

Subsea Electronic Module

This invention relates to a subsea electronic module for an underwater fluid extraction well, and a method of enabling Ethernet communication therefor.

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The control of an underwater fluid extraction well, such as a hydrocarbon extraction well, is typically managed by a subsea electronic module (SEM) housed in a subsea control module (SCM), itself mounted on a subsea “Xmas tree” located on the sea bed above the fluid extraction well. Existing SEMs contain a number of printed wiring boards or cards which perform dedicated functions, such as the operation of hydraulic directional control valves (DCVs). Communication to and from the SEM is enabled via a modem if there are copper links, or an equivalent optical modem if optical links are employed. Modern SEMs utilise Ethernet communication between the electronic cards, which requires Ethernet switches to be mounted on the circuit boards. Typically, the electronic cards are arranged in sets as a ‘bay’, with a number of bays within the SEM. Further Ethernet switches are required to enable communication between the bays. Consequently, a large number of interfaces is required between all the Ethernet components, which components typically include switch blades. These interfaces are conventionally effected by transformers. However, transformers are expensive and consume significant space on the SEM electronic cards, which limits the functions available in an SEM whose dimensions are strictly limited by well operator customers.

It is an aim of the present invention to remove the need for transformers as SEM Ethernet component interfaces.

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This aim is achieved by replacing the Ethernet component interface transformers with capacitive couplings, e.g. capacitances such as capacitors. Although the use of capacitors instead of transformers is a known technique, it is rarely employed, as there are severe restrictions on transmission distances compared to the transformer case. Thus capacitive coupling is not generally a viable option in Ethernet systems, and so transformers are standard, including for SEMs.

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However, in accordance with the present invention, capacitive coupling is made viable through re-organisation of the cards within an SEM to ensure that transmission distances are small. This brings about major benefits in terms of cost and weight reduction, as well as allowing the functional repertoire of the SEM to be increased.

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The present invention therefore provides various advantages, including:

- a) Additional space is provided on the electronic cards for well control and monitoring functions which are the primary purposes of the SEM;
- 10 b) The cost of components is reduced in the Ethernet communication system;
- c) Power consumption is reduced compared to prior art magnetic coupling, particularly if FX PHY(s) are employed as line drivers, as these devices have low quiescent power consumption (when compared to a PHY suitable for driving a magnetically coupled interface) but have adequate capacity to drive a capacitively
- 15 coupled LAN;
- d) Reduced dissipation results in lower component temperature, which in turn leads to enhanced component longevity and reliability;
- e) Due to the reduced power consumption, it is possible to employ system umbilicals having smaller cross-section conductors, lowering costs;
- 20 f) The weight of the SEM is reduced, consequently reducing handling costs;
- g) Enhanced EMC (electromagnetic compatibility) performance (Reduced LAN emissions & susceptibility); and
- h) Enhanced speed performance (Controlled track routing).

25 In accordance with a first aspect of the present invention there is provided an electronic module for use as a subsea electronic module for an underwater fluid extraction well, wherein a local area network enables communication within the module, the local area network including a plurality of interfaces with components of the network, and wherein the interfaces comprise capacitive coupling interfaces.

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In accordance with a second aspect of the present invention there is provided an electronic module for use as a subsea electronic module for an underwater fluid extraction well, comprising a plurality of substantially planar electronics cards, wherein the cards are arranged in a stack such that the major faces of each card are substantially parallel to, and coaxial with, major faces of the other cards in the stack, and wherein the module further comprises a substantially planar switch card orientated relative to the stack such that its major faces are substantially parallel to the axis of the stack and orthogonal to the major faces of the cards within the stack and positioned such that the switch card is substantially equidistant from each card within the stack.

In accordance with a third aspect of the present invention there is provided a method of enabling Ethernet communication between Ethernet components within a subsea electronic module for an underwater fluid extraction well, comprising the step of providing Ethernet interfacing between said components, said interfacing comprising a capacitance.

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

Figure 1 schematically shows a subsea electronic module functionality in accordance with the present invention;

Figure 2a schematically shows a physical arrangement of cards within an SEM in accordance with the present invention; and

Figure 2b schematically shows a cross-sectional view of the SEM of Fig. 2a.

Fig. 1 shows an example of a configuration of an Ethernet communication system within a multi-card, multi-bay SEM, in accordance with the present invention. In Fig. 1, interfaces for both an optical external interface 1 and a copper external interface 2 to the well control platform are shown. In practice, only one interface would be used, as described below. The selection of optical or copper interfaces 1, 2 is made to enable the SEM to be compatible with the form of interface required for a particular installation. In

both cases, the interface connects to a first card ("CARD 1") within the SEM, which comprises an Ethernet switch 4 capacitively coupled to a single board computer (SBC) 5.

If an optical interface 1 is used, this is connected to a small form-factor pluggable transceiver (SFP) 3, which acts as a media converter extending the topside LAN down to the SEM internal LAN(s) via an optical point to point Ethernet link, and thus provides an optical to electrical interface to the Ethernet switch 4. Modem 11 shown in Fig. 1 would not be present.

10 If however a copper interface 2 is used, this is connected via a modem 11 to the SBC 5. Here the SBC 5 supports the modem 11 and implements a bridge and interpreter / translator function for the modem communications.

SBC 5 is connected to Ethernet switch 4, and so may handle communications to and from
15 either external interface 1 or 2. Ethernet switch 4 is a managed switch capable of implementing key level three protocol router functions including Spanning Tree Protocol (STP) to ensure that no LAN loops are created between the SEM internal LANs (A and B - see below) and traffic management including bandwidth assignment and prioritization.

20 The configuration of the SEM shown has a number of bays each with a stack of six electronic cards. In Fig. 1, only three cards (i.e. CARD 1, CARD 2 and CARD 6) are shown. In addition, only two bays of cards are shown for simplicity (i.e. Bay 1 and Bay 2), with extension of the system being provided by additional interfaces 7 and 8 for additional bays.

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The SEM shown supports two internal LANs A and B, providing redundancy. Traffic on LANs A and B are routed and managed via switch 4. The LANs A and B are segregated to assure single point failure tolerance.

30 An ESB card of each bay includes a pair of Ethernet switch blades (ESBs) 6, denoted ESB A and ESB B, controlling LAN A and B traffic respectively. Each ESB 6 is an um-

managed eight-port Ethernet switch, with six ports assigned for connection to bay-mounted cards (i.e. CARD 1 - CARD 6) and two ports assigned for bay to bay connectivity. In Fig. 1 only four ports are shown connected. The Ethernet switch blades (ESBs) 6 of each CARD 1 are arranged in a dual configuration to provide system redundancy. Each ESB card is located above and orthogonal to the respective stack of six cards of the bay, as shown in Fig. 2.

Each card (i.e. CARD 1 - CARD 6) includes an SBC 10 which feeds electrical drivers to operate devices in the SEM, such as directional control valves (DCVs) and/or other electrical devices and also interface with monitoring sensors on the well tree. For simplicity, these drivers, devices and interfaces are not shown in Fig. 1. Each SBC 10 interfaces to both A and B function ESBs 6, and Ethernet ports A and B are processed separately within the SBC.

Capacitive coupling between the ESBs 6 and the SBCs 10 and switch 4 is enabled by a multiplicity of capacitances 9 provided on the respective cards.

Figs. 2a and 2b schematically shows the physical layout of cards within an SEM housing 12. For clarity, only three cards (i.e. "CARD 1" to "CARD 3") are shown in each bay's card stack.

As shown in Fig. 2a and 2b, each electronics card is substantially planar, and in each of bays 1 and 2, CARD 1 to CARD 3 are arranged in a stack such that the major faces of each card are substantially parallel to, and coaxial with, major faces of the other cards in the stack. The ESB card holding the ESB switch blades 6 is orientated relative to the stack such that its major faces are substantially parallel to the axis of the stack and orthogonal to the major faces of the cards within the stack and positioned such that the ESB card is substantially equidistant from each card within the stack.

SEM housing 12 is formed as an elongate cylinder, with a substantially circular cross section. Each stack is arranged with its axis orthogonal to the axis of the SEM housing 12.

- 5 As can be seen more clearly in Fig. 2b, each ESB card occupies a segment cross-section space that exists above or below the card stack when installed in the SEM housing 12.

Since the ESB cards sit above or below the respective card stacks, the distances between the ESB cards and the cards of each stack are minimized, so that capacitive coupling can
10 be realised.

Positioning the ESB(s) above or below the card stack provides various benefits, including:

- Segregation of the capacitively-coupled LAN from the standard SEM backplane to
15 enhance EMC performance;
- Reduction of the radiated and conducted susceptibility within the SEM;
- Segregation of the SEM LAN(s) from high speed digital from AC power lines, topside communications lines, high current switching functions and sensitive analogue cables;
- Restraining and minimizing of the LAN distribution and controlled impedance of
20 printed tracks;
- Maximizing use of the volume within the SEM enclosure;
- Maximizing the SEM thermal management afforded to the ESB;
- Facilitation of the implementation of thermal provisions to effectively export heat away (via conduction) from the switches and associated power converters to the SEM chassis
25 via an ESB support ladder metalwork and cover-plate metalwork. Effective thermal provisions are critical if the mean time to failure (MTTF) of the ESB function is to be optimized.

The above-described embodiment is exemplary only, and various modifications within
30 the scope of the claims will be apparent to those skilled in the art.

For example, in an alternative configuration (not shown), the axis of the stacks may be parallel to the axis of the SEM housing 12.

CLAIMS

1. An electronic module for use as a subsea electronic module for an underwater fluid extraction well, wherein a local area network enables communication within the module, the local area network including a plurality of interfaces with components of the network, and wherein the interfaces comprise capacitive coupling interfaces.

2. A module according to claim 1, wherein the local area network comprises an Ethernet network.

3. A module according to claim 2, wherein the components comprise Ethernet switches.

4. A module according to either of claims 2 and 3, wherein the components are mounted on electronics cards within the module.

5. An module according to any preceding claim, comprising an electronics card with an Ethernet component and an Ethernet interface mounted thereon, wherein the Ethernet interface comprises a capacitance.

6. A module according to claim 5, wherein the card comprises a plurality of Ethernet interfaces, each interface comprising a capacitance.

7. A module according to either of claims 5 and 6, comprising a plurality of electronics cards, each card having a respective Ethernet component and an Ethernet interface mounted thereon, each Ethernet interface comprising a capacitance.

8. A module according to claim 7, wherein Ethernet communication between cards is via an Ethernet interface.

9. A module according to either of claims 7 and 8, comprising at least two bays, each bay containing at least one electronics card.

10. A module according to claim 9, wherein Ethernet communication between bays is
5 via an Ethernet interface.

11. A module according to any of claims 4 to 10, wherein at least one card comprises an Ethernet switch.

10 12. An electronic module for use as a subsea electronic module for an underwater fluid extraction well, comprising a plurality of substantially planar electronics cards, wherein the cards are arranged in a stack such that the major faces of each card are substantially parallel to, and coaxial with, major faces of the other cards in the stack, and wherein the module further comprises a substantially planar switch card orientated
15 relative to the stack such that its major faces are substantially parallel to the axis of the stack and orthogonal to the major faces of the cards within the stack and positioned such that the switch card is substantially equidistant from each card within the stack.

13. A module according to claim 12, formed as an elongate cylinder with a
20 substantially circular cross-section.

14. A module according to claim 13, wherein the axis of the stack is substantially parallel to the axis of the module.

25 15. A module according to claim 13, wherein the axis of the stack is substantially orthogonal to the axis of the module.

16. A module according to any of claims 12 to 15, comprising a plurality of card
stacks arranged along the length of the module, and a respective switch card for each
30 stack.

17. A module according to any of claims 12 to 16, wherein each card within a stack comprises an Ethernet component and an Ethernet interface for coupling with a different card.

5 18. A module according to any of claims 12 to 17, wherein the or each switch card comprises an Ethernet switch and an Ethernet interface for coupling with a different card.

19. A module according to either of claims 17 and 18, wherein the or each Ethernet interface comprises a capacitance.

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20. A method of enabling Ethernet communication between Ethernet components within a subsea electronic module for an underwater fluid extraction well, comprising the step of providing Ethernet interfacing between said components, said interfacing comprising a capacitance.

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21. A subsea electronic module substantially as herein described with reference to the accompanying drawings.

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