

REFRESH CIRCUIT FOR DYNAMIC MEMORY OF A DATA
PROCESSOR EMPLOYING A DIRECT MEMORY ACCESS
CONTROLLER

Description

Technical Field of the Invention

This invention relates generally to the field of control circuits for refreshing dynamic or volatile memories in data processing systems and, more particularly, to a refresh circuit for the dynamic memory of a personal computer which includes a plural channel direct memory access (DMA) controller.

The invention utilises the existing DMA controller to perform the dynamic memory refresh operation, thus reducing the complexity and cost of the computer or data processing system.

Background Art of the Invention

It is well known that dynamic or volatile semiconductor memories employed as the main memory of an electronic data processing or computer system, for example, a microcomputer, must be periodically refreshed in order to prevent volatilisation of the contents of the memory. However, in the past, this refresh function has been provided by special refresh control logic which periodically generates refresh read cycles. Such control logic typically contains the following functions and/or circuits:

Arbitration of requests from the central processing unit (CPU) for memory cycles and refresh requests for memory cycles;

A refresh address register and counter; and

Circuits for multiplexing the refresh address onto the memory address bus.

The background art presents such special refresh control circuits, as exemplified by the following United State Patents: 3,999,170; 4,142,233; 4,158,883, 4,185,323 and 4,207,618.

Summary of the Invention

The present invention eliminates the complex special refresh control circuit used in the background art and provides means for performing the required refresh operations by using a spare channel of the normally existing DMA controller, together with a minimum amount of logic and special programming.

According to the invention, there is provided data processing system having a system bus for transferring address, data and control information among a central processing unit which produces a system clock signal, a programmable direct memory access controller which has a plurality of prioritised channels each of which contains the functions of a memory address register and counter, a central processing unit/-direct memory access cycle arbitration circuit, and a central processing unit/direct memory access address bus multiplexer; a plurality of input/output devices having access to the bus via the direct access memory controller; and a dynamic memory which requires periodic refreshing within predetermined minimum time intervals;

characterised in that the system includes:

memory refresh request signal generating means, coupled between the central processing unit and the highest priority channel of the direct

memory access controller, and responsive to the system clock signal for periodically applying memory refresh signals to said highest priority channel to initiate memory refresh cycles within said predetermined minimum time intervals.

For a better understanding of the present invention, together with other and further advantages and features thereof, reference is made to the following description taken in connection with the accompanying drawings, the scope of the invention being pointed out in the appended claims.

Brief Description of the Drawings

The single figure is a logic block diagram of the preferred embodiment of the invention.

Description of the Preferred Embodiment

In small computers and data processors, such as so-called personal computer, it is particularly important to minimise the complexity and cost of the hardware required to perform all desired functions. Thus, the drawing illustrates a preferred embodiment of the invention wherein a spare channel of an existing direct memory access (DMA) controller is used to provide the refresh function for the dynamic read/write memory in such a computer or data processor.

More particularly, a system bus 10, having address, data and control lines, interconnects the basic components of the computer of the data processing system to provide for the necessary transfer of address, data and control signals among these components. The components include

a central processing unit (CPU) 12, a dynamic random access memory (RAM) 14, a four-channel programmable DMA controller 16, a plurality of input/output (I/O) attachments and devices 18 and read-only storage (ROS) 20.

In this preferred embodiment, the CPU 12 is an Intel (RTM) micro-processor 8088 which is fully disclosed in "the 8086 Family User's, October 1979", published by Intel Corporation, Santa Clara, California. The DMA controller is an Intel 8237 high performance programmable DMA controller also fully disclosed in the above Intel Corporation publication. Each channel of the DMA controller 16 contains a starting address pointer and a transfer count register, and furthermore, the channels are prioritised with channel 0 having the highest priority. RAM 14 is any conventional dynamic memory, such as a TI 4116. ROS 20 is also conventional and may be a Mostek MK 3600°, for example.

Channel 0 is dedicated to the memory refresh cycles, while channels 1, 2 and 3 are dedicated to the I/O attachments and devices 18. When a channel of the DMA controller 16 receives a direct memory access request (DREQ), it outputs an acknowledgement (DACK) signal when the requested memory cycle is granted. According to this invention, only two components are added in order to provide a memory refresh cycle via channel 0 of the DMA controller 16. These components are a divider counter 22 and a D-type latch 24 (a 74LS74 dual D-type positive edge-triggered flip-flop) connected between the CPU 12 and channel 0 of the DMA controller.

Dynamic memory circuits require periodic refresh cycles at specific memory locations to maintain valid information. RAM 14 is a typical 16K x 1 dynamic memory chip, which, according to the manufacturer's specification, requires 128 refresh read cycles in a 2ms period, and the 128 cycles must access all of the first 128 memory locations at least once.

As already pointed out above, this refresh function is normally provided by a special refresh control logic circuit coupled to the system bus 10. However, in this invention the refresh function is performed by channel 0 of the existing DMA controller 16 whose other channels are used to perform high speed data transfers between the I/O attachments and devices 18 and dynamic RAM 14. Since the DMA controller 16 contains many of the same functions as the prior art refresh control circuits, i.e. memory address register and counter, CPU and DMA arbitration, and CPU/DMA address bus multiplexer, it has been discovered that it is possible to utilise one of the DMA channels as a memory refresh controller.

The highest priority DMA channel 0 is programmed in auto-load mode such that, after completing 128 cycles, it automatically starts over and performs the same 128 cycles. This function is continuously repeated, the address is set up to start at 0 and increment to 127, and the mode is set up to read from memory and to write to a non-existing I/O device. Thus, all the refresh functions are simulated by DMA channel 0, the actual request for a refresh cycle (DMA cycle) being generated by a counter or a channel of a timer counter.

As shown in Figure 1, the 2.38 MHz system clock P CLK is divided by the divider counter 22 to produce a 15.08µs period clock R CLK. The function of the divider counter 22 may be implemented by a frequency divider and a programmable interval timer such as an Intel 8253. This 15.08µs period clock R CLK is applied to the CLK input of the D-type latch 24 periodically to set the latch whose Q output, in turn, sets the DMA channel 0 request line DREQ0, thereby issuing a HOLD REQUEST to the CPU and initiating a DMA (refresh) cycle. The "D" latch is cleared or reset by the DMA signal DACK0, thereby acknowledging that the DMA refresh cycle is being performed. This operation is repeated on every positive edge of the 15.08µs period clock signal R CLK.

Since the programmable DMA controller 16 is programmed for a continuous dummy read cycle starting at address 0 and going to 127, resetting to 0, and then repeating, the memory refresh function is automatically performed by the DMA controller of the computer or data processing system, without the need for a special refresh control circuit as was required in the background art. A small ROS set-up program, which is entered upon power-up, initialises the DMA controller 16 and the timer in divider counter 22 prior to performing a memory cycle on the dynamic RAM 14. Furthermore, the DACK0 signal from the DMA controller 16 can be sent to any dynamic storage in the system as a signal that a valid memory refresh cycle is on the system bus 10.

CLAIMS

1. Data processing system have a system bus for transferring address, data and control information among a central processing unit which produces a system clock signal, a programmable direct memory access controller which has a plurality of prioritised channels each of which contains the functions of a memory address register and counter, a central processing unit/direct memory access cycle arbitration circuit, and a central processing unit/direct memory access address bus multiplexer; a plurality of input/output devices having access to the bus via the direct access memory controller; and a dynamic memory which requires periodic refreshing within predetermined minimum time intervals;

characterised in that the system includes;

memory refresh request signal generating means, coupled between the central processing unit and the highest priority channel of the direct memory access controller, and responsive to the system clock signal for periodically applying memory refresh request signals to said highest priority channel to initiate memory refresh cycles within said predetermined minimum time intervals.

2. Data processing system according to claim 1 characterised in that said refresh request signal generating means comprises: divider counter means, coupled to the central processing unit, and responsive to said system clock signal for generating a refresh clock signal having said predetermined time intervals; and latch means, coupled between said divider counter means and said highest priority channel, and responsive to the refresh clock signal for applying the refresh request signals to said highest priority channel; said latch means being periodically set by the refresh clock signal, and reset by an acknowledge signal from the direct memory access controller at the completion of each refresh cycle.



3. Data processing system according to claim 1 or 2 characterised in that the address bus and the data bus are connected to said dynamic random access memory to use in the performance of a memory operation at a selected location of said memory, each location being defined by an address code manifested by the signals on said address bus, and the highest priority channel of the direct memory access controller upon application thereto of a memory refresh request signal, acquires control of the address and data buses and causes a memory operation to be performed on a group of memory locations each identified by a first memory location therein, said divider counter means being incremented each time a refresh request signal is applied and storing a count which determines which first memory location and hence which group is to have said memory operation performed thereon, and the latch means provides memory refresh request signals at such a rate that all the groups of locations have a memory refresh operation performed thereon within said certain time period.

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