Optimizing RF Power Amplifier System Efficiency Using DC-DC Converters
RF power amplifiers used in CDMA / WCDMA cellular standards have been traditionally powered directly from the battery. This makes system implementation easy but the requirement for linear power amplifiers in such standards have intrinsic inefficiencies throughout the transmit power spectrum.

Cellular standards have been evolving with transmission speeds that started from 14.4 kbps in CDMA-1 to 2 Mbps in CDMA2000/WCDMA. Apart from this, cellular providers have increased the services bundled with the 3G phones in order to increase the average revenue per subscriber. At the same time, the talk time and battery life is expected to be improved with the same or slightly higher capacity batteries. This makes system design challenging. System designers have to be very cautious and perform a power survey of each and every component on the phone board. The RF Power Amplifier (RF PA) powered directly from the battery is a major concern from the power budget perspective.

The modulation schemes used in CDMA and WCDMA result in an amplitude-modulated signal that exhibits a non-constant amplitude envelope. In order to preserve signal integrity and further spectral re-growth, a linear...
Dynamic Power Management of RF Power Amplifiers

Feature-Rich LM320x Family Enhances Battery Life in Portable Applications

Family Features
- Dynamically adjustable output voltage optimizes RF PA power levels for increased battery life
- Bypass mode maintains maximum output power regardless of battery voltage
- 2 MHz Switching frequency minimizes external components and complies with spectral emission requirements

Ideal for powering RF power amplifiers in cell phones, smart PDA phones, GPS systems, two-way radios, and portable communications systems

Family Highlight:
DC-DC converters deliver up to 5X transmit time in RF PAs

Step-Down Switching Regulators for RF Power Amplifiers

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Product ID</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>$V_{IN}$</th>
<th>$V_{OUT}$</th>
<th>$I_{OUT}$ (mA)</th>
<th>Bypass Modes</th>
<th>Packaging</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LM3200</td>
<td>Dynamically adjustable output voltages, 2.2 µH inductor</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>Adj (0.8 to 3.6V)</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>Forced and automatic</td>
<td>micro SMD-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LM3202</td>
<td>Miniature, adjustable, step-down DC-DC converter</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>Adj (1.3 to 3.16)</td>
<td>650</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>micro SMD-8</td>
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<tr>
<td>LM3203</td>
<td>Miniature, adjustable, step-down DC-DC converter</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>Adj (0.8 to 3.6)</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>Forced</td>
<td>micro SMD-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LM3204</td>
<td>Miniature, adjustable, step-down DC-DC converter</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>Adj (0.8 to 3.6)</td>
<td>355/500</td>
<td>Forced and automatic</td>
<td>micro SMD-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LM3205</td>
<td>Miniature, adjustable, step-down DC-DC converter</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>Adj (0.8 to 3.6)</td>
<td>650</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>micro SMD-8</td>
</tr>
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Optimizing RF Power Amplifier System Efficiency

Power amplifier is necessary. However, power efficiency is traded off because power amplifiers operate efficiently when operated in gain compression. To meet the required linearity, the operating transmit power is backed off from the power amplifier’s compression point that causes an overall reduction in efficiency. When the handset is operating in transmit mode, the RF power section consumes up to 65% of the overall power budget as a result of the PAs intrinsic inefficiencies.

For this reason, linear PAs are ideal candidates to be powered with a magnetic buck converter which will dramatically increase efficiency of the system. Power-Added Efficiency (PAE) is a key performance metric of a power amplifier.

\[ \text{PAE} \, (\%) = \frac{(\text{POUT} - \text{PIN})}{\text{Pdc}} \]

The key in using a DC-DC converter (PA supply regulator) is to reduce the Pdc factor in the denominator. When the PA is connected directly to the battery, Pdc=Vbatt*Ibatt and, when it is powered by a PA supply regulator, Pdc=Vo*Io. Now it can be seen that for increasing the PAE we have to have a low Vo and Io compared to Vbatt and Ibatt. This is achieved by lowering the output voltage of the PA supply regulator at lower transmitted RF power levels. This in turn reduces Io (current drawn by the PA) and results in a much lower input current drawn from the battery due to the inherent high efficiency of the DC-DC converter.

It is important to consider the power probability profile (see Figure 2) for the modulation methods to really understand the impact of savings in powering a PA with a supply regulator. The profiles are different for urban and rural regions.

As shown in Figure 3, the output voltage of the DC-DC converter has to be varied as the transmitted power levels are changed to maintain the Adjacent Channel Power/leakage Ratio (ACPR) specifications. The savings in battery current can be as high as 50 mA in the 0 dBm to 20 dBm power levels. Figure 2 shows that the PA is operating in this band of power levels for a majority of its time.

So why do we have to change the voltage of the DC-DC converter as the transmitted power level is increased? The answer is that this change is needed to maintain the ACPR ratios. ACPR is used to characterize the distortion of power amplifiers and other subsystems for their tendency to cause interference with neighboring radio channels or
Industry’s Lowest Noise 150 mA CMOS LDO

LP5900 Low Dropout Regulator Requires No Bypass Capacitor

Features

- Industry’s lowest noise combined with 85 dB of Power Supply Ripple Rejection guarantees signal integrity
- 25 µA IQ minimizes current drain when system operates in low-power mode
- Elimination of bypass capacitor reduces BOM to only two ceramic 0.47 µF capacitors
- Low 80 mV dropout voltage (typ.)
- Virtually zero (<1µA) Iq when disabled
- Available in a micro SMD-4 package
- LLP® packaging available soon

Ideal for powering analog and RF signal path ICs, including low-noise amplifiers, voltage controlled oscillators, and RF receivers

Product Highlight:
Unique 150 mA RF LDO eliminates bypass capacitor and achieves low 6.5 µV_RMS noise
Optimizing RF Power Amplifier System Efficiency

systems. It is specified as the ratio of the Power-Spectral Density (PSD) of the main channel to the PSD measured at several offset frequencies.

In Figure 5 it can be seen that if the supply voltage to the PA is not increased as $P_{OUT}$ is increased, the ACLR specifications cannot be met.

The system-level specification (3GPP) for WCDMA is -34 dBc and, in order to preserve sufficient margin caused by temperature and device variances, the ACLR value of -38 dBc is used.

**Key Requirements of Buck Converters for Powering RF Power Amplifiers**

Buck converters that power RF PAs have specialized functions and are quite different from buck converters that power digital core processors. These differences arise in operating characteristics and parameters such as switching FET ON-resistances, current limit, transient response, modes of operation such as PFM/PWM, startup time, quiescent current, and dropout behavior. The following examples illustrate these differences:

- **High efficiency over wide output voltage and load range**
  
  *Example:* LM3205 has efficiency of 96% at $V_{IN} = 4.2V$, $V_o = 3.4V$, $I_o = 400$ mA (high RF power) and 87% at $V_{IN}=3.9V$, $V_o=1.5V$, $I_o = 100$ mA (low RF power).

- **Dynamic output voltage adjustment**
  
  *Example:* In LM3205 the output voltage can be adjusted between 0.8V to 3.6V using a Vcon pin. The voltage gain from Vcon to V0 is 2.5.
Accurate and Stable RF Power Detectors for Portable Devices

**Family Features**
- LMV227 100% RF tested for accuracy
- 30 dB Linear-in-dB power detection range
- Multi-band operation from 450 MHz to 2 GHz
- Accurate temperature compensation
- Logarithmic amplifier and mean square RF detector technology

Ideal for use in handsets, wireless LAN, WiFi, PC and PDA module cards, and GPS navigation modules

**Family Highlight:**
Real-time transmitter power adjustments simplify system calibration in communications systems

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<th>Detector</th>
<th>Channel</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Package</th>
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<td>LMV227</td>
<td>CDMA 2000, WCDMA, UMTS</td>
<td>Log amp</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>40 dB, 2.1 GHz</td>
<td>Micro SMD, LLP®</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LMV225/226/228</td>
<td>CDMA, WCDMA, UMTS</td>
<td>Log amp</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>40 dB, 2.1 GHz</td>
<td>Micro SMD, LLP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LMV232</td>
<td>3G Mobile communications</td>
<td>Mean square</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20 dB, 2.2 GHz</td>
<td>Micro SMD</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Optimizing RF Power Amplifier System Efficiency

- 30 µs Output slew rate and settling (50 µs window in beginning of every 667 µs transmit cycle in which the Vcon adjustments must be completed) In WCDMA architecture, transmit power is adjusted by ±1 dB in every 667 µs as requested by the basestation.

- Low dropout and low ripple near 100% duty cycle
  Example: Low R_{DSON} PFET 140 mΩ (LM3205) or Bypass FET (LM3204) gives low dropout voltage and pulse-skipping schemes gives low ripple near 100% duty cycle.

- Low duty cycle operation for low output voltages
  Example: Minimum on time, 50 ns facilitates 10% duty cycle operation for output voltages of 0.8V and lower depending on the V_{IN} range.

- High switching frequency
  Example: 2 MHz switching frequency helps the use of smaller sized external components and meet spectral emission requirements.

- Fast turn on time to meet time mask for transmit ON/OFF
  Example: LM3203 has turn-on time of 50 µs for V_{O} = 3.4V from EN = low to high.

100% Duty Cycle vs Bypass Mode

When the buck converter is operating at 100% duty cycle the dropout voltage is

\[ \text{Dropout Voltage} = (R_{ON,P} + R_{L}) \cdot I_{O}, \]

where R_{ON,P} is the R_{DSON} of the PFET and R_{L} is the inductor DCR. For a PA supply regulator that has a bypass FET the dropout voltage in bypass mode is,

\[ \text{Dropout Voltage} = (R_{ON,BYP}) \cdot I_{O}, \]

where R_{ON,BYP} is the R_{DSON} of the bypass FET. The bypass FET can be turned on automatically or manually. As shown, the key advantage in having a bypass mode is lower dropout voltages; which translates to longer talk times and lowering the low battery shutdown point for the phone. The alternative is to use low DCR inductors and a low R_{DSON} PFET.

Example Application Circuits

In this example, the baseband will have a lookup table scheme where it sets the output voltage depending on the output power levels required.

Figure 6. Baseband Controls V_{O} Directly

In this case, the power detector is part of a closed loop and sets the output voltage.

Figure 7. Using a Power Detector to Set V_{O}

Conclusion

DC-DC converters enhance the RF PA system efficiency in portable communication devices and support the addition of more features or functions by improving battery life.

For more information on Powering RF Power Amplifiers, visit www.national.com/onlineseminars to watch Mathew Jacobs' online seminar!
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