



WHITEPAPER 06

# Designing Displays for Extreme Temperatures

## From Cold-Start Behaviour to High-Temperature Lifetime

Thermal engineering for the complete display, touch and backlight assembly



A system-level guide to liquid-crystal response, backlight derating, heaters, thermal paths, material stress and accelerated-life validation across extended temperatures.



**Created by Crystal Display Systems Limited**

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## Executive summary

Extended-temperature display selection is not resolved by finding the widest number in a data sheet. Cold liquid-crystal response, touch behaviour, heater power, solar hot soak, LED junction temperature and bonded-material stress determine whether the HMI remains useful and reliable.

The best architecture may combine a wide-temperature panel, targeted heating for cold start and controlled backlight or compute derating at high temperature. Qualification must reproduce transitions, not only steady-state chambers.

### Core recommendation

Define a temperature mission profile and component-level limits before choosing a panel. Use native wide-temperature parts, heating and derating only where each method closes a measured failure mechanism.

## How to use this whitepaper

- Use the requirement table to convert extreme-temperature operation expectations into measurable pass/fail criteria.
- Use the comparison matrix to shortlist architectures without allowing one headline specification to dominate.
- Apply the weighted scorecard using the actual operating environment, duty cycle and commercial lifecycle.
- Validate the preferred approach in the final mechanical, optical, electrical and software implementation.

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### Key decision principles

- Specify cold-start readability and hot-operating lifetime separately; a wide storage rating does not guarantee either.
- Model temperatures at the LCD cell, LED board, driver and touch stack rather than using enclosure ambient alone.
- Use heaters and backlight power as controlled thermal loads with interlocks, not as independent accessories.
- Validate thermal cycling of bonded glass, gaskets and flexes because material mismatch often fails before the electronics.
- Derate brightness and compute power from real temperature and lifetime requirements rather than nominal room-temperature capability.

# 1. Define temperature performance before selecting a wide-temperature panel

A useful specification states storage and operating limits, cold-start time to readability, hot-soak luminance, solar load, duty cycle, touch availability, condensation transitions and acceptable derating. These requirements are more informative than a single operating-temperature range.

| Requirement domain          | Questions to resolve                                                                                                                      |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Temperature mission profile | Storage and operating minima/maxima, cold-start time, hot-soak duration, cycling rate, solar load, internal dissipation and altitude.     |
| Functional performance      | Time to readable image, motion response, contrast, colour, touch response, backlight output, boot sequence and safe fault state.          |
| Thermal stack               | LCD cell, backlight, LED board, driver, touch sensor, bond adhesive, cover glass, heater, enclosure and thermal interfaces.               |
| Power and control           | Heater power, preheat logic, backlight derating, temperature sensing, shutdown thresholds, warm-up current and vehicle supply transients. |
| Material compatibility      | Polariser shrinkage, adhesive modulus, seal stress, plastic creep, CTE mismatch, condensation and coating durability.                     |
| Lifetime and evidence       | Duty cycle at temperature, Arrhenius assumptions, LED junction temperature, accelerated tests, field telemetry and replacement strategy.  |

## A practical weighting model

Assign each criterion a weight from 1 (low importance) to 5 (critical). Score each candidate from 1 (poor fit) to 5 (strong fit), then multiply score by weight. The arithmetic does not replace engineering judgement, but it exposes where the thermal architecture depends on assumptions, incomplete test evidence or optimistic supplier data.

### **Do not average away a fatal constraint**

A candidate that fails a non-negotiable requirement for extreme-temperature operation should be removed before weighted scoring. Typical fatal constraints include unsafe operation, an unachievable environmental limit, incompatible interfaces, unacceptable field reliability or no credible supply route.

## Recommended process

- Set pass/fail gates for the mandatory extreme-temperature operation requirements before comparing desirable features.
- Agree criterion weights with electronics, mechanical, software, product, service and procurement stakeholders.
- Score only from controlled data, supplier evidence or representative testing; mark unknowns explicitly.
- Run sensitivity checks by changing the highest weights and identifying whether the preferred architecture changes.
- Document assumptions, test conditions and revision status so the decision can be revisited after a component or firmware change.

## 2. Thermal architectures for industrial displays

### 2.1 Native wide-temperature industrial TFT-LCD

Wide-temperature TFT modules use liquid-crystal mixtures, polarisers, LEDs, seals and driver components selected for extended operation. At low temperature, viscosity increases response time and can cause smearing or incomplete transitions. At high temperature, contrast, leakage, polariser life and backlight depreciation become limiting.

- Strengths: mature interfaces, broad industrial ecosystem and predictable integration when the required range is available natively.
- Limitations: cold response may remain slow at the rating limit; high-temperature operation often requires luminance and lifetime derating.
- Best fit: industrial and transport HMIs with moderate extended ranges and controlled warm-up expectations.

### 2.2 Heater-assisted LCD

A transparent heater, heated backplate or warmed enclosure can raise the LCD above its minimum functional temperature before full operation. The design must control heater uniformity, inrush current, sensor placement, condensation and the sequence between heater, logic, touch and backlight.

- Strengths: faster cold start, improved response and the ability to use a broader panel range.
- Limitations: added power, thermal gradients, control complexity and possible overheating or optical artefacts.
- Best fit: vehicles, outdoor equipment and cold stores where immediate or timed cold-start performance is required.

#### Cold-start control

Define the temperature sensor location, heater enable/disable thresholds, maximum surface temperature, timeout and degraded-mode behaviour. A heater without closed-loop protection is a new failure source.

## 2.3 High-temperature derated display system

High-temperature operation is often managed by reducing backlight current, compute load or duty cycle and by conducting heat into the chassis. Derating protects LED junction temperature, polarisers and electrolytic components, but must preserve minimum readability and touch performance.

- Strengths: extends life without active cooling and can use temperature telemetry to protect the assembly.
- Limitations: lower luminance or performance at the point where ambient light may also be highest.
- Best fit: sealed outdoor and vehicle HMIs subject to solar load and prolonged hot soak.

## 2.4 Reflective, bistable and low-heat display options

Reflective and bistable technologies avoid a continuously dissipating backlight and can reduce hot-enclosure load. Their cold refresh rate, colour, animation and front-light behaviour must be checked against the user interface.

## 2.5 Emissive technologies at temperature

OLED and direct-emissive displays avoid liquid-crystal viscosity but remain temperature dependent. OLED lifetime and luminance accelerate with heat; low-temperature drive and encapsulation behaviour vary. Evaluate the exact technology rather than assuming emissive displays are temperature independent.

### 3. Comparative decision matrix

| Criterion               | Native wide-temp TFT | Heated TFT | Derated / cooled TFT | Reflective / emissive alt. |
|-------------------------|----------------------|------------|----------------------|----------------------------|
| Cold-start speed        | Moderate             | Excellent  | Moderate             | Moderate                   |
| Hot-operating lifetime  | Moderate             | Moderate   | Excellent            | Strong                     |
| Full-colour motion      | Excellent            | Excellent  | Excellent            | Limited                    |
| Power at cold start     | Excellent            | Limited    | Strong               | Excellent                  |
| Power at hot soak       | Moderate             | Moderate   | Strong               | Excellent                  |
| Control complexity      | Excellent            | Limited    | Moderate             | Strong                     |
| Touch integration       | Excellent            | Strong     | Excellent            | Moderate                   |
| Supply breadth          | Strong               | Excellent  | Excellent            | Limited                    |
| Thermal-mechanical risk | Strong               | Limited    | Strong               | Moderate                   |
| Relative system cost    | Strong               | Moderate   | Moderate             | Moderate                   |

Indicative only. Actual performance depends on the complete system architecture, supplier implementation, environmental conditions and validation method.

## Example weighted scorecard

| Criterion                     | Weight | Native wide-temp TFT | Heated TFT | Derated TFT |
|-------------------------------|--------|----------------------|------------|-------------|
| Readable at -30 C within 60 s | 5      | 3                    | 5          | 3           |
| Operation at +70 C enclosure  | 5      | 3                    | 3          | 5           |
| Peak electrical power         | 4      | 5                    | 2          | 4           |
| Full-colour dynamic HMI       | 4      | 5                    | 5          | 5           |
| Control / software burden     | 3      | 5                    | 2          | 3           |
| Supply continuity             | 4      | 4                    | 5          | 5           |
| Whole-life reliability        | 5      | 4                    | 3          | 5           |
| Weighted total                |        | 121                  | 109        | 130         |

For this vehicle HMI, a thermally derated TFT scores highest overall because hot-soak lifetime and system reliability carry more weight than instant cold start. A heated TFT is preferred only when the 60-second cold-readability requirement is absolute and the power/control burden is acceptable.

### Reading the result

- Native wide-temperature ratings must be supported by measured cold response and hot-lifetime data at the intended content and luminance.
- Heater assistance solves cold viscosity only if power, uniformity, condensation and over-temperature protection are closed.
- Derating is effective when the minimum luminance and compute performance remain acceptable at the highest temperature.

## 4. Engineering trade-offs that change the answer

### 4.1 Storage range is not operating performance

A display may survive storage at -40 C yet be unreadably slow at that temperature. Specify time to usable contrast, touch availability and allowable image artefacts after cold power-up.

### 4.2 The LCD and backlight have different thermal limits

The LCD cell may need heat in cold conditions while the LED board needs heat removal at high brightness. Sensor placement and control must reflect both needs.

### 4.3 Solar loading can exceed electronics dissipation

Dark cover glass and polarisers absorb solar energy. Hot-soak qualification should combine sunlight simulation, enclosure sealing, backlight output and processor workload.

### 4.4 Bonded stacks create CTE stress

Cover glass, adhesive, touch sensor, LCD and metal chassis expand differently. Bond modulus, edge clearance and mounting preload become critical during rapid thermal cycling.

### 4.5 Condensation appears during transitions

A cold display moved into warm humid air can condense internally or on the front surface. Sealing, desiccation, pressure equalisation and controlled warm-up may be required.

### 4.6 Accelerated lifetime models need valid mechanisms

Arrhenius acceleration is useful only when the same failure mechanism dominates at test and use temperatures. Separate LED depreciation, polariser ageing, adhesive yellowing and electronic component wear.

## 5. Application-led recommendations

### Cold-store terminal

Use a wide-temperature or heated TFT with a defined preheat sequence and glove-capable touch. Manage condensation during door openings and washdown.

### Rail or off-highway vehicle HMI

Combine cold-start control with hot solar-load derating, wide input protection and vibration-resistant thermal interfaces.

### Outdoor kiosk

Prioritise solar hot-soak, backlight lifetime and automatic brightness. A heater may be needed only for the LCD and touch stack, not the complete enclosure.

### Process instrument near a furnace

Use conductive mounting, remote electronics where possible and temperature-based luminance or compute derating. Validate radiant heat and local hot spots.

### Battery portable in winter

Avoid large heater loads unless cold-start time is critical. Reflective or low-power displays may provide better mission endurance if slow updates are acceptable.

## 6. Qualification and sourcing checklist

|                          | Area                           | Verification action                                                                                                                   |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>Cold functional</b>         | Measure time to first image, readable contrast, transition response, touch operation and control boot at minimum temperature.         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>Hot functional</b>          | Measure luminance, colour, contrast, touch, compute throttling and power at maximum ambient and solar load.                           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>Thermal mapping</b>         | Instrument LCD surface, backlight board, driver, processor, adhesive edge and enclosure hot spots.                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>Heater control</b>          | Verify sensors, thresholds, uniformity, inrush, timeout, open/short faults and degraded operation.                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>Cycling</b>                 | Run thermal shock/cycling with production mounting, bonding, seals and flex routing; inspect mura, delamination and connector strain. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>Humidity / condensation</b> | Test dew formation, pressure changes, warm-up and repeated high-humidity transitions.                                                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>Lifetime</b>                | Age at representative temperature, brightness and content; separate LED, optical and electronic degradation.                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>Supply chain</b>            | Control panel grade, LED bin, adhesive, heater, sensors, firmware and replacement strategy.                                           |

### Questions to ask a display partner

- What cold-start image and touch performance is guaranteed, and how was it measured?
- Which component temperature, rather than ambient, determines the hot-operating limit?
- What derating curve applies to backlight current, processor load and duty cycle?

- How are heater uniformity, over-temperature, sensor faults and condensation controlled?
- What thermal-cycle evidence exists for the bonded glass, gaskets, flexes and mounting stack?
- Which lifetime model and acceleration factors are used for LEDs, polarisers, adhesives and electronics?

### Minimum evidence pack for design approval

- Temperature mission profile and pass/fail cold-start/hot-operation requirements.
- Thermal model and instrumented temperature map at worst-case power and solar load.
- Heater/backlight/compute control specification with thresholds and fault handling.
- Cold response, hot functional, thermal-cycle and humidity/condensation test reports.
- Ageing data and derating curves tied to component temperatures and duty cycle.
- Controlled thermal stack drawing, golden units and lifecycle/PCN/EOL plan.

## 7. Beyond passive wide-temperature design

Temperature resilience is increasingly achieved by coordinated sensing, adaptive control and materials engineering. New methods should be evaluated by the reduction in actual component stress and the clarity of their fault behaviour.

### Distributed temperature sensing

Multiple sensors at the LCD, LED board and processor enable more accurate control than one enclosure sensor. Sensor calibration and diagnostic coverage become part of the design.

### Predictive thermal control

Workload, ambient-light and temperature trends can be used to limit heat before thresholds are reached. The algorithm needs deterministic safety bounds.

### Transparent and patterned heaters

New heater films can improve uniformity and transmission, but bus-bar visibility, resistance tolerance, hot spots and EMC must be validated.

### Phase-change and advanced spreaders

Vapour chambers and phase-change materials can absorb transients or spread hot spots. Orientation, freeze/thaw cycling and long-term containment need evidence.

### Low-power reflective colour

Reflective displays can remove backlight heat for status-oriented HMIs, although cold refresh, colour and interaction limits remain application dependent.

#### Adoption gate

A new thermal technology should enter production only when it demonstrably reduces critical component temperature or cold-start time, has controlled fault states, and survives the full mechanical and environmental cycle of the assembly.

## 8. Working with Crystal Display Systems

Crystal Display Systems Limited supports wide-temperature display and HMI programmes with industrial TFT selection, high-brightness and heater options, optical bonding, custom thermal integration, rugged monitors and panel PCs.

### Relevant CDS resources

| Resource                                       | Purpose                                                                       |
|------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <a href="#">LCD TFT Displays</a>               | Industrial panel range, long-life options and value-added integration.        |
| <a href="#">Sunlight Readable Displays</a>     | High-brightness and optically engineered outdoor display solutions.           |
| <a href="#">Optical Bonding</a>                | Optical bonding options for readability, durability and condensation control. |
| <a href="#">Industrial Panel PC Solutions</a>  | Integrated industrial HMI and panel PC solutions with customisation options.  |
| <a href="#">Industrial Automation Displays</a> | Display, monitor and computing solutions for automation and machine HMI.      |
| <a href="#">CDS Knowledge Centre</a>           | Display guides and technical training documents.                              |
| <a href="#">Request a Quote</a>                | Submit project requirements for technical and commercial review.              |
| <a href="#">Contact CDS</a>                    | Contact details and enquiry routes.                                           |

### Contact Crystal Display Systems Limited

**Crystal Display Systems Limited**

Address: Unit 6 M2M Park, Fort Bridgewood, Maidstone Road, Rochester, Kent, ME1 3DQ, United Kingdom

Telephone: +44 (0)1634 791 600

Email: [info@crystal-display.com](mailto:info@crystal-display.com)

[www.crystal-display.com](http://www.crystal-display.com)

## Conclusion

Extreme-temperature display design is a coordinated thermal-control problem. Cold viscosity, heater power, solar load, LED junction temperature, optical ageing and material expansion must be considered together. A defensible design states functional performance at temperature, controls every active thermal element and validates the production mechanical and optical stack over the mission profile.

### Final engineering rules

- Separate survival ratings from measurable cold-start and hot-operation performance.
- Instrument the LCD, backlight, driver and compute hot spots, not just enclosure ambient.
- Control heaters and derating with sensors, limits and deterministic fault behaviour.
- Qualify bonded materials, gaskets and flexes through realistic thermal cycling.
- Tie lifetime estimates to actual component temperatures, brightness and duty cycle.

### Disclaimer

This whitepaper provides general engineering guidance and does not replace application-specific design review, supplier specifications, regulatory assessment or formal product qualification. Performance depends on the exact components, implementation, environment and usage profile.