

Fiber-Optic Cable

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A fiber-optic cable is made of glass or plastic and transmits signals in the form of light.

To understand optical fiber, we first need to explore several aspects of the nature of light.

Light travels in a straight line as long as it is moving through a single uniform substance.

If a ray of light traveling through one substance suddenly enters another substance (of a different density), the ray changes direction..

if the angle of incidence I (the angle the ray makes with the line perpendicular to the interface between the two substances) is less than the critical angle, the ray refracts and moves closer to the surface.

If the angle of incidence is equal to the critical angle, the light bends along the interface.

If the angle is greater than the critical angle, the ray reflects (makes a turn) and travels again in the denser substance.

Optical fibers use reflection to guide light through a channel. A glass or plastic core is surrounded by a cladding of less dense glass or plastic.

The difference in density of the two materials must be such that a beam of light moving through the core is reflected off the cladding instead of being refracted into it.

Propagation Modes

Current technology supports two modes (multimode and single mode) for propagating light along optical channels, each requiring fiber with different physical characteristics.

Multimode can be implemented in two forms:

step-index or graded-index .

Multimode: Multimode is so named because multiple beams from a light source move through the core in different paths. How these beams move within the cable depends on the structure of the core,

In **multimode step-index fiber**, the density of the core remains constant from the center to the edges. A beam of light moves through this constant density in a straight line until it reaches the interface of the core and the cladding. At the interface, there is an abrupt change due to a lower density; this alters the angle of the beam's motion. The term step index refers to the suddenness of this change, which contributes to the distortion of the signal as it passes through the fiber

A second type of fiber, called multimode graded-index fiber, decreases this distortion of the signal through the cable.

The word index here refers to the index of refraction. As we saw above, the index of refraction is related to density.

A graded-index fiber, therefore, is one with varying densities. Density is highest at the center of the core and decreases gradually to its lowest at the edge

Single-Mode Single-mode uses step-index fiber and a highly focused source of light that limits beams to a small range of angles, all close to the horizontal. The single-mode fiber itself is manufactured with a much smaller diameter than that of multimode fiber, and with substantially lower density (index of refraction).

The decrease in density results in a critical angle that is close enough to 90° to make the propagation of beams almost horizontal. In this case, propagation of different beams is almost identical, and delays are negligible. All the beams arrive at the destination "together" and can be recombined with little distortion to the signal.

Fiber Sizes

Optical fibers are defined by the ratio of the diameter of their core to the diameter of their cladding, both expressed in micrometers. Cable Composition

. The outer jacket is made of either PVC or Teflon. Inside the jacket are Kevlar strands to strengthen the cable. Kevlar is a strong material used in the fabrication of bulletproof vests. Below the Kevlar is another plastic coating to cushion the fiber. The fiber is at the center of the cable, and it consists of cladding and core.

Fiber-Optic Cable Connectors

There are three types of connectors for fiber-optic cables

The subscriber channel (SC) connector is used for cable TV. It uses a push/pull locking system. The straight-tip (ST) connector is used for connecting cable to networking devices. It uses a bayonet locking system and is more reliable than SC. MT-RJ is a connector that is the same size as RJ45.

Performance

The plot of attenuation versus wavelength in Figure 7.16 shows a very interesting phenomenon in fiber-optic cable. Attenuation is flatter than in the case of twisted-pair cable and coaxial cable. The performance is such that we need fewer (actually 10 times less) repeaters when we use fiber-optic cable.

Applications

Fiber-optic cable is often found in backbone networks because its wide bandwidth is cost-effective. Today, with wavelength-division multiplexing (WDM), we can transfer data at a rate of 1600 Gbps. The SONET network that we discuss in Chapter 17 provides such a backbone.

Some cable TV companies use a combination of optical fiber and coaxial cable, thus creating a hybrid network. Optical fiber provides the backbone structure while coaxial cable provides the connection to the user premises

. This is a cost-effective configuration since the narrow bandwidth requirement at the user end does not justify the use of optical fiber. Local-area networks such as 100Base-FX network (Fast Ethernet) and 1000Base-X also use fiber-optic cable.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Optical Fiber

Advantages Fiber-optic cable has several advantages over metallic cable (twisted pair or coaxial).

1. Higher bandwidth. Fiber-optic cable can support dramatically higher bandwidths (and hence data rates) than either twisted-pair or coaxial cable.

Currently, data rates and bandwidth utilization over fiber-optic cable are limited not by the medium but by the signal generation and reception technology available.

2. Less signal attenuation. Fiber-optic transmission distance is significantly greater than that of other guided media. A signal can run for 50 km without requiring regeneration. We need repeaters every 5 km for coaxial or twisted-pair cable.

3. Immunity to electromagnetic interference. Electromagnetic noise cannot affect fiber-optic cables.

4. Resistance to corrosive materials. Glass is more resistant to corrosive materials than copper

Light weight. Fiber-optic cables are much lighter than copper cables. o Greater immunity to tapping. Fiber-optic cables are more immune to tapping than copper cables. Copper cables create antenna effects that can easily be tapped.

Disadvantages

There are some disadvantages in the use of optical fiber.

Installation and maintenance.

Fiber-optic cable is a relatively new technology. Its installation and maintenance require expertise that is not yet available everywhere.

Unidirectional light propagation.

Propagation of light is unidirectional. If we need bidirectional communication, two fibers are needed.

Cost.

The cable and the interfaces are relatively more expensive than those of other guided media.

If the demand for bandwidth is not high, often the use of optical fiber cannot be justified.

