new reconfigurable devices to be realized.¹⁹

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Ryu Komatsu graduated from Kochi National College of Technology, Japan, in 2004. He joined the Semiconductor Energy Laboratory Co., Ltd. in 2004. Since then, he has been engaged in R&D of OLED displays.



Ryo Nakazato graduated from Iwasaki Gakuen Information Science College, Japan, in 2006. He joined the Semiconductor Energy Laboratory Co., Ltd. in 2006. Since then, he has been engaged in R&D of OLED displays.



Takeru Sasaki graduated from Miyagi National College of Technology, Japan, in 2010. He joined the Semiconductor Energy Laboratory Co., Ltd. in 2010. Since then, he has been engaged in R&D of OLED displays.



Akio Suzuki received his BE degree in the University of Electro-Communications, Japan, in 2002. After graduation, he joined the Semiconductor Energy Laboratory and has been engaged in R&D of OLED displays.



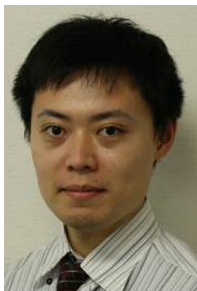
Naoto Ohno graduated from Iwasaki Gakuen Information Science College, Japan, in 2008. He joined the Semiconductor Energy Laboratory Co., Ltd. in 2008. Since then, he has been engaged in R&D of OLED displays.



Naoyuki Senda received his BE degree in Osaka University and ME degree in Kyoto University, Japan, in 2008 and 2010, respectively. After graduation, he joined the Semiconductor Energy Laboratory and has been engaged in developing flat panel displays like LCDs and OLED displays.



Susumu Kawashima received his BE and ME degrees in Physics from Tokyo University of Science, Japan, in 2008 and 2010, respectively. After graduation, He joined the Semiconductor Energy Laboratory Co., Ltd. Since then, he has been engaged in the Circuit Design of OLED display.



Takuya Kawata received his BS degree from Waseda University and MS degree from the University of Tokyo, Japan, in 2006 and 2008 respectively. After graduation, he joined the Semiconductor Energy Laboratory Co., Ltd. and has been engaged in the R&D of OLED.



Hisao Ikeda received his BE and ME degrees in Chemistry from Kyushu University, Japan in 1998 and 2000, respectively. After graduation, he joined the Semiconductor Energy Laboratory, Co., Ltd. and has been engaged in R&D of OLED.



Yasuhiro Jimbo received his BE and ME degrees in Nagoya University, Japan, in 2001 and 2003, respectively. After graduation, he joined the Semiconductor Energy Laboratory, Co., Ltd. and has been engaged in R&D of OLED.



Shingo Eguchi received his BS and MS degrees in Kyushu University, Japan. He joined the Semiconductor Energy Laboratory Co., Ltd. in 1996. Since then, he has been engaged in developing flat panel displays like LC and OLED displays.



Tomoya Aoyama received his BS and MS degrees in Shinshu University, Japan, in 2002 and 2004, respectively. After graduation, he joined the Semiconductor Energy Laboratory, Co., Ltd. and has been engaged in R&D of TFT and OLED displays.



Yoshiharu Hirakata received his BE and ME degrees in Electronic Device from Nagaoka University of Technology, Japan. He joined the Semiconductor Energy Laboratory Co., Ltd. in 1995. Since then, he has been engaged in developing flat panel displays like LCDs and OLED displays.



Shunpei Yamazaki received his PhD, ME, BE, and honorary degrees from Doshisha University, Japan, in 1971, 1967, 1965, and 2011, respectively. He is the founder and the president of the Semiconductor Energy Laboratory Co., Ltd. He was awarded a medal with a purple ribbon by the Japanese Prime Minister's Office for the innovation of MOS LSI element technology in 1997 and was the winner of the Okochi Memorial Technology Prize in 2010. He is a holder of Guinness World Record under the category of "most patents held by an individual", for the total of 6314 patents as of March 2011. He is a life fellow of the Institute of

Electrical and Electronics Engineers, Inc.; a member of the Japan Society of Applied Physics; and a foreign member of the Royal Swedish Academy of Engineering Sciences.



Takashi Shiraishi joined ELDiS. Inc. in 2002. Since then, he has been working on the manufacturing process. He joined Advanced Film Device Inc. in 2006.



Seiji Yasumoto joined the Semiconductor Energy Laboratory Co., Ltd. in 2002. He is engaged in research and development of TFT-LCD since then.



Masataka Nakada graduated from Akita University, Japan, in 2002. He joined ELDiS. Inc. in 2002. Since then, he has been working on the manufacturing process. He joined Advanced Film Device Inc. in 2006.

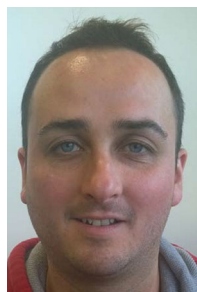


Masataka Sato joined ELDiS. Inc. in 2002. He joined Advanced Film Device Inc. in 2006. He is engaged in research and development of TFT-LCD then since then.



Chris Bower is a Principal Scientist at Nokia Research Centre, Cambridge. He has over 20 years' experience in industrial research environments, developing new products and getting existing products to market by reducing cycle times and defects, including sensitized goods, pdlcd and electrowetting flexible display devices, self-assembled and tunable photonic crystals, and novel patterning methods for printed electronics. Has co-authored over 25 publications in refereed journals and filed over 50 patents. He spent 12 years working for Kodak European Research

on diverse topics in imaging science, from novel inkjet technology to small molecule OLED display technology and flexible displays, and he helped to develop new roll-2-roll manufacturing methods for flexible displays and printed electronics. He has been with Nokia for 5 years working on topics including nanomaterials and block-copolymer templates to create displays and energy storage media with enhanced properties and functional coatings such as superhydrophobic and structural color, flexible displays, and sensors and materials to enable new form factor mobile devices.



Darryl Cotton is a chartered engineer with a Beng (Hons) degree in Mechanical Engineering from Newcastle University, UK, and a PhD in Electrical Engineering from the University of Southampton, UK. He has spent the past 6 years developing enabling technologies and materials for stretchable and flexible electronics at the University of Cambridge and Nokia and has a number of publications in these fields.



Andrew Matthews is a director of Technology Management responsible for creating business propositions from research and development activities undertaken within the Sensors and Materials Laboratory of Nokia Research Center in the UK, Finland, and Russia. He studied engineering at King's College, London, and went on to complete a PhD in ion implantation, receiving a Royal Society Fellowship to continue his research in RIKEN, Japan. Following his studies, he has spent the last 20 years in international sales, marketing, product innovation, and business management, focusing primarily on sensor and telecommunica-

tion technologies. He has obtained funding and delivered successful results for diverse high-technology developments, for industries ranging from aerospace, petrochemical, and process control to consumer electronics. During this period, he has held a variety of senior management roles, providing strategic vision and driving revenues for companies ranging in size from startups to multi-national corporations. He has been a founding member of two startups and has helped grow businesses from inception to multi-million dollar revenues.



Piers Andrew received his BSc and PhD degrees in Physics from the University of Exeter, Exeter, UK, in 1999. He joined Nokia Research Center (NRC), Cambridge, UK, in 2007, and since 2008, he has led a team in NRC's Cambridge, UK, laboratory researching nanomaterials, nanostructures, and their potential applications in mobile devices. This work encompasses flexible and stretchable electronics, energy storage, and multifunctional nanostructured materials and aims to enable new device form factors, functionalities, and user interactions. Before joining NRC, he was a postdoctoral research fellow in the Nanoscience Centre, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK, studying the phase separation and self-assembly of functional polymeric materials and previously at the School of Physics, University of Exeter, where his interests ranged from studies of the emission and propagation of light in microstructured materials, the control of radiative and nonradiative energy transfer between dye molecules, and the operation of distributed feedback lasers.



Catalin Gheorghiu received his BS degree in Computer Science and MS degree in Real Time Systems and Industrial Informatics from the Polytechnic University of Bucharest, in 1995 and 1996, respectively. He joined the Institute of Scientific Research in 1995 as a Software Engineer in the Technological Engineering for Automation team. He developed solutions for monitoring and optimizing various systems and processes in a major cement plant by defining and implementing the process automation, process control, and system. Systems provided innovative solutions that enabled fuel efficiency, increased productivity, less maintenance, and lower environmental emissions. From 1998 to 2000, he worked at Ericsson as a software engineer in the Software Development Department of Ericsson Denmark, and he was in charge with developing and maintaining the Access Node Switch (ANS) and its added services. He joined Nokia in 2000. At the moment, he works as a concepting manager in Mobile Division Group of Microsoft Mobile Oy, Finland. His key role consists of scouting new key technologies and developing them further until they reach the mass production maturity. He is specialized in Program Management with proven track record of ramping-up complex projects from scratch and delivering against the targets. He has proven leadership skills and ability to coordinate virtual team in very complex project matters, tracks record of operational and delivery skills, and is always consumer centric minded.



Johan Bergquist received his MS and PhD degrees in physics from Chalmers University of Technology in 1988 and 1994, respectively. From 1988 to 1992, he worked as a staff scientist at the Quantum Electro-Optics Laboratory of Canon Research Centre and also spent 1 year as a strategic R&D analyst at the company's R&D headquarters. After a post-doctorate period at the Electronics Engineering Department of the University of Electro-Communications, Tokyo, he joined the University of New Mexico's Asian Technology Information Program in Tokyo where he worked as senior technology analyst and manager of a DARPA-funded project on flat panel display technologies. In 1999, he joined the Visual Communications Laboratory of Nokia Research Center in Tokyo as a senior research engineer and is currently a principal engineer at the Nokia Platform Engineering Laboratory.