Video Production Module for Altera DE2 FPGA

Green Screen Effects, Fades, Titles, and Background Image Support

Final Project
Advanced Microcontroller Design
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Introduction

This project implemented a simple video production unit which could provide green screen effects, title overlays, fades, and display background images.

In this project we turned a Altera Cyclone II FPGA into a simple video production unit with the help of a Sony Handicam and a PC for serial communication. The main focus of the project is the ability to provide a green screen effect, most commonly seen with weather news. We would extract the green regions of the video based on a threshold and display a background image, such as a weather map. This image is able to be transferred to the FPGA over RS-232 serial communication in as fast as 1 second for a black and white image. Other production effects including interfacing a PS/2 keyboard to write titles on top of the image, fade in and outs, and a reverse green screen method. The output of the produced video image is displayed on a VGA compatible monitor at 640x480 resolution.

We chose to implement a simple video production module as our final project because we wanted to do something involving image processing in real time on a video stream. A first thought was to improve on a real time edge detector that was done in a previous year, but instead we decided to try something new and the green screen effect seemed like a fun idea for a project, combined with that no project to date had created a RS-232 hardware interface.

High Level Design

Our project idea is ubiquitous in special effects used in many TV shows, movies, and weather broadcasting.

The project can be divided into four main components. These include RS-232 transfer of background image, video acquisition, effects generation, and effects multiplexing out to VGA.

High Level Schematic

![High Level Schematic](image_url)

Figure 1: High level schematic showing the general process of editing the video.
We decided to implement and test each of the effects (green screen, reverse green screen, image transfer, etc.) separately, and then integrate them on top of each other in the main module. The fading in and out effect took precedence over all of the other effects since it controls whether or not the other effects would be displayed at all. Writing text to the screen took precedence over the green screen and reverse green screen effects because text should be written over all video regardless of whether or not the video is straight from the camera or from an image stored in SRAM. Green screen and reverse green screen effects have the same precedence since they are never used at the same time.

Part of our specification was to have an image displayed in the green portion of the video, such as when a weatherman has a map in the background. We decided to store this image in SRAM and load appropriately when creating the green screen effect. To store the image in SRAM we used RS-232 serial communication to transfer the image from a PC to the FPGA. On the FPGA we implemented both a UART receiver and transmitter module. These modules were capable of sending at varying baud rates, error checking, and issuing a timeout error on packet reception. Five different image transfer modes were implemented: 640x480 8-bit bitmap, 320x240 8-bit bitmap stretched in the x-axis and y-axis, 320x240 8-bit bitmap stretched in x-axis only, direct draw mode, and 320x240 black and white image stretched in both x and y axes.

Switches, push buttons, a PS/2 keyboard and PC executables were used to enable different types of produced effects. The final image after all effects processed was a 640x480 color image on a VGA capable monitor.

Usage
Download our design to the DE2 board and make sure everything in the diagram above is properly hooked up. Initially all effects are turned off and video feed from the Sony Handicam is directly displayed to the VGA monitor.

- To turn on/off in effects, press KEY 2. (To check if effects are turned on, point to Handicam at the green screen)
- To use the green screen effect, set switch 16 up.
- To use the reverse screen effect, set switch 16 down.
- To transfer 320x240 images, set switch 0 up, and switches 1 and 2 down; then run im.exe <image name> (located in the ImageTransfer folder).
- To transfer 320x240 images in black and white mode, set switch 2 up, and switches 1 and 0 down, then run bw.exe <image name>.
- To transfer 640x480 images, set switch 2 down, and switches 1 and 0 up; then run im.exe <image name>.
- To write text to the screen, start typing on the keyboard; text should appear in the middle of the screen.

Hardware Design

We used a Sony Handicam to capture and send video to SDRAM and an RS-232 serial port to send images to SRAM. The stored images are combined accordingly and sent to a VGA display.

![Figure 3. Overview of Signals](image)

Figure 2 shows how signals propagate from the camera and RS-232 serial port to the VGA display. Each line carries the value of a pixel and the modules know the current horizontal and vertical position of that pixel. Mux-A is used for the green screen effect. If the pixel from the SDRAM video feed is considered
green, mux-A outputs the pixel from the SRAM image instead of the SDRAM video feed. Mux-B is used for the reverse green screen effect. If the pixel from the SRAM image is green, mux-B outputs the pixel from the SDRAM video feed instead of the SRAM image. Mux-C is used to choose whether to output the green screen or reverse green screen. Mux-D is used for writing text to the screen. If the current pixel's position is within the bitmap of a letter that's supposed to be written to the screen, mux-D outputs the color of text displayed on the screen instead of the output from the green screen/reverse green screen effects. Finally, mux-E is used to fade in the effect. If the effects are supposed to be faded in, mux-E outputs the combination of all the other effects. If the effects are not supposed to be faded in, mux-E outputs the SDRAM video feed with no effects added in.

**Video Camera**

The video camera interfacing was handled by the DE2_TV provided by Terasic Technologies in a CD that came with the DE2 board. The video camera RCA video output is connected to the DE2 board. The signal is in ITU656 format. The signal gets converted to YUV 4:2:2 format, down-sampled from 720 to 420 horizontal pixels, and then stored in SDRAM. When the image is read out from SDRAM, the pixels get converted from YUV 4:2:2 to YUV 4:4:4, and then to RGB format. In the DE2_TV module, the RGB signal is sent to the VGA output. We intercept this signal and add effects before feeding it to the VGA output.

**Serial Image Transfer**

There were two possible ways for us to implement the RS-232 communication. We could choose to instantiate a NIOS II microprocessor and have it include a UART module or we could create our own hardware receiver and transmitter UART modules from scratch. While it would have been easier to go the NIOS II route the problem was that the NIOS II microprocessor needs the SDRAM as its memory, and we were currently using that memory for holding the video image data. In order to avoid any conflicts we decided it would be best to develop our own hardware receiver and transmitter.

**RS-232 Protocol Description**

In order to develop these modules one has to understand how RS-232 protocol works. There are a lot of different options that one can choose, but we decided on the following, fairly standard, options for communication – 8 data bits, 1 stop bit, 1 start bit, no flow control, no parity bit. The baudrate that we used changed throughout development, but initially we started with a fairly slow and safe baudrate of 9600 baud. The end product runs at a baudrate of 115200 baud.

To receive a byte of data you have to first listen for the start bit. The start bit is a logical zero on the UART receiver and you recognize it as the start bit because when the UART receiver is idle it has a logical one outputted. Once the start bit is received the following eight clock ticks will posses the data portion with the least significant bit being passed in first. After all 8 data bits are received you listen for a stop bit which will be a logical one. If a logical one is not received then you know that an error has occurred and you have probably lost sync or connection with what you are receiving from. The image below illustrates the protocol.
There is one intricacy in designing a receiver that isn't initially noticeable by simply following the protocol. We initially ran into problems that we were getting more bit errors than we typically should have gotten. This was thought to be a problem that we could not generate a baud rate exactly equal to 9600 baud. Since our baud rate was slightly off this meant that every now and then the receiving clock would lose sync with the transmitting clock (which is why error detection was implemented to correct this) however we were receiving possibly too many errors. After reading a bunch of literature on RS-232 error detection we found out that most modules sample the idle line at 16 * BaudRate. An example we found showed how to do it at 8 * BaudRate and suggested that this should be fairly sufficient and we implemented the examples suggestion. This greatly reduced the amount of bit errors received. The reason for this is that when you sample at 8 times the baudrate you ensure that you do not miss a potential start bit due to clock error. Then once your 8 times fast baud clock finds the start bit it resets the normal baud clock. Then you are almost guaranteed no error in the normal baud clock since it is always starting in sync with the transmitted data.

To transmit a byte of data this same protocol is followed. The transmitter constantly outputs a logical one, and then when it wants to begin transmitting it changes to logical zero, followed by the 8 data bits, and then back to logical one for the stop bit. It is up to the receiver to make sure that data is received correctly provided that the transmitter follows protocol. You do not need a fast baud clock for transmitting since it is the receivers job for staying in sync.

**Receiver and Transmitter Module Design**

Both the transmitter and receiver were designed to follow the protocol above. The receiver works by sampling the idle line at 8 times the baud rate and once a start bit is detected it enters a state machine that collects the data. Once the 8 data bits are collected it listens for the stop bit. If a stop bit is not detected it enters its error correcting mode. In error correcting it checks for one of two things to occur. The first is that it receives 10 logical ones in a row which would signal all idle bits. The second is that it finds a bit spacing equivalent to a start bit followed by 8 bits followed by a stop bit which would signal
data and it knows its back in sync. Any data received during error correcting is lost, but the main point is that the receiver is now back in sync with the transmitter.

The transmitter works by following the aforementioned protocol and writing back whatever data is issued to it at the time of a transmit request.

**Packaging the Data**

To send the image data it became apparent to us that we needed a way to ensure that what was being transmitted was what was actually received. Initially we had just assumed/hoped that the serial communication would be accurate enough that we could just send the data and let a FPGA state machine choose where to output the data. However, when data was lost this caused the image to skew itself and some pixel colors would be wrong. In an effort to fix this problem we needed to implement some form of bitwise error detection. Research showed that generally a CRC is done on packets of data or you could do a parity check. We felt that a one bit parity check would probably not be enough to ensure accuracy of the data so the packaging and CRC route was chosen.

When data comes into the receiver it is outputted to a PacketManager module. This module packages the incoming bytes into a packet of length 16 bytes. The format of the packet is 15 bytes of data followed by 1 byte of CRC. Now, we didn’t implement an actual CRC check, but rather a very quick yet suitable XOR. All 15 bytes of data were XOR’ed and this result was the 16 byte in the package. Once a packet is assembled the data bits are sent to our CRC module which performs the XOR. The result of this XOR is then compared to the 16\textsuperscript{th} byte of our packet. If the CRC matches the 16\textsuperscript{th} byte the transmitter is told to send a byte valued at 255 indicating a success, but if it does not match it sends a byte valued of 0. Then retransmission can take place if needed.

**Dealing with loss of synchronization – Timeouts**

A previous problem which was mentioned was a loss of synchronization with the transmitting and receiving module. It could happen that the receiving module enters a state that it can’t get out of because the transmitter keeps sending data and the receiver can never fix its error. If this happens then the transmitter will never have a finished packet and thus cannot send back either an ACK or NACK of successful receipt. Because of this potential problem we implemented a method to detect timeouts.

Whenever a new packet is started it is given a start time based on the FPGA run time. This start time is 128 bits long and should never overflow during the course of execution as it increments on the 50MHz clock (unless you run your FPGA for about 2\textsuperscript{23} years). Then each clock cycle the packet manager checks to see if the time between the receipt of the first byte in the packet and the current byte is greater than 0.2 seconds. If it is greater than we believe that some error has occurred and we need to issue a timeout error. The packet manager then resets the receiver and tells the transmitter to issue a timeout NACK to the host receiver. This NACK is byte valued at 128 to indicate a timeout has occurred.

**Baudrate Generation**

To generate the baud rate we used the 50 MHz clock and found an appropriate integer divider and incremented an accumulator. One the accumulator was equal to the divider we new that a baud clock tick was appropriate. The error rate depending on the desired baud rate was generally less than .001%.

**Writing the Image to SRAM**
Once a packet is fully received and checked that it contains no errors we “unpack” the data and write it appropriately to SRAM. There are five methods that we created for unpacking the data and writing to SRAM – each is used for a different application of displaying the image.

**Displaying 640x480 images:**
The first three bytes in this type of image contain a start X and Y coordinate. The reason that three bytes are needed is that 640 maximum value requires 10 bits and 480 maximum value requires 9 bits for a total of 19 bits which can only be held in 3 bytes or 24 bits. The following 12 bytes of the packet hold color values for the 12 pixels that immediately follow the start X and Y coordinate inclusive of start X and Y. The drawing state machine then cycles through these 12 bytes of data and increments the draw X by one for each subsequent data byte. If it gets to a point where X > 640 it just does not draw it to avoid drawing out of bounds. On each cycle the SRAM address and data registers are set to indicate the pixel position via the address register and color value via the data register.

**Displaying 320x240 images stretched to 640x480:**
Again the first three bytes specify the start X and start Y values. Again, the next 12 bytes represent color data. This time the data register duplicates the color data in order to stretch out the image in the X direction. The reason why this stretches it is because we store the image as 320 16-bit color values for each row. So essentially, each data block holds two pixel values that are adjacent to each other. When we duplicate the 8 high bits and low bits of the data this stretches the image. To stretch in the Y direction we write to SRAM by shifting the start Y value by 1 (doubling it) and adding either 0 or 1 depending on if it is the first row or second row to be saved to SRAM.

**Displaying 320x240 images stretched to 640x240:**
This works the same exact way as stretching to 640x480 except that we do not stretch in the Y direction. This means that the start Y value is not shifted right by 1 and instead is used directly in the SRAM destination address.

**Displaying 320x240 black and white images stretched to 640x480:**
In this mode we stretch a 320x240 black and white (binary) image to 640x480. To do this we again specify the first 3 bytes as start X and start Y values. Then, the next 12 bytes of 96 bits represent 96 pixels. The state machine loops through each of these 96 pixels and stores to SRAM either the color white or black depending on the pixel value. It stretches in the X and Y direction the same way as in the other stretch routine. Because we can write 96 pixels at once this method of image transfer is very quick.

**Direct Draw Method:**
One other method that was implemented was that in each packet we specified 3 direct locations and color values to be drawn to. In this method the packet was set up as 3 bytes for image location followed by 1 byte for image color data. Since this took four bytes we could hold 3 of these pixels in a packet and 2 bytes were wasted. This method is very slow compared to the other methods but has the advantage of being able to draw directly to any pixel value instead of sequentially. You could imagining this method being used to draw a title overlay instead of an actual image. This method only worked for 320x240 image resolutions.

**VGA Interface**
Getting 640x480 resolution out of SRAM

SRAM is not big enough to store 640x480 16-bit pixel information. However, it can accommodate 320x480 16-bit pixel information. Therefore to get a resolution of 640x480 we need to limit the amount of color information for each pixel. The logical approach is to have each pixel have a color depth of only 8 bits instead of 16 bits. We divided up the RGB values into 3-bits for red and green and 2-bits for blue. When it came time to read from SRAM and display on the VGA these 16 bits were read and if the least significant bit of the X part of the SRAM address was a 0 then we would output the left pixel or data bits 7:0 and if it was a 1 then the right pixel or data bits 15:8. The red, green, and blue components are required to be 10 bits according to the VGA parameters. To get 10 bits for each we used the following code:

```assign mVGA_R = Coord_X[0] ? {SRAM_DQ[15:13], SRAM_DQ[15:13], SRAM_DQ[15:13], 1'b1} : {SRAM_DQ[7:5], SRAM_DQ[7:5], SRAM_DQ[7:5], 1'b1};
assign mVGA_G = Coord_X[0] ? {SRAM_DQ[12:10], SRAM_DQ[12:10], SRAM_DQ[12:10], 1'b1} : {SRAM_DQ[4:2], SRAM_DQ[4:2], SRAM_DQ[4:2], 1'b1};
assign mVGA_B = Coord_X[0] ? {SRAM_DQ[9:8], SRAM_DQ[9:8], SRAM_DQ[9:8], SRAM_DQ[9:8], SRAM_DQ[9:8]} : {SRAM_DQ[1:0], SRAM_DQ[1:0], SRAM_DQ[1:0], SRAM_DQ[1:0], SRAM_DQ[1:0]};```

Green Detection in Video for Green Screen

The VGA output receives one pixel at a time. Each pixel goes through green detection. A pixel is determined to be green if its green is above a certain threshold, its red is below a certain threshold, and its blue is below a certain threshold. There is a tradeoff between having green artifacts at the borders of green areas and detecting green in areas that are not part of the green screen.

If the green threshold is set too high, and red and blue thresholds are set too low, the green screen might not be green enough to be classified as green, and any reflections or slight deviations from green on the green screen will not be classified as green. Green threshold being too low also results in large green borders between the green screen and anything that appears in front of it.

If the green threshold is set too low, and the red and blue thresholds are set too high, areas that are not part of the green screen will be classified as green. During testing, areas that were green were set as white; setting the green threshold too low made objects appear as if electricity were surging through them.

To match the thresholds to the green screen, we set the thresholds with switches. We tuned the thresholds until the green screen was considered green and there was no green in all of the other objects in the video.

Green Detection in an Image for Reverse Green Screen

Since we know the exact green value that we are drawing into the image that we are using for reverse green screen, we can look for an exact green value rather than setting thresholds. Other than image and video quality, reverse green screen works perfectly with no artifacts for all of the images that we tested since we do not have to worry about false green detections. If any part of an image happens to be the exact value that is considered green, we could tweak one of its bits, which would be unnoticeable except to the green detection.
**Fading Effects In and Out**

This effect doesn't make sense for green screen, but it is useful for reverse green screen effects and text. A 25 bit counter is used for this effect. When a button is pressed, the counter, which runs off of the 27 MHz clock, starts counting until it maxes out. If the counter starts at 0 it counts up; if the counter starts at its maximum, it counts down. The top 10 bits of the counter are bitwise &'d with the effects output. The complement of the top 10 bits of the counter are bitwise &'d with the regular video input. The counter length was chosen so that it would take 1.24 seconds to fade in and out so that the duration is long enough for a human viewer to notice. This scheme allows the regular video feed to fade out and video feed with effects to fade in at the same time, and vice versa.

**Writing Text to the Screen**

A keyboard is connected to the PS/2 port of the DE2 board. When keys are pressed, they are displayed at the center of the screen if effects are faded in. A 16 keystroke buffer is used to store the message displayed. When the first key is struck, it is displayed at the left most position of the 16 keystroke buffer. When the next key is struck, it is displayed 8 pixels to the right of the first keystroke; and so forth. When the end of the buffer is reached, the keystrokes wrap around and start writing over the first keys struck. The keyboard interface was obtained from [http://www.johnloomis.org/digitallab/ps2lab1/ps2lab1.html](http://www.johnloomis.org/digitallab/ps2lab1/ps2lab1.html). These modules read in the serial stream sent from the keyboard to the PS/2 port. A simple state machine is used to determine which keys are struck:

![Key pressing state machine](image)

Figure 5: Key pressing state machine.

There are two states for releasing a key because two bytes are sent when a key is released. When a key is initially pressed, the byte that corresponds to it is sent. If a key is pressed and held, the byte that corresponds to the key is sent over and over again. The mapping between the byte sent from the keyboard and the character the byte represents was obtained from [http://www.sm.luth.se/csee/courses/smd/098/lab31.pdf](http://www.sm.luth.se/csee/courses/smd/098/lab31.pdf).
The image of text on the screen is not stored in RAM. Writing text to the screen is implemented using each pixel's coordinates. A module called screenWriter determines whether or not to color in a pixel because the pixel is part of a letter. If a pixel's coordinates are in the white area in Figure 3, screenWriter tells higher level modules to output regular video for that coordinate because the pixel definitely cannot be part of the text. If a pixel's coordinates are in the yellow "Sentence Buffer" area, screenWriter looks up the bitmap that represents the character in that area. If a pixel's coordinates are in the grey area of the bitmap, then screenWriter once again tells higher level modules to output regular video for that coordinate. If a pixel's coordinates are in the blue area, then screenWriter tells higher level modules to output text color for that pixel.

Software Design

In order to send an image to the FPGA we had to design software to run on a PC. Initial prototype of the software was developed in MATLAB. However when we increased the baud rate substantially we noticed that the execution time offered almost zero increase and we thus believed that MATLAB was limiting our peak performance. This caused us to switch into developing a C executable.

While we developed all the MATLAB serial communication code ourselves we had to research and find source files for reading a bitmap image in C and for writing to a serial port in C. We have referenced the sources for these in the appendix. The actual executable that sends the data and implements these functions were written by us and the source code is included for both C and MATLAB.

Because the MATLAB code is more easily debuggable since you can step through it as opposed to creating an executable if you were to recreate this project we suggest you start with MATLAB as opposed to the C programs.

The way this software works is that you specify a bitmap image which you would like to send (either 640x480 or 320x240) and then the program packages the data appropriately, opens a serial communication, and sends the data to the FPGA for it to read. The user is responsible for making sure that the FPGA is in the right kind of data reading method (one of the five methods mentioned above).
Results of the Design

The green screen is very stable. There is no noticeable flickering in it. When testing the green detection using a green image on a VGA monitor, there was a one or two pixel green border around the edge of objects in front of the green screen. We tried to fix this by adjusting thresholds; the border was reduced from what we had originally, but we could not completely get rid of the border. However, when we ran our implementation on the actual green screen we ended up using, the green border was completely gone except when shadows were cast on the green screen.

Reverse Green Screen works perfectly since we know the exact color of the green in our uploaded image, but the video quality and image quality are not as high as they can be due to limits in upload speed. We attempted to transfer video instead of just images to SRAM but could not get frame rate to exceed a few frames per second, even with only black and white video.

The fading effect works but looks strange. Text starts fading in as strange colors before settling in as their final text color. We had originally wanted to implement more features with writing text to the screen but ran out of time. Once text is on the screen, it appears completely stable. Keystroke recognition works well immediately after uploading our design to the DE2 board but starts to malfunction if random keys are spammed.

Serial Interface Result

The result of this part of the project are two modules that can be configured at any baudrate to work with another serial receiver and transmitter pair that follow RS-232 protocol and have specified 8 data bits, 1 start bit, 1 stop bit, no flow control, and no parity bits.

It packages data into packets of 16 bytes that have a CRC type check performed on them to ensure accuracy of delivery and can also detect timeout failures and send a timeout NACK to the other receiver.

Sample tests of the transmission indicated that we get on average a single bit error every 1 million bits sent approximately. From research we have found that “acceptable” error rates for RS-232 at a baud around 9600 should be from every 1 billion bits to every 1 trillion bits. However because we are running at an extremely high baud rate and our module has the ability to perform error detection this is not really a problem because we can always resend the data.

Transmission of the data for a 640x480 image took approximately 36 seconds to perform, and transmission of a 320x240 black and white image took approximately 1 second to perform. Theoretical results at a baud of 115200 indicate that we should expect it to take 35.6 seconds and 1.1 seconds respectively. Therefore it appears that our serial transfer incurs almost no lag and is performing almost as fast as theoretically possible.

The C executables that we created are very easy to use and the user only has to specify an image name following the executable name. Transmission will take place immediately and accurately.

Conclusions
Compile time was the main bottleneck to our progress. We should have left our project broken up in small parts even after testing. Each part was developed on its own in a separate module; however, after a part's integration into the main project, we deleted or lost the individual modules and were unable to easily backtrack. Initially we were very satisfied with our green screen threshold, so we hard coded it into the main module.

If we'd had more time we would've worked more on refining keystroke recognition and switching to an Ethernet port so we could possibly stream in video to replace the green screen instead of just a still image.

The green detection seems to be almost as good as those used by weathermen. If the image quality were better, the reverse green screen would be up to standards since green detection is perfect. If we were tuning this effect for photography, we would lower the frame rate and increase image quality for the input from the camera.

We were satisfied with our green screen results. It is obviously not up to production standards, but it is good enough for recreational special effects.

We were very satisfied with the results of the serial communication. Although initially we struggled very much with getting accurate delivery of information we remained persistent in researching and find better ways to implement the receiving module. Eventually through research and much testing we implemented what we believe to be a very robust and reliable method of sending data following RS-232 protocol standards. The fact that we implemented hardware error detection and timeout errors was a great success for the project.

Specific Tasks

Green Screen – James Du
PS/2 Interface – James Du
Fades – James Du
RS-232 Communication – Peter Greczner
SRAM Image Writing – Peter Greczner
Website and Report – Both

References and Sources

RS-232 Protocol Resources:
http://www.fpga4fun.com/SerialInterface2.html
http://www.taltech.com/TALtech_web/resources/intro-sc.html
http://controls.ame.nd.edu/microcontroller/main/node24.html

RS-232 C Programming Resource:
http://www.teuniz.net/RS-232/

Bitmap Image Reading C Programming Resource:
http://www.cs.ucdavis.edu/~amenta/s06/proj4/readBMP.c
http://www.cs.ucdavis.edu/~amenta/s06/proj4/readBMP.h

PS/2 Keyboard Resources:
http://www.johnloomis.org/digitallab/ps2lab1/ps2lab1.html

Character bitmap Resource:
http://users.ece.gatech.edu/~hamblen/book/instruct_se.htm

Datasheets: