

WO 02/101401

PCT/GB02/02694

Fault Detection System and Method

Field of the Invention

The present invention generally relates to a method and system for fault detection and
5 characterisation in metallic transmission cable using time domain reflectometry.

Background to the Invention

Cables are relied upon to carry power and/or data between electrical and electronic
apparatus throughout the world. Uses vary from linking computers in a network to
10 devices within an aeroplane. Cables may be affected by their surrounding
environment, wear and tear and other factors that reduce their power or data signal
carrying capabilities. Whilst in some cases the drop in performance, accuracy or the
loss of a power or data supply may not have severe repercussions, many uses are now
termed as "mission critical", meaning that large sums of money, or in the most
15 extreme cases lives, may be lost due to interruption of power and/or data.

It is therefore desirable and in some cases essential to check cables regularly.

One type of check for cables and signal paths is an impedance check. When a single
20 pulse is launched into an electrical network, it may encounter various changes in cable
impedance on its journey. These discontinuities in impedance have the effect of
reflecting a certain amount of the signal back towards the source of the signal. By
repeatedly launching a pulse or pulses onto a network and sampling the voltage at
increasing points in time after initially launching the pulse, characteristics and
25 discontinuities can be determined. A variety of electronic instruments exist for
measuring electrical impedance between a pair of terminals. Impedance, expressed in
units of ohms, defines the relationship of the electrical current I through the terminals
to the voltage V across the terminals. In the simplest case, impedance may be purely
resistive such that the voltage and current are in phase. The relationship is governed
30 by Ohm's law such that $R=V/I$ where R is the resistance. Impedance may also be
complex when there is a significant amount of reactance between the terminals from
capacitive or inductive elements.

WO 02/101401

PCT/GB02/02694

One known technique for non-intrusively checking cables is Standing Wave Reflectometry (SWR). This is an impedance based technology in which the frequency of injected oscillating signals is varied in increments until a minimum, close to zero voltage is measured at a signal injection point. This is indicative of a minimum impedance at this point. The RMS voltage generated at the signal injection point in response to the applied test signal is monitored and analysed to determine the frequency to which the voltage is nearly zero volts. This indicates that the reflected signal from the discontinuity is approximately 180 degrees out of phase from the injected signal. This occurs when either an Open Circuit exists (at a distance of Quarter Wavelength of the injected signal down the cable) or a Short Circuit exists (at a distance approximately Half Wavelength down the cable).

Unfortunately, SWR is limited in performance by the fact that its diagnostics capabilities are restricted to only detecting Open and Short circuits on a "Single Channel". Furthermore, its distance measurement resolution is not very accurate and it has no Prognostic capability at all.

Pulse-based measurements of impedance may be performed by a time domain reflectometer (TDR) in a manner well known in the art. Time Domain Reflectometry (TDR) techniques have been available for at least the last 30 years and have been used in several application areas not least Test and Measurement both in relation to Copper based cables and the emerging Fibre Optic based cables, the latter techniques being known as Optical Time Domain Reflectometry (OTDR). The essence of TDR is to measure the time taken for a transmitted pulse and reflection to be sent down a cable and returned to its start point, the polarity characteristics of the reflection being further processed to determine a typical discontinuity such as an Open Circuit or Short Circuit. A TDR performs an impedance measurement by introducing an incident pulse of known magnitude into a transmission medium such as shielded and unshielded twisted pairs, coaxial cables, and the like, and measuring the resulting reflected signal. The pulse is introduced at a given pulse repetition rate, depending upon the designated range of the TDR. During the periods between pulses, acquisition circuitry samples the cable to acquire data representative of reflections from flaws, discontinuities, or breaks in the cable. The reflections in the cable are timed from the time of transmission of the energy pulse to determine the range from the transmitter to

WO 02/101401

PCT/GB02/02694

such flaws, discontinuities, or breaks. Reflections may represent changes in wire gauge, splices, moisture in the cable, and the like. The acquired data is normally processed and displayed as a waveform trace on a display device, such as a cathode-ray-tube, a liquid crystal display, or the like.

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A TDR notes any changes in the characteristic impedance of the cable under test. For a telecommunications copper facility or plant, the characteristic impedance is typically between 100 and 125 Ohms. Most unshielded cables fall between 100 and 105 Ohms. Shielded cable like T1 is typically about 125 Ohms. Any change in the
10 cable's impedance is displayed on the TDR display device as a positive waveform, negative waveform, or some combination of both deviating from a horizontal trace.

Because the incident pulse width can be made very narrow, typically less than ten nanoseconds, the TDR can measure impedance as a function of time. TDR's thus
15 have the ability to troubleshoot transmission lines by detecting discontinuities that can disrupt signals and are most often applied in measuring the impedance along transmission lines. Measuring impedance at selected points along the transmission line has the advantage of allowing faults or discontinuities along the transmission line to be detected and localized, a feature particularly desirable for field service
20 applications. If the propagation velocity of signals through the transmission line are known, the time delay between incident and reflected pulses may be used to determine the distance to the fault from the instrument along the transmission line.

In performing an impedance measurement with a TDR, the magnitude of the reflected
25 pulse as a fraction of the incident pulse may be used to calculate the characteristic impedance at any given point along the transmission line as referenced to the output impedance of the TDR.

To date, the main industries of Aerospace, Telecommunications, Scientific Research,
30 Manufacturing and Test and Measurement services have used a number of Handheld and/or Laboratory equipment to obtain the variety of test results necessary to diagnose or prognose faults.

WO 02/101401

PCT/GB02/02694

Whilst reasonably successful, no known individual piece of equipment provides techniques and means whereby any given number of varying cable types (Twisted Pair, Coaxial, Fibre, Single Core) with varying and unmatched impedances to the actual test equipment can be tested together for a variety of discontinuities, either as
5 an individual element of a group of cables or as a complete group of cables of a larger complete system known as a Harness.

In addition, no known equipment to-date addresses the real problem of an unknown or undefined Termination/Ground-return path as is the case with many Aerospace and
10 Automobile connections which use Single Core cables (in many cases no impedance known) which are further influenced by the metal structure surrounding them.

Lastly, no known equipment to date provides for the above whilst Power and Data are being applied to the cable under test.

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Any system, which provides all this with, enhanced Diagnostic and Prognostic capability, in Real-Time, will save many man-hours and improves the operational safety of Cable and Connecting system.

20 **Statement of Invention**

The present invention relates to a cable test system, comprising of Hardware and Software techniques that allow for varying types of cable to be tested at one end for impedance variations and mismatches, either as an individual entity or group, for a variety of faults and conditions, the latter being termed as respectively Diagnostics
25 and Prognostics. Further, this invention can perform this in Real-Time with Power and or Data also being applied to the cable under test.

The present invention allows the implementation of a Real-Time, non-intrusive, fully automated, variable Cable and impedance-based, multiplexed cable testing system
30 that uses Time Domain Reflectometry techniques. The system can process more than one cable type, with varying characteristics, at any one time during which it confirms and processes both the characteristics of the cable type under test and any discontinuities encountered during its operational life due to the impedance variations defined and processed. Furthermore, the system provides an extensive range of Real-

WO 02/101401

PCT/GB02/02694

Time Diagnostic and Prognostic data together with accurate location and interpretation of any said data and or discontinuity including, but not limited to, the additional mapping of impedance variations along the length of the cable.

- 5 A specifically designed General User Interface (GUI) allows the user to select and control tests. In particular, the user can select the number of Pin and Cable connections, the types to be tested and testing order.

- 10 Before a full test for discontinuities is commenced, the system transmits a pulse down each Pin/Cable connection, processing each returned reflection to firstly confirm the characteristics of the Pin/Cable against pre registered parameters and secondly to confirm and/or allocate a Termination/Ground path and test its condition. During this phase a Multiplexer automatically switches to each Pin/Cable connection in accordance with the GUI selection. Once this phase is completed the Multiplexer is
- 15 again switched through the chosen GUI sequence, this time using the allocated Termination/Ground return for a full discontinuity test. A single or continuous pulse can be further selected using the GUI and transmitted to each Pin/Connector combination in Real-Time. Each returned reflection obtained from the transmitted pulse and or pulses, is captured and stored. When the stored data is processed further
- 20 through a set of pre determined algorithms, the system extracts unique characteristics, such that it allows the system to determine both characteristics of the individual cable and any associated discontinuities, thus facilitating full interpretation of the any discontinuity. Furthermore, reflections are processed as a function of measured time such that the location of the cable characteristic and or discontinuity can be accurately
- 25 determined.

- A micro-controller is used to control all physical Hardware operational requirements of the cable testing system. A Software based GUI is used to send commands to the micro-controller and any associated Hardware logic including, but not limited to, the
- 30 Multiplexer itself. The GUI then provides facilities for the processing of the returned data and display of the results on a suitable display device.

The cable test system can be fully integrated into various systems or hardware formats. Relevant industry standards in which implementation could be achieved

include ISA, PCI, PCMCIA, ASIC, FPGA. Proprietary standards or systems can equally accept the system in various formats including Handheld, PC and or Embedded.

Instead of electrical pulses, light produced by, for example, an led or laser may be used to form a test system for use in an optical network.

In accordance with an aspect of the present invention, there is provided a time domain reflectometer comprising a transmitter for generating a test signal, a multiplexer connected to the transmitter and to a test port, the test port having a plurality of outputs, each being connectable to one of a plurality of transmission media to be tested, the multiplexer being controllable to cause routing of signals from the transmitter to a selected output of the test port,

characterised in that means is provided to determine, select or confirm the return ground path for the selected output port, and in that the reflectometer further comprises means for analysing reflected signals received back from the transmission media to be tested and the return ground path thereby enabling impedance changes along the length of the transmission media to be determined and the respective distance to the impedance changes for transmission media of known and unknown impedance.

In accordance with another aspect of the present invention, there is provided a method of performing time domain reflectometry, comprising:
generating a test signal at a transmitter,
supplying the test signal under the control of a multiplexer to a test port;
connecting each of a plurality of test port outputs to one of a plurality of transmission media to be tested;

characterised in that the method comprises:

determining, selecting or confirming the return ground path for the selected output port; and
analysing reflected signals received back from the transmission media to be tested and the return ground path thereby enabling impedance changes along the length of the transmission media to be determined and the respective distance to the impedance changes, for transmission media of known and unknown impedance.

Brief Description of the Drawings

Figure 1 is a block diagram of a time domain reflectometry system according to an embodiment of the present invention;

Figures 2 and 3 are screen shots of a test configuration for an aircraft retraction motor

system;

Figures 4, 5 and 6 are screen shots of test results from test configured in Figures 2 and 3; and,

Figure 7 is a schematic diagram of a channel from a multiplexer used in the system of Figure 1.

Detailed Description

Figure 1 is a block diagram of a time domain reflectometry system according to an embodiment of the present invention. A graphic user interface (GUI) 1 is provided on a terminal, user input device, computer or the like for interacting with the system. Inputs via the GUI 1 are passed to a micro-controller 2. The microcontroller is in communication with a fixed programmable gate array (FPGA) 3 for controlling operation of the time domain reflectometry system. The FPGA 3 is connected to a multiplexer 4 for sending and receiving signals to and from one or more of a number of transmission mediums under test. Under control of the multiplexer 4, a transmitter, such as a variable pulse generator (PG) 5 produces interrogating energy pulses that are launched into its respective connected transmission medium to be tested via a test port 6. The transmission medium may be shielded or unshielded twisted pairs, coaxial cables, single core cabling or other types of metallic transmission mediums. Return signal energy from events in the cable under test representing flaws, discontinuities, or breaks in the cable is coupled to a data buffer 7 which is in turn coupled to a sampling circuit, such as a sample and hold circuit 8. The sampled analogue signal is coupled to an analogue-to-digital converter (ADC) 9 that converts the sampled

WO 02/101401

PCT/GB02/02694

analogue signal to digital values representative of the return signal from the cable under test. The digitised values are stored in a memory, such as a number of registers 10, for processing by the micro-controller 2 in the digital domain. The digital data representing the return signal energy from the cable under test is processed to detect
 5 the presence of events in the cable and generate characterization data on the detected events. The digitised waveform data along with acquisition parameter data and the characterization data of the detected events are output to the GUI 1.

The GUI 1 allows cable data to be entered into the system and for tests to be selected
 10 and initiated. A cable management section allows the user to add, delete and edit a data associated with a cable. Data stored in the cable management section is used automatically during the selection and execution of a test for that particular cable type. Data stored for a cable type includes:

	Description	-	Twisted Pair, RG58, Single Core etc.
15	Part Number	-	Manufacturer's Part Number
	Impedance	-	Manufacturer's Specified Impedance (If any)
	Velocity Factor	-	Manufacturer's VF
	Actual VF	-	Calculated
	Loss	-	Manufacturer's dB Loss per/metre (If any)
20	Gauge	-	Gauge of Cable (If any)

The cable management section also allows cabling systems, also known as a Harness in the aeronautic industry to be recorded. A cabling system incorporates a number of potentially different cables with different pin assignments when coupled to the test
 25 port 6. Data recorded for a cabling system includes:

	Description	-	description/name of system
	MUX Channel	-	The Multiplexer Channel selected and allocated for the associated Pin / Circuit ready for testing.
	Pin Number	-	Pin / Circuit Number
30	Return Pin (Gnd)	-	The physically allocated Termination / ground path for the Pin Circuit named (as in the case for Twisted Pair with a known Ground) or the automatically allocated Termination / Ground path for the Pin / Circuit named as in the case of Single Core.

WO 02/101401

PCT/GB02/02694

Length (m) - Actual length of the Cable determined by the system when tested.

Cable Type - Type of pre registered Cable used on this Pin / Circuit.

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In operation, a user initiates a test via the GUI 1 causing a start command to be passed to the micro-controller 2. The micro-controller sends a command to the FPGA 3 whereby each channel in the multiplexer 4 is switched to and a pulse, typically of 30ns, is generated by the respective PG 5 and is injected into the connected
 10 cable/connector pin via a test port 6. Any reflected analogue pulse for that cable/connector pin is then received back via a predetermined channel and fed into the data buffer 7 then to the sample and hold circuit 8 then to the ADC converter 9 where it is converted and stored in the data register 10. The FPGA 3 then switches to this register thereby allowing the micro-controller 2 and the GUI 1 to extract the data for
 15 processing.

Preferably, the system determines the "start" impedance of a cable to be tested by using a predetermined algorithm. This process is repeated for every channel connected to the Multiplexer 4. The purpose of this is for the system to establish and
 20 confirm the impedance of cables under test both where impedance is known and where one is not known. The GUI 1 sends a command to the micro-controller 2 to start an initialising phase whereby the test port 6 is checked for discontinuities and authenticity. When this command is received, the micro-controller 2 sends an appropriate command to the FPGA 3 which initialises the Mutliplexer 4 by putting the
 25 start Channel and Pin numbers into the relevant registers. A small Pulse, typically 10ns, is then injected into the test port 6 as determined by the MUX Channel Registers. Because this initial Pulse is small it will be able to determine faults and discontinuities over the short distance of 1mm – 1m, thereby facilitating that the physical connection between the test unit and Cable/Harness under test is working.

30 This sequence is repeated for all channels of the test port 6. If any faults are found the user is given an appropriate message via the GUI 1 and the test is halted. Preferably, the test port 6 is in the form of an interface cable. The cable may have an embedded logic device that can be queried for authenticity of the cable and/or determination of parameter values for the cable before a test is finally initiated. The data recorded in

WO 02/101401

PCT/GB02/02694

the logic device may include: the Part Number of the Cable (to check that the proper User Interface Cable is being used); User Registration Number (to authenticate the user of the system); and individual cable parameters such as Gauge, Product Number, etc (to verify that the Harness/cable under test has not been changed or rewired from previous test results). Any faults or invalid data will be displayed to the user via the GUI with an appropriate message.

The GUI 1 then sends a command to the micro-controller 2 to start a Termination/Ground test. The purpose of this test is to confirm the Termination/Ground return path for each Pin/cable selected for test. In most cases a connector will have a designated Ground Pin. Cable types such as Twisted Pair and Coaxial will also have a return path. However, in the case of Single Core cables, no impedance or return path is known and one must be determined in order to carry out testing. As the impedance of the cable was identified and confirmed in the steps above, the multiplexer 4 chooses the first Pin/Cable, looks at its stored impedance and then scans the results of the remaining Pin / Cables until it finds the closest matched impedance. These combination results are then stored for use in the main test sequence providing the multiplexer with the combination such that a ground rail 11 can be switched to the designated combination before the test, thereby providing a stable Termination and Ground return path. Using this method, the system is able to verify any predefined Termination/Ground return paths for existence and performance prior to testing.

Once these steps are completed, the micro-controller 2 processes the test configuration set up by the user in the GUI 1. It uses this to send the appropriate commands to the FPGA 3, which controls the flow of signals and data between the micro-controller 2 and multiplexer 4. The first thing the FPGA 4 does is to select another pulse width and type, typically 30ns, which gives a longer range whilst still maintaining accurate resolution typically 1mm/1cm. The channel and pin numbers for the cable to be tested are put in the relevant registers, this having been determined by the user and GUI 1. The Termination/Ground return path pin is also selected and put into another appropriate register. The Multiplexer 4 reads this and switches the Termination/Ground rail to the pre-allocated Pin. The test is then carried out on the Cable selected. The user can select via the GUI 1 a single pulse to be transmitted,

WO 02/101401

PCT/GB02/02694

whereby one pulse is transmitted with one Reflection being processed for discontinuities, or a continuous pulse, whereby regular pulses are transmitted providing multiple reflections to be processed. Any faults and or discontinuities found are displayed via the GUI 1 in a suitable fashion.

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The system allows for multiple cable types of known and unknown impedance to be processed. To facilitate this, the system circuitry has to have a fixed Resistance path. It has been determined that approximately 100 Ohms is best suited to the system although other resistances could be used without substantially affecting operation of the system. It has been found that a range of 75-130 Ohms would work in this case. This resistance was found to give a dynamic range/loss coefficient when testing a range of cables with varying impedances between 25 Ohms – 400 Ohms. This means that reflection being received back is sufficient and constant in width and amplitude in order for the system to provide diagnostic and prognostic capabilities.

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The described system is able to identify and analyse small and large changes of impedance to within a pre programmed user resolution along the length of the cable under test. This leads to the ability for a wide range of faults being detected and analysed and monitored. Some of the diagnostic and prognostic capabilities of the system include:

20

Signal	Meaning
No return reflection	Cable correctly terminated, no faults
Positive full range reflection	Open Circuit
Negative full range reflection	Short Circuit
Positive/Negative combination full range at specific location	Splice and/or Junction
Positive Variable Range at specific area	Exposed Conductor
Positive Constant Range at specific area	Dielectric Damage
Positive Constant Range at variable area	Water Ingression
Positive/Negative zero crossing at variable range	Applied Pressure
Positive Variable Range at specific location	Corrosion/resistance

WO 02/101401

PCT/GB02/02694

Figure 2 is a screen shot of a test configuration for an aircraft retraction motor system. This screen shows that the Retraction Motor system for the Port landing Gear is being fully tested, when the test was initiated the system Locks out Pin Number (4) and does not test it. This is due to insufficient information being recorded to allow a proper test
5 of the Pin / Circuit.

Figures 3, 4, 5 and 6 are screen shots of test results from test configured in Figure 2. Figure 3 shows that a continuous pulse test has been applied. No faults have been found and Pin / Circuit number 4 was Locked out of the test. In addition Pin / Circuit
10 number 6 was selected by the user (during continuous Real-Time Testing) for a "Trace" selection being confirmed by the background highlight. This means that at any time during a test the user can look at a scaled down version of the Pulse Signal and trace of the fault. Figure 4 shows the output when no pulse is active in the Cable selected and Figure 5 shows the pulse and its reflections depicting that a fault has
15 been located. In this case the fault is an Open Circuit.

Figure 6 shows selected Pins/Circuits of the Environmental Bay within the Port Landing Gear being tested. Faults found are displayed under the status field together with the Line Loss and distance to the fault. The system also shows two locked out
20 Pin/Circuits (numbers 3 and 4) and shows pin 9 as the current Pin/Circuit under test.

Figure 7 is a schematic block diagram of a channel of the multiplexer described with reference to Figure 1. The complete multiplexer may have any number of channels, each channel having a corresponding architecture to that in described with reference
25 to Figure 7. In a preferred configuration, the multiplexer has six channels.

Each channel has a bi-directional, single pole, multi-throw relay configuration and allows a bi-directional flow of data and power down a single pre-selectable path. The multiplexer is controllable to switch a channel's path for selection of both the cable to
30 be tested and the associated ground path for the path under test.

Each channel includes a pulse generator 100 connected to a load impedance module 110 which in turn feeds an 8-way multiplexing module 120 that is connected to a test port 125. On the return signal path, the 8-way multiplexer 120 feeds a sampling unit

WO 02/101401

PCT/GB02/02694

130 that is connected to an analogue to digital converter (ADC) 135. The ADC is connected to a number of delay offset registers 140 that are described in more detail below. The components within the channel are controllable by the FPGA described with reference to Figure 1. Dashed lines represent control inputs whilst solid lines
 5 represent data flow.

In order to achieve a reasonable analogue/RF performance, the pulse generator and sampling unit have to have exact performance and position on the PCB board with respect to the number of channels. In one example, one pulse generator and sampling
 10 unit is used per channel. Alternatively, one pulse generator may be used for all channels.

In an example, the performance and characteristics of the multiplexer is selected as:

Property	Value	Unit	Tolerance	Comment
Input Impedance	100	Ohms	+/- 10%	
Output Impedance	100	Ohms	+/- 10%	
Forward Loss	1	dB		= or < than
Reverse Loss	1	dB		= or < than
Supply Voltage	12	Volts	+/- 10%	
Supply Current	250	mA		
Isolation	40	dB		> or = to
Switching Speed	5	Microsecond		< or = to
Bandwidth	3	GHz		

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Each channel of the multiplexer can be operated in the manner similar discussed above in Figure 1. Each channel is only responsible for cables/contacts the 8 pins of the multiplexer can be connected to. For example if a cable of 20 wires is connected
 20 to the test port – wire 1 to pin 1 etc, to test pin 7, channel 1 must be used and to test pin 17, channel 3. A ground node 150 is a connection common to all channels. Any channel can assign a pin to the ground node 150 via suitable routing in its multiplexer. The ground node is then used during a test as the return path. Selection of the most

WO 02/101401

PCT/GB02/02694

appropriate return path/termination pin has been discussed above with reference to Figure 1. Any of the 8 pins of a channel can be routed to the sampling unit, to the ground node or left as an open circuit. Typically during a test, the cable to be tested is routed to a sampling unit, the cable selected as the return path is routed to the ground node and all other cables are left as open circuits.

A value of 100 Ohms is used for the impedance of the multiplexer circuit together with the matching interconnect circuitry. Although other values may be used, it has been found that this value provides superior performance with values of impedance encountered in cabling. Typical cabling values range from 25 to 400 Ohms. Utilising the potential divider concept where voltage at a point is the source voltage V_s , the source Impedance is Z_s , and the Load impedance is Z_L , the equation for the amount of transmitted energy or voltage at the line is:

$$Z_L / (Z_L + Z_s)$$

Therefore, in the case when Z_L is equal to Z_s , 50% of the source voltage of the reflection will be divided in a similar manner according to $Z_s / (Z_L + Z_s)$ and in the case of Z_L equal to Z_s , 50% of the reflected pulse is "Received" at the input circuit.

These two ratios are then multiplied to obtain the overall efficiency (the dynamic range of the signal returned) of the multiplexer channel circuitry in terms of voltage transmission and reflection and the degree of variation experienced with various load impedances.

In the case of $Z_L = Z_s$ taking 50% (0.5) and multiplying by the received efficiency results in $0.5 \times 0.5 = 0.25$ or 25% efficiency for the ideal case of $Z_L = Z_s$.

In another example, taking an expected extreme of 25 Ohms, a transmit efficiency of $25 / (100+25) = 0.2$ (20%) and a receive efficiency of $100 / (100+25) = 0.8$ (80%) is obtained. Multiplying both transmit and receive efficiencies gives an overall transfer efficiency of $0.2 \times 0.8 = 0.16$ (16%).

Taking an extreme of 400 Ohms for the load impedance, a transmit efficiency of $400 / (400+100) = 0.8$ (80%) and a receive efficiency of $100 / (400+100) = 0.2$ (20%) is

WO 02/101401

PCT/GB02/02694

obtained. Once again, multiplying transmit and receive efficiencies gives a transfer efficiency of $0.8 \times 0.2 = 0.16$ (16%).

It can thus be seen that the selection of 100 Ohms impedance allows a wide range of
5 load impedances to be tested without dramatically affecting transfer efficiency.

The following sections describe algorithms and techniques used in the present invention:

10 Calculating "Start" or "Actual" Impedance

$$Z = (R * V_o) / (V_g - V_o)$$

Where:

- Z is the cable impedance
- 15 R is the series-driving resistor
- V_g is the height (in Volts) of the raw pulse generated before the resistor
- V_o is the height (in Volts) of the outgoing pulse as captured at source

By locating the time at which a reflected pulse reappears at the source, a profile can
20 be built of the discontinuities that the signal has encountered as it propagates along the cable.

To transform the measured impedance from the time domain into distance, the following equation is used:

25 $d = cvt$

Where:

- d distance (Programmable value, e.g. 1mm or 1foot 1Km etc)
- c Speed of light in a vacuum (2.00×10^8 ms⁻¹)
- 30 v Velocity factor of the conductor
- t Time taken for the reflected pulse to return to source

The velocity factor (VF) number of a cable is determined by the dielectric material that separates two conductors. In coaxial cables, it is the foam separating the centre

WO 02/101401

PCT/GB02/02694

- conductor and the outer sheath is the material determining the VF (The speed of light in a vacuum is 186,400 miles per second, this speed is represented by the number 1 all other signals are slower so a cable with a VF of .85 would transmit a signal at 85% the speed of light). In twisted pair cables, it is the plastic that separates the cables that
- 5 is the determining factor. Most cables come with a manufacturers VF, however, this factor is influenced by other factors such as an example aircraft structure so an error percentage needs to be addressed. Furthermore, Single core wire does not have a VF due to the fact that it does not meet the "material between two conductors" criteria.
- 10 To address these problems, to determine the VF for a cable several differing levels of return reflections are taken at differing sample lengths along the cable these are then averaged as a function of time thus allowing to check between the actual and stated VF. Additionally, a Ground return path is established (as described above with reference to Figure 1) and the same process is repeated. It is accepted practice that in
- 15 order to establish the VF accurately one must generate reflections from Open and Short circuits and not Correctly Terminated Cable. However, in the system according to the present invention the latter is not true because it has such a high resolution and overall dynamic range even small reflections generated by Correct Terminations can be used in the determination and verification of the VF.
- 20 A set of time delay offset registers is used to increase sampling and therefore resolution. During testing, a signal pulse is transmitted along the cable to be tested. The cable is monitored for signal reflections indicative of faults. Normal sampling is performed every 250ns giving a resolution of 3 or 4 cm. However, when a signal
- 25 reflection above a predetermined threshold is detected, the time taken from transmission to receipt of the reflection is recorded and a further pulse is transmitted. When the recorded time less a predetermined amount has expired, the delay offset register is triggered. The delay offset register samples for signals on the cable at a higher quantisation than previous sampling and therefore can identify the time of the
- 30 reflection (and therefore its location along the cable) with a higher degree of resolution. Depending on the system configuration, this step may also be repeated a number of times using further delay offset registers that each increase sampling rate and therefore resolution, each narrowing the range in the cable in which the fault is likely to have occurred.

WO 02/101401

PCT/GB02/02694

In an example, 3 delay offset registers are used: Coarse, Fine and Ultrafine. Using a 50 Ohm Coaxial Cable with a Velocity Factor of 75% the following results are obtained:

Delay offset type	Quantisation	Approx Resolution
Coarse	250ns	28 metres
Fine	0.977ns	11cm
Ultrafine	9.77ps	1.1mm

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Determining Type of Discontinuity

The exact amount of signal reflected back to the source is called the reflection coefficient and depends on the characteristic impedance of the conductor and the impedance at the discontinuity.

10

The reflection coefficient is defined as:

$$T = (Z_L - Z_0) / (Z_L + Z_0)$$

15 Where:

T = Reflection Coefficient

Z_L = Discontinuity Impedance

Z_0 = Characteristic Impedance

20 Some common relationships are:

$Z_L = Z_0$	$T=0$	Correctly Terminated
$Z_L = \infty$	$T = +1$	Open Circuit
$Z_L = 0$	$T=-1$	Short Circuit
$Z_L > Z_0$	$0 < T < +1$	Partially Open
$Z_L < Z_0$	$-1 < T < 0$	Partially Short

This is performed automatically by the system as a function of reflection width, amplitude, distance and time.

WO 02/101401

PCT/GB02/02694

Reference Trace

Prior to performing any analysis a reference trace is taken by scanning across the whole distance of the cable correctly terminated. By subtracting the reference trace
5 from subsequent scans, any DC offsets and or predictable noise can be eliminated prior to subsequent processing.

This is particularly useful in a Power environment where the cable is not correctly terminated. In this instance impedance mismatches occur throughout the length of the
10 cable due to the presence of devices such as motors, relays, switches, lamps etc, but are accepted as being part of the working environment. By scanning the cable in a known faultless state and subtracting this trace from subsequent traces, this allows further processing stages to concentrate on detecting only new faults.

Hysteresis

Having captured a reference trace, the cable is scanned using the previously mentioned course, fine and ultra fine delay registers.

A hysteresis algorithm is used to determine the approximate location of the reflected
20 pulses. A number of thresholds are set to determine which is an actual pulse worth investigating as opposed to Noise etc. The thresholds may be adjusted to take into account characteristics of the cable/device being tested. At this stage the Peak magnitude and Polarity of the Pulses is determined, and stored for use in later algorithms.

25

Centre of Mass

Whilst peak detection using hysteresis would produce acceptable results, losses in the cable have the effect of spreading the concentration of pulse energy away from the centre of the pulse, thus reducing the sharpness of the edges of the reflected pulse.

30

After determining the locations of the pulses using hysteresis the centre of mass (or 1st moment) of the area about the suspected pulse is calculated to determine a more precise location of an impedance mismatch and or impedance change. The addition of

WO 02/101401

PCT/GB02/02694

this algorithm gives us a more accurate position measurement as it takes into account the spread of the signal and focuses in on the location containing maximum energy.

$$\text{COM} = \sum_{i=0,N} Y_{(t+i)} i / \sum_{i=0,N} Y_{(t+i)}$$

Where:

Y = Trace value amplitude

t = Sample number about pulse leading edge

10 N = Samples to pulse trailing edge

Cross Correlation Function

To add further accuracy in determining the location of the pulse especially in a noisy
15 Environment, namely to establish an exact location, a cross-correlation algorithm is used. Cross Correlation provides us with a measure as to the degree of similarity between two signals. For two given sets of data, x and y the cross correlation is defined as:

$$20 \quad r_{xy} = (1/N) \sum_{i=0,N-1} x(i) y(i)$$

This equation gives us a single measure as to the similarity of the two signals. A positive sum indicates a positive degree of correlation. If the two signals are
25 completely uncorrelated, the results are close to zero.

In order to use this equation more effectively to determine the location of the pulse we need to introduce a phase shift to one of the signals, as the following equation depicts:

$$30 \quad r_{xy}(j) = (1/N) \sum_{i=0,N-1} x(i) y(i+j) \quad j=0,N-1$$

By introducing the phase shift we obtain a set of data points $r_{xy}(j)$ which we can scan to find the shift corresponding to the maximum level of correlation.

WO 02/101401

PCT/GB02/02694

Cross Correlation can be quite computationally inefficient so we can improve efficiency by electing to use an FFT algorithm:

$$5 \quad r_{xy}(j) = (1/N)F^{-1}\{X(-k)Y(k)\}$$

Where:

F^{-1} = Inverse FFT

$X(-k)$ = FFT(-k)

$$10 \quad Y(k) = \text{FFT}(k)$$

The FFT equation is functionally identical in result to the original equation but requires only $(N/2)\log_2 N$ operations per FFT. The complexity is further reduced by pre-calculating the reference function $X(-k)$, thus resulting in a computational
15 complexity of $N\log_2 N$ operations. This reduces the complexity of calculating the sequence by a factor of a thousand.

The apparatus of the invention has been described above for use in detecting various conditions in transmission media, such as open and short circuits, as well as junctions
20 and other conditions.

However, as a result of the various platforms that the system design can be applied to, the system lends itself to being integrated into a Circuit Breaker format whereby pre-
arcing conditions and pre-arcing location can be identified in a Conductor / Circuit
25 before a full blown arcing event occurs. Pulses are sent out continuously either at predefined timed intervals and/or event driven. When an arc starts to develop either by the conductor rubbing against a metal structure or by two conductors against each other, the system detects "Short Circuit" reflections as a function of time. With a pre-
arc event there will either be a succession of rapid short circuits or periodical short
30 circuits, which are continuously logged and processed by the system. If many short circuits occur in the same location the system identifies this as a pre-arc event.

The system also has the ability to monitor the reactivity of various Heat Sensitive Cable Sensors such as Linear Heat Detector, Firewire, Thermocoax either as an

WO 02/101401

PCT/GB02/02694

individual sensor or group of sensors. When the sensor reacts such that the impedance of that sensor changes, the system detects this, locates it and monitors it. In the case of a fire, the system is thus able to give direction and speed of fire and or temperature change in Real-Time. It also has the ability when used with a Thermocoax type sensor to detect and record such small changes of impedance within the sensor that a direct relationship can be established in table format of how many Ohms per rate of Degrees Celcius change. With this data the system can produce a 3 Dimensional Thermograph map on any suitable display device.

10 The system generates and uses variable pulses and as such processes the return reflections. In the case of multiple branches, any pulse that is generated will be transmitted and reflected back in all junctions therefore making it difficult in such installations to identify which side the fault is located. In this system, two functions provide key information in determining which side the fault has been located in.

15 Firstly, the length of each individual branch together with the timed generation and processing of variable pre-allocated pulses is possible. For example, a pulse width of 30ns can be used for all Right Hand branching and a pulse width say of 20ns for all Left Hand branching. Whilst all pulses will be generated and reflected down all sides, by predetermining which pulse widths are associated with which sides of the

20 installation and processing the reflections accordingly provides a means of determining which side.

The system of the invention provides the ability, using a static pre-defined impedance, to process varying cable types and varying cable impedances within the same unit, and to locate, interpret and identify various faults in these cables. The system enables

25 a "single core" wire with no known impedance to be identified and the impedance to be calculated. This "single core" wire can have no known return path, and the system can, from the calculated impedance, work out and assign the best-known return path. Automatic allocation of the correct circuit path for the wire can then be carried out

30 with to enable for faults.

The apparatus can be used with AC/DC power or data being transmitted in the cable.

WO 02/101401

PCT/GB02/02694

The apparatus can be used to provide a detailed Impedance map of an Individual Cable or Harness or Installation. Automatic testing of the impedance of Interconnect Circuits and Interconnections for damage can be carried out before cable testing starts, and all Ground / Return paths can also be tested for faults and performance
5 degradation.

The apparatus can be applied to various Hardware Platforms and various Software Operating Platforms. Authenticity and damage of actual Interface Cables can be tested.

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Claims

1. A time domain reflector comprising a transmitter for generating a test signal, a multiplexer connected to the transmitter and to a test port, the test port having a plurality of outputs, each being connectable to one of a plurality of transmission media to be tested, the multiplexer being controllable to cause routing of signals from the transmitter to a selected output of the test port,

characterised in that means is provided to determine, select or confirm the return ground path for the selected output port, and in that the reflectometer further comprises means for analysing reflected signals received back from the transmission media to be tested and the return ground path thereby enabling impedance changes along the length of the transmission media to be determined and the respective distance to the impedance changes, for transmission media of known and unknown impedance.

2. A time domain reflectometer as claimed in claim 1, wherein the circuitry has a fixed impedance for all media to be tested.

3. A time domain reflectometer as claimed in claim 2, wherein the fixed impedance is an output impedance of 75-130 Ohms.

4. A time domain reflectometer as claimed in claim 3, wherein the fixed output impedance is approximately 100 Ohms.

5. A time domain reflectometer as claimed in any preceding claim, wherein the means for analysing reflected signals enables the impedance to be determined of transmission media connected to each test port output.

6. A time domain reflectometer as claimed in claim 5, further comprising means for determining, for a transmission medium to be tested, the transmission medium connected to another test port having the closest matched impedance for use as a ground return path.

7. A time domain reflectometer as claimed in any preceding claim, further comprising a plurality of time delay offset registers controlled by thresholds which in

turn generate different sampling rates, each sampling rate providing a different distance resolution.

8. A time domain reflectometer as claimed in claim 7, wherein the means for analysing reflected signals sets a number of thresholds which trigger the time delay offset registers.

9. A time domain reflectometer as claimed in any preceding claim, wherein the means for analysing includes an algorithm for initially determining the location of the reflected pulse or pulses and for confirming that the pulse or pulses represent a fault in the transmission media.

10. A time domain reflectometer as claimed in any preceding claim, wherein the means for analysing includes a centre of mass algorithm for determining more accurately the level of impedance change.

11. A time domain reflectometer as claimed in any preceding claim, wherein the means for analysing includes a cross correlation algorithm for more accurately determining the location of a pulse or pulses.

12. A time domain reflectometer as claimed in any preceding claim designed as a fully integrated ASIC.

13. A time domain reflectometer as claimed in any preceding claim which can be used with a transmission medium that also has AC or DC power or data being transmitted in the transmission medium at the same time as the test is being conducted.

14. A time domain reflectometer as claimed in any preceding claim, further comprising means for providing an impedance map of an individual cable or harness of installation under test.

15. A time domain reflectometer as claimed in any preceding claim, further comprising a receiving circuit connected to the multiplexer, the multiplexer being controllable to route reflected signals from the selected output to the receiving circuit, wherein the receiving circuit is connected to a sample and hold circuit for sampling received signals.

16. A time domain reflectometer as claimed in claim 15, further comprising a controller arranged to control the multiplexer to determine and establish signal routing paths from the transmitter to the selected output, wherein the controller is arranged to accept an input selecting the output to be tested, to control the multiplexer to establish a signal routing path from the transmitter to the selected output, determine and establish a signal routing return path from the selected output to the receiving circuit.

17. A time domain reflectometer as claimed in claim 16, further comprising a ground node (GRND) connected to the multiplexer, wherein the multiplexer is controllable to route signals from the transmission media to the ground node.

18. A time domain reflectometer as claimed in claim 17, wherein the controller is arranged to switch between each output to determine closest impedance to the selected output and to establish the return path and hence the signal routing path between the output, return path and ground node.

19. A method of performing time domain reflectometry, comprising:
generating a test signal at a transmitter,
supplying the test signal under the control of a multiplexer to a test port;
connecting each of a plurality of test port outputs to one of a plurality of transmission media to be tested;

characterised in that the method comprises:

determining, selecting or confirming the return ground path for the selected output port; and analysing reflected signals received back from the transmission media to be tested and the return ground path thereby enabling impedance changes along the length of the transmission media to be determined and the respective distance to the impedance changes, for transmission media of known and unknown impedance.