

THERMAL PRINT HEAD CONTROL
FOR PRINTING SERIAL BAR CODES

The present invention relates to a printer for printing information in rows on a web of record members with a thermal print head wherein the information includes a serial bar code formed of bars and spaces in the information rows.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Printers that include a thermal print head for printing information on a web of record members, such as labels, are known. One such type of printer is a thermal direct printer utilizing heat sensitive paper on which printing is directly carried out by the thermal print head. Such printers have been known to employ a thermal print head having a series of print elements aligned in a row wherein each element

produces heat in response to energy applied thereto in order to print a dot. Such print elements may be resistors or the like to which a pulsed signal is applied to drive the print elements to print. In order to control the amount of energy applied to the print elements of a thermal print head, known systems have controlled the width or amplitude of the pulses applied thereto.

In another known system, a fixed number of pulses of a calculated duty cycle are applied to the thermal print head to print each row, wherein the duty cycle is calculated in response to measured, initial values of the thermal print head resistance and temperature as well as the input voltage applied to the thermal print head. In this system, the amount of energy applied to all print elements is made fixed so as to enable the printer to print narrow bars having a width as nominal as possible. This system works well for printing parallel bar codes as shown in FIG. 2 in which the length of the bars forming the code extends parallel to the direction of movement of the stock on which the information is printed. However, this system has several problems in printing serial bar codes in which the length of the bars forming the code extends perpendicular to the direction of movement of the stock as shown in FIG. 3. One such problem is that the serial bar code, and human readable characters if any, appear to be lighter when printed with this system. Further, in printing wide bars which are formed by printing narrow bars side by side, discontinuities such as a gap in the wide bar can result as shown in FIG. 4. These gaps result in wide bars that appear light. When human readable characters are printed adjacent to the serial code as shown in FIG. 5, discontinuities in the characters can result too. Such discontinuities include variations in the darkness

of the dots forming portions of a character wherein lighter dots result in those portions of the character that are in a row adjacent to a space of the serial bar code, darker dots resulting in those portions of the character that are in a row adjacent to a bar of the serial bar code. In addition, it has been found that with this system the width of each bar printed increases across the length of the serial bar code or label. As information is being printed, each energized printing element loses heat to the area surrounding the element. This localized, short term temperature increase in the surrounding area results in succeeding information rows starting at a higher temperature than the initial temperature from which the duty cycle is calculated. Because succeeding rows start at a higher temperature, the width of dots printed in each succeeding row increases.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention in its various aspects is defined in the appended claims, to which reference should now be made.

A preferred printer embodying the present invention includes a system for controlling the amount of energy applied to the thermal print head for printing a serial bar code such that the amount of energy varies for each row in accordance with the status of the row as a bar row or a space row; with the status of at least one immediately preceding and one immediately succeeding rows; and with the number of bar rows previously printed in order to eliminate discontinuities in the serial bar code and in information, such as human readable characters, printed adjacent thereto.

A preferred printer embodying the present invention includes a thermal print head having a number of printing elements aligned in a row for printing a row of information. Means are provided for applying energy to the thermal print head to cause the print elements to print a bar of a serial bar code, and a

portion of a human readable character if any, in a row. More particularly, the drive means applies a series of pulses to each print element that is to be on to print in a given row, wherein the duty cycle of the pulses is constant from row to row but the number of pulses in the series is variable. The number of pulses applied to the thermal print head to print each row is determined by a controller to vary the amount of energy applied to the thermal print head.

The amount of energy applied to the thermal print head for a bar row is determined by the number of preceding bar rows printed wherein this amount of energy forms a base value for the bar row. The base value amount of energy is such that it decreases in an approximately exponential manner with increasing number of previously printed bar rows. The base value amount of energy for a bar row is modified by a compensation factor if either the row immediately preceding or the row immediately succeeding is also a bar row.

If the row immediately succeeding the current row is also a bar row, the controller increases the base value amount of energy by a first compensation factor. If the row immediately succeeding the current row is a space row but the row immediately preceding the current row is a bar row, the controller decreases the base value amount of energy by a second compensation factor.

The amount of energy applied to the thermal print head for each row determined to be a space row and having a portion of a human readable character therein is fixed at a high level in order to eliminate discontinuities in any portion of a human readable character formed in a row with a space of the serial bar code.

In order to determine whether an information row is a bar row or a space row, the number of print elements to be on for each row is determined and compared to a threshold value. The row is identified as

a space row if the number of on print elements is less than the threshold value and the row is identified as a bar row if the number of on elements is greater than or equal to the threshold value. The threshold value may be set equal to the number of elements required to be on to print a bar of the serial bar code, that number defining the height of the bar code. In the preferred embodiment, however, the threshold value is less than the number of elements defining the height of a bar since it has been found that any time a significant number of dots is printed in a row, whether those dots are associated with a bar or a human readable character, a temperature rise results which should be compensated for.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The invention will now be described in more detail by way of example, with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

FIG. 1 is a block diagram of the printer embodying the present invention;

FIG. 2 is an illustration of parallel bar codes printed on stock moving in the direction of the arrow;

FIG. 3 is an illustration of serial bar codes printed on stock moving in the direction of the arrow;

FIG. 4 is an illustration of a serial bar code with wide bars having gaps therein;

FIG. 5 is an illustration of a serial bar code with adjacent human readable characters having discontinuities therein;

FIG. 6 is a graph illustrating the number of pulses applied to the thermal print head of FIG. 1 to print each bar row as a function of the number of bar rows printed;

FIG. 7a illustrates a wide bar having a gap therein;

FIG. 7b illustrates a wide bar formed of overlapping bar rows in accordance with the present invention; and

FIG. 8 is a flow chart illustrating the software routine that determines the amount of energy to be applied to the thermal print head shown in FIG. 1.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

A printer embodying the present invention is illustrated in the block diagram of FIG. 1 for printing information on a web of record members such as paper stock on which labels are carried. The printer includes a thermal print head 10 having a series of print elements 10' such as resistors or the like that are aligned in a single straight row. When each print element is energized, the print element generates heat in accordance with the amount of energy applied thereto. The heat generated by an energized print element causes a dot to be printed on heat sensitive stock wherein the width of the printed dot increases with increasing temperatures. The stock employed with the thermal print head 10 may be a heat sensitive paper stock or a heat sensitive synthetic label stock each of which requires a different temperature to print a dot of the same width as discussed in detail below. The present invention is equally applicable to non-direct or thermal transfer types of printing also.

The printer illustrated includes a microprocessor 12 that controls a stepper motor 14 through an interface 16 to move the stock in a direction perpendicular to the line of print elements 10' of the thermal print head 10 to print information on a label. The microprocessor 12 also controls a liquid crystal display, LCD 18 through an LCD driver 20 to

display various prompts to a user of the printer. The user may respond to displayed prompts via a keyboard 22 coupled to the microprocessor 12 through the interface 16. The microprocessor 12 is further coupled
5 to a thermal print head control 24 that is responsive thereto to drive the thermal print head 10, as powered by a battery 26, to print information on a label. The output of the battery 26 is also applied to a voltage regulator 28 that provides +5 volts to the
10 microprocessor 12.

The microprocessor 12 controls the thermal print head control 24, the stepper motor 14 and the LCD display 18 in accordance with software stored in a read only memory, ROM 30. The microprocessor 12
15 utilizes portions of a random access memory RAM 32 as working registers in which data is manipulated. Another portion of the RAM 32 is utilized to store a bit mapped image of information to be printed on a label wherein each bit identifies whether a particular
20 print element associated therewith should be on or off for a given row of information forming the label. When printing a serial bar code, each row of information may include a bar or a space and a portion of a human readable character, such characters generally
25 spanning a number of rows of information forming the label. To print a row of information, the microprocessor 12 couples a bit mapped image of the row from the RAM 32 to the thermal print head control 24 which responds thereto by applying energy from the battery
30 26 to the print elements of the thermal print head 10 that are identified as being on for the row. More particularly, the thermal print head control 24 drives the print elements of the thermal print head 10 to print by applying a series of pulses thereto for each
35 row. The duty cycle of the pulses applied to the print elements for each row is calculated from the initial values of the thermal print head resistance

and temperature, these values being coupled to the microprocessor 12 on lines 34 and 36 and further in response to the input voltage applied to the thermal print head 10 from the battery 26 as coupled to the microprocessor 12 via line 38. The microprocessor 12 controls the thermal print head control 24 to vary the number of pulses in the series applied to the thermal print head 10 for each row of information to be printed in accordance with the status of the row of information as a bar row or a space row; with the status of the rows immediately preceding and immediately succeeding the row to be printed; and with the number of bar rows previously printed as discussed in detail below with reference to FIG. 8.

The printer shown in FIG. 1, under the control of the microprocessor 12 operating in accordance with the flow chart shown in FIG. 8, may print a parallel bar code as shown in FIG. 2 wherein the length of the bars forming the code extends parallel to the direction of movement of the stock indicated by the arrow. The printer may also print a serial bar code as shown in FIG. 3 in which the length of the bars forming the code extends perpendicular to the direction of movement of the stock indicated by the arrow without the discontinuities depicted in FIG. 4 and FIG. 5 that can result with prior printers. The discontinuities eliminated by the printer illustrated include gaps 40 in the wide bars 42 and lighter portions 44 in the human readable characters 46 wherein the lighter portions 44 are in the same row as a space 48 of the serial bar code printed adjacent thereto. The printer illustrated further ensures that the width of each bar row remains substantially constant across the entire length of the bar code or label by decreasing the number of pulses, N, applied to the thermal print head 10 as the number of bar rows printed increases. Since it has been found that

the increase in temperature in the area surrounding a print element, when energized, increases exponentially, the number of pulses applied to the thermal print head control for each succeeding bar row printed, decreases in a substantially exponential manner as shown in FIG. 6. To provide the exponentially decreasing number of pulses for each succeeding bar row, the microprocessor 12 utilizes Tables I and II below.

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TABLE I

TABLE POSITION	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
ROW	SPACE ROW	1ST BAR ROW	2ND BAR ROW	3RD BAR ROW	4TH-15TH BAR ROWS	16TH-40TH BAR ROWS	41ST-70TH BAR ROWS	71ST-100TH BAR ROWS	101ST-130TH BAR ROWS	131ST-UP BAR ROWS	COMP. FAC-TOR	COMP. FAC-TOR	PARALLEL PRINT-ING
A. SYNTHETIC STOCK	60	61	59	58	56	54	52	51	50	49	12	9	60
B. PAPER STOCK	56	57	55	54	52	50	48	47	46	45	12	9	56

TABLE II

P	C	S	TABLE I POSITION
0	1	1	10
1	1	1	10
1	1	0	11
0	1	0	NO COMPENSATION FACTOR

Table I contains the base number of pulses to be applied to the thermal print head for serial bar codes, parallel bar codes or non-bar code characters that are to be printed on either synthetic stock or paper stock. More particularly, for each space row of a serial bar code, the number of pulses applied to each element of the thermal print head 10 when printing on synthetic stock is 60; whereas, the number of pulses applied to the thermal print head 10 when printing on paper stock is 56. These base numbers of pulses for a space row are sufficiently high in value to minimize discontinuities in those portions of a human readable character in the same row as a space of the adjacent serial bar code. The first, second and third bar rows printed for a serial bar code on a label have decreasing base numbers of pulses 61, 59 and 58 for synthetic stock and 57, 55 and 54 for paper stock as shown respectively at positions 1, 2 and 3 in Table I. The fourth through fifteenth bar rows printed for a serial bar code have the same base number of pulses, 56 for synthetic stock and 52 for paper stock, as shown at position 4 in Table I. Similarly, the sixteenth through fortieth bar rows have the same base number of pulses, 54 for synthetic stock and 50 for paper stock, as shown in the fifth position of Table I; the forty-first through seventieth bar rows have the same base number of pulses, 52 for synthetic stock and 48 for paper stock, as shown in the sixth position of Table I; the seventy-first through one-hundredth bar rows have the same base number of pulses, 51 for synthetic stock and 47 for paper stock, as shown in the seventh position of Table I; the one-hundred and first through one-hundred and thirtieth bar rows have the same base number of pulses, 50 for synthetic

stock and 46 for paper stock, as shown in the eighth position of Table I; and the one-hundred and thirty-first bar row and each bar row succeeding the one-hundred and thirty-first bar row have the same base number of pulses, 49 for synthetic stock and 45 for paper stock, as shown in the ninth position of Table I. The base number of pulses applied to the thermal print head 10 for a serial bar code may be modified by a positive compensation factor stored at position 10 of Table I to increase the base number or by a negative compensation factor stored at position 11 of Table I to decrease the base number in accordance with the compensation table, Table II as discussed below. The data stored in position 12 of Table I represents the number of pulses to be applied to the thermal print head 10 for each row of a parallel bar code. The data stored in position 12 is also used to print labels with only non-bar code characters in the serial direction.

In Table II, C stands for the status of the current row to be printed; P stands for the status of the row immediately preceding the current row and S stands for the status of the row immediately succeeding the current row. A "0" status identifies the row as a space row; whereas, a "1" status identifies the row as a bar row. The three bits associated with the preceding row, current row and succeeding row are shifted into a working register by the microprocessor 12 and used as the criteria, or as an address to Table I, for selecting a compensation factor to modify the base number of pulses applied to the thermal print head 10 for a current bar row of a serial bar code.

If the current row to be printed is a bar row and the succeeding row to be printed is also a bar row, a compensation factor of 12 is added to the base number of pulses so as to increase the amount of

energy applied to the thermal print head in printing adjacent bar rows. This results in overlapping bar rows as shown in FIG. 7B. As shown in FIG. 7A, a wide bar 42 of a serial bar code is formed by printing two or more bars 50 and 52 side by side. Prior to the present printer, a gap 40 can result in the wide bar 42. The present printer, when printing the wide bar 42' shown in FIG. 7B, prevents a gap from being formed therein by first determining the amount of energy to be applied to the thermal print head 10 for the bar 50' in accordance with whether the succeeding row 52' is also a bar row. Since the succeeding row 52' is also a bar, a compensation factor of 12 is added to the base number of pulses determined for the bar row 50'. By increasing the amount of energy applied to the thermal print head, the width of the bar 50' is increased over that shown for the bar 50 of FIG. 7A. When printing the bar 52', the microprocessor 12 determines whether the row succeeding the bar row 52' is also a bar row and if it is, the microprocessor 12 again increases the base number calculated for the bar row 52' by a factor of 12. If, however, the row succeeding the bar row 52' is a space row, the microprocessor 12 decreases the base number of pulses by a compensation factor of 9. This is because, the area surrounding the thermal print head elements energized in generating the preceding bar row 50' will still be relatively hot when the bar row 52' is printed and bar row 52' does not need to overlap a succeeding row so full power is not needed.

The microprocessor 12 operates in accordance with the flow chart depicted in FIG. 8 to determine the number of pulses to be applied to each thermal print head element identified to be on by the bit mapped image of the label stored in the RAM 32 for each row of the label as follows. The microprocessor at block 60 first determines whether the type of stock

being used is known and if not at block 62 the micro-processor 12 controls the LCD display 18 to display a message to the user prompting the user to enter the type of stock. When the user enters the stock type
5 into the printer via the keyboard 22, the microprocessor 12 proceeds to block 64 to select an energy table for the particular type of stock being used, such as Table IA for synthetic stock or Table IB for paper stock. At block 66 the microprocessor 12 determines
10 whether a serial bar code is to be printed and if not, the microprocessor 12 proceeds to block 68 to select the number of pulses to be applied to the thermal print head 10 for a parallel bar code from position 12 of Table I. At block 70, the microprocessor 12
15 saves the selected value for all of the rows of the parallel code and proceeds to block 72 to exit the routine. If, however, the microprocessor 12 determines at block 66 that a serial bar code is to be printed, the microprocessor 12 at block 71 initializes
20 the values X and Y to X=0 and Y=1.

At block 73 the microprocessor 12 updates the row history such that three bits in a working register in the RAM 32 accurately represent the status of the preceding row, current row and immediately
25 succeeding row as a bar row or a space row. The microprocessor 12 determines whether a row is a bar row or a space row by counting the number of print elements that are to be on in printing the row as identified in the bit mapped image of the label stored in the
30 RAM 32. The microprocessor 12 then compares the total number of elements to be on to a threshold value and if the number of elements to be on is less than the threshold value, the row is determined to be a space row. If the number of elements to be on is greater
35 than or equal to the threshold value, the row is determined to be a bar row. The threshold value may be set equal to the number of elements that are on for

printing each bar of a serial bar code, that number defining the height of the bars of the code. However, in the preferred embodiment, the threshold value is set to some value that is less than the number of print elements defining the height of a bar. This is because any time a significant number of print elements are energized whether a bar is printed or a human readable character alone, localized heating in the area of the thermal print head 10 occurs and it is this phenomena that the present printer compensates for. It is noted that the status of each row as a bar row or a space row may be determined at the time that the bit mapped image of the label is generated and then stored for use when printing so as to free the microprocessor 12 from performing this task when printing. At block 74, the microprocessor 12 determines from the updated row history whether the current row is a bar row or a space row.

If the current row is a bar row as determined by the microprocessor 12 at block 74, at block 76 the microprocessor 12 sets $X=X+1$. The microprocessor 12 then determines whether the row immediately succeeding the current row is a bar row or not at block 78. If the immediately succeeding row is a bar row, the microprocessor at block 80 sets the energy compensation factor to T_{10} and at block 82 sets $N=T(X)+T_{10}$. If, for example, the current row is the sixth bar row to be printed, the microprocessor 12 sets $X=6$ at block 76 so that $T(X)=T(6)=\text{Position 4}$ which represents a base amount of energy equal to 56 pulses for synthetic stock. Because the next succeeding row is a bar row, the microprocessor sets the energy compensation factor at block 80 to the tenth position in Table I which is equal to 12 so that in the example

$N=T(X)+T_{10}=T(6)+T_{10}=56+12=68$. At block 84, the microprocessor 12 saves this value of N for information row Y and at block 86 sets $Y=Y+1$. The microprocessor

then at block 88 determines whether Y is greater than Z, wherein Z represents the number of information rows to be printed for a label. If Y is not greater than Z, the microprocessor returns to block 73 to
5 update the row history so that the amount of energy to be applied to the thermal print head 10 for the next current row may be determined.

If the microprocessor 12 determines at block 74 that the current row is a bar row but determines
10 at block 78 that the immediately succeeding row is a space row at block 78, the microprocessor proceeds to block 90 to determine whether the row immediately preceding the current row was a bar row. If the immediately preceding row was a bar row, the microproces-
15 sor at block 100 sets the energy compensation factor to the value stored at the eleventh position in Table I, i.e., 9. The microprocessor 12 then sets $N=T(X)-T_{11}$ at block 102. If the current row again is the sixth row, $N=T(6)-T_{11}=56-9=47$. From block 102 the
20 microprocessor proceeds to block 84 to save this value of N for row Y.

If the microprocessor 12 at block 74 determines that the current row is a space row, the microprocessor 12 proceeds to block 106 to set N equal to
25 the value stored at position zero in Table I, this value being 60 for synthetic stock and 56 for paper stock. Thereafter, the microprocessor 12 proceeds to block 84.

Many modifications and variations of the
30 present invention are possible in light of the above teachings. Thus, it is to be understood that, within the scope of the appended claims, the invention may be practiced otherwise than as described hereinabove.



CLAIMS

1. A printer for printing information in rows on a web of record members, said information including a serial bar code having a bar or a space formed in each of said rows, comprising:

a thermal print head;

means for applying energy to said thermal print head to drive said thermal print head to print a serial bar code;

means for identifying each information row as a bar row or a space row based upon the information to be printed in said information row; and

means for controlling said energy applying means to apply an amount of energy to print a bar row that varies in accordance with the number of bar rows previously printed within the bar being printed.

2. A printer for printing information on a web of record members as recited in claim 1 wherein said amount of energy generally decreases with increasing numbers of previously printed bars.

3. A printer for printing information on a web of record members as recited in claim 2 wherein said amount of energy decreases in an approximately exponential manner as the numbers of previously printed bar rows increases.

4. A printer for printing information on a web of record members as recited in claim 1 including means for storing the bar row or space row status of a plurality of rows including a current row and at least one row succeeding said current row, said control means modifying said amount of energy in accordance with the status of said current and succeeding rows.

5. A printer for printing information on a web of record members as recited in claim 4 wherein said control means is responsive to a bar row status



of said current and succeeding rows to increase said amount of energy by a predetermined value.

6. A printer for printing information on a web of record members as recited in claim 1 including means for storing the bar row or space row status of a plurality of rows including a current row and at least one row preceding said current row, said control means modifying said amount of energy in accordance with the status of said current and preceding rows.

7. A printer for printing information on a web of record members as recited in claim 6 wherein said control means is responsive to a bar row status of said current and preceding rows to decrease said amount of energy by a predetermined value.

8. A printer for printing information on a web of record members as recited in claim 1 including means for storing the bar row or space row status of a plurality of rows including a current row, at least one row preceding said current row and at least one row succeeding said current row, said control means modifying said amount of energy in accordance with the status of said current, preceding and succeeding rows.

9. A printer for printing information on a web of record members as recited in claim 8 wherein said control means is responsive to a bar row status of said current and succeeding rows to increase said amount of energy by a predetermined value.

10. A printer for printing information on a web of record members as recited in claim 8 wherein said control means is responsive to a bar row status of said current and preceding rows and to a space row



status of said succeeding row to decrease said amount of energy by a predetermined value.

11. A printer for printing information on a web of record members as recited in claim 8 wherein said control means modifies said amount of energy in said series in accordance with the status of said current row, the row immediately preceding said current row and the row immediately succeeding said current row.

12. A printer for printing information on a web of record members as recited in claim 11 including a second storage means for storing representations of a plurality of compensation factors for modifying said amount of energy, said status of said current row, immediately preceding row and immediately succeeding row forming an address to said second storage means.

13. A printer for printing information on a web of record members as recited in claim 12 wherein said second storage means includes a plurality of tables storing values representing various amounts of energy, each table being associated with a different type of stock out of which said web of record members may be formed.

14. A printer for printing information on a web of record members as recited in claim 1 wherein said information includes at least one human readable character formed in a plurality of rows in which at least a portion of said bar code is formed, said control means controlling said energy applying means to apply a predetermined amount of energy to said thermal print head to print any portion of said character in a row in which a space of said bar code is formed.



15. A printer for printing information in rows on a web of record members, said information including a serial bar code formed of bars and spaces in said rows and at least one human readable character formed in a plurality of rows in which at least a portion of said bar code is formed, comprising:

a thermal print head;

means for applying energy to said thermal print head to drive said thermal print head to print a serial bar code;

means for identifying each information row as a bar row or as a space row based upon the information to be printed in said information row; and

means for controlling said energy applying means to vary the amount of energy applied to said thermal print head for a bar row and a space row, the amount of energy being applied to print a bar row varying in accordance with the number of bar rows previously printed within the bar being printed, and the amount of energy being applied to a space row being such as to minimize discontinuities in any portion of said human readable character formed in a spaced row.

16. A printer for printing information on a web of record members as recited in claim 15 wherein said control means controls said energy applying means to apply a predetermined amount of energy to said thermal print head for each space row having a portion of a human readable character therein.

17. A printer for printing information on a web of record members as recited in claim 15 wherein said thermal print head includes a plurality of printing elements each having an off state and an on state for printing in a row, said row identifying means including element identifying means for identifying the printing elements to be on for each of said rows; and means for comparing the number of elements identified to be on for a row to a threshold value, said row being identified as a space row if said number of on elements is less than said threshold value and said row being identified as a bar row if said number



of on elements is greater than or equal to said threshold value.

18. A printer for printing information on a web of record members as recited in claim 17 wherein each bar of said serial bar code is printed by a predetermined number of elements defining the height of said bars, said threshold value being less than said predetermined number of elements.

19. A printer for printing information on a web of record members as recited in claim 17 wherein each bar is printed by a predetermined number of elements defining the height of said bars, said threshold value being equal to said predetermined number of elements.

20. A printer for printing information on a web of record members as recited in claim 15 wherein said control means controls said energy applying means to apply an amount of energy to said thermal print head to print a bar row in accordance with the number of bar rows previously printed.

21. A printer for printing information on a web of record members as recited in claim 20 including means for storing the status of each of a current row, a row immediately preceding said current row and a row immediately succeeding said current row as a bar row or a space row, said control means modifying said amount of energy applied to said thermal print head for a current bar row in accordance with the status of said immediately preceding and succeeding rows.

22. A printer for printing information in rows on a web of record members, said information



including a serial bar code formed of a plurality of bars and spaces in said rows comprising:

a thermal print head;

means for applying energy to said thermal print head to drive said thermal print head to print;

means for storing for each current row to be printed, for at least one row immediately preceding said current row and for at least one row immediately succeeding said current row, the status of said rows as a bar row or a space row; and

means for controlling said energy applying means to apply an amount of energy to said thermal print head to print information in a current row, said amount of energy varying in accordance with the status of said current row, said preceding row and said succeeding row to minimize discontinuities in said printed information.

23. A printer for printing information on a web of record members as recited in claim 22 wherein said control means applies a predetermined amount of energy to said thermal print head for each current row the status of which is a space row to minimize discontinuities in information a portion of which is printed in a row in which a space of said bar code is formed.

24. A printer for printing information on a web of record members as recited in claim 22 wherein said control means includes:

means for determining for each current bar row the number of previous bar rows printed;

means for determining for each current bar row a base amount of energy to be applied to said thermal print head in accordance with said number of previous bar rows printed; and



means for modifying said base amount of energy in response to a bar row status of at least one of said immediately preceding and immediately succeeding rows.

25. A printer for printing information on a web of record members as recited in claim 22 wherein said modifying means increases said base amount of energy in response to a bar row status of said immediately succeeding row.

26. A printer for printing information on a web of record members as recited in claim 22 wherein said modifying means decreases said base amount of energy in response to a bar row status of said immediately preceding row and a space row status of said immediately succeeding row.

27. A printer for printing information in rows on a web of record members, said information including a serial bar code formed of a plurality of bars and spaces in said rows comprising:

a thermal print head having a plurality of print elements, each of said elements having an off state and an on state for printing in a row;

means for identifying the print elements to be on for printing in a row;

drive means for applying to each of said print elements identified to be on for a row a series of pulses to print in said row;

means for determining the number of bar rows previously printed within the bar being printed; and

means responsive to said determining means and coupled to said drive means for controlling said drive means to apply a number of pulses in said series for a bar row, said number of pulses decreasing approximately exponentially with increasing numbers of bar rows previously printed within the bar being printed.



28. A printer for printing information on a web of record members as recited in claim 27 wherein said control means controls said number of pulses in said series to be generally decreasing with increasing numbers of previously printed bars.

29. A printer for printing information on a web of record members as recited in claim 28 wherein said control means controls said number of pulses to decrease approximately exponentially.

30. A printer for printing information on a web of record members as recited in claim 27 including means for storing the status of a plurality of rows including a current row and at least one row succeeding said current row as a bar row or a space row, said control means modifying said number of pulses in said series in accordance with the status of said current and succeeding rows.

31. A printer for printing information on a web of record members as recited in claim 30 wherein said control means is responsive to a bar row status of said current and succeeding rows to increase said number of pulses by a predetermined amount.

32. A printer for printing information on a web of record members as recited in claim 27 including means for storing the bar row or space row status of a plurality of rows including a current row and at least one row preceding said current row, said control means modifying said number of pulses in said series in accordance with the status of said current and preceding rows.

33. A printer for printing information on a web of record members as recited in claim 32 wherein



said control means is responsive to a bar row status of said current and preceding rows to decrease said number of pulses by a predetermined amount.

34. A printer for printing information on a web of record members as recited in claim 27 including means for storing the bar row or space row status of a plurality of rows including a current row, at least one row preceding said current row and at least one row succeeding said current row, said control means modifying said number of pulses in said series in accordance with the status of said current, preceding and succeeding rows.

35. A printer for printing information on a web of record members as recited in claim 34 wherein said control means is responsive to a bar row status of said current and succeeding rows to increase said number of pulses by a predetermined amount.

36. A printer for printing information on a web of record members as recited in claim 34 wherein said control means is responsive to a bar row status of said current and preceding rows and to a space row status of said at least one succeeding row to decrease said number of pulses by a predetermined amount.

37. A printer for printing information on a web of record members as recited in claim 34 wherein said control means modifies said number of pulses in said series in accordance with the status of said current row, the row immediately preceding said current row and the row immediately succeeding said current row.

38. A printer for printing information on a web of record members as recited in claim 37 includ-



ing second storage means for storing representations of a plurality of compensation factors for modifying said number of pulses in said series, said status of said current row, immediately preceding row and immediately succeeding row forming an address to said second storage means.

39. A printer for printing information on a web of record members as recited in claim 38 wherein said second storage means includes a plurality of tables storing values representing various numbers of pulses, each table being associated with a different type of stock out of which said web of record members may be formed.

40. A bar code printer substantially as herein described with reference to the drawings.

41. A machine method of printing with a thermal print head information in rows on a web of record members, said information including a serial bar code having a bar or a space formed in each of said rows comprising applying energy to the thermal print head to drive the thermal print head to print, identifying each information row as a bar row or a space row, and controlling the amount of energy applied to said thermal print head to print a bar row that varies in accordance with the number of bar rows previously printed within the bar being printed.



42. A machine method of printing with a thermal print head information in rows on a web of record members, said information including a serial bar code formed of bars and spaces in said rows and at least one human readable character formed in a plurality of rows in which at least a portion of said bar code is formed, comprising applying energy to the thermal print head to drive said thermal print head to print, identifying each information row as a bar row or a space row based upon the information to be printed in said information row, and controlling the amount of energy applied to said thermal print head for a bar row and a space row, the amount of energy being applied to print a bar row varying in accordance with the number of bar rows previously printed within the bar being printed, and the amount of energy being applied to a space row being such as to minimise discontinuities in any portion of said human readable character formed in a space row.

43. A machine method of printing with a thermal print head information in rows on a web of record members, said information including a serial bar code formed of a plurality of bars and spaces in said rows, comprising applying energy to the thermal print head to drive said thermal print head to print, storing for each current row to be printed the status of at least one row immediately preceding said current row and the status of at least one row immediately succeeding said current row, controlling the amount of energy applied to said thermal print head to print information in a current row, said amount of energy varying in accordance with the status of said current row, said preceding row and said succeeding row to minimise discontinuities in said printed information.



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44. A machine method of printing with a thermal print head information in rows on a web of record members, said information including a serial bar code formed of a plurality of bars and spaces in said rows, the thermal print head having a plurality of print elements, each of said elements having an off state and an on state for printing in a row, the method comprising identifying the print elements to be on for printing in a row, applying a series of pulses to each of said print elements identified to be on for a row to cause each of said print elements to print, determining the number of bar rows previously printed within the bar being printed, and controlling the number of pulses applied in said series for a bar row, said number of pulses decreasing approximately exponentially with increasing numbers of bar rows previously printed within the bar being printed.

45. A machine method of printing bar codes substantially as herein described with reference to the drawings.
