



National Semiconductor
Application Note 84
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Driving 7-Segment Gas Discharge Display Tubes with National Semiconductor Drivers

INTRODUCTION

Circuitry for driving high voltage cold cathode gas discharge 7-segment displays, such as Sperry Information Displays* and Burroughs Panaplex II, is greatly simplified by two monolithic integrated circuits from National Semiconductor. They are: DS8880 high voltage cathode decoder/driver and DS8884A high voltage cathode decoder/driver.

In addition to satisfying all the displays' parameter requirements, including high output breakdown voltage, these circuits have capability of programming segment current, and providing constant current sinking for the display segments. This feature alleviates the problem of achieving uniformity of brightness with unregulated display anode voltage. The National circuits can drive the displays directly.

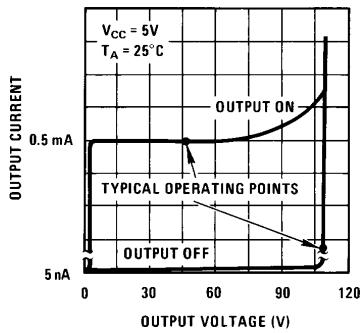
Sperry Information Display* and Burroughs Panaplex II are used principally in calculators and digital instruments. These 7-segment, multi-digit displays form characters by passing controlled currents through the appropriate anode/segment combinations. The cathode in any digit will glow when a voltage greater than the ionization voltage is applied between it (the cathode) and the anode for that digit. In the multiplexed mode of operation, a digit position is selected by driving the anode for that digit with a positive voltage pulse. At the same time, the selected cathode segments are driven with a negative current pulse. This causes the potential between the anode and the selected cathodes to exceed the ionization level, causing a visible glow discharge.

Generally, these displays exhibit the following characteristics: low "on" current per segment—from 200 μ A (in DC mode) to 1.2 mA (in multiplex mode); high tube anode supply voltage—180V to 200V; and moderate ionization voltage—170V. Once the element fires, operating voltage drops to approximately 150V and light output becomes a direct function of current, which is controlled by current limiting or current regulating cathode circuits. Current regulation therefore is most desirable since brightness will then be constant for large anode voltage changes. Tube anode to cathode "off" voltage is approximately 100V; and maximum "off" cathode leakage is 3 μ A to 5 μ A.

Correspondingly, specifications for the cathode driver must be complimentary, approximately as follows: A high "off" output breakdown voltage 80V minimum; typical "on" output voltage of 50V; maximum "on" output current of 1.5 mA per segment; and maximum "off" leakage current of 3 μ A to 5 μ A.

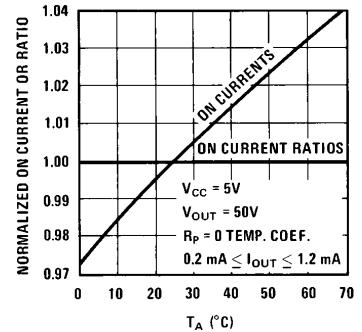
*Now called Beckman Displays

To allow operation without anode voltage regulation, the cathode driver must be able to sink a constant current in each output, with the output "on" voltage ranging from 5V to 50V (see *Figure 1*). The following is a brief description of the circuits now offered by National:



TL/F/5871-1

(a) Cathode Driver Output Characteristic



TL/F/5871-2

(b) On Currents vs Temperature

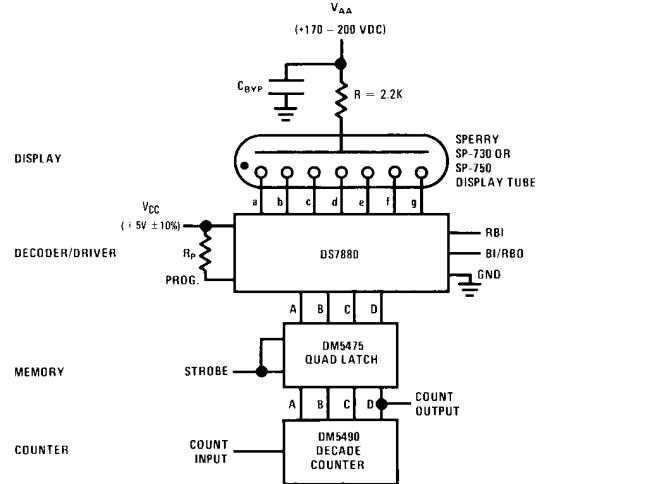
FIGURE 1

DS8880 HIGH VOLTAGE CATHODE DECODER/DRIVER

The DS8880 offers 7-segment outputs with high output breakdown voltage of 80V minimum; constant current-sink outputs; and programmable output current from 0.2 mA to 1.5 mA.

APPLICATION

The circuit has a built-in BCD decoder and can interface directly to Sperry and Panaplex II displays, minimizing external components (Figure 2). The inputs can be driven by TTL or MOS outputs directly. It is optimized for use in systems with 5V supplies.

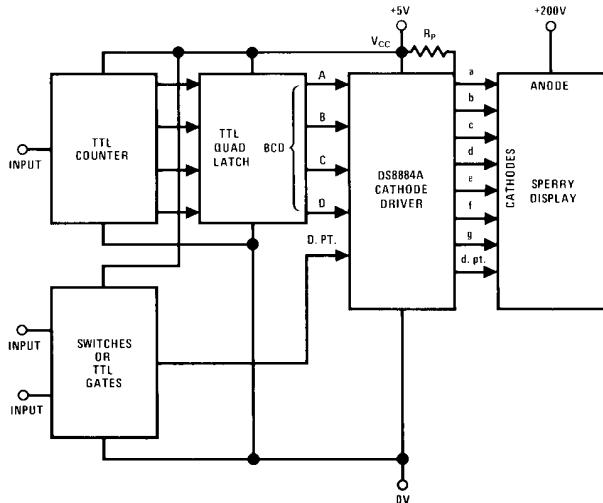


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FIGURE 2. DC Operation From TTL

The DS8880 decoder/driver provides for unconditional as well as leading and trailing zero blanking. It utilizes negative input voltage clamp diodes. Typically, output current varies only 1% for output voltage changes of 3V to 50V. Operating power supply voltage is 5V. The device can be used for multiplexed or DC operation.

Available in 16-pin cavity DIP packages, the DS7880 is guaranteed over the full military operating temperature range of -55°C to $+125^{\circ}\text{C}$; the DS8880 in molded DIP over the industrial range of 0°C to $+70^{\circ}\text{C}$.



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FIGURE 3. Interfacing Directly With TTL Output

DS8884A HIGH VOLTAGE CATHODE DECODER/DRIVER

The DS8884A offers 9-segment outputs with high output breakdown voltage of 80V minimum; constant current-sink outputs, programmable from 0.2 mA to 1.2 mA. It also offers input negative and positive voltage clamp diodes for DC restoring, and low input load current of -0.25 mA maximum.

APPLICATION

DS8884A decodes four lines of BCD input and drives 7-segment digits of gas-filled displays. There are two separate inputs and two additional outputs for direct control of decimal point and comma cathodes. The inputs can be DC cou-

pled to TTL (Figure 3) or MOS outputs (Figure 4), or AC-coupled to TTL or MOS outputs (Figure 5) using only a capacitor. This means the device is useful in applications where level shifting is required. It can be used in multiplexed operation, and is available in an 18-pin molded DIP package.

Other advantages of the DS8884A are: typical output current variation of 1% for output voltage changes of 3V to 50V; and operating power supply voltage of 5V. Inputs have pull-up resistors to increase noise immunity in AC coupled applications.

The DS8884A is guaranteed over the 0°C to +70°C operating temperature range.

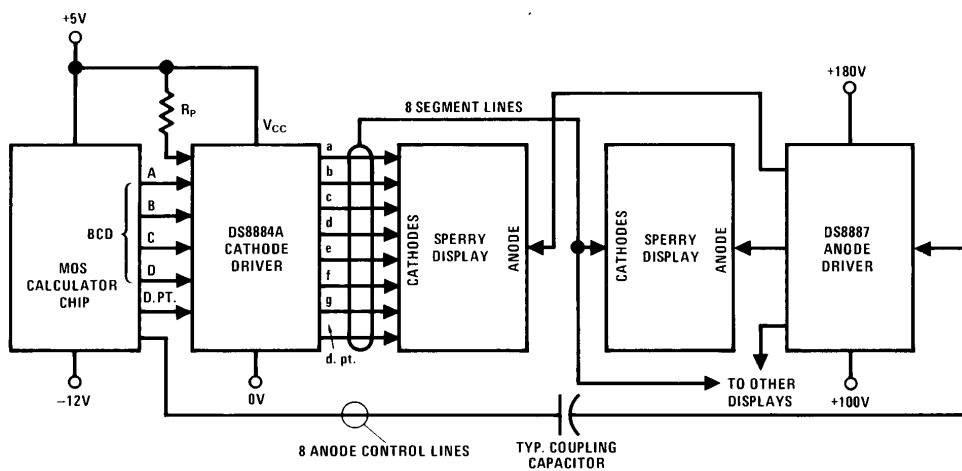
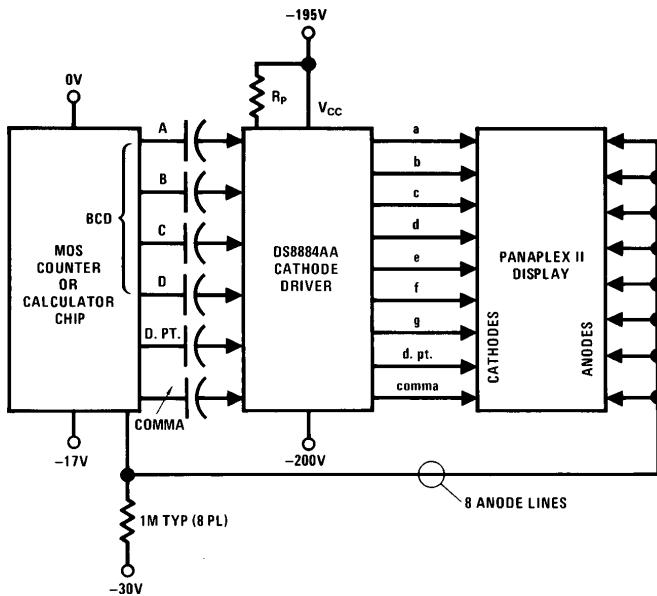


FIGURE 4. BCD Data Interfacing Directly With MOS Output

TL/F/5871-5



TL/F/5871-6

Note: Capacitive coupling between the logic and the segment drivers may be used only when the segment drivers are turned "OFF" during digit-to-digit transitions.

FIGURE 5. Cathode BCD Data AC Coupled From MOS-Output

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