

This Sheet Has Been Replaced



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DIGITAL DISPLAY DRIVEN BY ANALOG INTERFACE WITH REDUCED NOISE

Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to a digital display, such as a liquid crystal display (LCD) panel, for displaying information output from a data processing device (such as a computer). More specifically, the invention relates to an analog interface for driving the digital display.

Background of the Invention

Display units for displaying outputs from data processing devices have traditionally been analog in nature. The most typical example is a Cathode Ray Tube (CRT) display used in the common personal computer (PC). In such analog displays, analog interfaces in the PC's video driving unit provide three analog signals (red, green and blue) to the analog display. Each analog signal can assume, in this example, 1 out of 64 possible analog levels. Thus, the analog display is capable of displaying 262,144 different colours (64 x 64 x 64).

As shown in Fig. 1, the conventional analog interface includes a video memory 1 storing a digital label for uniquely indicating each of 256 possible colours which can simultaneously be used for display. The digital label contains 8-bits so that it can uniquely designate 256 different colours. The 8-bit digital label is output from video memory 1 onto line 4 to colour palette chip 2. For each of the 256 digital labels, colour palette chip 2 stores a set of three digital values, one for each of the primary display colours red (R), green (G) and blue (B) that make up the corresponding colour. Each of the three digital values is a 6-bit digital word thus allowing for 64 different levels. The three 6-bit words are output from the colour palette chip 2 via a built-in digital-to-analog (D/A) converter and sent as three 64-level analog signals 5, 6 and 7 to analog display 3 (such as a CRT).

In operation, the PC is running an application program which requires that a certain colour be displayed. The application program tells the PC's video display device driver (in the ROM BIOS) to display that certain colour. Video memory 1 then outputs the 8-bit digital word



on line 4 indicating that colour. Colour palette chip 2 receives the 8-bit word and outputs three analog 64-level signals 5 (for R), 6 (for G) and 7 (for B) to the analog display 3.

There are only 256 colours stored in the palette chip, yet there is a total of 262,144 colours available. The user can custom-design the palette chip 2 to store different colours therein. Alternatively, the application program itself can write directly to the palette chip 2 to change its colours if the application program requires a certain set of colours to be used.

Digital displays have recently been growing in popularity, especially for portable uses such as in notebook computers. The most typical example of a digital display is an LCD panel. Digital displays typically require that the R, G and B driving signals represent a smaller number of total levels than in an analog display. For example, in a digital display each of the R, G and B driving signals represent one of only 16 different levels (as opposed to one of 64 in the analog display). A 4-bit digital word (allowing 16 levels) is thus used in a digital display, while a 6-bit digital word (allowing for 64 levels) is used in the digital portion of the interface circuitry for driving the analog display. The digital display of our example is thus capable of displaying only 4,096 colours ($16 \times 16 \times 16$) as opposed to the 262,144 colours ($64 \times 64 \times 64$) displayable by the analog display.

Despite these differences, it is highly advantageous to drive a digital display using existing standard analog driver interfaces, such as the one shown in Fig. 1. This eliminates the need to provide a dedicated digital driving interface, and efficient use can be made of pre-existing circuitry without hardware modification. However, to do so requires that the analog interface's 6-bit primary colour signals be reduced to 4-bit signals so as to be compatible with the digital display.

One common way of making this reduction is simply to ignore the 2 least significant bits during the analog-to-digital (A/D) conversion that occurs inside the digital display. This, however, can produce undesirable effects since the analog signal will contain some noise and the effect of this noise will be greatly amplified by ignoring these 2 bits. Although the noise is only equivalent to a transition in the least significant bit it may actually have an effect on the fourth highest bit. That is, if the analog interface drives the 6-bit digital word 010011,



the display should see this as 0100 (i.e. the least significant 2 bits are ignored). If noise equivalent to 000001 is present it will increase the value of the 6-bit digital word to 010100 and the digital display will see 0101 (instead of the desired 0100). Thus, a small amount of noise is greatly amplified and results in a different colour being displayed and the error is clearly visible to the user.

There is thus a need for an improvement to the analog interface driving a digital display so that less noise (in the guise of the wrong colour being displayed) is perceptible to the user.

Summary of the Invention

In accordance with the present invention, there is now provided an analog interface apparatus for driving a digital display unit, said apparatus comprising: a colour palette means for storing colour signals for driving said digital display unit; and a look up table means for storing colour signals for driving said digital display unit and for supplying said colour signals to said colour palette means, said look up table including means for interrupting write operations to said colour palette means by receiving as inputs colour signals of said write operations and providing as outputs colour signals having a resolution matching that of said digital display unit.

Preferably, for each primary colour, said look up table stores one output value for a plurality of adjacent input values when said input values are arranged in ascending order in said table, and said one output value is selected to be the input value of said plurality of adjacent input values which provides the least noise with respect to the other input values of said plurality of input values.

In a preferred embodiment, the apparatus further comprises a calibration means for setting said one output value in said look up table by displaying colours on said digital display unit corresponding to each of said plurality of adjacent input values so that a user can select one of said colours using an input means.

Preferably, said means for interrupting is implemented in software as an addition to the operating system as a Terminate and Stay Resident program.



Viewing the present invention from a second aspect, there is provided a computer program stored on a storage medium readable by a computer, said program comprising: means for recognizing a write operation to a colour palette unit of an analog display interface; means for intercepting said write operation, taking colour information contained in said write operation and substituting therefor other colour information having a resolution matching that of a digital display unit driven by said analog display interface.

Preferably, said program is an addition to the operating system of said computer as a Terminate and Stay Resident program, and the program further comprising calibration means for setting values of said other colour information using a feedback routine.

Viewing the present invention from a third aspect, there is now provided a method of selecting colour information for a colour palette unit of an analog display interface for driving a digital display unit, comprising steps of: detecting a write operation to said colour palette unit; intercepting said write operation, taking colour information contained in said write operation and substituting therefor other colour information having a resolution matching that of said digital display unit driven by said analog display interface; and writing said other colour information into said colour palette unit for use in driving said digital display unit.

Viewing the present invention from a fourth aspect, there is now provided a computer system having the analog interface apparatus mentioned above, said computer system also having a processor, bus and memory means.

The analog interface apparatus, computer program and method of the present invention allows an existing analog interface apparatus hardware assembly to be used to drive a digital display unit without suffering from noise problems (causing the wrong colour to be displayed) existing in the prior art.

Brief Description of the Drawings

The present invention will now be described by way of example thereof with reference to the following Figures (Fig. 1 having already been discussed above):



Fig. 1 shows a conventional analog interface driving an analog display;

Fig. 2 shows an embodiment of the present invention, to allow the analog interface to drive a digital display; and

Fig. 3 shows a partial example of the contents of the look up table in the embodiment of Fig. 2.

Detailed Description of the Preferred Embodiments

In Fig. 2 the video memory 1 and colour palette chip 2 are of the same construction as described in Fig. 1 and will not be described in detail herebelow.

A major difference between Fig. 1 and Fig. 2 is the possible values assumable by the R, G, B signals on lines 5, 6 and 7, respectively output from the colour palette chip's D/A converter. In Fig. 1 the signals can assume 64 analog levels, capable of representing 262,144 colours. In Fig. 2 the signals can assume only 16 analog levels, capable of representing only 4,096 colours. Thus, when an 8-bit digital word is supplied from video memory 1, colour palette chip 2 outputs three analog signals (R, G and B) on lines 5-7, each signal having one out of only 16 possible levels. These three 16-level signals are then directly and completely converted to 4-bit digital words compatible with the digital display 21, by using the digital display's internal A/D converter. The words "directly and completely" used above mean that no bits are ignored (as in the conventional technique described above) after A/D conversion.

The video memory 1, colour palette chip 2 and digital display 21 are used during normal operation of the data processing system wherein the analog interface is commanded to display certain colours on the display. The further discussion presented immediately below explains how the 16 possible levels on lines 5-7 are chosen (out of the 64 total available levels which could be output from palette chip 2 on each of lines 5-7).

Fig. 2 includes a look up table 22 (which can be written in available RAM or on the hard disk) which stores, for each primary colour (R, G, B) a 6-bit word representing a selected value (out of a group of 16 values) corresponding to a 6-bit word representing one of a group of 64 values. That is, for R, the band of 64 possible values is divided into sixteen sub-bands of 4 values each, and one value is chosen from



each sub-band. This chosen value is stored in look up table 22 in a location corresponding to each of the 4 members of the respective sub-band. Then, when a 6-bit value of R arrives on line 28 (this value can assume 64 different values) the stored corresponding 6-bit signal is output on line 25 to the colour palette chip 2. This signal appearing on line 28, while a 6-bit signal, can only assume 16 values, because only 16 values are used when the data is stored in the look up table 22, as explained above. The same is done for the other two primary colours G and B.

Fig. 3 shows an example of the contents of look up table 22 for one of the three primary colours (R), a similar data structure exists for the other two primary colours G and B. The input column 221 lists each of the 64 values which the R signal appearing on line 28 may assume (it is a 6-bit signal). In Fig. 3 the digital values (0-63) are shown for clarity, however, the 6-bit binary equivalents would physically be stored in memory. An output column 222 is provided opposite the input column 221. The output column 222 stores the values which will be output on look up table output line 25 when the corresponding input column value is input to look up table input line 28. For example, when a 6-bit value representing "20" is input on line 28 the corresponding 6-bit value representing "22" is output from the table 22 onto line 25.

Thus, whenever a user tries to add a colour to the colour palette chip, the user's colour selection (appearing on lines 28-30) is intercepted by the look up table 22 and converted to a different colour and output onto lines 25-27 to the colour palette chip for colour writing therein. Also, when an application program (such as a computer graphics software package or desktop publishing software package) tries to write a particular colour to the palette chip 2, the look up table 22 would similarly interrupt the write operation and substitute the stored colour for the application program's intended colour.

This ensures that only 16 different levels are used to form the three primary colour components of the 256 colours existing in the colour palette chip 2. Because only 16 levels are used, only 16 levels can be sent on lines 5-7 to the digital display 21. These 16 levels are then converted to four-bit digital signals by the digital display's A/D converter.



The choice of which one of the four input column values in each of the 16 bands to place in the output column is made using a calibration procedure using calibration unit 23 and keyboard 24 as follows with reference to Fig. 3. For the first band 223 (having four values 0-3) the lowest value "0" of the four values is chosen. For the 16th band 224 (the highest band containing the values 60-63) the highest value "63" of the four values is chosen. For each of the other 14 bands in between these two bands, the calibration unit causes colours corresponding to each of the four potential values to be displayed on the display 21 and the user selects, via keyboard 24, the one of the four colours which appears to have the least noise (i.e., the one that looks the best of the four, according to the user's perspective). The value corresponding to this selected colour is then written to the look up table 22. This process is repeated for each of the remaining bands for one primary colour. Then, the overall process is repeated for the other two primary colours. This fills up the look up table 22.

While the described interception of a colour palette write operation could be implemented with the addition of additional hardware, the preferred embodiment is a software approach involving a user-loadable addition to the operating system. In the DOS operating system, this can be done by writing a DOS Terminate and Stay Resident (TSR) program which intercepts write operations to the colour palette using the standard BIOS INT 10H interface. The selected values for storing in the look up table are configurable by the user through a calibration program operating as described above with respect to the function of calibration unit 23.

When an application program needs to display data, the device driver in the ROM BIOS (firmware) is used. The TSR program added to the computer's operating system software controls the data which is supplied to the device driver by performing a data substitution using the look up table 22. The TSR program can also be implemented as an addition to the BIOS itself.

Since some program applications bypass the BIOS and write directly to the palette chip, the TSR can be further programmed to use the system unit's timer interrupt to periodically (e.g. 13 times per second) check the values stored in palette chip 2 and replace any values which are not of the selected 16 values with its corresponding value as stored in the look up table 22. In the "Windows" (a Microsoft trademark) and "OS/2"

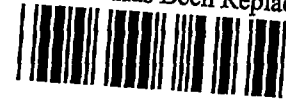


(an IBM trademark) operating systems, all accesses to the palette chip are through the BIOS so there is no need for the timer interrupt routine.

Because the invention can be implemented in software, there is no need to change the standard hardware of the PC's analog interface, thus making the invention compatible with existing hardware. Further, because the software can be implemented as a user-loadable addition to the operating system, it is completely independent of the application program. Therefore, there should be no compatibility problems because there is no need to modify the application code. As is well known, a computer's operating system is stored on a computer readable storage medium such as a hard drive or semiconductor memory (e.g., DRAM). Accordingly, the addition to the operating system according to the present invention would also be so-stored.

The invention can also be applied to situations when a digital display and an analog display are used at the same time. The colour information on the analog display is made to match that of the digital display using the look up table, thus making the two displays display the same colours. Note that in the conventional technique where 2-bits are ignored, this would not necessarily be the case, as is clear from the above discussion of the conventional technique.

The above description of a preferred embodiment of the present invention refers to a 4096 colour digital display and a standard PC (VGA) purely as an example. The invention is applicable to any video sub-system and any digital display where the digital display is unable to display the full range of colours provided by the video sub-system.

CLAIMS

1. An analog interface apparatus for driving a digital display unit, said apparatus comprising:

a colour palette means for storing colour signals for driving said digital display unit; and

a look up table means for storing colour signals for driving said digital display unit and for supplying said colour signals to said colour palette means, said look up table including means for interrupting write operations to said colour palette means by receiving as inputs colour signals of said write operations and providing as outputs colour signals having a resolution matching that of said digital display unit.

2. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein, for each primary colour, said look up table stores one output value for a plurality of adjacent input values when said input values are arranged in ascending order in said table.

3. The apparatus of claim 2 wherein said one output value is selected to be the input value of said plurality of adjacent input values which provides the least noise with respect to the other input values of said plurality of input values.

4. The apparatus of claim 3 further comprising a calibration means for setting said one output value in said look up table by displaying colours on said digital display unit corresponding to each of said plurality of adjacent input values so that a user can select one of said colours using an input means.

5. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein said means for interrupting is implemented in software as an addition to the operating system.

6. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein said means for interrupting is implemented in software as an additional to the system firmware.

7. The apparatus of claims 5 or 6 wherein said addition system is a Terminate and Stay Resident program.





8. A computer system having the analog interface apparatus as claimed in any preceding claim, said computer system further comprising a processor, a bus and a memory means.

9. A computer program stored on a storage medium readable by a computer, said program comprising:

means for recognizing a write operation to a colour palette unit of an analog display interface;

means for intercepting said write operation, taking colour information contained in said write operation and substituting therefor other colour information having a resolution matching that of a digital display unit driven by said analog display interface.

10. The computer program of claim 9 wherein said program is an addition to the operating system of said computer.

11. The computer program of claim 9 wherein said program is a Terminate and Stay Resident program.

12. The computer program of claim 9 further comprising calibration means for setting values of said other colour information using a feedback routine.

13. A method of selecting colour information for a colour palette unit of an analog display interface for driving a digital display unit, comprising steps of:

detecting a write operation to said colour palette unit:

intercepting said write operation, taking colour information contained in said write operation and substituting therefor other colour information having a resolution matching that of said digital display unit driven by said analog display interface; and

writing said other colour information into said colour palette unit for use in driving said digital display unit.

