

PROCESS FOR CREATING VIAS FOR CIRCUIT ASSEMBLIES

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to processes for creating vias and for
5 fabricating multi-layer electrical circuit assemblies.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Electrical components, for example, resistors, transistors, and capacitors, are commonly mounted on circuit panel structures such as printed
10 circuit boards. Circuit panels ordinarily include a generally flat sheet of dielectric material with electrical conductors disposed on a major, flat surface of the sheet, or on both major surfaces. The conductors are commonly formed from metallic materials such as copper and serve to interconnect the electrical components mounted to the board. Where the conductors are
15 disposed on both major surfaces of the panel, the panel may have via conductors extending through holes (or "through vias") in the dielectric layer so as to interconnect the conductors on opposite surfaces. Multi-layer circuit panel assemblies have been made heretofore which incorporate multiple stacked circuit panels with additional layers of dielectric materials separating
20 the conductors on mutually facing surfaces of adjacent panels in the stack. These multi-layer assemblies ordinarily incorporate interconnections extending between the conductors on the various circuit panels in the stack as necessary to provide the required electrical interconnections.

In microelectronic circuit packages, circuits and units are prepared in
25 packaging levels of increasing scale. Generally, the smallest scale packaging levels are typically semiconductor chips housing multiple microcircuits and/or other components. Such chips are usually made from ceramics, silicon, and the like. Intermediate package levels (i.e., "chip carriers") comprising multi-layer substrates may have attached thereto a plurality of small-scale chips
30 housing many microelectronic circuits. Likewise, these intermediate package

levels themselves can be attached to larger scale circuit cards, motherboards, and the like. The intermediate package levels serve several purposes in the overall circuit assembly including structural support, transitional integration of the smaller scale microcircuits and circuits to larger scale boards, and the
5 dissipation of heat from the circuit assembly. Substrates used in conventional intermediate package levels have included a variety of materials, for example, ceramic, fiberglass reinforced polyepoxides, and polyimides.

The aforementioned substrates, while offering sufficient rigidity to provide structural support to the circuit assembly, typically have thermal
10 coefficients of expansion much different than that of the microelectronic chips being attached thereto. As a result, failure of the circuit assembly after repeated use is a risk due to failure of adhesive joints between the layers of the assembly.

Likewise, dielectric materials used on the substrates must meet several
15 requirements, including conformality, flame resistance, and compatible thermal expansion properties. Conventional dielectric materials include, for example, polyimides, polyepoxides, phenolics, and fluorocarbons. These polymeric dielectrics typically have thermal coefficients of expansion much higher than that of the adjacent layers.

20 There has been an increasing need for circuit panel structures, which provide high density, complex interconnections. Such a need can be addressed by multi-layer circuit panel structures; however, the fabrication of such multi-layer circuit assemblies has presented serious drawbacks. A common difficulty in manufacture is the alignment of holes and vias by drilling
25 of the dielectric layers as increasing layers of circuitry are applied. Laser drilling is the most common method for forming vias, which can add significant cost to the manufacture of such circuit assemblies.

Generally multi-layer panels are made by providing individual, dual sided circuit panels with appropriate conductors thereon. The panels are then
30 laminated one atop the other with one or more layers of uncured or partially

cured dielectric material, commonly referred to as "prepregs" disposed between each pair of adjacent panels. Such a stack ordinarily is cured under heat and pressure to form a unitary mass. After curing, holes typically are drilled through the stack at locations where electrical connections between different boards are desired. The resulting holes or "through vias" are then coated or filled with electrically conductive materials usually by plating the interiors of the holes to form a plated through via. It is difficult to drill holes with a high ratio of depth to diameter, thus the holes used in such assemblies must be relatively large and consume a great deal of space in the assembly.

10 In applications wherein circuit layers are built one on top of another, a dielectric material typically separates the circuitized layers. Polymeric dielectric materials that typically are used in circuit assembly manufacture are thermoplastic or thermoset polymers. Thermoset materials are typically cured first to form a conformal coating. Although the conformally coated substrate may contain through holes conforming to a perforate substrate, blind vias are typically formed by drilling, such as by a laser.

U.S. Patent No. 6,266,874 B1 discloses of method of making a microelectronic component by providing a conductive substrate or "core"; providing a resist at selected locations on the conductive core; and electrophoretically depositing an uncured dielectric material on the conductive core except at locations covered by the resist. The reference suggests that the electrophoretically deposited material can be a cationic acrylic- or cationic epoxy-based composition as those known in the art and commercially available. The electrophoretically deposited material then is cured to form a conformal dielectric layer, and the resist is removed so that the dielectric layer has openings extending to the conductive core at locations that had been covered by the resist. The holes thus formed and extending to the coated substrate or "core" are commonly referred to as "blind vias". In one embodiment, the structural conductive element is a metal sheet containing continuous through holes or "through vias" extending from one major surface

to the opposite major surface. When the dielectric material is applied electrophoretically, the dielectric material is deposited at a uniform thickness onto the conductive element surface and the hole walls. It has been found, however, that the electrophoretically deposited dielectric materials suggested
5 by this reference can be flammable, and thus do not meet typical flame retardancy requirements. In addition, the method cannot be utilized on subsequent circuitized layers.

U.S. Patents 5,224,265 and 5,232,548 disclose methods of fabricating multi-layer thin-film wiring structures for use in circuit assemblies. The
10 dielectric applied to the core substrate preferably is a fully cured and annealed thermoplastic polymer such as polytetrafluoroethylene, polysulfone, or polyimide-siloxane, preferably applied by lamination.

U.S. Patent 5,153,986 discloses a method of fabricating metal core layers for a multi-layer circuit board. Suitable dielectrics include thermally
15 processable vapor-depositable conformal polymeric coatings. The method uses perforate metal cores providing coated through holes, however the thermally processable polymers are cured before laser drilling to form blind vias.

European Publication No. EP 0 573 053 describes a photocurable and
20 thermosetting coating composition and a method for formation of a solder resist pattern using the composition. The water soluble composition comprises an epoxy resin comprising tertiary amine groups solubilized with a carboxylic acid, as well as photoreactive ethylenically unsaturated groups. The composition is applied to a printed circuit board and dried, thus reacting
25 the solubilizing carboxylic acid with part of the epoxy groups. The coating is then exposed to actinic radiation through a photomask. Exposed portions are rendered insoluble and the remaining coating is dissolved away by dilute acid solution. The remaining pattern is then thermally cured, thus reacting the amine with the remaining epoxy groups. This method, however, is limited to a
30 very specific group of amine-functional epoxy polymers.

U.S. Published Patent Application No. US 2002/0004982 A1 describes a method for forming blind vias without producing "haloing" in the underlying conductive layer. The method comprises applying an insulating layer onto one major surface of a substrate, providing holes in the insulating layer to the substrate, and then thermally curing the insulating layer. Holes are formed by either photo-etching or laser drilling. After the heat oxidized metal is reduced, the process is repeated on the other major surface. In the production of multi-layered double sided wiring boards, production efficiency is critical to be competitive in the marketplace. Sequential treatment of the major surfaces effectively doubles the number of steps in production, thereby reducing efficiency and yield.

Circuitization of intermediate package levels is conventionally performed by applying a positive- or negative-acting photoresist (hereinafter collectively referred to as "resist") to the metallized substrate, followed by exposure, development, etching, and stripping to yield a desired circuit pattern. Resist compositions typically are applied, for example, by laminating, spin coating, electrodeposition, roll coating, screen printing, curtain or immersion techniques. The resist layer thus applied can have a thickness of 5 to 50 microns.

In addition to the substrates previously mentioned, conventional substrates for intermediate package levels can further include solid metal sheets such as those disclosed in U.S. Patent No. 5,153,986. These solid structures must be perforated during fabrication of the circuit assembly to provide through vias for alignment purposes.

In view of the prior art processes, there remains a need in the art for multi-layer circuit panel structures which provide high density and complex interconnections, the fabrication of which overcomes the drawbacks of the prior art circuit assemblies.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In one embodiment, the present invention is directed to a process for exposing predetermined areas of a substrate. The process comprises the steps of: (a) applying a curable coating composition to a substrate, some or
5 all of which is electrically conductive, to form an uncured coating thereon; (b) applying a resist over the uncured coating; (c) imaging the resist in predetermined locations; (d) developing the resist to expose predetermined areas of the uncured coating; (e) removing the exposed areas of the uncured coating; and (f) heating the coated substrate of step (e) to a temperature and
10 for a time sufficient to cure the coating.

In another embodiment, the invention is directed toward a process for fabricating a multi-layer electrical circuit assembly comprising the steps of: (a) applying a curable coating composition to a substrate, some or all of which is electrically conductive, to form an uncured coating thereon; (b) applying a
15 resist over the uncured coating; (c) imaging the resist in predetermined locations; (d) developing the resist to expose predetermined areas of the uncured coating; (e) removing the exposed areas of the uncured coating to form a via; (f) heating the coated substrate of step (e) to a temperature and for a time sufficient to cure the coating; (g) stripping the remaining resist; (h)
20 applying a layer of metal to all surfaces; (i) applying a second resist to the layer of metal applied in step (h); (j) processing the second resist to form a predetermined pattern of exposed underlying metal; (k) etching the exposed metal; (l) stripping the remaining second resist; and (m) optionally, repeating steps (a) through (l) one or more times to form multiple layers of
25 interconnecting electrical circuit patterns.

The present invention is further directed to a coated substrate and circuit assembly prepared by the respective aforementioned processes.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Other than in the operating examples, or where otherwise indicated, all numbers expressing quantities of ingredients, reaction conditions and so forth used in the specification and claims are to be understood as being modified in
5 all instances by the term "about." Accordingly, unless indicated to the contrary, the numerical parameters set forth in the following specification and attached claims are approximations that may vary depending upon the desired properties sought to be obtained by the present invention. At the very least, and not as an attempt to limit the application of the doctrine of
10 equivalents to the scope of the claims, each numerical parameter should at least be construed in light of the number of reported significant digits and by applying ordinary rounding techniques.

Notwithstanding that the numerical ranges and parameters setting forth the broad scope of the invention are approximations, the numerical values set
15 forth in the specific examples are reported as precisely as possible. Any numerical values, however, inherently contain certain errors necessarily resulting from the standard deviation found in their respective testing measurements.

Also, it should be understood that any numerical range recited herein is
20 intended to include all sub-ranges subsumed therein. For example, a range of "1 to 10" is intended to include all sub-ranges between and including the recited minimum value of 1 and the recited maximum value of 10, that is, having a minimum value equal to or greater than 1 and a maximum value of equal to or less than 10.

25 As previously mentioned, in one embodiment, the present invention is directed to a process for exposing predetermined areas of a substrate. The process comprises the steps of: (a) applying a curable coating composition to a substrate, some or all of which is electrically conductive, to form an uncured coating thereon; (b) applying a resist over the uncured coating; (c) imaging
30 the resist in predetermined locations; (d) developing the resist to expose

predetermined areas of the uncured coating; (e) removing the exposed areas of the uncured coating; and (f) heating the coated substrate of step (e) to a temperature and for a time sufficient to cure the coating. Optionally, the process further comprises step (g) stripping the remaining resist.

5 The substrate or core can comprise a variety of substrates, provided that at least part of the substrate is electrically conductive. In one embodiment, the substrate can be an electrically conductive substrate, particularly a metal substrate, for example, untreated or galvanized steel, aluminum, copper, gold, nickel, magnesium, and alloys thereof, and
10 conductive carbon coated materials. In another embodiment, the substrate can comprise parts which are electrically conductive and parts which are not electrically conductive, for example, a printed circuit board. The at least partially electrically conductive substrate has two major surfaces and edges, and can have a thickness ranging from 25 to 100 microns, typically from 15 to
15 20 microns. In the case of a multi-layered printed circuit board, the thickness can be much higher. Any printed circuit board known in the art would be suitable for the present invention.

 It should be understood that for purposes of the processes of the present invention the formation of vias is intended to encompass the
20 formation of "through vias" (i.e., the formation of holes extending through the substrate from one major surface to the other) to provide through connections, as well as the formation of "blind vias" (i.e., the formation of holes extending through the applied coating only to, but not through, the underlying substrate, or alternatively adjacent previously applied metal layer) to provide electrical
25 connections to, for example, ground or power. Also, for purposes of the present invention, the formation of vias extending "through the substrate" is intended to encompass the formation of through vias only. Likewise, the formation of vias extending "to the substrate" is intended to encompass the formation of blind vias only.

In a particular embodiment of the present invention, the substrate is a metal substrate selected from perforate copper foil, an iron-nickel alloy or combinations thereof. In one embodiment of the present invention, the substrate comprises an iron-nickel alloy commercially available as INVAR
5 (trademark of Imphy S. A., 168 Rue de Rivoli, Paris, France) comprising approximately 64 weight percent iron and 36 weight percent nickel. This alloy has a low coefficient of thermal expansion comparable to that of the silicon materials typically used to prepare chips. This property is desirable in order to prevent failure of adhesive joints between successively larger or smaller scale
10 layers of a chip scale package due to thermal cycling during normal use. When an iron-nickel alloy is used as the metal substrate, a layer of metal, usually copper, typically is applied to all surfaces of the iron-nickel alloy substrate to ensure optimal conductivity. This layer of metal can be applied by conventional means, for example, by electroplating, metal vapor deposition
15 or electroless plating, and typically has a thickness of from 1 to 10 microns.

By "perforate metal core" is meant a mesh sheet having a plurality of holes or vias spaced at regular intervals. The diameter of the holes usually is about 200 microns, but may be larger or smaller as necessary, provided that the diameter is large enough to accommodate all the layers applied in the
20 process of the present invention without the holes becoming obstructed. The center-to-center spacing of the holes typically is about 500 microns, but, likewise, may be larger or smaller as necessary. Via density can range from 500 to 10,000 holes per square inch (77 to 1550 holes per square centimeter).

In another embodiment of the present invention, the substrate is a
25 printed circuit board. The printed circuit board can be any printed circuit board provided it comprises at least one electrically conductive region. The printed circuit board can comprise electrically conductive regions on one or both major surfaces. The printed circuit board optionally comprises through holes or vias.

To the substrate is applied a curable coating composition such as any of the curable coating compositions described below. The coating composition is applied such that a coating is formed over the substrate on all surfaces, including the surfaces within any vias in and/or through the substrate. Obstruction of the vias with the curable coating composition can occur, though not necessary to the present invention. In one embodiment, predetermined areas of the substrate can be masked to prevent the coating from being applied in the masked areas. These areas can be as small as, but typically are larger than vias (i.e., greater than 400 microns) and can be as large as necessary to provide uncoated areas of sufficient size to allow the desired connections in the finished article. By "curable" is meant the composition is uncured and capable of thermosetting within a given temperature range and time specific to the coating composition being used. As used herein, a material that is "thermoset" refers to a material that solidifies or "sets" irreversibly when heated. A thermoset material has formed a crosslinked network. As used herein, a polymeric material is "crosslinked" if it at least partially forms a polymeric network. One skilled in the art will understand that the presence and degree of crosslinking (crosslink density) can be determined by a variety of methods, such as dynamic mechanical thermal analysis (DMTA) using a TA Instruments DMA 2980 analyzer conducted under nitrogen. This method determines the glass transition temperature and crosslink density of free films of coatings or polymers. These physical properties of a cured material are related to the structure of the crosslinked network. Typically the curable coating compositions are stable to thermosetting at temperatures used for normal handling of the article, usually ambient temperature, but capable of thermosetting at elevated temperatures further described below. For the purposes of the present invention, by "uncured" is meant the coating composition maintains a degree of solubility in a liquid, for example, acidic solution, basic solution, or organic solvent. By

"basic solution" is meant a solution whose pH is greater than 7. By "acidic solution" is meant a solution whose pH is less than 7.

The curable coating composition can be applied by any of a variety of methods known in the coatings art. Examples of such methods include, but are not limited to electrodeposition, screen printing, curtain coating, roll coating, immersion coating techniques, spray coating, and spin coating. One skilled in the art would recognize that electrodeposition as an application method would be suitable only for substrates which are electrically conductive over substantially the entire surface.

10 The coating composition applied to the substrate can comprise any of a variety of curable coating compositions known to those skilled in the coatings art, provided that the composition is thermoset curable. In a particular embodiment, the curable coating composition comprises (a) one or more active hydrogen-containing resins, and (b) one or more curing reagents
15 reactive with the active hydrogens of (a). A variety of active hydrogen-containing resin materials are suitable for use in the present invention, provided that the resin has a degree of solubility in acidic solution, basic solution, or organic solvent. Non-limiting examples of such resins include: polyepoxide polymers, acrylic polymers, polyester polymers, urethane
20 polymers, silicon based polymers, polyether polymers, polyurea polymers, vinyl polymers, polyamide polymers, polyimide polymers, mixtures thereof and copolymers thereof. As used herein, by "silicon-based polymers" is meant a polymer comprising one or more -SiO- units in the backbone. Such silicon-based polymers can include hybrid polymers, such as those comprising
25 organic polymeric blocks with one or more -SiO- units in the backbone. The resin may further comprise functional groups to impart solubility in acidic or basic solution, for example ionic groups or groups capable of forming ionic groups. Non-limiting examples of such functional groups include amines, amine salts and carboxylic acids. An example of particularly suitable
30 electrodepositable compositions are halogenated ionic salt group-containing

resins as described in pending application serial number 10/184,195. It should be understood that the resins suitable for use in the coating compositions used in the processes of the present invention typically are not photocurable. As used herein, the term "polymer" is meant to refer to
5 oligomers and both homopolymers and copolymers.

The active hydrogen-containing resin (a) typically is used in conjunction with one or more curing agents (b). Suitable curing agents would be those comprising groups that are reactive with the active hydrogens of resin component (a). Such curing agents include, but are not limited to blocked
10 polyisocyanates, carbodiimides, aziridines, epoxies, aminoplasts, active esters, and mixtures thereof. As used herein, by "active esters" is meant a non-acidic polyester of a polycarboxylic acid having more than one β -hydroxyl ester group per molecule, such as those disclosed in U.S. Patent Nos. 4,352,842 and 4,332,711.

15 Mixtures of crosslinking agents (b) may also be used. In one embodiment, two crosslinking agents can be used which cure at different temperatures. One crosslinking agent may impart partial cure at ambient temperature prior to the steps leading to formation of the vias, providing a degree of integrity to the film, but leaving the coating composition soluble in
20 acidic, basic or organic solution. The second crosslinking agent may complete the cure in a separate step at substantially higher temperatures, thus rendering the coating composition intractable.

In one embodiment, the curing agent (b) comprises an aminoplast resin. Suitable aminoplasts are known to those of ordinary skill in the art.
25 Aminoplasts can be obtained from the condensation reaction of an aldehyde with an amine or amide. Nonlimiting examples of amines or amides include melamine, urea, or benzoguanamine. While formaldehyde is used most often, other aldehydes such as acetaldehyde, crotonaldehyde, and benzaldehyde can be used. The aminoplast contains imino and methylol
30 groups and in certain instances at least a portion of the methylol groups are

etherified with an alcohol to modify the cure response. Nonlimiting examples of aminoplasts include melamine-, urea-, or benzoguanamine-formaldehyde condensates, in certain instances monomeric and at least partially etherified with one or more alcohols containing from one to four carbon atoms.

- 5 Nonlimiting examples of suitable aminoplast resins are commercially available, for example, from Cytec Industries, Inc. under the trademark CYMEL® and from Solutia, Inc. under the trademark RESIMENE®.

In a particular embodiment, the curing agent (b) comprises a blocked polyisocyanate. By "blocked polyisocyanate" is meant that the isocyanate
10 groups have been reacted with a compound such that the resultant blocked isocyanate group is stable to active hydrogens at ambient temperature but reactive with active hydrogens in the resin at elevated temperatures, usually between 90°C and 200°C. The polyisocyanates can be fully blocked as described in U.S. Patent No. 3,984,299 column 1 lines 1 to 68, column 2 and
15 column 3 lines 1 to 15, or partially blocked and reacted with the polymer backbone as described in U.S. Patent No. 3,947,338 column 2 lines 65 to 68, column 3 and column 4 lines 1 to 30, which are incorporated by reference herein.

In one embodiment, the curable coating composition may further
20 comprise a rheology modifier which can assist in preventing the coating from flowing into and obstructing the vias, during the subsequent curing step described below. Any of a variety of the rheology modifiers well-known in the coatings art can be employed for this purpose. Examples of suitable rheology modifiers include solid inorganic fillers in finely divided form such as those
25 described in U.S. Patent No. 4,601,906, and microgels, for example cationic microgel such as those described in U.S. Patent No. 5,096,556 and EP 0 272 500 B1.

After application of the curable coating composition, the coated substrate optionally can be heated to a temperature and for a time sufficient to
30 remove any residual water and/or solvent remaining in the coating layer, but

insufficient to cure the coating. The temperature to which the coated substrate is heated (which is sufficient to remove volatile liquids from the coating, but insufficient to cure the coating) typically ranges between 100°C and 130°C. The duration of the heat exposure can depend on the application method and the nature of the volatile substances, and typically ranges between 1 and 10 minutes. The optional drying step may also be accomplished under ambient conditions. As would be recognized by those skilled in the art, these ambient conditions would require longer periods of time to effectively drive off volatile solvents from the coating layer.

10 A resinous photosensitive layer (i.e. "photoresist" or "resist") is applied over the uncured coating. The resinous photosensitive layer can be a positive or negative photoresist. The photoresist can be applied to part of the uncured coating, but would typically be applied to the entire surface. The photoresist layer can have a thickness ranging from 1 to 50 microns, typically from 5 to 25
15 microns, and can be applied by any method known to those skilled in the photolithographic processing art. Suitable positive-acting photosensitive resins include any of those known to practitioners skilled in the art. Examples include dinitro-benzyl functional polymers such as those disclosed in U.S. Patent No. 5,600,035, columns 3-15. Such resins have a high degree of
20 photosensitivity. In one embodiment, the resinous photosensitive layer is a composition comprising a dinitrobenzyl functional polymer, typically applied by roll coating.

Negative-acting photoresists include liquid or dry-film type compositions. Liquid compositions may be applied by rolling, spin coating,
25 screen printing, immersion or curtain techniques. Examples of dry-film photoresists include those disclosed in U.S. Patents 3,469,982, 4,378,264, and 4,343,885. Dry-film photoresists are typically laminated onto the surface such as by application of hot rollers. Dry films may be used provided the temperature and time used for lamination is insufficient to cure the film
30 composition.

After the photosensitive layer is applied, a photo-mask having a desired pattern may be placed over the photosensitive layer and the layered substrate exposed to a sufficient level of a suitable radiation source, typically an actinic radiation source (hereafter referred to as "imaging"). As used
5 herein, the term "sufficient level of radiation" refers to that level of radiation which polymerizes the monomers in the radiation-exposed areas in the case of negative acting resists, or which de-polymerizes the polymer or renders the polymer more soluble in the case of positive acting resists. This results in a solubility differential between the radiation-exposed and radiation-shielded
10 areas.

The photo-mask may be removed after exposure to the radiation source and the layered substrate developed using conventional developing solutions to remove more soluble portions of the resist, and expose selected areas of the underlying uncured coating. Typical developers comprise either
15 acidic solutions or basic solutions.

After processing the resist as described above, the exposed portion(s) of the uncured coating are then removed. The portion(s) thus removed can be as small as a via, but can be as large as is necessary to provide an exposed area of sufficient size and shape to allow the desired connections in
20 the finished article. In an embodiment of the present invention, the exposed portions of the uncured coating are removed to form vias in the uncured coating. The vias thus produced can range from 25 to 400 microns, usually 50 to 250 microns, and typically 50 to 200 microns in diameter. The solution used for removal of the uncured coating can be an acidic solution, a basic
25 solution or an organic solvent. The coated substrate can be immersed in the solution used for removal, or sprayed with the solution. In the case where the coated substrate is immersed in the solution used to remove the uncured coating, ultrasonic agitation may be used to ensure adequate mixing of the solution. Coating compositions that can be removed with an acid solution
30 include those polymers comprising basic groups, such as amines. A basic

solution can remove coatings comprising acidic groups, such as carboxylic acids.

In one embodiment, the photosensitive layer is developed by applying an acidic solution, and the exposed areas of the uncured coating are removed by the action of a basic solution. In another embodiment, the photosensitive layer is developed by applying a basic solution, and the exposed areas of the uncured coating are removed by the action of an acidic solution. In yet another embodiment, the exposed areas of the uncured coating are capable of being removed by the action of the developer used for the development of the photosensitive layer. In this case, the steps of developing the resist and removing the exposed areas of the uncured coating occur simultaneously. In another embodiment, the exposed areas of the uncured coating are capable of being removed by the action of an organic solvent. Non-limiting examples of suitable solvents include aliphatic, araliphatic and aromatic hydrocarbons and halocarbon, ethers, alcohols, ketones, and esters.

In one embodiment, the removal of the exposed areas of the uncured coating results in one or more openings extending through the coating to the underlying substrate. The area(s) removed may be located upon one or both major surfaces of the coated substrate, and/or may encompass the edge of the coated substrate. In another embodiment, the removal of the exposed areas of the uncured coating results in a pattern of vias through the coating. The vias may extend to the substrate, resulting in blind vias. Additionally, when the exposed area of the uncured coating is aligned with a hole through the substrate, a through via is obtained.

The coated substrate is heated to cure the coating composition. It should be understood that for purposes of this invention, by "cured" is meant the coating is rendered substantially insoluble in the aforementioned acidic, basic or organic solutions by a thermosetting reaction. The temperature and time required to cure the coating composition is dependant on the particular resin (a) and curing agent (b) combination described above. Cure

temperatures can range from 60°C to 220°C, typically 100°C to 200°C. It should be understood that when the coating is cured, the pattern of vias to or through the substrate remains intact. The cured coating is of substantially uniform thickness except in locations where vias are present. The cured
5 coating is often no more than 50 microns, usually no more than 25 microns, and typically no more than 20 microns in film thickness. In one particular embodiment, the cured coating comprises a dielectric material. By "dielectric material" is meant a substance that is a poor conductor of electricity, but an efficient supporter of electrostatic fields, i.e. an insulator.

10 The resist protects the underlying uncured coating during the removal of the exposed areas of the uncured coating. The remaining resist, which is impervious to the solutions used for the removal of the exposed areas of the uncured coating described above, may then be removed by a chemical stripping process. In a particular embodiment, the remaining resist is
15 removed before the curing of the underlying coating. In an alternate embodiment, the remaining resist is removed after the underlying coating has been cured. Those skilled in the art would recognize that if the if the exposed areas of the uncured coating are capable of being removed by the action of the same developer used for the development of the resist, the step of curing
20 the underlying coating must be performed before the step of stripping the remaining resist.

In a further embodiment of the present invention, the process can be continued after curing the curable coating and stripping the remaining resist, comprising the subsequent steps of: (h) applying a layer of metal to all
25 surfaces; (i) applying a second resist to the layer of metal applied in step (h); (j) processing the second resist to form a predetermined pattern of exposed underlying metal; (k) etching the exposed metal; and (l) stripping the remaining second resist to form an electrical circuit pattern.

Metallization is performed by applying a layer of metal to all surfaces,
30 allowing for the formation of metallized vias to and/or through the substrate.

Suitable metals include copper or any metal or alloy with sufficient conductive properties. The metal is typically applied by electroplating or any other suitable method known in the art to provide a uniform metal layer. The thickness of this metal layer can range from 1 to 50 microns, typically from 5 to 25 microns.

To enhance the adhesion of the metal layer to the cured coating, prior to the metallization step all surfaces can be treated with ion beam, electron beam, corona discharge or plasma bombardment followed by application of an adhesion promoter layer to all surfaces. The adhesion promoter layer can range from 50 to 5000 Angstroms thick and typically is a metal or metal oxide selected from chromium, titanium, nickel, cobalt, cesium, iron, aluminum, copper, gold, and zinc, and oxides thereof.

After metallization, a second resinous photosensitive layer (i.e. "second photoresist" or "second resist") which can be the same or different from the first resist can be applied to the metal layer. Optionally, prior to application of the photoresist, the metallized substrate can be cleaned and/or pretreated; e.g., treated with an acid etchant to remove oxidized metal. The resinous photosensitive layer can be a positive or negative photoresist as described above, and may be the same as or different from the resist used above. Any of the resists described above are suitable for use as the second resist. In additional embodiments, the resist can be electrodepositable. The photoresist layer can have a thickness ranging from 1 to 50 microns, typically from 5 to 25 microns, and can be applied by any method known to those skilled in the photolithographic processing art. Dry film resists may be used without restriction of laminating temperature and time. Additive or subtractive processing methods may be used to create the desired circuit patterns.

In one embodiment, a positive-acting resist comprises an electrodepositable composition comprising a dinitrobenzyl functional polyurethane and an epoxy-amine polymer such as that described in Examples 3-6 of U.S. Patent No. 5,600,035.

In another embodiment, a liquid negative-acting resist is applied by electrodeposition, preferable cationic electrodeposition. Electrodepositable photoresist compositions comprise an ionic, polymeric material which may be cationic or anionic, and may be selected from polyesters, polyurethanes, acrylics and polyepoxides. Examples of photoresists applied by anionic electrodeposition are shown in U.S. Patent 3,738,835. Photoresists applied by cationic electrodeposition are described in U.S. Patent 4,592,816.

The second resist is processed as described in detail above (i.e., imaged and developed), to give a pattern of uncovered underlying metal. The metal uncovered may then be etched using metal etchants which convert the metal to water-soluble metal complexes. The soluble complexes may be removed by water spraying.

The second resist protects the underlying metal layer during the etching step. The remaining second resist, which is impervious to the etchants, may then be removed by a chemical stripping process to provide a circuit pattern connected to the substrate by the metallized vias.

After preparation of the circuit pattern on the layered substrate, the process can be repeated from the beginning to form a multi-layered circuit assembly. One skilled in the art would recognize that electrodeposition as an application method would be unsuitable for use in subsequent layers due to the presence of insulating areas between the conductive traces. The curable coating composition may be the same as or different from that applied in previous layers as described above. The resists used in the various steps throughout the process may also be the same as or different from those used in previous steps.

In another embodiment, the present invention is directed to a process for fabricating a multi-layer electrical circuit assembly. The process comprises the steps of (a) applying a curable coating composition, such as the curable coating compositions previously described, to any one of the substrates described above, some or all of which is electrically conductive, to form an

uncured coating thereon; (b) applying a resist, for example any of the
aforementioned resist compositions, over the uncured coating; (c) imaging the
resist in predetermined locations using conditions described above; (d)
developing the resist using methods previously described to expose
5 predetermined areas of the uncured coating; (e) using any of the methods
described above, removing the exposed areas of the uncured coating to form
a via; (f) heating the coated substrate of step (e) to a temperature and for a
time sufficient to cure the coating, such as under the above mentioned
conditions; (g) stripping the remaining resist as described previously; (h)
10 applying a layer of metal to all surfaces by any of the previously described
methods for metallizing; (i) applying any of the aforementioned resist
compositions as a second resist to the layer of metal applied in step (h); (j)
processing the second resist by art-recognized methods as described above
to form a predetermined pattern of exposed underlying metal; (k) etching the
15 exposed metal under conditions described previously; (l) stripping the
remaining second resist by art-recognized methods as mentioned above; and
(m) optionally repeating steps (a) through (l) one or more times to form
multiple layers of interconnecting electrical circuit patterns.

Illustrating the invention are the following examples which are not to be
20 considered as limiting the invention to their details. Unless otherwise
indicated, all parts and percentages in the following examples, as well as
throughout the specification, are by weight.

EXAMPLES

25

PREPARATION OF RESINOUS BINDER:

EXAMPLE A

The following Example describes the preparation of a resinous binder
30 composition used in the electrodepositable paint of Example B. The resinous
binders were prepared as described below from the following ingredients.

<u>Ingredients</u>	<u>Parts by weight (grams)</u>
Crosslinker ¹	1882
Diethylene glycol monobutyl ether formal	108.78
EPON [®] 828 ²	755.30
Tetrabromobisphenol A	694.90
TETRONIC 150R1 ³	0.33
Diethanolamine	51.55
Aminopropyl diethanolamine	113.2
Distillate removed	(67.66)
Sulfamic acid	45.17
Deionized water	2714
Lactic acid ⁴	1.70
Resin intermediate ⁵	244.7
Gum rosin ⁵	27.49
Deionized water	2875

¹ Polyisocyanate curing agent prepared from the following ingredients:

<u>Ingredients</u>	<u>Parts by Weight (grams)</u>
Ethanol	92.0
Propylene glycol	456.0
Polyol ^a	739.5
Methylisobutyl ketone	476.5
Diethylene glycol monobutyl ether formal ^b	92.8
DESMODUR LS2096 ^c	1320.0
Methylisobutyl ketone	76.50

^a Bisphenol A/ethylene oxide adduct available from BASF Corporation as MACOL

98B.

^b Available from BASF Corporation as MAZON 1651.

^c Isocyanate available from Bayer Corporation.

The first five ingredients were charged to a suitably equipped reaction vessel under agitation. As the temperature reached about 25°C, the addition of DESMODUR LS2096 was begun. Temperature was increased to 105°C at which time the last addition of methylisobutyl ketone was made. Temperature was held at 100°C as the reaction was monitored for the disappearance of NCO by infrared spectroscopy at which time, the temperature was reduced to 80°C.

² Diglycidyl ether of bisphenol A available from Shell Oil and Chemical Company.

³ Surfactant available from BASF Corporation.

⁴ 88% aqueous solution.

⁵ Cationic resin prepared from the following ingredients:

<u>Ingredients</u>	<u>Parts by Weight</u> <u>(grams)</u>
MAZEEN 355 70 ^a	603.34
Acetic acid	5.99
Dibutyltindilaurate	0.66
Toluene diisocyanate	87.17
Sulfamic acid	38.79
Deionized water	1289.89

^a Aminediol available from BASF Corporation.

The first two ingredients were charged to a suitably equipped reaction vessel and agitated for 10 minutes at which time dibutyltindilaurate was added. The toluene diisocyanate was added slowly as the reaction was permitted to exotherm to a temperature of 100°C and held at that temperature until the disappearance of all NCO as monitored by infrared spectroscopy. The resin thus prepared was solubilized with the addition of sulfamic acid and deionized water under agitation. The final dispersion had a measured resin solids content of 26 percent by weight.

The resinous binder of Example A was prepared generally as follows. The crosslinker was added to a suitably equipped reaction vessel. The next four ingredients were added to the reaction vessel under mild agitation and the reaction mixture was heated to a temperature of 75°C at which time the diethanolamine was added and the reaction mixture was held at that

temperature for a period of 30 minutes. The aminopropyl diethanolamine was then added and the reaction mixture was permitted to exotherm to 132°C and held at that temperature for a period of 2 hours. Distillate was removed. For solubilization, the reaction product was added under mild agitation to an admixture of the sulfamic acid, deionized water, lactic acid solution and cationic resin intermediate. The gum rosin solution was then added to the solubilized resin, followed by deionized water in two sequential additions. Excess water and solvent were removed by stripping under vacuum at a temperature of 60°-65°C. The final reaction product had a measured resin solids content of approximately 40 percent by weight.

PREPARATION OF CURABLE COATING COMPOSITION:

EXAMPLE B

The following example describes the preparation of electrodepositable coating compositions in the form of an electrodeposition bath. The composition was prepared as described below from the following ingredients. All values listed represent parts by weight in grams.

Ingredients	Parts by weight (grams)
Resinous binder of Example A	704.9
Hexyl cellosolve	28.5
E6278 ¹	13.2
Deionized water	3053.4

¹ Catalyst paste, available from PPG Industries, Inc.

The ingredients were combined and mixed with mild agitation. The composition was ultrafiltered 50% and reconstituted with deionized water.

PREPARATION OF PATTERNED SUBSTRATE CONTAINING DIELECTRIC COATING WITH BLIND VIAS

EXAMPLE 1

5 Preparation of the Dielectric Coated Substrate

A single layer of 50 micron thick Invar metal perforate containing 200-micron diameter holes positioned 500-microns apart (center to center) in a square grid array, supplied by Buckbee-Mears (a division of BMC Industries, Inc.), was electro-plated with 9 microns of copper. The copper plated Invar
10 perforate was pre-cleaned and micro-etched to remove undesirable dirt, oils and oxides. The metal substrate was then electrophoretically coated with the composition of Example B from a 105°F (41°C) coating bath at 90 volts for 2 minutes. The coated article was then rinsed with deionized water and air dried such that all the holes of the perforate were void of water. The coated
15 substrate was then heated to a temperature of at 250°F (120°C) for 6 minutes to dry and remove all solvents from the coating.

Blind-Via Formation

The uncured coated substrate was laminated with RISTON® Special
20 FX (available from E.I. Du Pont de Nemours and Company) dry film photoresist. The coated substrate was then exposed with ultraviolet (UV) light through a phototool on each side and developed with a potassium carbonate photoresist developing solution. The substrate was further developed with ELECTROIMAGE® Developer EID-523 (available from PPG Industries, Inc.)
25 photoresist developing solution to remove the exposed areas of the uncured coating thus forming blind-vias in the coating layer. The dry film photoresist was removed with a potassium hydroxide stripping solution and the substrate heated in an oven at 350°F (177°C) for 30 minutes to facilitate crosslinking of the polymer coating, yielding a dry film thickness of 20 microns with 100
30 micron diameter blind-vias formed where needed.

Metallization of the Substrate

The coated perforate metal core was heated in an oven at 50°C for 30 minutes to remove trace amounts of moisture that may have been absorbed during handling. The substrate was then immediately introduced into a vacuum chamber where it was plasma treated with argon ions to activate the coating surface. After plasma treatment, 200 angstroms of nickel was sputter coated onto the surface followed by 3000 angstroms of sputter coated copper. The metal layer was increased by electro-plating 9 additional microns of copper.

Patterning of the Substrate

The metallized substrate was pre-cleaned and micro-etched to remove undesirable dirt, oils and oxides. The metal substrate was then electrophoretically coated with ELECTROIMAGE® Plus photoresist (available from PPG Industries, Inc.) from an 84°F (29°C) coating bath at 80 volts for 90 seconds. The coated article was then rinsed with deionized water and heated in an oven at 250°F (120°C) for 6 minutes to dry and remove all solvents from the photoresist coating to give a dry film thickness of 5 microns. The coated board was then exposed with ultraviolet (UV) light through a phototool on each side and developed with ELECTROIMAGE® Developer EID-523 photoresist developing solution. The exposed copper areas were etched with a cupric chloride acid etchant and the remaining photoresist stripped with ELECTROIMAGE® Stripper EID-568 photoresist stripping solution (available from PPG Industries, Inc.), giving the circuitized article.

PREPARATION OF PATTERNED SUBSTRATE CONTAINING DIELECTRIC
COATING WITH BLIND VIAS, COMPRISING CURING COATING BEFORE
STRIPPING RESIST

5 EXAMPLE 2

 The substrate was prepared and coated as in Example 1 above. After
removing the exposed areas of uncured coating, the coated substrate was
heated in an oven at 350°F (177°C) for 30 minutes to facilitate crosslinking of
the polymer coating. The dry film photoresist was then removed with a
10 potassium hydroxide stripping solution, giving a 20 micron thick dielectric
layer with 100 micron diameter blind-vias where needed. The cured coated
substrate was metallized and patterned as described above in Example 1 to
give a circuitized article.

15 It will be appreciated by those skilled in the art that changes could be
made to the embodiments described above without departing from the broad
inventive concept thereof. It is understood, therefore, that this invention is not
limited to the particular embodiments disclosed, but it is intended to cover
modifications which are within the spirit and scope of the invention, as defined
20 by the appended claims.

C L A I M S

1. A circuit board comprising:
 a conductive sheet sandwiched between an insulating top layer and an insulating bottom layer, the top and bottom layers and the conductive sheet defining an edge that includes an edge of the conductive sheet; and
 an insulating edge layer covering the edge of the conductive sheet,
wherein:
 the insulating edge layer includes at least one opening where part of the edge of the conductive sheet is exposed;
 the part of the edge is within a perimeter of the circuit board;
 the part of the edge is on a tab attached to the circuit board; and
 the tab extends into a recess in the circuit board.
2. The circuit board as set forth in claim 1, wherein the conductive sheet includes at least one via therethrough.
3. The circuit board as set forth in claim 1, wherein the insulating layers are formed from a common dielectric material deposited on the conductive sheet.
4. The circuit board as set forth in claim 3, wherein the dielectric material is conformally coated on the conductive sheet.
5. The circuit board as set forth in claim 1, wherein at least one of the top and bottom layers has a circuit pattern formed thereon.
6. The circuit board as set forth in claim 1, wherein the part of the edge is exposed in response to separating the circuit board layer from a panel.
7. The circuit board as set forth in claim 1, wherein the tab terminates within the recess.
8. A circuit board comprising:
 a conductive sheet sandwiched between an insulating top layer and an insulating bottom layer, the top and bottom layers and the conductive sheet defining an edge that includes an edge of the conductive sheet; and
 an insulating edge layer covering the edge of the conductive sheet,
wherein:
 the conductive sheet includes a tab that extends outward from

between the top layer and the bottom layer; and

at least a part of an edge of the tab is exposed.

9. The circuit board as set forth in claim 8, wherein the at least part of the edge is outside a perimeter of the circuit board.

10. The circuit board as set forth in claim 8, wherein:
the tab has a top surface and bottom surface; and
at least part of at least one of the top surface and the bottom surface of the tab is exposed.

11. The circuit board as set forth in claim 8, wherein a plurality of circuit boards is laminated together to form a multi-layer circuit board.

12. The circuit board as set forth in claim 11, wherein the tab of one circuit board of the multi-layer circuit board is offset from the tab of another circuit board layer of the multi-layer circuit board.

13. The circuit board as set forth in claim 12, further including an electronic component connected between the tab of the one circuit board layer and the tab of the other circuit board layer.

14. The circuit board as set forth in claim 11, wherein:
the conductive sheet of one circuit board layer defines a power plane; and
the conductive sheet of another circuit board layer defines a ground plane.

15. The circuit board as set forth in claim 8, wherein:
the conductive sheet also comprises a panel;
the tab joins the circuit board layer to the panel; and
the tab is responsive to a breaking force for breaking whereupon the circuit board layer and at least part of the tab separate from the panel.

16. A method of forming a circuit board comprising the steps of:
(a) providing a first conductive sheet;
(b) selectively removing one or more portions of the first conductive sheet to form a first panel having a first circuit board that is coupled to a disposable part of the first panel by at least one tab that extends from an edge of the first circuit board to an edge of the disposable part of the first panel;

(c) applying an insulating coating to the first circuit board so that at least each edge of the first circuit board is covered thereby; and

(d) separating the first circuit board from the disposable part in a manner whereupon at least part of the tab remains attached to the first circuit board and includes an exposed edge of the conductive sheet of the first circuit board.

17. The method as set forth in claim 16, wherein step (c) further includes applying the insulating coating to the first circuit board so that at least each edge of the at least one tab is covered thereby.

18. The method as set forth in claim 16, wherein the at least part of the tab terminates one of inside and outside a perimeter of the first circuit board.

19. The method as set forth in claim 16, further including the steps of:

(e) providing a second conductive sheet;

(f) selectively removing one or more portions of the second conductive sheet to form a second panel having a second circuit board that is coupled to a disposable part of the second panel by at least one tab that extends from an edge of the second circuit board to an edge of the disposable part of the second panel;

(g) applying an insulating coating to the second circuit board so that at least each edge of the second circuit board is covered thereby;

(h) laminating the first and second circuit boards together; and

(i) separating the second circuit board from the disposable part of the second panel in a manner whereupon at least part of the tab remains attached to the second circuit board and includes an exposed edge of the conductive sheet of the second circuit board.

20. The method as set forth in claim 19, wherein the at least part of each tab terminates inside a perimeter of the corresponding circuit board.

21. The method as set forth in claim 19, wherein the at least part of each tab terminates outside a perimeter of the corresponding circuit board.

22. The method as set forth in claim 21, wherein the at least one tab of the first circuit board is offset from the at least one tab of the second circuit board.

23. The method as set forth in claim 21, further including the step of electrically connecting an electrical component between the at least one tab of the first circuit board and the at least one tab of the second circuit board.

24. A method of forming a circuit board comprising:

(a) providing a first conductive sheet;

(b) selectively removing one or more portions of the first conductive

sheet thereby defining a first circuit board, a first disposable part and at least one tab that extends between an edge of the first circuit board and an edge of the first disposable part;

(c) coating each edge of the first circuit board where one of the tabs does not extend therefrom with an insulating material; and

(d) separating the first circuit board from the first disposable part via each tab that extends therebetween such that said separation exposes one of (1) an edge of the tab and (2) the portion of the edge of the first circuit board not including the coating of the insulating material.

25. The method as set forth in claim 24, wherein step (c) further includes conformal coating a top surface and a bottom surface of the first circuit board.

26. The method as set forth in claim 24, further including:

(e) providing a second conductive sheet;

(f) selectively removing one or more portions of the second conductive sheet thereby defining a second circuit board, a second disposable part and at least one tab that extends between an edge of the second circuit board and an edge of the second disposable part;

(g) coating each edge of the second circuit board where one of the tabs does not extend therefrom with the insulating material;

(h) laminating the first and second circuit boards together; and

(i) separating the second circuit board from the second disposable part via each tab that extends therebetween such that said separation exposes one of (1) an edge of the tab and (2) the portion of the edge of the second circuit board not including the coating of the insulating material.

27. The method as set forth in claim 26, wherein step (g) further includes conformal coating a top surface and a bottom surface of the first circuit board.

28. A method of forming a circuit board comprising:

(a) providing a first conductive sheet coupled to a first disposable part by at least one tab that extends between an edge of the first conductive sheet and an edge of the first disposable part;

(b) coating at least each exposed edge of the first conductive sheet with an insulating material; and

(c) separating the first conductive sheet from the first disposable part

via the tabs) that extend between the edges thereof such that said separation exposes at least one of (1) an edge of each tab and (2) the portion(s) of the edge of the first conductive sheet not including the coating of the insulating material.

29. The method as set forth in claim 28, further including:

- (d) providing a second conductive sheet coupled to a second disposable part by at least one tab that extends between an edge of the second conductive sheet and an edge of the second disposable part;
- (e) coating at least each exposed edge of the second conductive sheet with the insulating material;
- (f) joining the first and second conductive sheets together in spaced relation via the insulating material; and
- (g) separating the second conductive sheet from the second disposable part via the tab(s) that extend between the edges thereof such that said separation exposes at least one of (1) an edge of each tab and (2) the portion(s) of the edge of the second conductive sheet not including the coating of the insulating material.

30. The method as set forth in claim 29, wherein at least one of step (b) and step (e) further includes conformal coating exposed surfaces of the first and second circuit boards, respectively.

31. A circuit board comprising:

- a freestanding conductive sheet having a pair of opposed surfaces and a surrounding edge defined by the termination of the opposed surfaces;
- a first insulating layer disposed on one surface of the conductive sheet;
- a second insulating layer disposed on the other surface of the conductive sheet; and
- a first insulating edge layer covering substantially all of the edge of the conductive sheet, said first insulating edge layer having at least one opening therein where a portion of the edge of the conductive sheet is exposed.

32. The circuit board of claim 31, further including:

- another conductive sheet having a pair of opposed surfaces and a surrounding edge defined by the termination of the opposed surfaces, the other conductive sheet joined in spaced relation with the freestanding conductive sheet via the second insulating layer;
- a third insulating layer disposed on a surface of the other conductive

sheet opposite the second insulating layer; and

a second insulating edge layer covering substantially all of the edge of the other conductive sheet, said second insulating edge layer having at least one opening therein where a portion of the edge of the other conductive sheet is exposed.

33. The circuit board of claim 32, wherein an insulating material forms each insulating layer and each insulating edge layer.

34. The circuit board of claim 32, wherein each conductive sheet is conformally coated with the insulating material to form the insulating layers and the insulating edge layer.