SYSTEM AND METHOD OF COMMUNICATION VIA EMBEDDED MODULATION

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

[0001] This application is a continuation of U.S. Application No. 11/774,803, filed on July 9, 2007, which is a continuation of U.S. Application No. 10/412,878, filed April 14, 2003, which is a continuation-in-part of U.S. Application No. 09/205,205, filed December 4, 1998, and which claims priority to and the benefit of the filing date of U. S. Provisional Application No. 60/067,562, filed December 5, 1997, each of which is incorporated by reference herein.

TECHNICAL FIELD

[0002] The present invention relates generally to the fields of data communications and modulator/demodulators (modems), and, more particularly, to a data communications system in which a plurality of modulation methods are used to facilitate communication among a plurality of modem types.

BACKGROUND

[0003] In existing data communications systems, a transmitter and receiver modem pair can successfully communicate only when the modems are compatible at the physical layer. That is, the modems must use compatible modulation methods. This requirement is generally true regardless of the network topology. For example, point- to-point, dial-up modems operate in either the industry standard V.34 mode or the industry standard V.22 mode. Similarly, in a multipoint architecture, all modems operate, for example, in the industry standard V.27bis mode.

While the modems may be capable of using several different modulation methods, a single common modulation is negotiated at the beginning of a data session to be used throughout the duration of the session. Should it become necessary to change modulation methods, the existing data session is torn down, and a new session is negotiated using the new modulation method. Clearly, tearing down an existing data session causes a significant disruption in communication between the two modems.

[0004] As discussed in the foregoing, communication between modems is generally unsuccessful unless a common modulation method is used. In a point-to-point network architecture, if a modem attempts to establish a communication session with an incompatible modem, one or both of the modems will make several attempts to establish the communication link until giving up after a timeout period has expired or the maximum number of retry attempts has been reached. Essentially, communication on the link is impossible without replacing one of the modems such that the resulting modem pair uses a common modulation method.

[0005] In a multipoint architecture, a single central, or "master," modem communicates with two or more tributary or "trib" modems using a single modulation method. If one or more of the trib modems are not compatible with the modulation method used by the master, those tribs will be unable to receive communications from the master. Moreover, repeated attempts by the master to communicate with the incompatible trib(s) will disturb communications with compatible trib(s) due to time wasted in making the futile communication attempts.

[0006] Thus, communication systems comprised of both high performance and low or moderate performance applications can be very cost inefficient to construct. For example, some applications (e.g., internet access) require high performance modulation, such as quadrature amplitude modulation (QAM), carrier amplitude and phase (CAP) modulation, or discrete multitone (DMT) modulation, while other applications (e.g., power monitoring and control) require only modest data rates and therefore a low performance modulation method. All users in the system will generally have to be equipped with a high performance modem to ensure modulation compatibility. These state of the art modems are then run at their lowest data rates for those applications that require relatively low data throughput performance. The replacement of inexpensive modems with much more expensive state of the art devices due to modulation compatibility imposes a substantial cost that is unnecessary in terms of the service and performance to be delivered to the end user.

[0007] Accordingly, what is sought, and what is not believed to be provided by the prior art, is a system and method of communication in which multiple modulation methods are used to facilitate communication among a plurality of modems in a network, which have heretofore been incompatible.

SUMMARY

[0008] The present invention is generally directed to a system and method of communication between a master transceiver and a plurality of tributary transceivers in a multipoint communication system in which the tributary transceivers use different types of modulation methods. Broadly stated, the communication system includes a master transceiver in communication with a first tributary transceiver and a second tributary transceiver over a communication medium. The first tributary transceiver uses a primary modulation method for communication while the second tributary transceiver uses a secondary or embedded modulation method for communication. The master transceiver and tributary transceivers each include a processor, memory, and control logic for controlling their operation. While the primary modulation method is normally used for transmissions on the communication medium, the master transceiver can communicate with the second tributary transceiver by notifying the first tributary transceiver that the primary modulation method is being temporarily replaced by the secondary or embedded modulation method. The master transceiver can then exchange information with the second tributary transceiver while the first tributary transceiver ignores any secondary modulation transmissions. In the meantime, the first tributary transceiver conditions itself to look for a trailing sequence from the master transceiver indicating that communication with the second tributary transceiver is complete. When the master transceiver transmits the trailing sequence using the primary modulation method, the first tributary transceiver conditions itself to look for primary modulation transmissions while the second tributary transceiver conditions itself to ignore primary modulation transmissions.

[0009] The present invention has many advantages, a few of which are delineated hereafter as merely examples.

[0010] One advantage of the present invention is that it provides to the use of a plurality of modem modulation methods on the same communication medium.

[0011] Another advantage of the present invention is that a master transceiver can communicate seamlessly with tributary transceivers or modems using incompatible modulation methods.

[0012] Another advantage of the present invention is that a master and tributary transceiver can calculate a channel parameter using a test signal sent using embedded modulation.

[0013] Other features and advantages of the present invention will become apparent to one with skill in the art upon examination of the following drawings and detailed description. It is intended that all such additional features and advantages be included herein within the scope of the present invention.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0014] The present invention can be better understood with reference to the following drawings. The components and representations in the drawings are not necessarily to scale, emphasis instead being placed upon clearly illustrating the principles of the present invention. Moreover, in the drawings, like reference numerals designate corresponding parts throughout the several views.

[0015] FIG. 1 is a block diagram of a prior art multipoint communication system including a master transceiver and a plurality of tributary transceivers;

[0016] FIG. 2 is a ladder diagram illustrating the operation of the multipoint communication system of FIG. 1;

[0017] FIG. 3 is a block diagram of a master transceiver and tributary transceiver for use in the multipoint communication system of FIG. 1 in accordance with the principles of the present invention;

[0018] FIG. 4 is a block diagram of a multipoint communication system including the master transceiver and a plurality of tributary transceivers of the type illustrated in FIG. 3;

[0019] FIG. 5 is a ladder diagram illustrating the operation of the multipoint communication system of FIG. 4;

[0020] FIG. 6 is a state diagram for a tributary transceiver of FIGS. 3-5 using a secondary modulation method in accordance with the principles of the present invention;

[0021] FIG. 7 is a state diagram for a tributary transceiver of FIGS. 3-5 using a primary modulation method in accordance with the principles of the present invention; and

[0022] FIG. 8 is a ladder diagram illustrating the operation of an alternative embodiment of the multipoint communication system of FIG. 4.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF ILLUSTRATIVE EMBODIMENTS

[0023] While the invention is susceptible to various modifications and alternative forms, a specific embodiment thereof is shown by way of example in the drawings and will herein be described in detail. It should be understood, however, that there is no intent to limit the invention to the particular form disclosed, but on the contrary, the invention is to cover all modifications, equivalents, and alternatives falling within the spirit and scope of the invention as defined by the claims.

[0024] With reference to FIG. 1, a prior art multipoint communication system 22 is shown to comprise a master modem or transceiver 24, which communicates with a plurality of tributary modems (tribs) or transceivers 26-26 over communication medium 28. Note that all tribs 26-26 are identical in that they share a common modulation method with the master transceiver 24. Thus, before any communication can begin in multipoint system 22, the master transceiver and the tribs 26-26 must agree on a common modulation method. If a common modulation method is found, the master transceiver 24 and a single trib 26 will then exchange sequences of signals that are particular subsets of all signals that can be communicated via the agreed upon common modulation method. These sequences are commonly referred to as training signals and can be used for the following purposes: 1) to confirm that the common modulation method is available, 2) to establish received signal level compensation, 3) to establish time recovery and/or carrier recovery, 4) to permit channel equalization and/or echo cancellation, 5) to exchange parameters for optimizing performance and/or to select optional features, and 6) to confirm agreement with regard to the foregoing purposes prior to entering into data communication mode between the users. In a multipoint system, the address of the trib with which the master is establishing communication is also transmitted during the training interval. At the end of a data session a communicating pair of modems will typically exchange a sequence of signals known as trailing signals for the purpose of reliably stopping the session and confirming that the session has been stopped. In a multipoint system, failure to detect the end of a session will delay or disrupt a subsequent session.

[0025] Referring now to FIG. 2, an exemplary multipoint communication session is illustrated through use of a ladder diagram. This system uses polled multipoint communication protocol. That is, a master controls the initiation of its own transmission to the tribs and permits transmission from a trib only when that trib has been selected. At the beginning of the session, the master transceiver 24 establishes a common modulation as indicated by sequence 32 that is used by both the master 24 and the tribs 26a, 26b for communication. Once the modulation scheme is established among the modems in the multipoint system, The master transceiver 24 transmits a training sequence 34 that includes the address of the trib that the master seeks to communicate with. In this case, the training sequence 34 includes the address of trib 26a. As a result, trib 26b ignores training sequence 34. After completion of the training sequence 34, master transceiver 24 transmits data 36 to trib 26a followed by trailing sequence 38, which

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