On acronyms, jargon, and terminology

Every special-interest group has their own language, and only part of the reason is to exclude others from the conversation. Jargon also helps define common terms necessary to conduct business or discuss philosophies and procedures within the group. Engineering is a very special discipline, and EEs are a further esoteric subset with its own plethora of acronyms, slang and terms.

Terminology is a very important issue since a common language is vital for the proper exchange of information. When a new technology is developed, we must all agree what to call it so we know what we are talking about when we refer to it.

In the new world of solid-state lighting, many of the terms for the various devices were already developed because the technology involved is old and established. The problem crops up in the area of new development (in this case what to call the next generation of LEDs) and in the area of establishing infrastructure for the commercialized technology (in this case, what to call LED drivers).

In the case of newly-developed LEDs, manufacturers strive to label their product to establish a clear difference in the minds of their customers. Names like ultraluminescent, superluminescent and hyperluminescent are often used. We need to stop using superlatives to describe better behavior in a series of products with continued improvements in performance or we'll all sound like laundry-soap marketers. What do we call the next generation of LEDs? Superduperluminescent? List the LED's lumens/Watt performance and let the engineer decide if it's bright

enough for their application or not.

In the case of the driver terminology, many in this industry have been using the term “ballast” to describe LED and EL drivers as the term relates to driving illumination. However, calling a constant-current power system a “ballast” is a grave mislabeling and a poor excuse for inappropriate terminology. We here at ECN have started to use the term “SSLD” for solid-state lighting driver. Pronounced “sled,” the term will be applied to all OLED, EL and LED drivers covered in the magazine.

What are your favorite (or least favorite) acronyms? What terms need one? Are there acronyms you feel are superfluous? Send us your input with your picture and we’ll run the best submissions in our Design Talk pages in an upcoming issue.

On a completely different note, the acquisition of Ireland-based Commergy Technologies, a power supply reference design provider specializing in energy-efficient and compact architectures, by Texas Instruments is a very promising joining of IP. According to TI, the acquisition will allow TI to broaden its focus on improving energy efficiency in the areas of AC adapters and high power density computing and server systems. We were discussing this in a round-robin email among the ECN staff, and we decided to mention what we normally consider to be business news because the company offers reference designs that will now become members of the TI family.

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