

A METHOD AND A DEVICE FOR TRANSMITTING INFORMATION OVER A COMPLEX NETWORK

The present invention relates to a method and a device for transmitting information over a complex
5 network.

The invention applies particularly, but not exclusively, to exchanging information between a plurality of modules interconnected by an electricity distribution network that is used both for electrically
10 powering the modules and as a communications network for conveying digital messages between modules by carrier current modulation.

The invention is particularly suitable for the remote control and remote surveillance of urban lighting
15 columns.

In an application of this type, a central control unit and a plurality of electronic modules are connected to the network for the purposes:

- firstly of making it possible to implement remote
20 control or remote parameter setting; and

- secondly of transferring to a central station information that has been detected by the electronic modules.

As a general rule, an electricity distribution
25 network presents topology that is complex, including numerous intersections that are randomly distributed. Furthermore, knowledge of the exact topology of the network has often been lost, with such a network generally being the result of successive installation
30 operations performed over several tens of years.

Furthermore, carrier current transmission range is relatively short. It is therefore necessary for the transmitted messages to be repeated in order to enable them to reach their destinations.

35 In particular, the electricity distribution network presents a wide variety of impedances as a function of

location and as a function of the users that are connected to the network.

Furthermore, the types of cable used (overhead, twisted, buried, single-phase, or three-phase) vary very often as a function of circumstances and the impedances per unit length specific to each type of cable, which impedances are likewise very variable.

Thus, when using the carrier current technique, in application of present standards, and insofar as it is desired to transmit data over long distances over an electricity network, it is essential to have a system for regenerating messages.

Because the impedances and attenuations are not under control, it is difficult to determine in advance which modules ought to reamplify messages.

Furthermore, if it is desired to be able to communicate with each module separately, it is necessary for each module to be given its own address.

In the context of such a network, giving each module an address raises numerous problems.

Firstly, it is necessary for the addressing mode of the various modules that are to be enabled to communicate can be applied to a network of any topology. Then, if it is desired to interconnect a large number of modules, it must be possible to perform module addressing without time-consuming operations that would involve a high risk of error. Provision must also be made for it to be easy to add a module to the network without that requiring manual intervention on other modules.

French patent No. 95/05749 proposes an addressing mode that requires manual action to be performed on each module that does not yet have an address and also on the module that does have an address and that is situated immediately upstream going towards a central unit situated at the root of the tree structure network. The address of the module that does not yet have an address is determined as a function of the address of the

upstream module. That method thus presents the drawback of requiring operators to intervene on site by acting on control buttons provided on each module.

French patent No. 00/01559 proposes a method of
5 automatically allocating addresses, in which the address of each module is determined from the address of the module situated immediately upstream, said address being sent over the network by the upstream module in an address allocation message. That method enables
10 excellent results to be obtained, however it is difficult to implement and is not well suited to a network that is relatively complex.

The invention thus has more particularly the object of solving the above-mentioned problems, and in
15 particular the problem of regenerating the messages being transmitted and the problem relating to the addressing of the module.

To this end, the method of the invention comprises at least the following steps:

20 · Prior allocation of an identifier to each module, such as for example the serial number of the module manufacturer, and during installation of the module in the network, associating said identifier with data relating to the geographical position of the location
25 where the module is installed, in such a manner as to be capable subsequently of identifying the location of the module from its identifier, independently of its position in the network.

· When sending a message over the network to a
30 module and/or to the central unit, the modules connected to the network that are suitable for receiving the message recognize and/or validate said message, and modules that have recognized and/or validated the message systematically and synchronously repeat the message over
35 the network, this repetition of messages enabling other modules to become capable of receiving the message, and after recognizing and/or validating it, of resending the

message in turn: from each repetition, other modules, understand the message and are in a position to proceed with another repetition, and so on. This process repeats until the message has been transmitted over the entire
5 network and all of the modules have received and resent the message at least once. This ensures that the message does indeed reach its destination(s).

In order to make it possible for the messages to be resent synchronously, it is essential (with the exception
10 of amplifying technology interfaces) for the detection and sending systems of the modules to be implemented entirely on the basis of a crystal-clocked microprocessor: since analog type decoding would not make it possible to provide a satisfactory guarantee
15 concerning message synchronism.

This synchronism can be ensured because of the high operating speed of present-day microprocessors (20 megahertz (MHz) and above). Synchronism is obtained on the basis of the instant at which the message is
20 validated by the microprocessor located in each module.

In order to avoid any problem of message collision, the sending of messages is triggered either by the central unit or by the zone unit UZ.

The above-described method presents numerous
25 advantages. It makes it possible in particular:

- to modify the structure of the electricity network without spoiling message transmission;
- to add new modules to an existing network without taking any special precautions and without having any
30 consequences on message transmission; and
- to ensure that the transmitted information is available at any point of the communications network.

An embodiment of the invention is described below by way of non-limiting example with reference to the
35 accompanying drawing, in which:

- Figure 1 is a diagram of a (public or private) electricity distribution network for lighting on which the method of the invention is implemented;

- Figure 2 is a block diagram showing the
5 architecture of a module for controlling and monitoring the lamps used in the network shown in Figure 1; and

- Figure 3 is a general operation flow chart.

In the example shown in Figure 1, the electricity distribution network for lighting makes use of two
10 electricity cabinets 1, 2 each powering lighting lamps in a determined zone via a distribution network of tree structure.

In this example, the tree structure networks of two zones are interconnected by two couplers 3 and 31,
15 thereby enabling messages to be transmitted from one zone to another while leaving the electricity networks isolated.

Naturally, the invention is not limited to a determined number of couplers. A set of zones
20 interconnected by one or more couplers is referred to as a "sector". When a single sector has a plurality of couplers, in the event of one of the couplers failing, the other couplers take over for the sector as a whole. A sector defines the transmission network and it is
25 generally fitted with a transmission unit UT_z 4 defined by an internal number z that is associated with the cabinet 1 in this example. This transmission unit UT_z 4 can send (or receive) information, (e.g. to or from) a remote processor 5, constituting a control station PC, via the
30 telephone network, the Internet, or any other transmission network.

Furthermore, zone units UZ 6, 7 identified by respective internal numbers y are installed in the cabinets 1, 2.

35 The lighting lamps are controlled and monitored by control/check modules M_x disposed on the lamp power supply

circuits, these control/check modules having respective identifiers, each consisting in an internal number $\underline{x}$.

As shown in Figure 2, the control/check modules M_x include a crystal-clocked processor 8 connected to an electricity network interface 9 that is connected to the electricity network 11 via two circuits, namely:

- a receive circuit 12 having a receive amplifier;

and

- a transmit circuit 13 having a transmit amplifier.

The analog electronic subassemblies, in particular the electricity network interface 9 and the send and receive amplifiers 13 and 12 should make use of components that are sufficiently accurate in terms of their tolerances to ensure that there are no phase rotations that differ as a function of differing manufacturers.

Messages can be transmitted over the electricity network using a pure carrier frequency that is frequency modulated or phase modulated. Each message may be made up of the following elements:

- a preamble, e.g. made up of a carrier indicating that a message is to follow;
- a message order number;
- the identity of the message source given by the identifier of the remote processor 5, of the transmission unit 4, of the zone unit 6, 7, or of the control/check unit M_x ;
- the internal number of the sender;
- the number of the zone and, optionally, of the outgoing line;
- the number of the destination or the destination group concerned (this may be all of the control/check modules M_x , a defined group of modules M_x , or even a single module M_x);
- setpoint data, e.g. possibly relating to remote parameter setting, reduction ratios, etc., or even state

data relating to a control/check module M_x (which data may relate to lamp faults, for example, etc.); and

- message check data implementing a predetermined algorithm.

5 The control/check modules are designed so as to be capable of performing internal processing steps of predetermined durations on the signals conveyed over the network in order to be able to recognize and process "interesting" signals that might relate to them.

10 Because these interesting signals are transmitted by modulating a carrier (e.g. frequency modulation or phase modulation), the time the carrier is present must be sufficient to cover the internal processing time.

15 The operating sequence performed by the control/check modules M_x , during transmission over the network, is shown in Figure 3.

It comprises the following operating stages:

- an external stage of internal processing (block 12);
- 20 · a stage of detecting the presence of a carrier on the network (block 13). The purpose of this stage is to recognize that the received carrier has the proper frequency, e.g. a frequency of 130 kilohertz (kHz). If no carrier is detected, the system returns to the stage 25 12 of executing internal treatment 12. If a carrier at the proper frequency is detected, the system moves on to the following stage;
 - a stage of detecting the modulation of the carrier ("start") and the beginning of the message (block 14).
- 30 If no meaningful modulation is detected, the system returns to the stage 12 of executing internal processing, otherwise it goes firstly to a stage of decoding the message (block 15) and then to a stage of checking its validity (block 16);
- 35 · a message validation stage (block 17). The validity of the message is checked by applying a calculation algorithm on the received data and by

comparing the result that is obtained with check data that is contained in the received message. If the message is not valid, the system returns to the stage 12 of executing internal processing, otherwise the system
5 moves onto to the following stage;

- a stage of determining the existence or absence of a new message (block 18). By way of example, this stage is performed by comparison with the latest message to be stored by the module M_x . If nothing new is detected, the
10 system returns to the stage 12 of executing internal processing, otherwise it moves onto the following stage;

- a stage of storing the new message N_m in the memories of the module (block 19);

- a stage of resending the message over the network
15 (block 20). This stage is triggered after a precise time lapse relative to an origin that is determined by the end of the new message; and

- a stage of processing the new message N_m (block 21) at the end of which the system returns to the
20 internal processing stage 12.

An advantage of the above-described method consists in that it serves to solve the problem of communication between modules mounted on multiphase distribution lines, which modules may be connected between neutral and any
25 one of the live phases of the line.

Under such circumstances, an attenuated signal is propagated by induction over the other phases. The process of repeating the initially attenuated signal serves to obtain on the line repeated signals having the
30 same amplitude as the signals on the phase to which the original signal was applied.

CLAIMS

1. A method of transmitting a message by carrier current modulation over an electrical power distribution network having connected thereto a central unit or a zone unit
5 (6, 7) together with a plurality of control/check modules (M_x) that might be concerned by the message, the method being characterized in that it comprises at least the following steps:
- initially allocating to each module (M_x) an
10 identifier such as the serial number of the manufacturer of the module (M_x), and on installing the module (M_x) in the network, associating said identifier with data relating to the geographical position of the location where the module is installed, so as to make it possible
15 subsequently to identify the location of the module (M_x) from its identifier, independently of its position in the network; and
 - when sending a message over the network to a module (M_x) and/or to the central unit, recognizing and/or
20 validating the message in the modules that are connected to the network and that are suitable for receiving the message, and systematically and synchronously repeating the message over the network by means of those modules (M_x) that have recognized and/or validated the messages,
25 this repetition of messages enabling other modules to become able to receive the message, and after recognition and/or validation, of resending the message in turn, such that from each repetition, other modules (M_x) understand the message and are in a position to repeat it again,
30 this process repeating until the message has been sent over the entire network and all of the modules (M_x) have received the message and retransmitted it at least once.
2. A method according to claim 1, characterized in that
35 the modules (M_x) resend messages in synchronous manner, and in that the resending is synchronized by the

operating frequency of crystal-clocked microprocessors forming part of said modules (M_x).

3. A method according to claim 2, characterized in that
5 the resending of messages is synchronized on the basis of the instant at which the message is found to be valid by the microprocessor (8) located in each module (M_x).

4. A method according to any preceding claim,
10 characterized in that message sending is triggered by the central unit or by a zone unit (6, 7).

5. A method according to any preceding claim,
characterized in that said network is an electricity
15 power distribution network for public lighting lamps, and in that said modules (M_x) are control/check modules of the lighting lamps.

6. A method according to claim 5, characterized in that
20 the control/check modules (M_x) comprise a crystal-clocked processor (8) connected to an electricity network interface (9) that is connected to the electricity network (11) via two circuits, namely:

- a receive circuit (12) having a receive amplifier;
25 and
- a second circuit (13) having a send amplifier.

7. A method according to claim 5, characterized in that the electricity distribution network makes use of
30 electricity cabinets (1, 2), each powering lighting lamps in a determined zone via a distribution network of tree structure, the tree structure networks of different zones being capable of being interconnected by couplers (3) enabling messages to be sent from one zone to another
35 while leaving the electricity networks mutually isolated, the set of zones connected together by one or more couplers (3) constituting a sector having a transmission

unit identified by an internal number associated with the cabinets, said transmission unit being capable of communicating with a remote processor (5), and in that each message is made up of the following elements:

- 5 · a preamble;
- a message order number;
- the identity of the origin of the message relying on the identifier of the remote processor (5), of the transmission unit, of the zone unit, or of the
- 10 control/check module;
- the internal number of the sender;
- the zone number and, optionally, the outgoing line number;
- the number of the destination or destination group
- 15 concerned;
- setpoint data; and
- check data for checking the message using a predetermined algorithm.

20 8. A method according to any preceding claim, characterized in that the operating sequence executed by the check and control modules comprises the following operations:

- a first stage (12) of executing internal
- 25 processing;
- a second stage (13) of detecting the presence of a carrier on the network, and returning to the first stage in the absence of a carrier, otherwise moving on to the third stage;
- 30 · a third stage (14) of detecting carrier modulation and the beginning of the message, returning to the first stage if no meaningful modulation is detected, otherwise moving on to a stage (15) of decoding the message and then on to a stage (16) of checking the validity of said
- 35 message;

- a fourth stage (17) of validating the message and returning to the second stage if the message is not valid, otherwise moving on to the following stage;
- a fifth stage (18) of determining the existence or
5 the absence of a new message, returning to the first stage if no message is detected, otherwise moving on to the next stage;
- a sixth stage (19) of storing the new message (Nm) in the memories of the module;
- 10 · a seventh stage (20) of resending the message over the network, this stage being triggered after an accurate time lapse from an origin determined by the end of the new message; and
- an eighth stage of processing the new message (Nm
15 21).