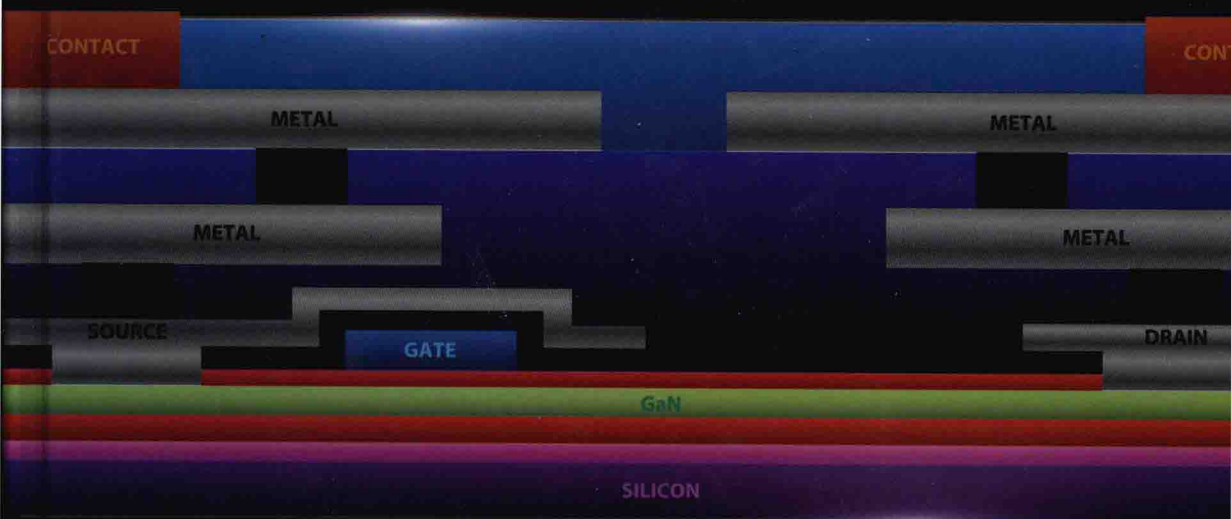


GaN Transistors for Efficient Power Conversion



SECOND EDITION

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Johan Strydom

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David Reusch

WILEY

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Second Edition

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Efficient Power Conversion Corporation, El Segundo, California, USA

WILEY

This edition first published 2015

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John Wiley & Sons Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, United Kingdom

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Lidow, Alex.

GaN transistors for efficient power conversion / Alex Lidow, Johan Strydom, Michael de Rooij, David Reusch. – Second edition.

1 online resource.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Description based on print version record and CIP data provided by publisher; resource not viewed.

ISBN 978-1-118-84478-6 (ePub) – ISBN 978-1-118-84479-3 (Adobe PDF) – ISBN 978-1-118-84476-2 (cloth)

1. Field-effect transistors. 2. Gallium nitride. I. Title.

TK7871.95

621.3815'284–dc23

2014023079

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: 978-1-118-84476-2

Set in 10/12 pt TimesLTStd-Roman by Thomson Digital, Noida, India

Printed and bound in Malaysia by Vivar Printing Sdn Bhd

1 2015

GaN TRANSISTORS FOR EFFICIENT POWER CONVERSION

*In memory of Eric Lidow,
the original power conversion pioneer.*

Foreword

It is well established that the CMOS inverter and DRAM are the two basic building blocks of digital signal processing. Decades of improving inverter switching speed and memory density under Moore's Law has unearthed numerous applications that were previously unimaginable. Power processing is built upon two similar functional building blocks: power switches and energy storage devices, such as the inductor and capacitor. The push for higher switching frequencies has always been a major catalyst for performance improvement and size reduction.

Since its introduction in the mid-1970s, the power MOSFET, with its greater switching speed, has replaced the bipolar transistor. To date, the power MOSFET has been perfected up to its theoretical limit. Device switching losses can be reduced further with the help of soft-switching techniques. However, its gate drive loss is still excessive, limiting the switching frequency to the low hundreds of kilohertz in most applications.

The recent introduction of GaN, with much improved figures of merit, opens the door for operating frequencies well into the megahertz range. A number of design examples are illustrated in this book and other literatures, citing impressive power density improvements of a factor of 5 or 10. However, I believe the potential contribution of GaN goes beyond the simple measures of efficiency and power density. GaN has the potential to have a profound impact on our design practice, including a possible paradigm shift.

Power electronics is interdisciplinary. The essential constituents of a power electronics system are switches, energy storage devices, circuit topology, system packaging, electromagnetic interactions, thermal management, EMC/EMI, and manufacturing considerations. When the switching frequency is low, these various constituents are loosely coupled. Current design practices address these issues in piecemeal fashion. When a system is designed for a much higher frequency, the components are arranged in close proximity, to minimize undesirable parasitics. This invariably leads to unwanted electromagnetic coupling and thermal interaction.

This increasing intricacy between components and circuits requires a more holistic approach, concurrently taking into account all electrical, mechanical, electromagnetic and thermal considerations. Furthermore, all operations should be executed correctly, both spatially and temporally. These challenges prompt circuit designers to pursue a more integrated approach. For power electronics, integration needs to take place at the functional level or the subsystem level whenever feasible and practical. These integrated modules then serve as the basic building blocks of further system integration. In this manner, customization can be achieved using standardized building blocks, in much the same way as digital electronics

systems. With the economy of scale in manufacturing, this will bring significant cost reduction in power electronics equipment and unearth numerous new applications previously precluded due to high cost.

GaN will create fertile ground for research and technological innovations for years to come. Dr. Alex Lidow mentions in this book that it took thirty years for the power MOSFET to reach its current state of maturity. While GaN is still in an early stage of development, a few technical challenges require immediate attention. These issues are recognized by the authors and are addressed in this book.

1. High dv/dt and high di/dt render most of the commercially available gate drive circuits unsuitable for GaN devices, especially for the high-side switch. Chapter 3 offers many important insights in the design of the gate drive circuit.
2. Device packaging and circuit layout are critical. The unwanted effects of parasitics need to be contained. Soft-switching techniques can be very useful for this purpose. A number of important issues related to packaging and layout are addressed in detail in Chapters 4–6.
3. High-frequency magnetic design is also critical. The choice of suitable magnetic materials becomes rather limited when the switching frequency goes beyond 2–3 MHz. Additionally, more creative high-frequency magnetics design practice should be explored. Several recent publications suggest design practices that defy the conventional wisdom and practice, yielding interesting results.
4. The impact of high frequency on EMI/EMC has yet to be explored.

Dr. Alex Lidow is a well-respected leader in the field. Alex has always been in the forefront of technology and a trendsetter. While serving as the CEO of IR, he initiated GaN development in the early 2000s. He also led the team in developing the first integrated DrMOS and DirectFET[®], which are now commonly used to power the new generation of microprocessors and many other applications.

This book is a gift to power electronics engineers. It offers a comprehensive view, from device physics, characteristics, and modeling to device and circuit layout considerations and gate drive design, with design considerations for both hard switching and soft switching. Additionally, it further illustrates the utilization of GaN in a wide range of emerging applications.

It is very gratifying to note that three of the four authors of this book are from CPES, joining with Dr. Lidow in an effort to develop this new generation of wide-band-gap power switches – presumably a game-changing device with a scale of impact yet to be defined.

Dr. Fred C. Lee
Director, Center for Power Electronics Systems
University Distinguished Professor, Virginia Tech

Acknowledgments

The authors wish to acknowledge the many exceptional contributions towards the content of this book from our colleagues Jianjun (Joe) Cao, Robert Beach, Alana Nakata, Guang Yuan Zhao, Audrey Downes, Steve Colino, Bhasy Nair, Renee Yawger, Yanping Ma, Robert Strittmatter, Stephen Tsang, Peter Cheng, Larry Chen, F.C. Liu, M.K. Chiang, Winnie Wong, Chunhua Zhou, Seshadri Kolluri, Jiali Cao, Lorenzo Nourafchan, and Andrea Mirenda.

A special thank you is due to Joe Engle who, in addition to reviewing and editing all corners of this work, put all the logistics together to make it happen. Joe also assembled an exceptional group of graphic artists, all of whom worked with endless patience against difficult deadlines.

A note of gratitude to the editors and staff at Wiley who were instrumental in undertaking a diligent review of the text and shepherding the book through the production process.

Finally, we would like to thank Archie Huang and Sue Lin for believing in GaN from the beginning. Their vision and support will change the semiconductor industry forever.

Alex Lidow
Johan Strydom
Michael de Rooij
David Reusch

Efficient Power Conversion Corporation
April 2014

Contents

Foreword	xiii
Acknowledgments	xv
1 GaN Technology Overview	1
1.1 Silicon Power MOSFETs 1976–2010	1
1.2 The GaN Journey Begins	2
1.3 Why Gallium Nitride?	2
1.3.1 Band Gap (E_g)	3
1.3.2 Critical Field (E_{crit})	3
1.3.3 On-Resistance ($R_{DS(on)}$)	4
1.3.4 The Two-Dimensional Electron Gas	4
1.4 The Basic GaN Transistor Structure	6
1.4.1 Recessed Gate Enhancement-Mode Structure	7
1.4.2 Implanted Gate Enhancement-Mode Structure	7
1.4.3 pGaN Gate Enhancement-Mode Structure	8
1.4.4 Cascode Hybrid Enhancement-Mode Structure	8
1.4.5 Reverse Conduction in HEMT Transistors	10
1.5 Building a GaN Transistor	10
1.5.1 Substrate Material Selection	10
1.5.2 Growing the Heteroepitaxy	11
1.5.3 Processing the Wafer	12
1.5.4 Making Electrical Connection to the Outside World	14
1.6 Summary	14
References	17
2 GaN Transistor Electrical Characteristics	19
2.1 Introduction	19
2.2 Key Device Parameters	19
2.2.1 Breakdown Voltage (BV_{DSS}) and Leakage Current (I_{DSS})	19
2.2.2 On-Resistance ($R_{DS(on)}$)	24
2.2.3 Threshold Voltage ($V_{GS(th)}$ or V_{th})	26

2.3	Capacitance and Charge	27
2.4	Reverse Conduction	31
2.5	Thermal Resistance	33
2.6	Transient Thermal Impedance	36
2.7	Summary	37
	References	38
3	Driving GaN Transistors	39
3.1	Introduction	39
3.2	Gate Drive Voltage	41
3.3	Bootstrapping and Floating Supplies	43
3.4	dv/dt Immunity	44
3.5	di/dt Immunity	47
3.6	Ground Bounce	48
3.7	Common Mode Current	50
3.8	Gate Driver Edge Rate	51
3.9	Driving Cascode GaN Devices	51
3.10	Summary	53
	References	53
4	Layout Considerations for GaN Transistor Circuits	55
4.1	Introduction	55
4.2	Minimizing Parasitic Inductance	55
4.3	Conventional Power Loop Designs	58
4.4	Optimizing the Power Loop	60
4.5	Paralleling GaN Transistors	61
	4.5.1 <i>Paralleling GaN Transistors for a Single Switch</i>	61
	4.5.2 <i>Paralleling GaN Transistors for Half-Bridge Applications</i>	65
4.6	Summary	69
	References	69
5	Modeling and Measurement of GaN Transistors	70
5.1	Introduction	70
5.2	Electrical Modeling	70
	5.2.1 <i>Basic Modeling</i>	70
	5.2.2 <i>Limitations of Basic Modeling</i>	73
	5.2.3 <i>Limitations of Circuit Modeling</i>	75
5.3	Thermal Modeling	76
	5.3.1 <i>Improving Thermal Performance</i>	77
	5.3.2 <i>Modeling of Multiple Die</i>	79
	5.3.3 <i>Modeling of Complex Systems</i>	82
5.4	Measuring GaN Transistor Performance	83
	5.4.1 <i>Voltage Measurement Requirements</i>	83
	5.4.2 <i>Current Measurement Requirement</i>	85
5.5	Summary	87
	References	87

6	Hard-Switching Topologies	89
6.1	Introduction	89
6.2	Hard-Switching Loss Analysis	89
6.2.1	Switching Losses	91
6.2.2	Output Capacitance (C_{OSS}) Losses	96
6.2.3	Gate Charge (Q_G) Losses	96
6.2.4	Reverse Conduction Losses (P_{SD})	97
6.2.5	Reverse Recovery (Q_{RR}) Losses	99
6.2.6	Total Hard-Switching Losses	99
6.2.7	Hard-Switching Figure of Merit	100
6.3	External Factors Impacting Hard-Switching Losses	101
6.3.1	Impact of Common-Source Inductance	101
6.3.2	Impact of High Frequency Power-Loop Inductance on Device Losses	103
6.4	Reducing Body Diode Conduction Losses in GaN Transistors	106
6.5	Frequency Impact on Magnetics	109
6.5.1	Transformers	109
6.5.2	Inductors	110
6.6	Buck Converter Example	110
6.6.1	Output Capacitance Losses	112
6.6.2	Gate Losses (P_G)	114
6.6.3	Body Diode Conduction Losses (P_{SD})	117
6.6.4	Switching Losses (P_{sw})	119
6.6.5	Total Dynamic Losses ($P_{Dynamic}$)	120
6.6.6	Conduction Losses ($P_{Conduction}$)	120
6.6.7	Total Device Hard-Switching Losses (P_{HS})	121
6.6.8	Inductor Losses (P_L)	122
6.6.9	Total Buck Converter Estimated Losses (P_{Total})	122
6.6.10	Buck Converter Loss Analysis Accounting for Common Source Inductance	123
6.6.11	Experimental Results for the Buck Converter	125
6.7	Summary	126
	References	126
7	Resonant and Soft-Switching Converters	128
7.1	Introduction	128
7.2	Resonant and Soft-Switching Techniques	128
7.2.1	Zero-Voltage and Zero-Current Switching	128
7.2.2	Resonant DC-DC Converters	129
7.2.3	Resonant Network Combinations	130
7.2.4	Resonant Network Operating Principles	131
7.2.5	Resonant Switching Cells	132
7.2.6	Soft-Switching DC-DC Converters	133
7.3	Key Device Parameters for Resonant and Soft-Switching Applications	133
7.3.1	Output Charge (Q_{OSS})	133
7.3.2	Determining Output Charge from Manufacturers' Datasheet	134

7.3.3	<i>Comparing Output Charge of GaN Transistors and Si MOSFETs</i>	135
7.3.4	<i>Gate Charge (Q_G)</i>	136
7.3.5	<i>Determining Gate Charge for Resonant and Soft-Switching Applications</i>	136
7.3.6	<i>Comparing Gate Charge of GaN Transistors and Si MOSFETs</i>	138
7.3.7	<i>Comparing Performance Metrics of GaN Transistors and Si MOSFETs</i>	138
7.4	High-Frequency Resonant Bus Converter Example	139
7.4.1	<i>Resonant GaN and Si Bus Converter Designs</i>	142
7.4.2	<i>GaN and Si Device Comparison</i>	143
7.4.3	<i>Zero-Voltage Switching Transition</i>	144
7.4.4	<i>Efficiency and Power Loss Comparison</i>	145
7.5	Summary	148
	References	148
8	RF Performance	150
8.1	Introduction	150
8.2	Differences Between RF and Switching Transistors	151
8.3	RF Basics	153
8.4	RF Transistor Metrics	154
8.4.1	<i>Determining the High-Frequency Characteristics of RF FETs</i>	155
8.4.2	<i>Pulse Testing for Thermal Considerations</i>	156
8.4.3	<i>Analyzing the S-Parameters</i>	158
8.5	Amplifier Design Using Small-Signal S-Parameters	161
8.5.1	<i>Conditionally Stable Bilateral Transistor Amplifier Design</i>	161
8.6	Amplifier Design Example	162
8.6.1	<i>Matching and Bias Tee Network Design</i>	165
8.6.2	<i>Experimental Verification</i>	168
8.7	Summary	170
	References	170
9	GaN Transistors for Space Applications	172
9.1	Introduction	172
9.2	Failure Mechanisms	172
9.3	Standards for Radiation Exposure and Tolerance	173
9.4	Gamma Radiation Tolerance	173
9.5	Single-Event Effects (SEE) Testing	175
9.6	Performance Comparison between GaN Transistors and Rad-Hard Si MOSFETs	176
9.7	Summary	177
	References	177
10	Application Examples	179
10.1	Introduction	179
10.2	Non-Isolated DC-DC Converters	179

10.2.1	12 V_{IN} – 1.2 V_{OUT} Buck Converter	180
10.2.2	28 V_{IN} – 3.3 V_{OUT} Point-of-Load Module	184
10.2.3	48 V_{IN} – 12 V_{OUT} Buck Converter with Parallel GaN Transistors for High-Current Applications	185
10.3	Isolated DC-DC Converters	191
10.3.1	Hard-Switching Intermediate Bus Converters	192
10.3.2	A 400 V LLC Resonant Converter	203
10.4	Class-D Audio	204
10.4.1	Total Harmonic Distortion (THD)	204
10.4.2	Damping Factor (DF)	205
10.4.3	Class-D Audio Amplifier Example	206
10.5	Envelope Tracking	208
10.5.1	High-Frequency GaN Transistors	209
10.5.2	Envelope Tracking Experimental Results	211
10.5.3	Gate Driver Limitations	211
10.6	Highly Resonant Wireless Energy Transfer	214
10.6.1	Design Considerations for Wireless Energy Transfer	216
10.6.2	Wireless Energy Transfer Examples	217
10.6.3	Summary of Design Considerations for Wireless Energy Transfer	224
10.7	LiDAR and Pulsed Laser Applications	224
10.8	Power Factor Correction (PFC)	226
10.9	Motor Drive and Photovoltaic Inverters	227
10.10	Summary	228
	References	228
11	Replacing Silicon Power MOSFETs	232
11.1	What Controls the Rate of Adoption?	232
11.2	New Capabilities Enabled by GaN Transistors	232
11.3	GaN Transistors are Easy to Use	233
11.4	Cost vs. Time	234
11.4.1	Starting Material	234
11.4.2	Epitaxial Growth	234
11.4.3	Wafer Fabrication	235
11.4.4	Test and Assembly	235
11.5	GaN Transistors are Reliable	235
11.6	Future Directions	236
11.7	Conclusion	237
	References	237
Appendix		239
Index		246

